

The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare

The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare

A Long View of India's 2014 Election

Edited by
Irfan Ahmad and Pralay Kanungo

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To
Democracy to come,
and
all honest democrats worldwide who cannot even think of
contesting elections, let alone win them!

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PREFACE

Writing about the 2014 Indian elections, anthropologist Mukulika Banerjee (2016) described them as ‘rambunctious, great equalizer in public life’. Calling it ‘the largest human event anywhere in the planet’, elections bring, she wrote, a ‘carnavalesque atmosphere to public life’, transform the landscape into a ‘festive one’, and generate ‘exaggerated civility’ in ‘the world’s biggest festival’. Election time, she continued, is ‘efficient and exciting’ and the act of voting is ‘beautiful’. Nowhere did she mention, even mistakenly, that elections also constitute and generate terror as manifest in the chilling murder of over 40 Muslims in Assam in the first week of May 2014. The Bodo separatist militants killed Muslims ‘as punishment for failing to vote for their [Bodo] candidate’ (*BBC* 2014; *Guardian* 2014). It was not simply that lives of Muslims were eliminated; they were also eliminated from the subsequent electoral campaigns and discussions by the advocates of democracy in the world’s largest democracy. For families of the killed and for the people for whom the massacre was a stern message of warning, elections were an unspeakable tragedy, not a carnival; elections were a great eliminator of life in public, not an equalizer in public life; elections reflected and produced accelerated enmity, not exaggerated civility; the act of voting was awful, not beautiful.¹

¹ While campaigning for his wife, Shashi Srivastava, in a local election in Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Ranjeet Bahadur Srivastava issued a threat:

‘You (Muslims) do not have anyone to be on your side in Bharatiya Janata Party. If you do not vote for BJP candidates, if you do not vote for my wife, not even

The elimination of the massacre in Banerjee's account is not only an empirical omission. This narrative elimination—as constitutive of democracy in India (think also of other massacres, not only those in Gujarat in 2002 or Muzaffarnagar in 2013)—and the simultaneous use of superlative adjectives that inundate her account, I argue, stem from captivity to a theoretical vocabulary whereby accounts of democracy secure an auto-immunity for themselves by disguising, to cite Jason Brennan (2016a), the 'rot in democracy's roots'. The logical outcome of that captivity is discursive circularity (see 'Introduction').

Panegyric accounts such as Banerjee's thus figuratively (re)produce a series of aporias about democracy predicated on 'a set of impossible concepts: people, border, law, life, liberty, decision, foundation, sovereignty' (Ross 2006: 75). They equally display a blindness to the 'antagonism against others and xenophobia that are built into its [democracy's] very practice' (Gaon 2009: 2). One may add, albeit with some caution, that antagonism against others and xenophobia are built into the theory of democracy as well and that hostility is directed as much against outsiders as it is towards insiders—'civic enemies' in Brennan's (2016b: 245) terse words.

Superlatives such as Banerjee's are also at work in the characterization—by journalists and academics alike—of the result of the 2014 elections. If Louise Tillin (2015: 118) described it as an 'extraordinary' and 'critical' election, Ronojoy Sen (2017: 172), a fellow academic, called it 'seminal'. For Ashutosh Varshney (2014: 34), it was 'truly distinctive'. Paul Wallace (2015: xxi) termed it 'historic'. Journalist Rajdeep Sardesai (2014) described it as an election 'that changed India'—a phrase that appears in the title of his book on the election. Such descriptions are based on political punditry emanating from a short-termism manifest in the following maxim: 'In politics, three months can be a lifetime.' However, for a thorough, sound political analysis that refuses the seduction of presentism, the skewed temporal unit of analysis is surely unhelpful. Unlike

Samajwadi Party will be able to save you. That is why I am saying to Muslims, vote for us. If you vote for BJP you will be happy, else you will have to face problems.' Srivastava issued the threat from a public stage in the presence of two ministers of the UP government who approved of his vitriol (*News18* 2017).

Sedgwick (2008: xiii), who pleaded for ‘the scale of centuries or even millennia’ to understand the politics of sexuality, this volume, while being attentive to the immediate factors and consequences, suggests that a proper appraisal of the 2014 elections beyond its sheer immediacy can only be made over what the French *Annales* School and Fernand Braudel termed as ‘longue durée’. Our usage of *longue durée* requires some clarification. While for Braudel it meant several centuries, we use it to refer to the history of democracy and elections in India, primarily in the wake of British colonialism (see ‘Introduction’). In *On History*, Braudel’s (1980: 26, 28, 31ff.) counterpoint to *longue durée* is what he calls ‘the instant’ and ‘history of events’. He takes the history of events to mean a ‘short time span, proportionate to individuals, to daily life ... to our hasty awareness—above all the time of the chronicle and the journalist’. We use *longue durée* to show our dissatisfaction with the immediacy, the current, and a reluctance to step back and view election over a long span of time. Braudel criticizes sociologists–anthropologists precisely on this point, for their preoccupation with the present (Ahmad 2017: 91–3). Notably, Braudel’s *longue durée* was also conceptual. It meant a structural relationship with enduring, distinct features. As is well known, Braudel did not give much weight to the political in its own right. But if we take it more seriously, *longue durée* will be considerably justified here for we also refer to a certain structure of politics instituted in the early twentieth century and its continuation into our very present. Readers who may still find *longue durée* unpleasant and less convincing, to them we instead make a modest offer: ‘a long view’—a non-technical but comprehensive phrase suggested by Peter van der Veer. ‘Thank you, Peter!’

When and if analysed in the proposed long-term framework, the 2014 elections results were less than the most dramatic. They were instead an outcome of a long process set in motion—synthetically, albeit differently—by the ‘secular’ Indian National Congress and ‘communal’ Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or its ancestors, Jan Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha. Going past Friedrich Engels’ observation that ‘the names of political parties are never entirely right’ (cited in Schmitt 1986: 29), it is important to say that even the apparent differences in ideological programmes of different political parties are not that different for they all, communist parties included, are

wedded to the grammar of ethnifying nationalism. Proposals such as Habermas' constitutional patriotism or civic nationalism (Hayward 2007), too, remain subservient to the master frame of nationalism, especially with the renewed assertions of populism (Müller 2016). One may, therefore, justifiably ask: what is 'socialist' about the Samajwadi Party (socialist party)? Likewise, does the word 'socialist' in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution have any signification beyond its decorative presence?

This book examines the 2014 elections beyond the aforementioned twin types of superlatives that pervade the understandings of electoral democracy—academic as well as popular. Unlike most books belonging to the genre of election studies with gigantic numbers and 'cold statistics' (Alam 2012: xv)—compiled along the variables of constituency, party's name, caste, region, gender, age, rural versus urban, and so on—this volume approaches election and democracy substantively. We use 'substantively' to mean foregrounding of subjectivity liberated from the mere act and decision of voting and instead analyse elections as sociological–anthropological processes (which are no less political) with institutional anchoring rather than bare political events within a span of some weeks or months. Put differently, this volume makes lives—human and non-human, lived and unlived or unliveable—central to any understanding of elections and democracy. In our view, probably this is at once the most parsimonious and most expansive way to articulate an anthropological–sociological approach to election and democracy.

The reigning assumption that 'data' about Indian elections and politics—which have witnessed 'a dramatic increase' since the early 1990s (Wilkinson 2010: 587)—are good things in themselves needs to be questioned. Likewise we ought to ask if our texts—packed with colourful charts, bars, diagrams, and tables, which contain percentages—may divert our attention from the idea that mere data torn apart from the subjectivities in their full diversity are no super gateways to knowledge, much less to any meaningful understanding. For, if to understand is to stand 'under' (Tiryakian 2005: 305), mere data may disfigure that 'under' to present themselves as if they were objective truth defying their moment and motive of conceptualization, collection, and circulation.

To recapitulate, the distinction of this volume is threefold. First, rather than focussing squarely on the empirical acts of voting and

party politics—that largely inform voting as well as its studies—it anthropologically–sociologically examines the enduring as well as changing institutional, social, political, and cultural landscapes in which voting takes place and which shape the choice of voting for a given party. As a result, the contributors are able to transcend the dualism between formal and informal politics to view elections as a holistic political phenomenon: culture of elections and elections of culture (cf. Bertrand, Briquet, and Pels 2007). Second, contra statist–statist (distinct from statistical) analyses manifest in lifeless data, this volume puts subjectivity at the core of our understanding of electoral democracy. To state the obvious, the suggestion is not against the use of data per se, for we, too, have used them, albeit unconventionally (Ahmad and Siddiqui 2017), but against a tendency that elevates data to the status of analytical destination, thereby sacrificing pursuit of a coherent understanding. Third, and following from the second, the sensibility and thrust of the volume are largely anthropological–sociological (broadly conceived) even as all contributors are not trained as anthropologists or sociologists. After all, the sensibility of everyone with a degree in anthropology or sociology is not necessarily and always anthropological–sociological!

We hope that readers—academics across social sciences and humanities as well as the interested public at large from many walks of life—will find this intervention meaningful and useful to inaugurate a truly democratic conversation about democracy and its sine qua non, elections.

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The idea of this volume emerged soon after the election results as a conversation between the two editors. At that time, Irfan Ahmad worked at the Institute for Religion, Politics and Society, Australian Catholic University (ACU), Melbourne, Australia, and Pralay Kanungo was at Leiden University, the Netherlands. As our conversation thickened, we felt the need for an intellectual partnership, which resulted in Kanungo becoming a Professorial Fellow at ACU. We organized a conference about the 2014 elections on 18 and 19 December 2015 in Sariska, Rajasthan, India. It was part of a larger network conference of EECURI (Explaining Electoral Changes in Urban and Rural India), consisting of European and Indian scholars and institutions.

Most contributors to this volume were invited to present their papers in the conference. Though a few of them could not attend, they wrote their respective chapters. We solicited one additional contribution after the conference. However, despite our best efforts and whatever resources at our disposal, we could not get an academic or intellectual visibly aligned with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to write a chapter. We then sought to have a conversation, such as the one with sociologist T.K. Oommen in this volume, with a prominent BJP intellectual or leader. After much effort and time, we established contact with Tarun Vijay, a member of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament and previously editor of *Panchajanya*, a Hindi weekly magazine of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). However, the interview could not take place on account of Vijay's ill health as well as his hectic schedule.

Over two years, as co-editors, we had several conversations over email, Skype, phone, and in person with each other as well as with some of the contributors. We thank all the participants of the conference for making it an enjoyable experience in the winter of 2015. We also thank all the contributors for writing their respective chapters and addressing editorial comments and queries at different stages of this project. In the post-conference stage of the project, Nicholas Morieson of ACU, Melbourne, Australia initially corresponded with the contributors. 'Thank you, Nic!' We also thank the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden, the Netherlands, and the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands, for providing us with ideal ambience and support to bring this project to its completion. Finally, we are thankful to Oxford University Press for the timely, enabling, and enthusiastic response to our proposal. In this case, the word 'thanks' seems less than adequate.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Aam Aadmi Party
ABPS	Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha
ACU	Australian Catholic University
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AIMIM	All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen
AIOIM	All India Organization of Imams of Mosques
AMU	Aligarh Muslim University
APL	Adani Power Ltd
ATS	Anti-terror Squad
AUD	Ambedkar University Delhi
BHU	Banaras Hindu University
BJD	Biju Janata Dal
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
BKU	Bhartiya Kisan Union
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
BSA	Bharat Swabhiman Andolan
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CAG	Comptroller and Auditor General/Citizens for Accountable Governance
CBI	Central Bureau of Investigation
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CD	compact disc
CIS	<i>Contributions to Indian Sociology</i>

CMP	common minimum programme
CMS	Centre for Media Studies
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CSDS	Centre for the Study of Developing Societies
DAVP	Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity
DK	Dravidar Kazhagam
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DTH	direct to home
DU	University of Delhi
EECURI	Explaining Electoral Changes in Urban and Rural India
EU	European Union
FIBs	factitious informational blends
FIR	first information report
GDP	gross domestic product
GSDP	gross state domestic product
GST	Goods and Services Tax
HDI	Human Development Index
HM	Hindu Munnani
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IBSA	India, Brazil, and South Africa
ICAS	International Convention of Asia Scholars
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
IIAS	International Institute for Asian Studies
IM	Indian Mujahideen
IMFA	Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Limited
INC	Indian National Congress
IPC	Indian Penal Code
IPS	Indian Police Service
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	information technology
JD	Janata Dal
JD(U)	Janata Dal (United)
JTSA	Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Association
JUH	Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind

LARR	Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Act)
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
LJP	Lok Janshakti Party
MBC	Micro Broadcasting Corporation
MDMK	Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MLAs	Members of Legislative Assembly
MMS	Multimedia Messaging Service
MoU	memoranda of understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
MRM	Muslim Rashtriya Manch
NAC	National Advisory Council
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCPUL	National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NES	National Election Study
NGO	non-governmental organization
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OBC	Other Backward Class
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PMK	Pattali Makkal Katchi
POSCO	Pohang Steel Company
POTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
PR	public relations
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español or the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
PT	Puthiya Tamilagam
PTI	Press Trust of India
PUP	Palmer United Party
PVTG	particularly vulnerable tribal group
RFFT	Report of the Fact-Finding Team

RGF	Rajiv Gandhi Foundation
RIL	Reliance Industries Ltd
RJD	Rashtriya Janata Dal
RLD	Rashtriya Lok Dal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SASAA	South Asian Studies Association of Australia
SC	Scheduled Caste
SEZ	special economic zone
SIMI	Student Islamic Movement of India
SMEs	small and medium enterprises
SMS	short message service
SP	Samajwadi Party
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
3D	three-dimensional
TDP	Telugu Desam Party
TMMK	Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam
TMT	terror management theory
UIDAI	Unique Identification Authority of India
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
URL	uniform resource locator
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
WoT	War on Terror
YSR Congress Party	Yuvajana Shramika Rythu Congress Party

INTRODUCTION

Democracy and the Algebra of Warfare-Welfare

Irfan Ahmad

Nothing is more available for deconstruction than 'democracy' since, not only in its implementation but also in its very idea, democracy seems nothing but a set of aporias. However democracy is imagined in every case it depends on a set of impossible concepts: people, border, law, life, liberty, decision, foundation, sovereignty, etc. It is not difficult to make manifest the aporetic if not simply contradictory basis of each of these democratic pillars.

—Daniel Ross (2006: 75; *emphasis in original*)

The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but what can be chosen.... Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear—that is, if they sustain alienation.

—Herbert Marcuse (2002[1964]: 9–10; *emphasis in original*)

In the case of a word like democracy, not only is there no agreed definition but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning.

—George Orwell (1946)

Fanaticism is patriotism for religion; patriotism, fanaticism for country.

—Muhammad Iqbal (*cited in Ahmad 2016b: 359*)

The key goal of this 'Introduction' is to propose a preliminary framework to understand the truth behind, as opposed to the mere reality of (Fassin 2014), democratic politics, the celebrated manifestation of which is periodic election. By its very nature, this task is far from easy, requiring as it does a critical appraisal of political science, political theory, and philosophy in multiple intellectual, linguistic, and cultural traditions, contemporaneously as well as historically. In 2014, political scientist James Alexander published 'Notes towards a Definition of Politics'. In a laudably ambitious endeavour, he examined the definitions of politics in the thoughts of Hannah Arendt, Michael Oakeshott, R.G. Collingwood, Carl Schmitt, and Jacques Rancière. Firmly placed in the Western tradition and its appropriation of the classical Greek thought, Alexander, however, did not discuss, for instance, Hindu political thoughts such as Kautilya's (Altekar 1958; Bhandarkar 1929; Boesche 2003; Mitra and Liebig 2017; Weiner 1984). Nor did he dwell on Muslim political thoughts, including those emerging out of an engagement with the Greek traditions (Ahmad 2017a; Black 2011; Hallaq 2013; Mahdi 2001).

What drove Alexander to revisit and write a definition of politics was the disjunction he identified between the pre-twentieth century understanding of politics, where it referred primarily to the business of the state, and the subsequent notion of politics that encompassed within its definitional ambit 'everything'. Though Alexander did not say so explicitly, the latter definition of politics comes close to politics as an everyday practice beyond the affairs of the state, or to the maxim 'the personal is political' of the second-wave feminist movement (McKinnon 2015: 267). Alexander (2014: 300) concluded his article by offering a 'complete definition' of politics—a definition, which, however, is unsatisfactory on many counts. To begin with, it effaces the non-Western thoughts on politics. Importantly, it does not clarify why one should have, after Nietzsche (2003; Geuss 1999), a definition rather than a genealogy of politics. Contra Alexander, my goal here is less ambitious. Rather than viewing the understanding of politics as a function of the state in opposition to the understanding of politics as not limited to the state, I ask: can both be seen conjunctionally? If so, can welfare and warfare be the terms to construe politics as a function of the state as well as politics as an activity beyond the immediate realm of the state?

This 'Introduction' advances the thesis that an important way to analyse electoral democracy is to understand it as a phenomenon of warfare and welfare, where both become intimately intertwined in such a way that they can work—indeed they often do so—as near synonyms. In many forms—now direct, now indirect—this algebra of warfare and welfare, if this phrase is useful, is integral to electoral democracy in India, as also elsewhere. As a term, while 'calculus' has been used in writings on elections (for example, Khare 2014: 52), algebra probably has not been used. Both calculus and algebra pertain to mathematics. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson and Weiner 1989: 778, 311), while 'calculus' is a 'method of calculation', 'algebra' 'investigates the relations and properties of numbers by means of general symbols' and does so in 'a more abstract sense'. I choose algebra to account for what I take to be its relational, symbolic, and abstract signification.

To this end, I examine various works on the 2014 elections and the understandings of democracy—most of which pertain, to invoke Brian Massumi's (2013[1987]: ix) phrase from a different context—to the genre of 'state-happy' scholarship. My examination of democracy is informed by insights from recent works by Jason Brennan (2016), John Dunn (2014), Roselyn Fuller (2015), Stella Gaon (2009), and others cited in the text. If there is one commonality between these works and the exercise undertaken in this 'Introduction', it is to go past what Brennan (2016: 6) christens as 'democratic triumphalism'. Much of these works, however, hardly deal with India, certainly not the way this 'Introduction' formulates the issue of democracy. The line of enquiry and argumentation is thus my own.

Before I enunciate this thesis in the second part of this 'Introduction', it is necessary to create ground for its articulation by examining the available analyses of the 2014 elections and the associated stories of democracy. In the first part, I pursue this task. In both parts, I discuss select literature from many disciplines; I make no claim for a thorough engagement with the literature of any single discipline. My method is multidisciplinary and indisciplinary at the same time, and my engagement with the literature is suggestive rather than exhaustive. I aim to throw a pebble into the calm, muddy, and unquestioned (to some, even unquestionable) water of democracy and its uncritical valorization so as to shake it, in order to pave the way for an alternative notion of

democracy (Ahmad and Siddiqui 2017). An alternative can come about only when understandings of democracy are no longer monopolized by the few and they instead become truly democratic. In the third part, I close the 'Introduction' with a synoptic account of chapterized contributions. Let me clarify that the contributors themselves do not make, at least consciously, the thesis proposed here. However, I critically read their contributions from the perspective of the argument. Invitations to contributors did not outline a specific framework to tailor their chapters to; they were invited to reflect on and analyse, based on their respective interests, the 2014 elections.

The Received Wisdom: Analyses of the 2014 Elections

In 2015, Paul Wallace published an edited volume, *India's 2014 Elections: A Modi-Led BJP Sweep*. In it, he described the result of the 2014 elections, in which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured a clear majority, as 'historic' and 'transformative'. Excluding the 'Introduction', it comprised 4 'thematic' chapters and 12 'state studies' (Wallace 2015: xxi). Before analysing the book from the perspective of this 'Introduction', some facts about the author are in order. Wallace is one of the leading experts of Indian election studies; he has earlier published three edited volumes on the parliamentary elections of 1999, 2004, and 2009. He is Professor Emeritus of political science at the University of Missouri, Columbia, USA, who has been a consultant on South Asia to a member of the United States (US) Senate Foreign Relations Committee and several other agencies in North America. He has also received many 'Smithsonian-funded awards for national election studies in India' (Wallace n.d.).

In his 'Preface', Wallace stated that contributors offered 'in-depth national and state studies'. Readers do not know what the nature of the 'in-depth' is, however. From there, he quickly proceeded to note the distinctiveness of Indian democracy, 'by Indian democratic standard', vis-à-vis democracies in the neighbouring countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Elections in these three countries, we are told, 'fail to cope with basic political and social fissures'. Noting that in 2013 Pakistan 'technically' had a 'successful election', he stressed how it 'did little to resolve the role of the military, or that of *jihadi* groups'. To this end, he noted the killing of 142 people in Peshawar

in December 2014 by the Taliban (Wallace 2015: xxii). It remains a mystery why Nepal stood excluded from Wallace's list of neighbours. Notably, there was no mention of the killing of over 40 Muslims in the course of electoral campaigning in Assam or the Muzaffarnagar 'riots' in 2013 as a result of which the BJP won 71 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh (UP). That is, the 'basic political and social fissures' attributed to the neighbouring countries remained invisible in the country that the book was actually about. If violence in the name of religion is inconsistent with democracy, as Wallace implied in his remark about India's distinctiveness vis-à-vis democracy among its neighbours, he did not ask why and how Modi kept winning one election after another in Gujarat where over 2,000 Muslims were killed while Modi presided over the state as its chief minister (Ahmad 2013a). He also did not ask how and why in a democracy, Modi, who had justified the killings of Muslims, including a formerly elected Member of Parliament (MP), on the flimsy ground of his theory of action–reaction, got elected to become prime minister? Importantly, does democracy mean only getting elected by majority votes? Or, is it connected to truth and justice? Furthermore, why did Indian electorates give the right-wing religious party, BJP, an absolute majority whereas right-wing religious parties in Pakistan or Bangladesh—Jamaat-e-Islami, for instance—have never won more than a dozen seats, let alone become a ruling party?

Let me focus on Wallace's contribution as outlined in his 'Introduction'. After the first five or six pages packed with data, Wallace outlined three factors (in bullet points) that led to the BJP's victory: economy, corruption, and a presidential-style campaign. In a seven-line paragraph on economy, he took the onion as a symbol of 'high inflation'. The food prices during the regime of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Congress, he tells readers, rose by 400 per cent. From there, he straightaway moved to cite James Carville's remark made during Bill Clinton's election campaign: 'It's the economy, stupid' (Wallace 2015: 10). No further explanation is offered about economy. What is more, the very meaning of economy remains less than clear in Wallace's too brief an explanation. It seems to echo the rational choice model of sociologists such as Rodney Stark. In social science discussions, to speak of 'pure' economy is, however, risky. Economy is closely associated with ritual, culture, religion, and social formations. In fact, bare economy is a misnomer. It is political

economy (Ahmad 2013b; Kohli and Singh 2013). From a political economy framework, it is true that growth had slowed in the two years preceding elections. However, the UPA had also passed a set of laws—writes Michelguglielmo Torri (2015: 57), an Italian specialist of India—empowering the disadvantaged people: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) of 2005 gave rural families the right to 100 days of work in a year; and the 2013 Food Security Act provided ‘certain amount of food at very reduced prices on a monthly bases [*sic*] to some 80 percent of the population’.

As with economy, Wallace’s treatment of corruption was equally cursory. He simply mentioned that in 2011 Anna Hazare led the agitation against corruption to ‘mobilize huge crowds’ (Wallace 2015: 15). The issue is: why did the agitation against corruption—a systemic problem that cuts across political parties—directed at the UPA take off and why did it receive such popularity? Wallace did not mention the mobilizational roles of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), nor of the media, or the gurus like Baba Ramdev, without whom the movement would have been far from successful (see Chapter 3). Also, on what basis were people made to believe that, unlike the Congress, the BJP would be free from corruption when its own former president, Bangaru Laxman, was convicted in 2012 by a court on charges of corruption and at the time of conviction he continued to sit on BJP’s national executive board (*NDTV* 2012)? In 2003, Dilip Singh Judeo from Chhattisgarh, a minister in the Vajpayee government, was caught taking Rs 900,000. On camera, he unashamedly said that money (made from bribes) was not god, but it was not less than god either. Even after the corruption case, BJP fielded him as its candidate and he was elected to the Parliament. In 2017, Sukh Ram, an old Congress leader caught with money under his bed and convicted on charges of corruption, joined the BJP (Gupta 2017). Given the systemic and supra-party nature of corruption, it is important to note that individuals and parties who in the past became popular fighting corruption, themselves engaged in corruption subsequently. In the late 1980s, V.P. Singh, a star symbol of anti-corruption, founded the Janata Dal (JD), which won elections to form the government (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2008: 220). However, a key leader of the JD, Lalu Prasad Yadav, was jailed later (multiple times) on corruption charges (*Hindu* 2017). My point is that an academic explanation of 2014 elections has to be

more than an parroting of stories that the parties themselves occasionally furnish. Moreover, the explanation ought to account for structural factors transcending the immediacy of the vanishing present.

The final factor, ‘the most important’ one, Wallace noted, was the ‘largely positive presidential, plebiscitary-style campaign’ led by Modi. In the campaign, readers are told, Modi ‘softened his association with right-wing Hindu slogans’ and instead stressed ‘his record of economic development and governance as chief minister of Gujarat’ (Wallace 2015: 10). However, no evidence or explanation is offered either about Modi getting soft during the campaign or about his record of development (see Chapter 4) in Gujarat. Wallace also connected ‘the most important’ factor to Modi’s ‘charisma’, which Rahul Gandhi lacked. However, here too, Wallace made no reference to any academic study of charisma and how we may understand its significance in elections beyond the mere pronouncement that A is charismatic or B is devoid of charisma. My point is not that Wallace did not refer to, let alone discuss, Max Weber (1991), who thought that charisma was the belief among followers that the leader has an extraordinary quality, that is, the gift of grace. He did not even refer to studies which discuss charisma in social-political movements such as Bhoodan and Gramdan movements led by Vinoba Bhave (Oommen 1967) or Shiv Sena movement in Bombay (Gupta 1982, 1995). Nor did he dwell on *how* voters realized that Modi had charisma and how that charisma worked for voters in the age of television, Google, social media, and YouTube.

Wallace’s three-pronged factors are thus no more than a bare mention for they are analytically too disconnected from one another to constitute an argument, even in a minimal sense. In fact, the ‘Introduction’ does not attempt any argument. As for different chapters and their contributions, they make contradictory points without the editorial realization that they might be contradictory. For instance, Walter Anderson in Chapter 3, Wallace stated, attributed Modi’s success to his appeal among the poor and the young and that he ‘studiously avoided Hindutva themes during the campaign and publicly rebuked those who did’ (Wallace 2015: 20). However, in Chapter 6, Sudha Pai and Avinash Kumar contended that the key to BJP’s victory was the inroads made by it into the social bases of Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) for a ‘broad “Hindu vote bank”’. For Pai and Kumar, BJP’s victory was on account of Modi and Amit Shah ‘using both Hindutva

and development'. Likewise, in their joint chapter on Bihar, Maneesha Roy and Ravi Ranjan stated that BJP's victory lay 'in consolidating the Hindu identity in its favor' (Wallace 2015: 20–1).

A similar problem is noticeable in the book *Electoral Politics in India: The Resurgence of the Bharatiya Janata Party* (Palshikar, Kumar, and Lodha 2017). Simply calling BJP's victory 'the spectacular triumph', its 'Introduction' makes no argument (2017: 1). Lodha, Palshikar, and Kumar (2017: 5) enumerated a list of myriad factors: BJP's and Modi's massive campaign involving 437 public rallies and an additional 1,350 rallies through three-dimensional (3D) medium; the RSS network which organized and executed the mobilization; the anti-incumbency stance of the voters; cases of scams and corruptions linked to the UPA; non-delivery of welfare schemes instituted by the UPA; Modi as a 'successful chief minister of a "model state"'; BJP's expansion beyond its traditional caste bases to include Other Backward Classes (OBCs); support lent by the rich corporate houses to Modi; and so on. On occasion, as analysts, the three co-editors uncritically seemed to embrace the language of the subject under analysis. They wrote: 'Modi's rich experience of developmental politics in the state of Gujarat enabled the BJP to make use of the development card to enlist the support of a growing class of Indians, mostly youth' (Lodha, Palshikar, and Kumar 2017: 6). The claim of development is recycled without being investigated.

The absence of an argument becomes starkly present when Lodha, Palshikar, and Kumar (2017: 8) describe their volume as a 'humble addition to the list of academic interpretations of 2014' elections. They cite three academic works, including Wallace's, the other two being Varshney's (2014) and C.S. Krishna and Kartik Laxman's. However, these works are literally only mentioned, as are works by journalists Rajdeep Sardesai (2014) and Harish Khare (2014).¹ No engagement whatsoever is made with any of their works to tell readers what their own argument is and how it is different from or similar to the academics they cite.² One is left wondering if and how the volume makes an addition to the list of academic interpretations.

Before publication of the edited volumes discussed earlier, special issues of *Contemporary South Asia* and *Studies in Indian Politics* were

¹ I will discuss Khare, Sardesai, and Varshney later on.

² Welcome to bibliographical collegiality or citational nicety!

the first to comment on the 2014 elections. In 2015, *Contemporary South Asia* published a special issue, titled 'Indian Elections 2014: Explaining the 2014 Landslide'. It contained seven articles. Louise Tillin (2015) began the 'Introduction' by noting the extraordinary nature of the election result. For the first time in the past 30 years, a non-Congress party, BJP, she wrote, 'secured its first parliamentary majority, albeit on a platform which professed to foreground economic development and growth over religious majoritarianism'. It is unclear what 'albeit' is meant to convey. The next sentence mentioned 'record levels voter participation, in terms of both turnout (66.4%) and the size of the franchise (834 million)'. The objective of the special issue was to analyse 'continuities amid the change' (Tillin 2015: 117).

In this special issue, we explore what might be considered new or critical: the mobilization of new voters and of a larger, young electorate; the significance of urbanization as a disruptive force; the plebiscitary and leader-focused character of the national contest; the extent to which issues such as governance rather than identity defined the nature of party competition. Yet ... there are also many continuities in the 2014 results. The ... outcomes remain the product of a fragmentary party system and fragmented electorate. The politics of identity and of region remain salient, despite a campaign that was unusually focused on a prime ministerial candidate.... (Tillin 2015: 117–18)

This description is less diffused than the accounts previously discussed. However, in some instances, it is riddled with stated and assumed binaries that deserve clarification. To begin with, Tillin posited governance as obverse of identity when she stated the novelty of elections by examining 'the extent to which governance rather than identity defined the nature of party competition'. How and why should identity be counterpoised to governance or good governance—a term associated with international organizations such as the World Bank and in massive circulation from the mid-1990s onwards (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 1–2)? And whose identity is at stake—identity as perceived by a community or collectivity, or identity as inscribed by a power configuration, which nonetheless thrives beyond party politics? Similarly, why should the Indian party system be seen as 'fragmentary' (and not diverse) and the electorate as 'fragmented'? Is the assumption that Indian party system should become non-fragmentary to resemble the Australian, British, or the US scene with two main parties?

Largely similar to the previous two introductions, Tillin's 'Introduction' too listed a series of factors without weaving them into a coherent argument. In this context, the special issue of *Studies in Indian Politics* was not that different either. In its short two-page 'Introduction', Christophe Jaffrelot (2015a: 5–6) listed facts which made the elections 'unprecedented': an unusual voter turnout (66.4 per cent); an increase in women's participation from 55.8 per cent in 2009 to 65.3 per cent in 2014; the rise in the number of parties taking part in the election from 363 in 2009 to 464 in 2014; and so on. The 'Introduction' then switched to different parties' performance in various states, all listed in terms of percentages. Readers get a hint of the analytical pursuit of the special issue when Jaffrelot remarked that men who made history were usually the product of their time. Though prosaic, this statement became important in the context of the special issue. However, Jaffrelot did not advance this useful observation. Instead, he moved on to write that the special issue drew from an 'analytical exercise ... during an academic meeting in Delhi', with a network of institutions in India, the United Kingdom (UK), and Europe collaborating with one another (Jaffrelot 2015a: 6). Without specifying the theoretical formulations behind that analytical exercise, he stated that it used 'quantitative and qualitative methods'. Using quantitative and qualitative methods is a worthy initiative and there cannot be much disagreement over those methods. After the sentence about methods, he wrote '[T]he articles ... combine both perspectives' (Jaffrelot 2015a: 6). As there was no mention of any perspective before this, what Jaffrelot probably meant by perspective was, then, quantitative and qualitative methods. But method is not perspective, unless duly clarified. The next sentence stated that the special issue threw 'new light' on the elections. However, Jaffrelot did not state what that new light was. He concluded his 'Introduction' by noting that the issue would contribute to 'a better understanding' of 2014 elections. Like the new light, contours of a better understanding were left untreated because there was no engagement with the existing literature on elections in the first place.³

³ Other articles in the issue dwelled on urbanization (Jaffrelot and Kumar 2015); gender (Kumar and Gupta 2015); and neo-middle class and dynamics of regions, states, and constituencies (Jaffrelot 2015; Kanungo 2015; Mukerji 2015; Priyam 2015; Saikia 2015; Thakur 2015).

To close this part, I turn to Ashutosh Varshney's article 'India's Watershed Vote: Hindu Nationalism in Power?' (2014). It too began with percentages of various sorts to show how the 2014 elections were 'truly distinctive'. In Varshney's analysis, Modi's victory rested in part on his eight-month-long mobilizational duration, in which he focussed on 'economic growth, good governance, and an unflinching critique of the Nehru–Gandhi dynasty' and 'except for occasional and brief references, Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim virulence were absent from the campaign'. Leaving the weakness of this argument aside for the moment (see Chapters 1 and 2), suffice it to say here that in making the contention that anti-Muslim virulence was absent and that Modi's critique of the Nehru–Gandhi dynasty was disconnected from Islam, Varshney, for instance, missed Modi's description of the Congress government as Delhi Sultanate (*Indian Express* 2011; also see Chapter 3). Enacting the dog-whistle politics (discussed in detail below), the description recognizably characterized the UPA government as 'Muslim'. To Varshney, all social groups (Dalits, middle castes, and Adivasis) voted for BJP, hitherto seen as a party mainly of the Hindu upper castes. The only exception was Muslims, '91.5 per cent of whom remained unwilling to put their faith in Modi or the BJP'. Leaving the accuracy and source of this figure aside, the sentence structure, as also tenor of the article (discussed next), makes it clear that the problem lies not with the BJP but with 'unwilling' Muslims. This is more evident from his view that Muslims showed ingratitude towards BJP. He quoted some lines from BJP's manifesto that promised to 'modernize' minority education system, strengthen *waqf* (endowments) boards, and institute a 'permanent inter-faith consultative mechanism to promote harmony'. He followed the quote by noting 'the concessions' BJP gave to Muslims as follows: 'Despite the explicit move towards moderation by Modi and BJP, only a small share of India's Muslims found this conciliatory stance to be credible' (Varshney 2014: 36, 39).

As it is clear, Varshney first created an 'analytical' problem, the source of which he later transferred to Muslims rather than the BJP to show the benevolence of the latter (which gave 'concessions') and stubbornness of the former (as 'unwilling' to appreciate the concessions). Notably, he did not bother to investigate the contents

of the promise in BJP's manifesto (cf. Chapter 11). Why is it that only minority educational institutions, and not also Hindu institutions, need modernization? Is the call for modernization not based on the Orientalist dogma—shared across party lines—that Muslims cling to their religion and are hostile to so-called modernity? Why is there no discourse about modernization of communities other than Muslims? It has been argued elsewhere why the academic as well as popular explanations about the backwardness of Muslims are predominantly in terms of their religious traditions (Ahmad and Siddiqui 2017), whereas explanations for the backwardness of other communities, including Hindus, remain removed from any religious factor. Returning to the BJP's manifesto, the promise to institute a 'permanent inter-faith consultative mechanism to promote harmony' vis-à-vis Muslims is indeed a dangerous idea because: (a) it takes Muslims as a source of disharmony; and (b) displaces the causes of that disharmony onto faith, rather than to political, societal, or governmental factors.

While explaining the success of BJP, a key 'question' for Varshney was how would BJP deal with religious diversity, namely Muslims. That is, 'to make governance in India a Hindu-nationalist ideological enterprise', a change was necessary in the Constitution (Varshney 2014: 35). With this premise, he wrote: 'The last BJP-led government ... could not do it. Will the current one ... succeed where its predecessor failed?' (Varshney 2014: 35). The nature of and normative assumptions behind both the sentences is fairly open-ended. While the first one can also be read as a lament or missed opportunity, the second one likewise can imply that the BJP government should do it, but the issue is whether or not it would.

Part of Varshney's article also dealt with his prophecy about the new government's future: 'If communal violence erupts, other parties—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—can blame the BJP and court the Muslim vote or work to consolidate it' (Varshney 2014: 41). The deployment of the word 'erupt' is striking. Note that riots just erupt. There are no agents of riots. Such formulations mask the engineered nature and political goal of riots (Brass 2006; Chopra and Jha 2014), as is evident in Varshney's earlier work on ethnic violence which I have critiqued, among others, for letting the state off the hook (Ahmad 2009b). Here, too, he identified Muslims as the

cause for the occurrence of the riots. Read the passage preceding the lines I quoted:

In theory, communal tensions can lie dormant if Muslims remain mute in response to Hindu-nationalist assertiveness. But the problem is not so simple. The BJP's rise ... creates strategic opportunities for two other types of political actors: the Muslim right, whose political fortunes improve when communal fires are raging, enabling it to present itself as a savior of Muslims in an adverse environment; and some non-Muslim, anti-BJP political parties who make the same calculation. (Varshney 2014: 41)

Astonishingly, nowhere in the article did Varshney use the term Hindu right. As for the Muslim right, which political party, one may ask, represents it? And if any party does, what name does it bear and how much political power does it possess? Terminological asymmetry apart, Varshney (2014: 44) prophesied about the (non)occurrence of riots under the new government as follows: 'Modi is known for advocating an investment-driven model of growth, and massive riots would seriously damage prospects for both private investment and growth.' Does it not follow from this sentence that small riots are okay? Beyond the logic of instrumental rationality, are riots not immoral and wrong in themselves, irrespective of whether they hamper or accelerate economic growth?

To close this section, I comment briefly on a point more than implicit in analyses like Varshney's. There is a pervasive tendency in Indian political and academic discourses that a 'balanced' and 'nuanced' statement must criticize both majority and minority communalisms (Hansen 2001: 236ff.). The assumption is that both mirror each other. Let me call it 'ditto theory'—'an exact resemblance, a similar thing' (Simpson and Weiner 1989: 880). In election studies, it goes something like this: both Hindus and Muslims use religious cards to get votes. Elsewhere, it operates variously. In *What Is This Hindu Rashtra*, Sitaram Yechuri (1993: 24), an ideologue of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), compared M.S. Golwalkar of the RSS to Abul Ala Maududi, founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941. 'Just as Hitler was a hero for Golwalkar, so was he,' he wrote, 'for Maududi.' Yechuri gave no citation for this dubious claim about Maududi, for whom Hitler was no hero by any means (Ahmad 2017a). On the same page, Yechuri wrote: 'Hindu communalism and Muslim fundamentalism feed each other.' Notice that

while Hindus have communalism, Muslims have fundamentalism.⁴ The ditto theory is not limited to card-holding ‘progressives’ like Yechuri. Liberals like Ramachandra Guha and award-winning radicals such as Arundhati Roy, who otherwise significantly diverge from each other on many issues (for example, Narmada Bachao Andolan), do converge in endorsing the ditto theory. While Guha (2018) appealed that ‘India’s liberals must take on both Hindu and Muslim communalists’, Roy (2008: 237; cf. Ahmad 2009a) argued that ‘the rhetoric of SIMI [Student Islamic Movement of India] should be seen and treated in the same continuum as the Bajrang Dal’s’.

The problems with ditto theory are multiple. The most important of them is that it flattens, in a single stroke, the entrenched gigantic asymmetry in political, societal and cultural power to reach a ‘balanced’ and ‘nuanced’ analysis. We ought to pause and ask: why do analysts transform the monumental power of asymmetry into a textbook-style simple symmetry; what consequences does this transformation have on the field of politics; and who ultimately benefits from this unjust analytical operation? In ‘Fuck Nuance’, Healy (2017) observes how the call for nuance is a diversion to the empiricist realm of fine grain as well as a move against theory building in sociology. My point, contra Healy, is that the push for nuance also works to maintain a prior theoretical-political apparatus where the ditto theory comfortably resides.

To return to my critical readings of them, the factorial analyses of the 2014 elections discussed so far are too dispersed and diffused—not to say of one being inconsistent with another—to formulate a coherent argument or a set of arguments. My point should not be misconstrued as implying that I am in search for a monolithic explanation. The challenge before academics is how to present a set of meaningful explanations which account for the diversity and complexity of a polity that India is; and yet these explanations are not too wandering to mean everything thereby banishing centring explanations. Furthermore, can the analyses of the 2014 Indian elections be related to theories

⁴ The choice of ‘fundamentalism’ is deliberate; it ties Indian Muslims to Muslims in West Asia, about whom fundamentalism had become a common descriptive term in the West since the 1980s (Choueiri 1990). Notably, while fundamentalism has a religious imprint, communalism—used for Hindus—is largely societal.

and practices of democracy, Western and non-Western? If so, what are the points of similarities and differences? Are available concepts—political—theoretical, historical, anthropological—sociological—and methodologies adequate to account for the kinds of questions that the 2014 elections have thrown up? In my reading, one key question which the 2014 elections has thrown is the question about democracy itself, entailing a thorough examination. However, none of these studies even hinted at examining it. They begin with the premise of democracy as a nice, great idea and conduct their respective studies by remaining within and producing that premise. This un-thought and under-thought about democracy amounts to sending politics and critical studies thereof on an extended vacation, for democracy is a byword for politics in India.

The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare and Elections

It is almost a truism in India that politics is coterminous with democracy. It is assumed that democracy is integral to politics, from local to the national level. It is further assumed that democracy informs nearly everything, be it institutions, political processes, ideological formulations, drafting and implementation of policies, conduct of media, and so on (Jayal and Mehta 2010: xxi). This assumption is demotic as much as textual in that it pervades from textbooks (Chakrabarty and Pandey 2008; Singh and Raj 2012) to handbooks (Jayal and Mehta 2010; Kohli and Singh 2013). When and how did the ditto identification of politics with democracy and democracy with politics take place? To ask this question is the first step towards understanding the 2014 elections and its outcome.

While there exists a popular term called ‘pseudo-secularism’, ‘pseudo-democracy’, as a corresponding term, does not exist (Ahmad 2014a). As both secularism and democracy are terms derived from Western vocabulary mediated by British colonialism, why is the first one ‘pseudo’ and the second one is not? Put differently, whereas there exists a plethora of writings investigating the (non)suitability of secularism (for example, Chandhoke 1999; Madan 1987, 1993, 1997; Mahajan 2003; Nandy 1985; Needham and Rajan 2007; Sen 2005; Tejani 2008), similar literature investigating the relevance or suitability of democracy is almost absent. What explains the publication and popularity

of *Secularism and Its Critics* (Bhargava 1998) but the non-existence of something like *Democracy and Its Critics*?⁵ That is, why is secularism considered a Western import whereas democracy is not? More recently, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Aloka Sen (2017) subject secularism as a constituent of modernity to a scrutiny. The examination of democracy as a co-constituent of modernity remains un-thought, however.

This un-thought is indeed a well-thought-out position reached a century ago, as elucidated in a landmark chapter by Jaffrelot (2000). He examined the evolution of Hindu political thought on democracy from the interwar period until the 1990s. To this end, he distinguished Hindu nationalism crystallized during the interwar period from Hindu revivalists who preceded it. Hindu revivalists supported democracy and did not consider it as 'alien' to India. For Hindu nationalists such as Aurobindo, democracy was born in India and it was only making a comeback through the British. For both Hindu revivalists and Hindu nationalists, the locus of democracy was 'ancient' India; the absence of medieval India and Muslim traditions is stark. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, a professor of history aligned with the Hindu Mahasabha, saw flashes of democracy in Pali texts. Congress leaders such as Purushottam Das Tandon articulated such views in the Constituent Assembly debates. Although RSS leaders such as M.S. Golwalkar, Thengadi (who founded the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh in 1955), and K.N. Govindacharya were sceptical of democracy, especially in its British parliamentary form, they, too, supported democracy because Hindus were in majority. In this respect, there were more affinities than differences between Gandhi and Hindu nationalists (Jaffrelot 2000: 354, 358).⁶ 'While

⁵ In 1991, Robert Dahl published *Democracy and Its Critics*. My point pertains to India. A search on Google (on 23 December 2017) yielded two results containing 'democracy and its critics'—Mazoomdar (2013) and Shankar and Rodrigues (2011). Both do not relate to the question posed here. Adding prefixes like 'new' and 'people', the Indian Left initially criticized democracy. Though small non-parliamentary groups still exist, the Left is now parliamentary with its own voice nationalized and electorally much reduced, if not atrophied.

⁶ Nirmal Kumar Bose (1961[1929]: 82), an anthropologist who served as the Bengali interpreter of and secretary to Mohandas Gandhi, wrote: 'In this new form of organized action, Gandhi tacitly formed an alliance with those who believed in a restoration of Hindu domination.'

Hindu nationalists look at democracy as something that is not alien to India ... and as an element of its historical prestige, they have been especially interested in this political system', wrote Jaffrelot, 'because it is a convenient way to establish the domination of the majority community' (2000: 362–3).

For reasons untold to readers, Jaffrelot did not discuss Nehru. However, as Nehru is regarded as the architect of 'democratic, secular, plural' India, accounting for his thoughts is necessary. In an important publication, Shefali Jha (2003: 1581) demonstrates how the current meaning of minorities in India was secured by robbing it of its power in the Constituent Assembly, which framed India's Constitution. With the creation of Pakistan, central to which was also the demand for communitarian electorates, this very demand was dropped in the Assembly in 1949. In July 1947, its committee on minorities discussed the granting of reservations in legislatures to Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in proportion to their population. Advocating proportional representation so as to escape the 'pervading evil of democracy [that is,] the tyranny of the majority', Qazi Karimuddin argued that it 'is not based on religious grounds and it applies to all minorities—political, religious and communal'. 'Without any sacrifice of democratic principle', he further argued, 'representatives of communal and political minorities can be elected.' Similarly, Z.H. Lari contended that with proportional representation, the Parliament would become 'the mirror of the national mind'. Through a variety of mechanisms, the Assembly later passed Sardar Patel's motion, which scrapped all provisions for political representation of minorities. An elated Nehru congratulated his deputy, Patel, for bringing the 'historic motion' to discard the 'evil' of communitarian political representation.

I would like you to consider this business, whether it is reservation or any other kind of safeguard for the minority, objectively. There is some point in having a safeguard ... where there is autocratic rule or foreign rule.... [In a] political democracy ... instead of helping the party to be safeguarded and aided, [it] is likely actually to turn against it.... [I]f you seek to give safeguards to minority ... you isolate it. May be you protect it to a slight extent, but at what cost?.... [A]t the cost of forfeiting that inner sympathy and fellow-feeling with the majority, *which is*

dangerous.⁷ Now, of course, if it is a democracy, in the long run or in the short run, it is the will of the majority that will prevail.... [It is] in the very nature of things in a democracy [that] the will of the majority will ultimately prevail. (Jha 2003: 1581; Parliament of India n.d.)

Nehru revealed his majoritarianism when, contra a few members in the Assembly who viewed democracy as an equal voice for each citizen (Jha 2003), he advocated pure majoritarianism, saying twice in the span of a single minute that in a democracy, 'the will of the majority ... will prevail'. Neither majority nor minority in Nehru's usage was procedural or issue-based; it was communitarian because he made his long, fervent speech soon after the motion scrapping provisions for political representation of religious minorities was passed. In claiming this majority, Nehru took, as did Gandhi, a *savarna* (twice-born, ritually superior castes) assimilationist view of Hinduism subsuming Shudras (Dalits) within it—a position Ambedkar, who supported minority safeguards (Chakrabarty 2008: 48), simply rejected (Guru 1991; Roberts 2017: 134–7; Soske 2013: 65).⁸ Returning to Nehru's statement in the Assembly, notice his celebration of scrapping of political representation and his placement of onus on Muslims as minority to generate 'inner sympathy [from] and fellow-feeling with the majority', the text of which was to be scripted by the majority (Jha 2003). This logic resembles exactly that of the RSS, which holds that minorities 'need the Majority's goodwill' (Raja 2011). Nothing illustrates better the transference of the political, from Constitution to the realm of majoritarian sympathy, than the stark absence of 'secular' in the Constitution until the mid-1970s. Academics celebrating 'secular' Nehru are yet to explain why he did not attempt to place 'secular' in the Constitution. Similarly, with Nehru as the prime minister, how did 'the holocaust in Jammu', where over 200,000 Muslims were massacred in October 1947,

⁷ The italicized words do not occur in the online document at the Parliament of India (n.d.) website. I take it that Jha consulted the hard copy of the debate.

⁸ In a workshop paper, 'The Freedom to be Free: Political Judgement and Self Determination', delivered at Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Göttingen, Germany, on 15 December 2017, Aishwary Kumar discussed Ambedkar's thoughts. Ambedkar viewed majority not so much as an entity but more as a technique mediated through the generation of fear in order to rule. This is my reading of Kumar's oral presentation.

and the killing of 50,000 to 200,000 in Hyderabad in 1948 take place (Naqvi 2016: 187–8, 190; also see Ahmad 2016, 2017b)?

The aim of the discussion thus far was to show that the great verve behind democracy in India is because it ensures majority rule of Hindus. This enthusiasm is not limited to Hindu nationalists whom Niraja Jayal (2016), Sudipta Kaviraj (2010), Sunil Khilnani (2010), Shail Mayaram (1997), Mukulika Banerjee (2011), Amartya Sen (2005), and several others describe as exclusivists pitted against the so-called plural, secular, and inclusive visions of Nehru, Gandhi, and the Congress.⁹ The ‘opponents’ of Hindu nationalism too shared it, albeit differently.¹⁰ The root of this ethnic democracy, as discussed in preceding pages, is traceable to the very birth of India as a nation-state and the complex processes that accompanied it. Based on historical–legal and ethnographic research on conversion in Tamil Nadu and extending van der Veer’s (1993, 1994) argument, Roberts (2017: 150) shows how a prior notion of a Hindu nation permeates the Supreme Court judgments and that such a notion ‘was not just Savarkar’s understanding but also Gandhi’s’. According to Patrick Wolfe (2002: 374), ‘European orientalism and Indian nationalism colluded in endorsing the communalist principle that Muslim decline was synonymous with Hindu renaissance’, thereby inscribing Muslims as the other of Indian nationalism.

The salience of my argument will become only starker when juxtaposed with Javeed Alam’s *Who Wants Democracy?* Alam (2012: xv–xvi)

⁹ The reason these scholars fashion such a clichéd surgical separation is not simply individual; instead, it emerges from captivity to a vocabulary of knowledge formation and its interests, which are the subject and object of analysis at the same time, and which results in a discursive circularity to police ideas disobedient to that circularity. Daniel Dubuisson (2003: 54–5) makes a similar argument about the studies of religion.

¹⁰ In the 2017 Gujarat elections, the Congress and the BJP accused each other of being ‘non-Hindu’. BJP’s Arun Jaitley remarked: ‘The BJP has always been seen as a pro-Hindutva party. So if an original is available, why one would prefer a clone [Rahul Gandhi]?’ (*Deccan Herald* 2017). Mani Shankar Aiyar, a prominent Congress leader, wrote about the Congress Prime Minister Narasimha Rao who had profound sympathy for and contacts with RSS. Rao told Aiyar: ‘India is a Hindu nation’ (Ahmad 2016a: 356n7). On flows between RSS, Congress, and other parties, see Ahmad (2012, 2014a), Bhagavan (2008), and Shinde (2017).

argues that those who want democracy are 'the governed' deemed 'incapable of comprehending democratic requirements', not the 'elite'. His concern is what Yogendra Yadav (1996: 101) called the 'second democratic upsurge' marked by the ascendance of the OBCs. Even if one accepts this argument, one cannot but notice glaring methodological and theoretical difficulties. The temporal scale of Alam's analysis is immediate—a post-1990 phenomenon. Theoretically, the notion of the nation-state within which elections are held remains beyond an in-depth conceptual scrutiny. The problem gets compounded when, as 'a communist for long', he confusingly deals with religion–culture only to dissolve it. The premise that capital is colourless and above culture deletes the fact that while corporate houses donated funds for earthquake relief, they chose not to do the same for relief camps where thousands were rendered homeless after the Gujarat pogrom lived. On a related note, Gujarati businessmen forced the Confederation of Indian Industry to apologize for its earlier statements critical of the government (Khare 2014: 188). As Choudhary (Chapter 6) cogently shows vis-à-vis the transformation of Banaras city, neoliberalism and religion dovetail into each other in 'corporate-sponsored communalization'. Devoid of conceptual delineation among terms such as 'strata', 'elite', 'governed', 'people', and so on, Alam reads the 2004 election result as a 'class backlash'. In Chapter 4, 'Muslims: The "Joker" in the Democratic Pack', his analysis lapses into a classic sermon: 'For Muslims to be drawn into the struggle, in the process shedding the Muslim label in the act of making political choices, would be a progressive shift towards more open democratic choices and secular orientation' (Alam 2012: 73). Alam's sermon is actually a demand Rajni Kothari (1992: 2698; also see van der Veer 1996: 258) had earlier made on Muslims that they 'gave up a religious approach to their survival in the present and prospects in the future'. My contention is that if the governed want democracy, they do so in a historically embedded political structure with religion as its lynchpin. An analysis that disregards that historical–ideological structure amounts to dispatching itself on a long holiday.

Seen from this perspective, the limits of recent theatrical approach to elections also become apparent. Anthropologist Lisa Björkman (2015: 143, 154, 159) views democratic politics as 'a form of street theatre', where power is 'performed ... by participant-audience crowds of discerning voters'. She studied protest mobilizations (road blockades) in

Mumbai to find out that the participant crowd was ‘paid—with food, cash, or both’. ‘By participating in road blockades’, she observes, ‘voters communicate to party leaders ... a potential willingness to support a bid for office.’ In the next sentence, she states that ‘the crowd in turn becomes its own audience, watching eagerly to see how a drama will unfold—to see “what happens” when party leaders seek to perform ... material authority over the roads, pipes, and police’. Three of her keywords need unpacking—crowd, drama, and performance. To begin with, a crowd is a crowd only to the extent that the power elites define it so; media and police can also baptize it as a ‘gang’ or ‘mob’ whereby the whole analysis will tend to crumble. For instance, when Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles ‘participate in the public sphere, doing what democracy asks them to do, they are physically beaten by police trained to see gatherings of poor people of color not as a movement but as a gang, not as a celebration of democracy but as a threat to law and order’ (Hartnett 2011: 2). Second, if drama assumes a script, is the Mumbai crowd free to write it? Or, is there a prior script of the majoritarian national democracy, a version of which the crowd relates to by sub-writing it? If there is a prior script, is not that script and the drama associated with it historically specific and religiously-culturally marked? Finally, if there is a performance à la theatre, is the crowd, even if doubly paid, free to perform by raising slogans, for instance, in praise of Chile’s Salvador Allende or Mohammad Ali Jinnah? If the crowd did so, will the nation’s media view the crowd as the audience as well or will the latter be located elsewhere? In short, is there a performance without a prior idea of nation with its border outside and its boundaries inside (Fassin 2011: 213)?

With Pakistan’s creation—Sardar Patel called it ‘cutting [off] the diseased limb’ (cited in Ahmad 2012: 487)—the enemy-other was simultaneously without and within Indian nationalism, itself elevated to a divine pedestal. In the early twentieth century, the terrorist-turned-mystic, Aurobindo, answered the question ‘What is nationalism?’ as follows: ‘Nationalism is not a mere political program; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live’ (cited in Heehs 2008: 146). Well over a century after Aurobindo, Baba Ramdev, a yoga guru and partisan of BJP, rearticulated it: ‘There is no God greater than the nation. National interest is above everything.... Nation-god is the greatest god.... Those who do not

love the soil, culture, civilization, and the people of the nation have no right to stay in this country' (cited in Chapter 3). As Marino's (2014) biography of him illustrates, Modi's worldview squarely falls within this universe.

Inbuilt into the matrix comprising religion, culture, national interest, democracy, nation, and a recast non-traditional Hinduism is an imagined inimical other which Ramdev threatened to expel from the nation—the definition of which he himself had laid down, anti-democratically. Soon after the election result, Modi acknowledged this enmity, if only by denying it. 'There is no enmity in democracy but there is competition' (*Firstpost* 2014a). This denial was needed precisely because the entire electoral campaign exemplified it.

The logic of development or economic growth as a winning catalyst, as asserted by many an academic (see the previous section and Chapter 10), is flawed because throughout India, especially in Bihar and UP—from where BJP won over 100 seats—RSS-BJP had systematically manufactured an anti-Muslim polarization to consolidate the 'Hindu Vote'. In UP, it began with the Muzaffarnagar riots operationalized through an incident in Kaval village in August 2013, because of which over 50,000 Muslims were rendered refugees. In January 2014, with some journalists-academics, I visited many camps, including the village Kakra (Ahmad 2014a). Remarkably, there was perfect harmony in the accounts of the remaining villagers, police officials, and the Kakra chief (*pradhān*). They all held that Muslims themselves burnt their houses and *willingly* left the village to claim compensation from the government—an alibi resembling L.K. Advani's. After the Babri Masjid was demolished and Muslim houses in Ayodhya were set on fire, Advani watched them burn through a pair of binoculars. When Ruchira Gupta asked whose houses were burning, Advani said: 'Oh, you know these are Muslims burning their own homes for compensation from the government' (*Wire* 2017). A similar logic was at work about Kakra's Muslims being 'greedy': the fact that the promised compensation was far lower than the price of their deprived land and properties did not matter.

The Muzaffarnagar riots were a preface to the 2014 elections. Two months later, in October 2013, in Bihar too an anti-Muslim campaign began with explosions in the Patna rally that Modi addressed. Soon after the blast, television channels such as *News 24* showed one Pankaj

as the culprit and the police arresting him. Within hours, the narrative changed—as did the name of the suspect. Suspects became Muslims and their names began to flash on television screens. The National Investigation Agency arrested a youth from Muzaffarpur, where my parents live. Though released after a few days, the media was awash with the equation between Islam and terrorism. Local media as well as many people in the ‘civil society’ called the area where the youth lived ‘mini Pakistan’. Muslim people in the city felt terrified (Ahmad 2014a). Describing Modi’s speech in the Patna rally as ‘development-driven’, journalist Sardesai (2014: 146, 150–1) applauded Modi, for ‘not once did he refer to the blasts in his speech’. To say the least, such ideology-driven analysis by Sardesai fails to account for the fact that his non-mention had in no way minimized the spectre of ‘Islamic terrorism’. Due to on-the-ground mobilization by the RSS–BJP network, arrests of Muslim youth in Bihar and Jharkhand, as well as media discourse, the enmity against Muslims was rife. From the time of the Patna blast, the political field was methodically mobilized along religious lines, as a result of which Bihar was electorally as productive to BJP as UP was after the Muzaffarnagar riots.¹¹ It was precisely because of such a line of political enmity—sharply drawn well before the elections with a specific political aim—that at the conclusion of elections, Modi said: ‘There is no enmity in democracy but there is competition.’

Harish Khare (2014: 175) is one of the few to recognize this politics of enmity. In his view, it began long before 2014; in 2002, when Modi began to ‘reinvent himself as a polarizing figure, pushing ... a politics of antagonism that led to the victory in 2014’ and he ‘remained unwaveringly committed to the calculus of Hindu–Muslim antagonism, just as he un-tiredly continued to nurse his prime ministerial ambitions’. Khare is mostly right, with an important qualification that Modi indeed began it nationally in 2001. In a televised debate soon after 9/11, Modi hailed the Indian media for speaking ‘the truth’ in using the phrase ‘Islamic terrorism’. Modi opined that terrorism was innate to Islam (less emphatically also to Christianity), for it did not consider other religions to be true. In his view, the ‘whole world’ had witnessed

¹¹ I ethnographically offer an elaborate treatment of the Patna rally, and the religious polarization it unleashed, in my book on terrorism (Ahmad 2019).

terrorism 'for 1,400 years' (since Prophet Muhammad's time). Modi saw the post-9/11 era as a battle between 'humanity' and 'terrorism'. The 'humanity' Modi spoke of did not exist as a prior idea. Instead, it was manufactured through the disingenuous discourse on terrorism that his party enacted on the international stage. Read this exchange:

Sardesai: Why don't you give one assurance that [when] there will be an election campaign in UP you will not use the incident [9/11] ... to stir a communal divide, to label every Muslim in this country as ... an Islamic terrorist?

Modi: It is a tragic condition in my Indian media that [there is] such a challenge to the humanity and we are talking about footpath politics. What are we doing? ... When people are talking about the challenge to humanity, we are talking about UP politics.

In the same television debate, Modi said:

See, because of India's initiative in the UN meeting twice, we have made terrorism an issue. Due to this, *we have succeeded in dividing the country into two camps: those who are against terrorism and those who are in support of terrorism*.¹² I think that the recent incident in America [9/11] will intensify it [the division]. The world is about to be divided (*batnē*) into two parts: those who are in favour of humanity and those who are against humanity. (All quotes from Modi cited in Ahmad 2017b; also see Ahmad 2017c; emphasis mine.)

As the given quotes amply show, the discourse of terrorism aimed to create a dualistic politics located at the confluence of national and international politics. The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was also the disappearance of the enemy for the US-led Western world. Left with no enemy, Colin Powell (a top military general) said: 'I am running out of demons. I am running out of enemies' (cited in Waltz 2000: 2). The Cold War was thus replaced by the 'Hot War' on terrorism, made identical with Islam (Ossewaarde 2011: 134; see also Ahmad 2017c: 123–4). Politics in India since 2001

¹² A contradiction in its purity emerges here. Having divided the country into two inimical camps—those who support terrorism and those who are against terrorism—does not Modi's claim to speak for and on behalf of '125 crores of Indians' (narendramodi.in 2013) logically include Indians who support terrorism?

cannot be delinked from politics of terrorism, the prominence of which stands out in not only its ubiquity in public discourse but also in the passage of new laws against terrorism (Singh 2007) and the colossal securitization of Muslims' lives and their cultures (Ahmad 2014b). The logic, positioning, and argumentation in the aforementioned quotes from Modi entail a fresh conceptualization of politics away from the dominant conception of it in the language of 'welfare' alone.

For long, in India, the state has been viewed as '*māi-bāp*/mother-father'. This view stemmed from the language of 'care': the state takes care of its citizens in the same way parents take care of their children (Ray 2003: 246; Sharma 2011: 77). That parents (many, at least) also inflict violence on their children was sidelined to paint the image of the state as a caretaker and provider of welfare, thereby peripheralizing, if not obliterating, the violence all states are based on. In an overview of the evolution of modern states in Europe, Peter van der Veer (2018: 11) observes that while 'the state protects some, ... [it] attacks others'. Indian textbooks on political science have, however, highlighted only the welfarist view of politics. For example, a textbook published by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU n.d.: 52–3) mentioned definitions of politics by David Easton and Bernard Crick to settle for the welfare distribution-oriented definition: politics 'pertains to the manner in which power, wealth and resources are distributed in society'.

At the intersection of national and international politics, the 2014 elections, however, demonstrated the combination of welfare with warfare. I use warfare as shorthand for the dualistic politics, which constructs and produces a sharp fence between 'us-friends' and 'them-enemy'. In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt (1996: 19) began by noting that 'the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political', which he elaborated as follows:

The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that *between friend and enemy*. This provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition or one indicative of substantial content.... *The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation....* The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions.

But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. (Schmitt 1996: 25–6; emphasis mine)

As it is clear, Schmitt viewed the political as instituting the distinction between friend and enemy embodied in the figure of ‘the others, the stranger’, ‘something different and alien’. Furthermore, while the enemy is outside, that is, another state, ‘every state provides ... some kind of formula for the declaration of *an internal enemy*’.¹³ He went on to observe that meanings of terms like state, society, republic, class, sovereignty, economic planning, and so on, acquired significance not by themselves, but primarily in relation to the friend–enemy distinction. The political by no means meant, Schmitt clarified, party politics in a conventional sense. The figure of the enemy exists and is continually enacted beyond differences among political parties (Schmitt 1996: 46; emphasis mine).

Politics in the precise sense of Schmitt was at full display in the 2014 elections and the processes and mobilizations preceding the elections. Before I proceed to demonstrate this, let me pre-empt a likely objection. I invoke Schmitt descriptively, not normatively. It is well known that Schmitt nursed sympathy for and had ties with the Nazi ideology and its partisans, as did Martin Heidegger (Neocleous 1996; Strong 1996: ix). That is, I approve neither of Schmitt nor of Schmittian politics in India; I simply show how this politics operates in India. Thus viewed, far from being an imposition of a Western theorist on the Indian political scene, my move to bring Schmitt to bear on politics in the tropics is the enunciation of that which already exists in Indian politics, albeit not in a vocabulary exactly like Schmitt’s. Though Khare does not use terms like friend and enemy, he does deploy words such as ‘antagonism’, present in Schmitt’s text. To explain electoral and voting trends, journalists and politicians frequently use—as do academics occasionally (Saikia 2015;

¹³ To Alexis de Tocqueville, prisoners were enemies and a small nation within (Harcourt 2014: 8). Using Talal Asad’s (2012) insights and based on prisoners’ experiences, Ahmad and Siddiqui (2017) view democracy with fresh eyes—democracy as a sensibility emanating from identification with and the sharing of suffering, human finitude rather than a form of bureaucratic government by a mathematical majority.

also see Chapter 5)—‘polarization (*dhruvikaran*)’. Polarization approximates friend–enemy distinction in Schmitt. Theorization in Indian political science, it seems, lags behind practices in the field—a point Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) made in a different context.

In recent history, no leader enacted the politics of friend–enemy the way Modi did. However, the enemy was as frequently Muslim as the friend was Hindu. As pointed out earlier, the enemy was outside as much as inside. Much before the 2014 elections, as the chief minister of Gujarat, he had made umpteen speeches exemplifying friend–enemy dualism along the lines of religion. For lack of space, I list only some:

It is not an election for MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly] or choosing a Chief Minister. It is an election related to religion.

If all the destinations where Lord Ram travelled from Ayodhya to Lanka are joined, they will all pass through the tribal areas of India. So the tribals are the original Hindus.

This is the deciding moment. If you want to save the state from the clutches of fundamentalists and jihadis, you must all vote. If you want to sleep well till 2007, wake up on December 12 and vote.... Come out in large numbers and kick the jihadis and fundamentalists out.

This is a fight which will decide who is the protector of Hindus.... When we talk of protecting Hindus, there is objection from certain quarters who talk of Hindu militancy.... If some day a group of Hindus become militants, they will rule the world and Pakistan will be wiped out.

Musharraf [Pakistan’s dictator] should remember that if he tries to create any problem with the people of Gujarat then the Hindus would become terrorists who will remove Pakistan from the world map.

If Congress wins, they will burn firecrackers in Pakistan. If the BJP wins, India will celebrate Diwali [a Hindu festival]. You choose.

Congress men cannot see Gujarat’s *Gaurav* [pride] because they are wearing Italian spectacles.

We do not want to continue to run relief camps [where people displaced by anti-Muslim pogrom lived out of fear] to produce children. They [Muslims] keep giving birth to long ques [*sic*] of children.... We must teach a lesson to those who multiply like this.

Is [James Michael] Lyngdoh [Chief Election Commissioner of India from 2001 to 2004] from Italy? He and Sonia Gandhi could be meeting each other at church. (Cited in Bunsha 2006: 194–6)

Such speeches and statements enabled Modi to win one election after another. They were not mere rhetoric; a young woman sitting in the front row and listening to Modi, screamed: 'Kill the Muslim motherfuckers' (cited in Kumar 2005: 38). Notably, in a provincial (state) election, Pakistan was a recurring theme. In the Gujarat elections, the BJP printed posters with photos of Parvez Musharraf, showing Modi and him as enemies (Bunsha 2006: 12). This meant that all those, especially Muslims, inside who did not back him were 'all supporters of Pakistan' (Pelly 2008: 197), a Muslim country outside. The enemy was at once inside and outside.

It is mostly fair to say that many non-BJP parties did not overtly endorse Modi's dualistic politics. However, they did not oppose it by launching a counter-mobilization. All of them, including the Left parties, nurtured the discourse of terrorist enemy identified with Muslims and Islam. Thus, the difference between the Congress and the BJP was not about the passage of new legislations to fight terrorism, which, like Muslims, was both inside and outside; it was about the ways to fight it. In Schmitt's (1996: 28) terms, the Congress was not an enemy of the BJP; it was at best a 'debating adversary'. Post-9/11, the figure of the enemy terrorist remained constant while the party in power changed. In 2014 elections, too, politics as enmity continued (see Chapter 2), albeit in different forms and nature. From this perspective, Modi's much-talked-about *differentia specifica* (mark of distinction)—development—was not free from religion. As many BJP leaders themselves made it clear, Hindutva and development were far from rivals (see Chapter 1). Analysing the 2007 Gujarat elections, Pralay Kanungo and Adnan Farooqui (2008: 238) perceptively observed that Modi's strategy was to 'start with development, walk through Gujarati *asmita* [identity] and wrap it up with Hindutva'. Notably, as Choudhary (Chapter 6) demonstrates, in Banaras, from where Modi won the 2014 elections, the discourse of development was replaced with Hindu mythological factors and features.

For a fuller analysis of the friend–enemy dualism, we must consider the deep play of 'dog-whistle' politics, a term yet to join mainstream explanations in India.¹⁴ Widely used in Australia and elsewhere, it

¹⁴ To clarify, the claim is not that this 'Introduction' uses the term 'dog-whistle politics' for the first time. The contention instead is that dog-whistle politics is not central to electoral analysis in the same way as, for instance, 'vote bank' is.

means transforming common words to specific meaning to send a message to split the public/voters. That is, it aims to send a specific message to a particular group, while keeping the rest in the dark or in oblivion. The fundamental characteristic of dog-whistle politics is ‘plausible deniability: the dog whistler can say “I didn’t mean that, I meant this instead”’ (Fear 2007: v; also see López 2014). Along with politicians, journalists also practice dog-whistle politics (Poynting and Noble 2003). Thus, the phrase ‘family values’ in Australia means a party committed to Christianity. We see many such examples in India. For instance, Modi describing Rahul Gandhi as ‘*shahzāda* (prince)’ (Ashok 2013) was not extempore. Nor was it innocent. There exists a Hindi word for *shahzāda*, *yuvrāj*. In fact, Yuvraj Singh is one of the few cricketers to hit six sixes in a row and, thus, he is quite popular among millions of Indians, this author included. The choice of the Urdu word, *shahzāda*, rather than *yuvrāj*, was to signal an equation between Muslims and the Congress, or if you like, ‘appeasement of Muslims’ by the Congress. The same holds true about Modi’s usage of ‘Pink Revolution’ in a rally in Bihar. Instead of a Green Revolution, Modi said, the Congress wants a ‘Pink Revolution’. He explained it as follows: ‘When animals are slaughtered, the colour of their flesh is pink. Animals are being slaughtered and being taken to Bangladesh. The government in Delhi is giving subsidies to those who are carrying out this slaughter’ (NDTV 2014). The phrase ‘Pink Revolution’ aimed to show the sacredness of cows for Hindus and their disrespect by Muslims who eat beef. The mention of subsidy by the government again linked Congress with Muslims who, with the mention of Bangladesh, were also foreignized. Another example of dog-whistle politics was the manner in which ‘vote bank’ was employed and its meaning altered. The sense and context in which M.N. Srinivas first used vote bank (Guha 2008) was transformed to mean a specific thing—Muslims as vote bank.¹⁵

The politics of antagonism and warfare continued well after the electoral victory. Re-enacting the dog-whistle politics, Modi—as prime minister—spoke of ‘the slave mentality of 1,200 years [which]

¹⁵ My focus on a specific form of politics as warfare by no means implies that this is the only form. I consider it one key form, however. On other forms of warfare politics, see Sundar (2015, 2006a, 2006b, 2015), Roy (2008), Pattnaik (Chapter 9), and the documentary, *The Referendum* (Mishra 2015).

is troubling us' (*Firstpost* 2014b). Rajni Kothari, 'the doyen of Indian political science' (Jha 2015) who 'helped establish election studies as one of the hallmarks of Indian political science' (Rudolph and Rudolph 2010: 567), had already said something remarkably similar. Modi's temporality of the slave mentality of 1,200 years resembled Kothari's (1970: 31)—from the eighth century until 1862, when the Mughal Empire ended. To understand political democracy, in *Politics in India* (1970: 21), Kothari underlined the need to know the 'historical and institutional experience through which Indian society has passed'. He identified three historical strands with 'substantial influences': Hinduism, the British impact, and pre-1947 nationalism. Islam's influence was 'not profound'; its 'mark' was mostly in social, administrative, literary, artistic, and behavioural fields. A footnote listed an exception: 'Thus, in northwest India, where the Sanskrit tradition had not penetrated deeply enough and where *Islam was able to destroy Hindu civilization more thoroughly than elsewhere*, the influence of Islamic customs and traditions is marked even today' (Kothari 1970: 35n3; emphasis mine).¹⁶

The line between a politician, who does politics in the idiom of friend–enemy dualism and a political scientist who studies politics, seems so blurred!

I close this section by clarifying my hyphenated use of warfare–welfare. From the frame of the power elites (Mills 1959) and the rich who benefit from and defend the prevalent form of democracy by 'buying and selling elections' (Fuller 2015: Chapter III), including violence in the name of democracy (Keane 2004), welfare is not obverse of warfare in the same way as warfare is not antithetical to welfare. They are inseparable (Ossewaarde 2011: 137). If welfare aims to ensure 'social security', warfare does the same for 'national security'. As is obvious, I have dealt more with warfare than welfare. It is simply because welfare as a credo has received more attention

¹⁶ The genealogy of Muslims as barbaric outsiders and Hindus as oppressed insiders and original inhabitants is traceable to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, considered as the father of the Indian Renaissance. Notably, Roy wrote: 'Your dutiful subjects have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors, but rather as deliverers, and look up to your Majesty not only as a Ruler, but also as a father and protector' (cited in Dhar 1987: 30).

than warfare. A recent representative example of the welfare-oriented view of politics is Drèze's and Sen's (2013; also see Drèze and Sen 1996; Kaur and Sundar 2016).

To attain freedom in an administered society, in *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse (1966[1955]: xv) wrote, was to 'avoid the fate of a Welfare-Through-Warfare State'. Taking welfare and warfare as nearly the same, in *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse (2002[1964]: 52) described such a state as 'a state of unfreedom'. The state of unfreedom is constituted and continued, Marcuse (2002[1964]: 24) went on to observe, by mobilizing the alienated labour against a manufactured enemy: '[M]obilization against the enemy works as a mighty stimulus of production and employment, thus sustaining the high standard of living.' The link between the necessity for an enemy and economic development or progress is more clearly articulated in Marcuse's essay: 'The Individual in the Great Society'. In an incisive critique of President Lyndon Johnson's plan for a 'Great Society', sketched in the mid-1960s, Marcuse (2001: 79) stated how the plan 'would be like a welfare state prepared to turn into a warfare state'. This preparedness, Stanley Hauerwas (2011: 4), a former professor of theological ethics at Duke University, observed, is because 'war is America's central liturgical act necessary to renew our sense that we are a nation unlike other nations.' It needs no clarification that the nation is a democracy.

The algebra of warfare-welfare that Marcuse alluded to, and which I foreground, acquired new modalities with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent 'Hot War on Terrorism' (Ossewaarde 2011: 134). With neoliberalism as its ideology, the 'New World Order' adopted a variety of practices, such as privatization, structural adjustment, liberalization, and sheer triumph of the market. In its various forms—as an ideological project, policy and programme, state form and governmentality—neoliberalization inaugurated a massive change in reorganization of the states, politics, and societies worldwide. Globalization, planetary vulgate to read that moment in the history of capitalism, was neither the withdrawal of the state nor its diminishing role—for policing, securitization, and militarization have only increased—rather it was its reconfiguration (Burawoy 2000; England and Ward 2007; Harvey 2005; Said 2000; Steger 2008). The idiom of the 'free market' became the master language applied to nearly every domain. Passengers became customers, students clients (Ahmad 2013b). With the advent of

political market, citizens became customers (Saul 1997[1995]: 100). It is important to stress the use of market- and media-infused terms in BJP's manifesto, which resolved to 'revive Brand India'. That is, India has always been a brand, what it needs is its mere revival. During the campaign, media freely compared 'brand Rahul' and 'brand Modi' (see Kaur 2015). The move to see India as a brand was by no means a trend limited to one nation-state; it was as global as Aronczyk (2013) shows (see next chapter). With commodities reigning untrammelled, fear—terrorism being its ultimate signifier—became the pivot of generating political consensus in a society 'grouped around the warrior state' (Rancière 2010: 106).

In politics, this transformation led to projecting politicians as salespersons and citizens as buyers. Issues of ideologies, civic participation, contestation over what the common good is, and so on, all became hostage to the calculus of mammon. Introduced in Chapter 1, 'designer democracy' as an analytical concept aims to capture synoptically this moment in the history and practice of democracy. For the 2013 Australian federal election, I went to observe a polling booth in St Kilda, Melbourne, where I lived at the time. I had heard about Palmer United Party (PUP), launched by flamboyant billionaire Clive Palmer. Seeing two PUP volunteers distributing flyers at the booth (see Figure I.1), I struck a conversation with one of them. I asked her what the PUP stood for, what its ideology was, and how it was different from the Liberal Party or the Labour Party. She drew a near blank. Later she told me that she was a British tourist. She became a 'volunteer' because the money she earned in a day equalled payment for seven days' work elsewhere. The PUP, a right-wing party, spent Australian \$12 million on the campaign (Johnson and Wanna 2015). According to one estimate, the BJP spent Rs 5,000 crore (50 billion; that is, over US \$900 million) on advertisements alone (Ahmad 2014a). This, too, is 'welfare' for those who benefitted from it.

The BJP victory in the 2014 elections was surely defining, but the full meaning and explication of that victory can properly be comprehended not in the catalogues of superficial percentages of voters' turnout, or increase in numbers of seats by this or that party presented in colourful charts or diagrams, but in relation to the theoretically inscribed historical, political, neoliberal, cultural configurations that this 'Introduction' outlines, and in terms of costs, consequences, and



Figure I.1 ‘Volunteers’ of the PUP at a Polling Booth in Melbourne, 2013 (top left is the PUP’s logo; below the map is inscribed ‘Reunite the Nation’).
Source: Author.

visions of life—human and non-human alike—life as essentially itself, the destination of which is death, natural or otherwise!

An Outline of Chapters

To reiterate, the thesis of this ‘Introduction’ is entirely mine; none of the contributors makes it in the way I enunciate it. However, I read their contributions from a critical frame and relate them to this thesis. In summarizing their contributions, I am guided by Nietzschean perspectivism (O’Brien 2017). Without going into its intricacies here, I take it to mean, among other things, that one may analyse the world with an ‘open’ mind. However, seldom—perhaps never—is the open mind a blank mind. It follows that what is observed depends on the object and subject of observation and the theoretical and political goals of the observer situated in the matrix of power. If to observe is to also name, then naming as a definitional act is decisively political: to define,

as Mamdani (2012) argues, is to rule. To call a particular violent person a terrorist but to withdraw that label in cases of similar acts of violence committed by other individuals and instead describe them as ‘mentally ill’ best illustrates my proposition. When I make (dis)connections, I do so following Nietzsche’s (2003: 2) call that ‘we have no right to be “disconnected”’.

Chapter 1 by Irfan Ahmad demonstrates the enactment of Schmittian politics in 2014 elections by examining the role of rumours—a subject election study has rarely treated and given the attention it deserves. Situated in the emerging anthropological subfield of news and journalism and synthesizing insights from politics, sociology, media studies, and history, it uses qualitative data from the coverage of 2014 Indian elections by television channels and in social media. Titled ‘Democracy as Rumour: Media, Religion, and the 2014 Indian Elections’, it discusses how rumour and religion were central to the 2014 electoral mobilization. The media circulated, *inter alia*, Hindutva as development to resemble rumour-mongering in that the sources of the much-publicized development remained unknown. The emerging interface among media, elections, and neoliberal economy in polities such as India signifies the onset of ‘designer democracy’, of which rumour is a key component. The author contends that the term ‘designer democracy’ is useful to understand the contemporary democratic politics where the role of media is decisive. To this end, he discusses the effects of rumours and other factors that helped Hindutva win in 2014. Analytically, he disavows the rupture between modern and pre-modern world to argue that what was rumour to pre-modern society, television and new media are largely to contemporary nation-states. The premise of rumour as a plebeian, oral form of resistance in the subaltern studies scholarship, he contends, is unsustainable because mainstream media, which is at the service of the power elites, work like rumour machines. Contrary to the widespread view, he argues how rumour is also a weapon of the power elites and how it is deployed during elections. Dwelling on the vital issues of truth and lies, the chapter concludes with observations about the place of rumour and media in democracies in general.

Without directly engaging with Carl Schmitt, Chapter 2 by Manisha Sethi discusses the political discourses of terrorism as the terrain of dualistic politics in the 2014 elections. Drawing on election speeches

by Narendra Modi, BJP's publicity materials, and the extensive reportage, commentary, and analysis focussed on the person of Modi, with much analytical fineness, Sethi demonstrates how 'terrorism as an election issue was carefully calibrated by Modi's managers: raised in one place directly, elliptically in another, spoken through codes and signs elsewhere' (reflecting dog-whistle politics). Terrorism, she notes, formed a key element of the larger repertoire of ideas and images that Modi's campaign disseminated on a massive scale. At the heart of this dissemination was the move to depict Modi as a powerful, decisive, and brave leader of India, conceived as essentially a Hindu nation, with Muslims as 'the other' of and as a threat to that nation. The ways in which this dualist image war was enacted was by portraying a macho Hindutva icon in battle with imminent threats to India, which the outgoing government failed to quarantine. Such mobilizational mechanisms, Sethi's chapter elucidates, were aimed to consolidate and rally a majoritarian vote bank. This chapter also comparatively shows how manufacture of fear is an integral part of elections in democracies in general, especially since 9/11. Furthermore, she makes a vital point by historically discussing the mobilization of fear and terrorism in the 1984 elections. Much before the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Congress party's advertising campaign for English media already had materials evoking and generating fear for electoral goals.

In Chapter 3, 'Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Politics: The Baba Ramdev-BJP Partnership in the 2014 Elections', Pralay Kanungo dwells on a theme largely absent in the studies of elections. Focussing on the political trajectory of Baba Ramdev, a popular yoga guru, he discusses the entanglement of Hindu religious leadership with politics, especially in relation to the RSS and its network of organizations. He begins with the early life of Ramdev and discusses his evolution into a national figure. Outlining his political ideas, at the centre of which is a version of Hindu nationalism, Kanungo deals in particular with Ramdev's participation in Anna Hazare's India Against Corruption campaign, which discredited the then ruling Congress party thoroughly and later lent its overt support to Narendra Modi. To this end, he dwells on the ways in which Ramdev mobilized his disciples and followers to support Modi in the 2014 election campaign. In doing so, Kanungo underlines the significance of economic and other factors beyond the common assumption that religious and political leaders

need each other. The political import Ramdev acquired, this chapter illustrates, was greatly predicated on the role of television channels, one of which Ramdev later owned. In some ways, Kanungo's chapter skilfully practices Mills' (1959) sociological imagination as he weaves biography, politics, and social structure together to account for his influence. However, his analytical frame remains predominantly national and does not sufficiently dwell on the wider extra-national landscapes in which gurus such as Ramdev become important to shape and be shaped by religion and politics.

This chapter also uses the autobiography of Ramdev. However, seldom is life lived in the same way as it is self-narrated, especially by wily politicians such as Ramdev. Moreover, to analyse his political vision as inclusive, as Ramdev himself claims, is to miss the point that the claim of inclusivity may go hand in hand with practices of exclusivity. After all, did Modi not speak of 'all Gujaratis' and justify the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in the same breath? If so, we are faced with 'inclusive exclusion', approximating *homo sacer* as used by Giorgio Agamben (Hansen and Stepputat 2005: 17). Tucked away in a footnote of the chapter, however, is Ramdev's statement espousing violence. This statement is worth quoting in full: 'We respect this country's law ... otherwise if anybody disrespects Bharat Mata, we have the capability of beheading not one, but thousands and lakhs' (Quint 2016). This shows the algebra of warfare-welfare practised by a renouncer. This is also the case with Anna Hazare, whom the chapter describes as a 'Gandhian', perhaps to suggest that Hazare is a present-day apostle of non-violence as Gandhi was. Gandhi clearly was not an advocate of non-violence. At a prayer meeting on 20 December 1947, he preached violence precisely in the sense of warfare, as this 'Introduction' argues. In the case of a war between India and Pakistan, and Muslims allegedly siding with Pakistan, Gandhi said: 'If later they [Muslims] betray you, you can shoot them. *You may shoot one or two or a certain number.* Everyone will not be disloyal.... If later they violate the trust *you can cut off their heads*' (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 98: 160–1; emphasis mine). It is, thus, not surprising that Hazare described corruption as a 'more serious threat than Pakistan' (*Hindustan Times* 2011). In 2016, he showed his resolve as follows: 'If Pakistan doesn't listen and if need be, I'll go and fight at the border.' To serve the 'nation', at 79 he resolved to rejoin the army (*Urban Asian* 2016). I take it

that fighting at the border is not the same as exchanging bouquets of tulip flowers. In Ralegan, Hazare's model village, the dualistic enmity is pretty widespread in the name of 'national regeneration' and 'rural development'. According to one villager: 'We have to hold the nation. Otherwise, Pakistan will grab it. That is why we consciously send our sons to the army' (cited in Sharma 2006: 1985).

Characterizing the 2014 general elections as marking a major right-wing shift in Indian politics, Zoya Hasan delineates a number of crucial issues in Chapter 4. Her key contribution lies in conducting a thorough examination of the so-called Gujarat model of development, believed to have been a key catalyst for BJP's victory. In what might be described as a genealogy of the much-publicized Gujarat model of development projected as a 'vision that India awaits', she reads it backwards to note that it was the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) which, in 2005, had ranked Gujarat as the best in the country for 'economic freedom'. The Gujarat government readily took this praise showered by a Congress think tank to publicize it massively. The ruling party in Gujarat, and Modi, did it to counter criticism of complicity and inaction of the state in the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom and instead highlight its 'achievement'. Importantly, Hasan also discusses how development was not purely an economic issue, as it bore religious/communal marks. Utilizing recent writings, which are beginning to appear now, Hasan shows shortcomings of this model as well as its anti-plebeian stance, biased heavily towards growth rather than distribution. In part, this chapter also dwells on the development trajectory of the Congress-led UPA government, with many points of success, to examine how this model in the end lost to the Gujarat model. The explanations as to why the Congress did not take its own success about various welfare schemes to the public require further elaboration. However, the questions raised about the two models of developments are pertinent and likely to receive attention of scholars in future. Hasan's chapter unveils many elements of the algebra of warfare-welfare, as, for instance, in her contention that 'if there was one obvious feature of the 2014 election, it was the BJP's successful consolidation of the Hindu vote, with religion often deciding voter preference'.

Chapter 5 by Hilal Ahmed asks a key question, the salience of which goes well beyond the immediacy of elections: do incidents of communal violence bear a relation to electoral polarization, influencing the

election results? To address this question, he zooms in on the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots and the patterns of voting among Muslims. He justifiably criticizes the widespread views according to which Muslims constitute a homogenous community and they vote uniformly. He concludes by saying that though communal violence undoubtedly shapes the contour of Muslim identities in various contexts, it does not inevitably determine the Muslim electoral choices. Another key issue this chapter dwells on is whether a more pronounced presence of Muslims in assemblies or the Parliament in terms of their numbers would prevent communal violence. Using the 2013 Muzaffarnagar case, he argues that it will not. The riots happened, he explains, even though the presence of Muslim MLAs in the UP Assembly was significant. From there he proceeds to make a distinction between formal and informal representation, the valence of which remains somewhat under-discussed here. An associated question worth asking is whether Muslim MLAs want to prevent the violence or not? And if they did, why did they not succeed? This question will likely take the inquiry into a different direction. Some readers may find part of Ahmed's chapter showing an affinity with the ditto theory (adumbrated earlier). From the lens of the algebra of warfare-welfare, Ahmed's focus is not on its enactment, the existence of which he glaringly notes, but whether or not it electorally worked (cf. Jha 2017: Chapter 6).

Bikramaditya Choudhary's chapter, 'Does Space Matter in Electoral Democracy?: Analysing Mother Ganga's "Call" to the BJP's Prime Ministerial Candidate' (Chapter 6), is an important contribution in that it is probably the first intervention of its kind to make space central to the analysis of elections. Influenced, in part, by French scholars such as Barthes, Foucault, Lefebvre, as well as David Harvey, Choudhary casts his focus on Banaras, a constituency in limelight because Modi chose to contest from there. This chapter analyses the reason for this choice. In Banaras, Choudhary shows, the driving force behind the electoral mobilization by BJP was not the depiction of Modi as symbolizing 'development'. Instead, it was the mythical and mythological 'call' of Mother Ganga—a river considered sacred by Hindus—to Modi, who was compared with Lord Shiva. Weaving insights from the disciplines of cultural-social geography and election studies, this chapter demonstrates how a specific religious imagery of Banaras was projected at the cost of other identities that mark the city. By casting Banaras in

an exclusionary and monolithic mould, the mobilization was geared to generate polarization and win elections—a point at the core of this ‘Introduction’. Though not explicitly stated, a key method at work here is discourse analysis. The chapter also draws on Choudhary’s earlier work on Banaras.

In Chapter 7, ‘Caste and Cultural Icons: BJP’s Politics of Appropriation in Tamil Nadu’, R. Thirunavukkarasu discusses the electoral performance of BJP in the south, which, in Wallace’s terms (2015: 14), ‘largely resisted the Modi wave’. Pursuing the vital approach of historical sociology, Thirunavukkarasu reads the present by connecting it to the colonial order and the ways in which the latter inaugurated new social forces as well as distinct forms of knowledge, both of which influenced electoral politics in post-1947 Tamil Nadu. At the analytical core of this chapter is the ideology of Dravidianism, constituted by an opposition to Brahmanism and hegemony of Hindi-Sanskrit traditions. This Dravidianism—expressed politically by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, and its subsequent offshoots—worked, argues Thirunavukkarasu, as a bulwark against BJP making any noticeable electoral impact. However, he also notes the increasing influence of BJP in the past two decades or so. Thirunavukkarasu discusses BJP’s strategy of expansion, which includes, among other things, politicization of religious festivals in the language of religious dualism. To illustrate this, he gainfully dwells on the dialectic of Hindutva being vernacularized and local Tamil traditions pan-Indianized to fit in the vocabulary of Hindutva. Thirunavukkarasu discusses the welfarist political measures that various Dravidian parties in power took and views them as hampering the politics of warfare. In my view, his description of Dravidianism as an inclusive ideology—with Brahmanism as its other and Tamil as a uniting symbol—addresses neither the issues of religion other than Hinduism nor of minority languages such as Urdu which have a long presence in the state. With close attention to the changing configuration of Tamil politics, this chapter futuristically notes that in times to come, the influence of BJP, thanks to the use of warfare politics, is likely to expand electorally too.

Chapter 8, ‘Hindutva’s Reach Out to Muslims in the 2014 Elections: A Historical Analysis’, by Mohammad Reyaz, offers reflections on a subject that is probably one of the most discussed but less analysed and

least understood. In discussing how BJP sought to mobilize ‘Muslim votes’ in its support, Reyaz asks if there is a tension between BJP mobilizing ‘Muslim votes’ and its earlier criticism of similar moves by other political parties as ‘Muslim appeasement’, and if this move was effective in the 2014 elections? This chapter begins with Hindu revivalists’ conceptualization of Islam and its subsequent enunciation by the RSS to read the contemporary moment. Along the way, it discusses BJP’s Muslim leaders such as Arif Baig and Sikander Bakht. The bulk of the chapter dwells on new fronts floated by or affiliated to RSS–BJP—the Muslim Rashtriya Manch, the Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind (not to be confused with the anti-colonial Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind) led by Maulana Suhaib Qasmi, and the All India Organization of Imams of Mosques. Like Thirunavukkarasu’s, Reyaz’s chapter, too, draws on interviews conducted with activists and leaders of these organizations. What emerges from Reyaz’s analysis is that the BJP’s reach among Muslims is severely limited; however, Muslim leaders recruited by BJP and converted to its ideology speak the language of assimilation and majoritarianism resembling RSS’. This specific aspect shows that the goal of warfare—to efface Muslim difference and violently assimilate them into the putative ‘mainstream’—seems to have worked with a tiny section of Muslims, especially upon the formation of the new government after the 2014 elections.

In Chapter 9, ‘Media, Corporates, and Democracy: Lessons from the 2014 General Elections’, Sudhir Pattnaik discusses at length the relationship between media and democracy, a theme addressed by Ahmad as well as Sethi and Hasan, though differently. In more ways than one, Pattnaik’s account is that of an insider’s as he edits *The Samadrusti*,¹⁷ a news magazine in Odia, and he has also been associated with pro-people movements. His analysis covers both the national scene and the state he is based in and is most familiar with. His main concern is the alliance between media and the rich corporate houses, which, he argues, does not augur well for a genuine democracy. Because of this alliance and the increasing expenses required for fighting elections, the democratic choice is severely restricted and chances for pro-people parties to win nearly foreclosed. In his view, it is this alliance between media, politicians, and the corporate houses that explains the victory of

¹⁷ See http://samadrusti.com/ourassociations_samadrustiv.asp.

Modi at the national level and that of Naveen Patnaik-led Biju Janata Dal at the state level (Odisha). Sudhir Pattnaik takes liberalization of India as marking a new phase when the doors for the investment capital in India opened wide. Odisha was a prime site for neoliberal investment. As a result of it, companies such as Vedanta were given free space to pursue anti-people, profit-driven policies, which severely affected the lives and world of Dongria Kondhs, a tribal community. The net result of the above-mentioned alliance and the processes underpinning it is that people stand transformed, to cite Pattnaik's evocative phrase, 'into helpless spectators to elections'. In spirit, Pattnaik's observation speaks to Marcuse's delineation of warfare-welfare mechanism—displacement of and misery for the tribals and the dispossessed and the glitter of development for the rich and the corporate.

Chapter 10 is by Patrick French, an award-winning historian, prominent writer, and global researcher, known, among others, as biographer of V.S. Naipaul (French 2017). Titled 'On the Ground: The Unfolding of the 2014 General Election Campaign', French's chapter presents a panoramic view of his travel account across India—Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Bihar, and UP. Undertaken in April–May 2014, French spoke to people from various walks of life, including politicians, during his travels. 'Impressionistic', as he himself describes it, French's main contention is that no single factor can be identified to explain BJP's victory. Among those he considers salient are: the professional nature of BJP's nationwide campaign; Modi's appeal among the youth which enthusiastically took part in voting; people's ability to decide on the grounds of economic self-interest and aspiration than caste calculus; and so on. This line of explanation converges with the one discussed in the first part of this 'Introduction'. French also suggests that the BJP is likely to win in 2019 elections. Some readers may find part of French's descriptions—written in a flowing prose—striking. French writes:

Paswan Junior wore a crisp white shirt and blue jeans. Which designer were they from, if he didn't mind me asking? 'I don't know if I should say this, but they're True Religion.' Faith! True Religion jeans were selling at Rs 40,000 a pair in the finer shopping malls. On polling day, Chirag Paswan won his seat and became the MP for Jamui.

The fact that the price and brand of Paswan's dress is observable finely illustrates sociologist Niklas Luhmann's (1998: 48) observation that

‘everything becomes contingent whenever *what* is observed depends on *who* is being observed’.

In his second contribution, ‘Unity in Diversity: Democracy and Manifestos in the 2014 Indian Elections’ (Chapter 11), Irfan Ahmad offers a detailed exploration of manifestos of three parties: the AAP, the BJP, and the Congress. Paying attention to their texts as well as visual symbolism, the chapter argues that there were more similarities than differences among them. The discussion on similarity is organized under three headings: (a) Economy, Development, Religion; (b) Social Groups; and (c) International Relations and Security. The next section dwells on the minor differences to say that they, too, did not reflect what Jacques Rancière calls dissensus and takes, unlike Schmitt, as the core of the political. Ahmad concludes with some observations on the prevalent views that elections offer freedom of choice to show their limits, structural and theoretical. Ahmad’s key contention, following Rancière, is that elections and their manifestos institute policies that inscribe the *world differently* as opposed to politics, which beckons to a *possible different world*. In Rancière’s terms, this chapter shows the weight of the warfare-welfare synthesis and the lack of an alternative to it.

Before the volume concludes with an ‘Afterword’ by Pralay Kanungo, in the final chapter, that is, Chapter 12, R. Thirunavukkarasu holds a detailed conversation with T.K. Oommen, Professor Emeritus at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Formerly, president of the International Sociological Association as well as of the Indian Sociological Society, and an established author with many works of distinction to his credit, Oommen has influenced a generation of sociologists, some of whom are contributors to this volume. Given the anthropological–sociological approach of this volume, it is only befitting to elicit Oommen’s views on how the discipline he worked in has historically dealt with the subjects of elections and democracy. The nature and subject of this conversation between Thirunavukkarasu and Oommen make it as much a chapter about the present as it is a chapter in the history of Indian sociology, or about the sociology of sociology. Thirunavukkarasu poses thoughtful and probing questions about the past as well as future of sociology–anthropology in relation to the study of elections. Drawing on his vast, long, rich experience as a teacher, as well as on his prolific scholarship

and research (including an empirical inquiry into the Bhoodan movement led by Vinoba Bhave), Oommen also reflects on methodological and theoretical questions that the discipline ought to pursue in the future. He identifies three levels of anthropological–sociological investigation: local, meso, and macro-national. Oommen recognizes the warfare-welfare dynamic as follows: ‘The Indian state is at once a protector in terms of welfare measures and a predator indulging in warfare against a segment of its citizens because of their religious and even linguistic identities’ (also see Oommen 1994). In the latter part of this sentence, it is fair to include the ‘unruly’ poor and not so poor among the manufactured majority too.

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I

DEMOCRACY AS RUMOUR

Media, Religion, and the 2014 Indian Elections

Irfan Ahmad

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country.

—Edward Bernays¹ (cited in Fuller 2015: 290)

The Argument: Media, Rumour, and Democracy

It is my hypothesis that rumour, democracy, and media—in the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ alike—are connected. Much of the literature, however, does not make this connection because it links rumour to peasants (prior to the onset of electoral democracy) who did not operate in the parliamentary realm. Furthermore, rumour belongs to ‘precapitalist society’ where, according to Guha (1983: 256), it is a natural medium of insurgency in the absence of literacy whereas democracy pertains to capitalism with literacy. Put differently, the assumption here is that whereas the sources of written/printed words are identifiable, those of oral words are not. Another perspective views rumours as a threat

¹ An architect of modern public relations and nephew of Sigmund Freud.

to democracy because they lack official verification (Coady 2012). In both perspectives, however, rumour and democracy remain unrelated. Scholars have written separately on rumour (for example, Gluckman 1963; Pain 1967; Stewart and Strathern 2004), democracy (for example, Dahl 2001; Guha 2007; Keane 2009; Tilly 2007), and media (for example, Mehta 2008; Rajagopal 2001; Ranganathan and Rodrigues 2010; Rudolph 2008; Willis 2007).² But few connect them to advance a hypothesis as this chapter does.

A key assumption of the literature on rumour is that its agents are often non-state. Although some view them positively, others hold a pessimistic view. In writings from Guha (1983) and Scott (1990) to Bhabha (1995), rumour is invested with a heroic signification and hailed as 'genre of rebel communication' (Ghosh 2008: 1235; Spivak 1988). Anthropologists studying post-colonial India, albeit not focussed on rumours, also echo this view (for example, Gupta 1995: 388). So do studies of rumour elsewhere. In his study of the 1996 violence in Owerri, Nigeria, Bastian (2003: 67, 74–5) shows how rumour worked to galvanize subaltern militants against the wealthy, parvenu millionaires and the secrecy behind their power. 'Rumored conspiracies' that these elites belonged to 'secret cults', Bastian argues, were forms of contestation against the non-transparent dictatorial regime. To Coombe (1997: 268, 270–1), rumours about Procter & Gamble, Reebok, and the like, among the 'subaltern spheres' of African-Americans are 'cultural guerilla tactics' against the invisibility and hyperreality of the post-industrial age where sign value has dislodged exchange value. Coombe agrees with Patricia Turner (1993) that rumour and legends are modes of resistance; she critiques Turner for not linking them to the "'post-industrial" conditions'. In contrast, Veena Das (1998) and Jonathan Spencer (2000) view rumour pessimistically. Discussing the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom, Das (1998: 119) notes the 'pessimistic view of ... rumor in mobilizing hate'. Both viewpoints, however, imply that seldom do the powerful and the state circulate rumour (see, for example, Sunstein [2014] on rumours about Barack Obama). That members of a power elite (Mills 1959) such as John Howard, are also agents of rumour remains undiscussed (Maddox 2008).

² Literature cited here is representative, not exhaustive. Space constraints prevent me from mentioning many other important works.

This chapter contends that rumour is also a patrician weapon. During World War II, for example, the United States set up 'rumor clinics' (Coady 2012: 105). In the build up to Iraq's invasion in 2003, Western media worked as rumour mills to spread the lie that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.³ Rumour figured in the 2006 WikiLeaks cable in which the USA planned to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria. The strategy was to 'take rumors that are ... false ... and promote them.' (Assange 2015). The 2013 Muzaffarnagar 'riot' that preceded the 2014 elections in India was sparked by a fake video shared on Facebook and YouTube by Sangeet Singh Som (*New York Times* 2013) of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the right-wing, anti-minorities party that won the elections. In the 'riots' of 1990–1 in Aligarh, newspapers like *Amar Ujala* told readers that Muslims had killed 74 Hindus at Aligarh Muslim University. This was a lie (Ahmad 2009: 168–9).⁴

These instances amply show that rumour is also non-oral. For Guha (1983: 259–60), whereas the source of news is 'open to verification', rumour's origin is unknown. Leaving aside if it is origin or effect that is consequential, Indian media routinely use anonymous, unidentifiable sources: '*sutroṇ kī māneñ tō*' (if we believe the sources), '*sutroṇ kē anusār*' (according to the sources), '*kahā jāta hai*' (it is said), and so on.⁵ My argument disavows Guha's separation between rumour (specific to pre-capitalist society) and news (specific to a capitalist society). I see continuity between pre-capitalist and capitalist society, though the continuity is far from straightforward. Herskovits (1937: 74) illustrated this vis-à-vis *combite*, an act of collective solidarity when Haitians come together to help their neighbour finish a specific work, usually in the midst of singing and drumming.

³ See <https://www.mediamatters.org/research/2013/03/19/where-are-the-medias-iraq-war-boosters-10-years/193117#friedman>, last accessed on 16 July 2018.

⁴ During my doctoral fieldwork between 2001 and 2004 in Aligarh (Ahmad 2009), a university town in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), many of my interlocutors referred to *Amar Ujala* as *Amar Uchālā*, the last word meaning literally 'tossing up'. But in that context of conversation, it meant making up, bordering on untruth.

⁵ On the use of 'anonymous sources' by media (including television), especially in cases related to 'terrorism', see the report by, *TwoCircles.net* (2016), a non-mainstream medium.

At the *combite* a man not only learns all the gossip of the day but enjoys learning and singing ... which ... comment on the shortcomings of neighbors or evaluate the hospitality of those who have called *combites*.... The *simidor* is thus a person to be feared, since in addition to his ability as a singer ... he is also an outstanding improviser. As one Haitian expressed it, 'The *simidor* is a journalist'.

Reading this passage, I was reminded of my native village in Bihar, India. Though men, no less than women, also indulged in rumour-mongering, it was a poor widow who was singled out as rumour-monger, called 'the village BBC'.⁶ Relevant here is the link between rumour and BBC that the villagers made. Returning to Herskovits, if gossip is connected to *simidor* (a journalist), it is plausible to see rumour-mongers of pre-capitalist society as today's journalists. Before proceeding further, it should be noted that neither rumour nor gossip is merely oral. Italy has a 'huge gossip magazine industry' owned by the democratically elected Silvio Berlusconi (White 2010).

To substantiate my argument, in the next section, I show how the presumed distinction among rumour, propaganda, advertising, and related terms is unsustainable. The subsequent section analyses Indian media to illustrate my argument, which comprises three connected propositions. First, the analyses of coverage by television channels—*India TV*, *NDTV*, *Aaj Tak*, *ANI*, and *IBN*—and social media demonstrates how rumour was important to the 2014 elections, especially vis-à-vis their stance towards BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi. Second, to craft the myth of Modi as representing 'development'—rather than the divisive, religious nationalism of Hindutva, an ideological-political project that aims to make India majoritarian along Brahmanical Hindu path (see Bhatt 2001; Jaffrelot 2007; Kanungo 2002)—media worked as channels of rumours.⁷ Third, through a discussion of the circulation of forged photographs on Facebook, this chapter shows how rumour also worked in social media. The penultimate section describes how the 2014 interface among rumour, media, elections, and the neoliberal economy marked the onset of 'designer democracy' as manifested in

⁶ On the gendering of gossip in the Central Pacific and Mexico, see Besnier (1996) and Lomnitz (1995) respectively.

⁷ This is not to imply that media always favoured Modi. During the 2002 pogrom, the English-language media was in particular critical of Modi (Mehta 2006).

'politics *as* media'. In conclusion, the chapter discusses the effects of mass-mediated rumours and three distinct factors that enabled the BJP's victory. It ends with comparative observations on the interrelationships between rumour and democracy beyond India.

Situated in the emerging anthropological subfield of news and journalism (Bird 2010b), this chapter draws on my earlier ethnographic fieldwork on Indian media (Ahmad 2014b). The anthropology of news and journalism has predominantly dealt with the reception of news media (Bird 2010a; Peterson 2010; Rao 2010). Using critical discourse analysis (van Dijk 2009), this chapter focusses on the contents of television news—a neglected aspect Bird (2010a) urged anthropologists to address. Although I am aware of the need to study reception of rumours, my focus here is on their production and representation. Postill (2010: 8–9) notes that practice theory (concerned with reception) cannot explain phenomena such as the 2004 tsunami and 'rumors and hoaxes across internet and mobile networks'. It is interesting to note that the 2014 election was called a 'political tsunami' (Sardesai 2014: xi). As the anthropology of news journalism is 'inherently multidisciplinary' (Bird 2010a: 14), so is my intervention.

Examining the Separation: Rumour, Propaganda, Advertising, Public Relations (PR)

I find Weeks' and Garrett's (2014: 402) definition of 'rumour' useful: 'Rumors are unverified stories or information statements people share with one another.' An important difference between rumour and gossip concerns their respective scale. A communication becomes a rumour when it spreads via a large number of people. Gossip, in contrast, is focussed and first-hand. Although the subject of rumour may be impersonal, that of gossip is not (Coady 2012: 87, 107n4).⁸ The merit in Weeks' and Garrett's definition is rumour's relative neutrality vis-à-vis:

⁸ In literature, anthropological (for example, see Besnier 1996, 2009 and Stewart and Strathern 2004) and general, rumour and gossip are verily written with an 'and'—rumour and gossip. Pain (1967: 284n2) used "gossip" as a catch-all term subsuming both "rumour" and "scandal". For philosophers, gossip is 'a subspecies of rumor' (Gelfert 2013: 769). Sudhir Kakar (2005: 58), a well-known Indian psychoanalyst, however, maintains that in India, 'rumor is ... only a more dignified term for gossip'.

(a) media (oral/written/visual); (b) agent (elite/subaltern); and (c) source (anonymous/identifiable). That is, rumour is not inevitably tied to orality, subalternity, and anonymity as the literature on rumour presupposes. Nor does it see rumour as obverse of propaganda, which was initially a positive term used by the Vatican. Propaganda became negative in the twentieth century. In the 'democratic world', it became identified with wartime Germany and Communism even as the United States and the United Kingdom (UK) used it. The democratic world's attribution of propaganda to its enemies is due to the Enlightenment premise that public opinion is formed in the 'tribunal of reason', not based on emotions, faith, or prejudice (Price 1992; Speier 1934). One can discern the following equations:

Public opinion: reason=debate=persuasion=European Enlightenment=
liberalism=democracy=truth
Propaganda: prejudice=faith/belief=passion=manipulation=crowd=
totalitarianism=lie

However, democracy entails the 'manufacture of consent' (Chomsky 1987–8: 14). The claim that public opinion is averse to belief misses the point that 'the politician who yesterday said "God is on our side" today says "public opinion is on our side"' (Bourdieu 1979: 125). For Modi, god and public opinion went together. During election rallies, he said that 'in democracy, people are like God ...' (IBN7 2014) and 'I have been chosen by God' (Hindu 2014). After being elected as prime minister, in a speech at Madison Square Garden in New York in 2014, Modi described his electoral victory as divine. He pronounced: '*janata jan janārdan*', or 'the will of the people prevails over the world', where the people themselves are god because *janārdan* denotes the Hindu god Lord Krishna (Rajagopal 2016: 129).

I agree with Jowett's and O'Donnell's (2012) definition of propaganda: it includes advertising and public relations (PR).⁹ They classify it

⁹ Public relations or PR is simply a successor to propaganda without conceptually distancing itself from the latter. Dwelling on its origin, Edward Bernays, one of the founders of PR, said: 'Propaganda got to be a bad word because of the Germans ... using it [in 1914–18]. So what I did was to try to find some other words. So we found the words Counsel on Public Relations.' Spin is a specific tactic in PR and used as 'manipulative or deceptive communications'

into white, black, and grey. Although sources of white propaganda (for example, national parades) are identifiable, those of black propaganda (for example, 'the big lie', deceptions intended to help vanquish the enemy during a war) are 'concealed ... and spreads lies.' Grey propaganda falls in between (2012: 7, 17). This typology, however, is not relational. For instance, it does not account for the transformation and stabilization of the big lie during wars (when many nation-states were born) into post-war 'truth'.

Unlike propaganda, rumour is linked to a close-knit community and emerges in crises (Watson and Hill 2012: 263; Vernon 2014). Limiting rumour to such a condition, however, masks a modernist bias. When printed words replaced speech in eighteenth-century Europe (Speier 1934), it meant relative incredibility of circulatory, floating speech vis-à-vis stable, verifiable printed words because pre-modern peasants spread rumours orally. This privileging of the eye over the ears (McLuhan 1964) is by no means universal. In South Asia and elsewhere, the oral and the visual/printed (that is, rumour and propaganda) criss-cross each other. While reporting on a Modi rally, Srinivasan Jain (2014), a well-known journalist of *NDTV* (the English-language channel of the Delhi-based private news broadcaster, New Delhi Television), discussed Modi's neoliberal model of politics, development. He asked the youth why they supported Modi. One youth replied as follows: 'Because Modi transformed Gujarat into Gujarat.' Notice the tautology. When asked if he had visited Gujarat, the youth continued: 'I have not gone to Gujarat but people say so and I know.' Mark the certitude of knowing based on unnamed sources. Another youth remarked: 'I have seen on TV and heard it from so many people repeatedly ... that good development has taken place there.' Notice the source is both television and

(cited in Miller and Dinan 2008: 5, 2). Such is the context to locate the role of Hill and Knowlton, a PR company, or PR lobbyist Edward Klobberg, whose clients included dictators of Guatemala, Burma, and Liberia. Justifying why he represented Saddam Hussein, then systematically killing the Kurds, Klobberg said that Hussein was a friend of the West (Miller and Dinan 2008: 13). As for legends, Turner (1993: 5) takes them as more than solidified rumours which are 'short, non-narrative expression of belief', whereas legends are 'more traditionally grounded narratives of belief'.

repeated hearing, the source of which remains unsubstantiated. Such power of saying/hearing was already evident in the 1951 elections. The Congress party rumoured that Gandhi's 'soul had taken residence in ballot box' to watch who voted for the Congress (Akbar 1996: 60).¹⁰ What Jain's report showed was simultaneity of the oral and the visual—rumour and propaganda. In the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots also, the oral and visual went together. As most people did not have access to social media, the riots spread through a rumour based on the claim that people had watched it in a video or received it as a text message on their phone (conversation in Delhi in 2014 with anthropologist Badri Narayan).

It is due to the sensory prejudice that rumour in print, television, and social media is called propaganda, not rumour. In some ways, this prejudice is Leninist. To Lenin, 'without ABC, there are rumors, fairy tales and prejudices—but not politics' (Banerjee 2001: 208). Despite the documented role of newspapers and telegrams in spreading rumours as early as 1935 (Prasad 1935),¹¹ Mukhopadhyay (2005: 39) found it 'peculiar' that rumours circulated through modern media. Knopf (1974), however, showed how newspapers, including the *New York Times*, circulated rumours. Rumour is also not absent from Twitter (Oh, Agrawal, and Rao 2013). In the 2014 Delhi riots, WhatsApp was used to spread rumours (*afvāh*) (NDTV 2014d). The notion that rumour circulates in a close-knit community bypasses the changing nature of community itself. Likewise, the premise that rumour emerges in a crisis ignores the fact that a crisis depends on media.

¹⁰ Contra the liberal self-claims about the transparency and rationality of democracy and market (West and Sanders 2003), several works show indeed how opaque they are. Furthermore, the 'non-rational', 'the mystical' (for example, *uwavi* [sorcery] in Mozambique) are not absent in democracies as people construe power and their own engagements with it by bringing in the invisible and the vernacular (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2003; Hellinger 2003; Michelutti 2008; West 2005).

¹¹ After the 1934 Bihar earthquake, Prasad (1935: 4, 10) recorded how rumours also circulated through newspapers. Further, an astrologer from Delhi 'wired to Mr. X entreating him to leave Patna' for it would stand destroyed. That Mr X received the telegram was not a rumour. Concerned with psychology of rumour, Prasad's focus, however, remained on the orality of rumour to disregard the salience and role of modern media.

Gary Fine and Bill Ellis (2010: 9) write: ‘Governments ... lie, but scholars don’t consider their statements to be rumor, only propaganda’, because authorities can know the truth. Fine and Ellis presume two separate domains—government and non-government. They overlook the deep state that may present itself as non-government (Lofgren 2014; Sluka 2000). For example, *Deccan Herald* (2014) published a story ‘Video Footage of ISIS Member having Sex with a Donkey.’ This 74-word story reported that a coalition ‘drone in Syria’ captured the image. It ended with: ‘the video ... may be [a] ... hoax ... watch it nevertheless’. It gave no source except the embedded video. Given that the Government of India had earlier blocked ‘dangerous’ videos, why didn’t it ask *Deccan Herald* to remove the alleged Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) video? Is not such a public anonymity a cover for impunity (Bauman 2014: 129)?

In light of the clarifications showing instability, inaccuracy, even poverty, of the sealed distinction among rumour, propaganda, and cognate terms, readers may appreciate why rumour is central in this chapter. My concern is with what Theobald (2004: 2) calls ‘untruth’ and ‘half-truths’ that the media reflect and generate. To inform readers, Theobald drew on sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’ (d. 1936) observation about every newspaper being a defender of some interests rather than defending a principle. There are three additional reasons why I privilege rumour over propaganda. First, the written and visual communications are mediated by oral communications. Anthropologist Mark Hobart observed that in Indonesia, media practices included not only watching television shows but also ‘chatting about’ them (Bird 2010a: 12). Second, my contention about the inseparability of propaganda and rumour approximates that of Abélès (1988: 391, 398), who sees ‘no difference in kind between the political rituals of traditional societies and those [of modern France]’ with ‘a religious dimension’. Third, I unsettle the narrative of modernization theory that the separation between rumour and propaganda enacts: the onward march from orality to written/screen culture as a sign of ‘progress’. In short, I am sceptical of a radical and thorough rupture between ‘traditional’ society associated with rumours on the one hand, and ‘modern’ society linked to propaganda, on the other. I instead see many elements of non-linear continuities between rumours, the oldest form of mass media (Kapferer 1990) in pre-modern world marked by orality, and ‘modern’ polities

characterized by newspapers, radio, television, and, more recently, digital and social media.¹²

Media and Rumour in the 2014 Elections

This section analyses the interface between rumour and media during the 2014 Indian elections. It focusses on television as well as social media. My choice of television channels is premised on their language diversity and their reach (Ahmad 2014b; Rajagopal 2015).

Modi's 'Fixed' Interview: India TV

On 12 April, 2014, *India TV* telecast a 77-minute interview of Modi. The director of *India TV* resigned, alleging that it was fixed. Known for his show, *Aap ki Adalat* (Your Court), Rajat Sharma (2014b) interviewed Modi (see Figure 1.1). The audience was made up of *India TV* staff and their friends and relatives. The interview was more like 'a BJP

¹² Most scholarly writings on rumour assume this rupture. As noted earlier, they also take it for granted that while rumour originates from the people (the subaltern, so to speak), propaganda originates from the state and the elites. Thus, in a valuable publication based on archival research, anthropologist Martin Sokefeld (2002) too maintains this dualism even as his own data say otherwise. In India, under the colonial rule (during World War I), rumour spread among the people in areas close to the Gilgit Agency that the German Kaiser and his people had embraced Islam and that they had joined the Turkish caliph in the fight against the British. Sokefeld himself notes that the foreign wing of the German state spread this rumour. Yet, he continues to maintain the distinction between rumour (people) and propaganda (the state or the elite). Writing about rumours in Haiti, Perice (1997: 4–5) does occasionally say that 'rumors are integral to the power of terror and the terror of power', and that 'this is the rumor of the authoritarian state', yet he too could not go past the consensus in literature to see rumour as the weapon of the elite. Perice too viewed rumour as part of oppositional discourse vis-à-vis the authoritarian Haitian state. Likewise, Julia Paley (2001: 73–4) notes that residents of La Bandera, a *población* (shanty town) in Santiago (in Chile), told her how rumour that one group of residents would attack another was planted by the regime of dictator Pinochet. Paley simply mentions them without analysing rumours in their own right and as a weapon of the power elites.



Figure 1.1 Modi in Sharma's *Aap ki Adalat*

Source: Quora.com (2014).

rally' than an interview. Television crew and audience competed to click 'selfies' with Modi. A young woman screamed: 'Modi, I love you!' *India TV* broadcast seven repeats of the interview, each on a polling day (Sardesai 2014: 226–9).

Sharma, host of the show, had been an activist in BJP's student wing and was part of the Hindutva family of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), formed in 1925 for the purpose of establishing a Hindu state (Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 2007; Kanungo 2002). In the 1970s, Sharma came to know Modi, then an RSS foot soldier, and they became friends (Sardesai 2014: 225–9). In Sharma's show, there is a judge who pronounces his verdict. In the show featuring Modi, the judge was Pushpesh Pant of Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Before 'interviewing' him, Sharma showed a collage of Modi as a towering, awe-inspiring leader. Modi proclaimed: 'I will not let the lamp be extinguished, I will not let the nation be eliminated.' Sharma began by stating the allegations by Modi's rivals that his popularity stemmed from media publicity. Modi turned to the audience smilingly, to ask if they supported him willingly. 'Yes' was the cheerful reply. Sharma (2014a) did not ask Modi counter-questions as he had earlier done

with Arvind Kejriwal, leader of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). So scripted was the Modi interview that the judge treated Modi as if he was already prime minister. Exonerating him of any role in the 2002 pogrom,¹³ he warned him that people would ask Modi how ‘as prime minister he would keep promises’. Pant felt no need to add ‘if elected’. Likewise, long before results were announced, ANI’s Smita Prakash addressed Modi as: ‘You are the first prime minister who ...’ (ANI 2014).

Readers wondering why Modi’s interview is being discussed as a rumour should recall the definition: ‘Rumors are unverified stories or information statements people share with one another.’ So, what were the unverified statements in the interview? The slogan—‘I will not let the lamp be extinguished, I will not let the nation be eliminated’—was unverified. Sharma could have asked: was there a threat to eliminate India? If so, who was the enemy? Furthermore, had not Modi already extinguished the lamp of scores of farmers (*Outlook* 2014) who committed suicide in his state, and that of more than 250,000 people who were forced to languish in camps for years as a result of the 2002 pogrom that took place under his aegis as chief minister (Ahmad 2013)? That Sharma did not ask such questions was partly due to the changed nature of the interview itself. Anil Chamadia (2015: 4–8), himself a journalist, observes that the liberalization of India changed politics and media (explained later). The nature of political interviews began to resemble embedded journalism. Rather than being a critical dialogue to establish veracity of news and events, it became a monologue where the interviewee determined what questions would be asked. Chamadia

¹³ This refers to the state-mediated anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in early 2002 in which around 3,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed. The pogrom was justified as revenge against the death of 58 Hindutva activists in a train accident/incident on 27 February 2002 at Godhra railway station (Ahmad 2013; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Thapan 2010). This incident occurred following a quarrel between Hindutva activists-passengers and Muslim hawkers who, according to initial media reports, set the coach S-6 of Sabarmati Express on fire. A government inquiry, however, found that the fire might have been caused from within the train. ‘Given the stakes involved for the BJP’, writes Sundar (2004: 153; cf. Kishwar 2014), ‘perhaps we shall never know what really happened [at the Godhra station].’ As the then chief minister of Gujarat, Modi described the Godhra incident as a terrorist conspiracy.

takes Modi as a symbol of this transformation. He also notes how the interview itself became news. And 'all news' became 'breaking news' (Ninan 2007: 249).

Before and after the Modi interview, *India TV* (2014) telecast news about the interview itself. It ran a story stating how the interview went viral as it was trending on Twitter and Facebook.¹⁴ Since rumour also operated in print and visuals, the Modi interview demonstrates how rumour spreads at the conjunctions of orality, print, television, and Web 2.0, reflecting what Rojecki and Meraz (2016: 26) term factitious informational blends (FIBs). Anchored in the new communications infrastructure, they take FIBs as unverified information 'that resembles rumor'. Rojecki and Meraz studied Web pages, Google searches, television, and newspapers as an example of FIB to analyse the 2004 US presidential campaign.

To address Modi as India's prime minister before ballots were cast was also a rumour. To grasp this point, we must cut the umbilical cord between rumour and crisis/uncertainty that the literature on rumour presupposes. Writing about the poor of Mumbai, Eckert (2012) mentions how there are also rumours of hope. As he heard through a rumour that a fellow slum dweller got legal justice, Gopal Bhai, too, hoped for justice. What mattered for Gopal Bhai was the hope of securing justice generated by the rumour. Thus viewed, the FIBs relating to the Modi interview reflect rumours of hope and opportunity. Unlike Eckert's interlocutors, among whom rumours spread horizontally, in the *India TV* example they also spread vertically.

Let me move away from the persona of Modi to the issue considered central to the BJP campaign: development.

Development versus Hindutva: NDTV and Aaj Tak

Barkha Dutt, a prominent anchor-journalist of *NDTV*, did a show about Amethi, a town in the state of UP and the constituency of Rahul Gandhi, candidate for prime minister of the Congress party in the 2014 general elections (*NDTV* 2014a). Dutt asked Gandhi's electoral rival from the BJP, Smriti Irani (a former leading television actress): 'Has development taken priority over Hindutva or is the BJP a bit

¹⁴ On media virality, see Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013).

confused?’ Irani replied: ‘I don’t think there is confusion ... Hindutva is a way of life and when you talk about a better way of life, then, development is central to that entire thing [Hindutva].’ Dutt eliminated the link Irani made between development and Hindutva to present development, not Hindutva, as the key issue. In the penultimate part of the programme, showing Irani address people in the background, she asserted: ‘At street-side meetings like this ... Irani makes the focus of her speeches what she calls the absence of real development.’ Shortly before this the camera had depicted the rough road signifying the lack of development under Gandhi, the sitting Member of Parliament (MP). Dutt posed the same question to Murli Manohar Joshi, a senior BJP leader: ‘Is Hindutva now a footnote from being a core issue’ (NDTV 2014b)? Joshi refuted it. Yet, she persisted with her narrative of development, at which point Joshi said: ‘Barkha jī, you have every right to be confused. But you have no right to confuse the people and me.’

It is relevant to dwell on ‘development’, central to the Indian state since Independence and modelled on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’ (USSR) economy. Important to development was distribution of surplus lands to the landless (Dube 1982). In BJP’s discourse, development became its obverse. In Modi’s Gujarat, Adani got land at very cheap rates, as compared to others (*Business Standard* 2014). For Modi, taking land from farmers to give to capitalists who backed him became development. While he ruled Gujarat, scores of farmers committed suicide. Anyone questioning Modi’s ‘development’ became ‘anti-national’. Those who questioned his wilful inaction in the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, in which over 3,000 were killed with authorities’ complicity, were labelled ‘anti-national’ (Sardesai 2015). For BJP, Modi, and scores of his supporters in India and abroad, development also meant a muscular Hindu nationalism manifest in India’s rise on the global stage and her military might in fighting ‘Islamic terrorism’ inside as well as outside, especially ‘Muslim’ Pakistan.

Anjana Om Kashyap, a well-known anchor-journalist with the leading Hindi news channel *Aaj Tak* (2014), also staged this development myth. In a show, she asked students of Banaras Hindu University what election meant to them. The first response was: ‘I will say only this—*har har Modī ghar ghar Modī*’—a slogan comparing Modi to God Shiva and indicating his presence in every home. Although a few students did speak of growth, most saw development and Hindutva as substitutes for each other.

Kashyap: What is the meaning of development?

Student: Since respected Modi, the greatest development man (*vikās pūrush*), is fighting from Varanasi our faith is reaffirmed that it is considered the greatest town of Hindutva.

Kashyap: Will he win because of Hindutva?

Student: Yes, yes! He will win because of Hindutva.

Kashyap: What is the meaning of Hindustan [India]?

Student: The meaning of Hindustan is Hindutva. (*Aaj Tak* 2014)

The student finished, shouting: 'Victory to Hindus; victory to nationalism'. More students reasserted such views. To conclude, Kashyap asked what mattered to them—'development, religion, politics, or caste?' Only a few students said 'development'. Yet, she concluded the show urging students 'to clap in the name of development'.

The link between Hindutva and development that Kashyap of *Aaj Tak* severed was reaffirmed a day after the election result by Uma Bharti, a senior ascetic-leader of the BJP. Barkha Dutt asked Bharti: is '[people's] vote for development, as Modi *jī* has said?' She clarified that development and Hindutva were not separate, as Dutt implied: 'Hindutva is breath of life [*prāṇ*] of India.... However, *prāṇ* remains still in its place.... Things which require maintenance are hands, feet and eyes—in other words, development.' Bharti later extolled Modi's development and predicted that 'for the first time Muslims would be happy and safe in India because the report of Gujarat is saying this. Muslims of Gujarat are the happiest' (*NDTV* 2014e). Dutt did not ask Bharti to verify which report described Muslims as the happiest in Gujarat. To seek the veracity of Bharti's statement was to examine the rumour of development.

Social Media: Threat, Abuse, and Rumour

Rumour also worked in social media. In using social media, Modi was far ahead of his main rival, Rahul Gandhi. Having launched his website in 2002, Modi had joined Twitter and Facebook in 2009. The Congress reluctantly considered social media only in 2013. The BJP had formed a special information technology (IT) cell commanded by Arvind Gupta, a PhD from a US university. A 'war room' tasked with advertising was instituted in Delhi. 'We used Facebook and Twitter', a BJP leader

stated, 'to make micro messaging part of our election strategy ... like ... Obama did' (Sardesai 2014: 37). During the campaign, 13 million had participated in 75 million Facebook interactions about Modi. Of 56 million election tweets, Modi figured in 11.1 million, Kejriwal in 5 million, and Gandhi in 2 million (Sardesai 2014: 235–43; also see Kanungo 2015; Pal 2015).

Modi took personal interest in social media. He said to Sardesai: 'You and your wife are on Twitter a lot.' Modi made this remark after Sardesai's wife had tweeted how Modi should have acknowledged Jasodhaben, his wife: a taboo topic. Sardesai faced the 'campaign of hate ... against anyone who didn't follow the prescribed narrative [of the BJP]'. Profiles on social media, such as 'Proud Hindu Nationalists' and 'Hindu Defense League', spewed abuse 'under the cloak of anonymity'. Sardesai was threatened for his tweet about Modi: 'We will cut you into pieces.' When Sardesai (2014: 239–40) complained to Modi, he said: 'It is wrong but how can I stop everyone.' Following Teun van Dijk (1992), one can see how Modi's disapproval of threat was undercut by the latter part of his comment. It is important to note that the anonymity of social media justified the lack of action against threats issued to Sardesai. Contrast this with the swift action in 2012 against a Mumbai girl. On Facebook, a 21-year-old girl had disapproved of the shutdown of Mumbai to mark the funeral of Bal Thackeray, a militant leader of Shiv Sena (who once opined that there was 'nothing wrong if they [Muslims] are treated as Jews were in Nazi Germany' [Ahmad 2009: 175]). She was immediately arrested (Prakash 2012).

The BJP campaign used fake photos and tweets to garner support for Modi. A tweet from an account purportedly of the daughter of the cricket legend, Sachin Tendulkar, was made to endorse Modi (BBC 2014). Of the many fake photos used for mobilization, I will discuss two. To show his humble origin, one photo depicted Modi sweeping the floor (see Figure 1.2). It was fake; Modi's head was superimposed on someone else's (*India Post* 2014; *India Today* 2016).

Another photo on Facebook, posted by a BJP MP from Gujarat, C.R. Paatil, depicted Obama watching Modi speak on television (see Figure 1.3). This image was doctored. In the original, Obama was watching the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak speak (BBC 2014). This photo aimed to show voters the importance given to Modi by the supreme leader of the world.



Figure 1.2 Fake Photograph of Modi Sweeping the Floor
Source: India Post (2014) and *India Today* (2016).



Figure 1.3 Fake Photograph of Obama Watching Modi's Speech on Television
Source: India Today (2014).

Both photographs were uncaptioned. Bourdieu's (2010: 19) observation that 'photos are nothing without words' requires qualification. The necessity for captions is predicated upon what is in the photograph and who is the audience. In the 1971 war, the Bangladeshi press circulated a photo showing a soldier peep inside the *lungī* (lower garment for men) of a villager. The caption read: 'That they are human is not important for these barbarians [West Pakistani soldiers]: what is important is whether

they are Hindus or Muslims.' It was believed that religious identity could be determined if the penis was circumcised. The original caption in the book where the photo first appeared read: 'Indian troops ... round up villagers suspected to be Pakistani spies. They peer into lungs in search of weapons' (Mookherjee 2012: 1587, 1596). The caption was needed because the identity of the soldier and the villager was uncertain. However, if figures in photos such as Modi or Obama are mediatized, what matters then are their activities and epistemic coverage reliability. Gelfert (2013: 763) writes that rumour thrives in an 'information-deprived' set-up. However, he takes the 'information-deprived' set-up as a given rather than ask why information is scant on some issues, whereas other topics are marked by 'communicative abundance' (Keane 2013: 19ff). This leads me to propose 'epistemic dissimulation' as a specific mechanism through which media obscure truth. For example, Modi's electoral punchline, 'I will not let the nation be eliminated'—indeed the entire Hindutva discourse of which it was a reflection—would not have acquired credence without media's discourse on 'Islamic terrorism'. It is important to recall that in a television debate soon after 9/11, Modi, then general secretary of the ruling party, congratulated the media for speaking the truth when it used the phrase 'Islamic terrorism'. He, however, lamented that Indian media used the phrase only after Western media did. In his view, terrorism was inherent in Islam (as also in Christianity, albeit less categorically), since it did not recognize other religions as true. He went on to say that 'for 1400 years', the 'whole world' had been a witness to terrorism (that is, since Muhammad's time). He saw the post-9/11 era as a battle between 'civilization' and 'terrorism' (Ahmad 2017c: 118). Sustaining this discourse of terrorism entailed effacing all that disrupted the narrative of Islamic terrorism. After 9/11, a United Nations (UN) resolution condemned 'Islamophobic violence'. 'Not a word about it appeared anywhere in the press nor was it mentioned on any [Indian] TV channel' (Zakaria 2006: 63). True, people follow what Gelfert (2013: 765) calls 'epistemic routines' of watching television. But media also practice 'epistemic dissimulation' without which our understanding of rumour, I submit, is flawed.

To close this section, a disclaimer is in order. My argument about rumours in social media and television channels holds when the 'unverified stories or information statements' are wilful. If they are due to negligence and inattentiveness, then media are obliged to issue corrections

as and when fact/truth becomes known. However, fact/truth does not come by itself; it is the media's responsibility to discover facts/truth for the public good. Publishing stories about the use of fake photos long after the election result, as, for instance, by *India Today* (2016), is almost redundant because rumours had achieved the goal of securing electoral victory.

Designer Democracy

Such relationships between media and democracy, as discussed earlier, are not limited to elections. Politics like India, the United States, and the UK work on the principles of political marketing and permanent campaigning. In 1997, Tony Blair told the newly elected MPs: 'Today is the day one of the campaign to win a second term' (in Lilleker 2006: 146). In India, elections are held almost every six months. Permanent campaigning follows the logic of advertising industry in which civic participation and meaningful debate are transformed into a brand through constant media ratings of politicians. Media and politics morph into politics *as media* (Ahmad 2014a).

Political Economy of News Media

Politics as media is facilitated by structural conditions. The early 1990s saw the beginning of liberalization in India, which meant end of the 'licence raj', thereby throwing sectors previously under state control open to the private sector. With privatization and expansion of television, enabled by foreign investment, the scene changed radically as news and television became a 'free' market. An important factor in the initial phase of privatization was Rupert Murdoch, chair of News Corporation. Among other things, he introduced the first 24/7 news network (*Star News*). In 2012, India was one of the top 15 media and entertainment markets in the world with US \$17 billion annual revenue (Mehta 2015: 50). From 1959 (when television was introduced) to 1991, state-controlled *Doordarshan* was the only news channel. In 2014, half of the 800 channels were news (Mehta 2015: 55). In this regard, Nalin Mehta, a television journalist-turned-academic, noted that news channels are largely propaganda wings of political parties; those investing in them are politicians, real estate, chit fund, money market companies and big corporations. It is an established practice

for news channels' teams of highly-paid professionals to mobilize paid news. Claiming to present the 'truth', news channels, however, keep the sources of their own finances hidden (Gupta and Shivramakrishnan 2011; Mehta 2015; Rajagopal 2015; Ranganathan 2015; Saeed 2015; Thomas 2010; Thussu 2007; also see Chapter 9 in this volume).

Scholars also note the concomitant rise of electoral Hindutva (with its explicit othering of religious minorities) and the private television. However, the othering can be traced to the state-controlled *Doordarshan* telecast of the television series, *Ramayana*, in 1987. Since the serial had a national audience, Indian and multinational companies competed to buy advertising time. At the conjunction of nationalism, Hindutva, and market, *Ramayana* surpassed all other series in advertising revenue (Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001). Such was the backdrop for the emergence of private news channels that aligned Hindu majoritarian nationalism with majority audience/viewers, who also shaped ratings of television networks. These news channels spoke of empowerment of audience/viewers vis-à-vis government-controlled media. However, 'empowerment' meant increased demand for the answerability of the media to 'Hindu sentiment' rather than enacting the common good (Ohm 2010: 129; also see Gopalakrishnan 2006).

'Designer democracy' may capture the multilayered interface among media, elections, politicians, the advertising industry, and neoliberalization, which has led to the bastardization of the common good and a 'major loss ... in democracy' (Said 2000). As an ideological project, policy and programme, state form, and governmentality (England and Ward 2007: 11–14), neoliberalization should not be taken to mean either withdrawal of the state or its declining role, but the redesigning of the state, and hence, of democracy. By 'designer democracy', I mean an electoral polity under a neoliberal economy where voters are viewed as consumers and parties/contestants as salesmen, and the communication between them is mediated predominantly by modern electronic and visual media, including social media (Chamadia 2015; Ninan 2007; Oza 2006; Rodrigues 2010). With analytical fineness, in *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity*, Melissa Aronczyk (2013) shows how profound changes within the corporate firms in the 1980s, mediated as they were by globalization, led to the idea of nation as a brand, which was officially adopted by many

nation-states in the 2000s or so.¹⁵ An important figure behind the phenomenon of 'nation-branding' was Simon Anholt, a British advertising tycoon. It is within this context that the description of India as 'Brand India' in the BJP's manifesto and constant comparison of 'brand Modi' and 'brand Rahul' by media has to be located.

My usage of 'designer democracy' is similar to Paley's (2001) 'marketing of democracy'. The difference, however, is that whereas 'designer democracy' stems from media studies and studies of democracy, 'marketing democracy' seems to be derived from economics.¹⁶ It is important to note that neither Paley nor I share Mehta's (2008a: 34ff.) account of how free market and satellite television 'strengthen democratic culture'. Mehta's 'argumentative television', which replicates Amartya Sen's 'argumentative Indian', ignores those Indians who argue in modes disapproved by media and thereby they stand excluded from any appearance in the media.¹⁷

As Gujarat's chief minister, Modi had hired APCO Worldwide (*Times of India* 2009), a Washington DC-based PR company, to ensure his 'image makeover'. Likewise, the Congress party approached a Japanese advertising company (*Times of India* 2014). In the 2014 BJP manifesto, India itself was presented as a 'brand'. Since they considered themselves brands, media deemed it normal, even moral, to ask: 'Is brand Gandhi diminishing?' (*NDTV* 2014c) or 'Brand Modi: Is he unstoppable?' (*Times Now* 2014).

A key element of designer democracy, especially since 9/11, has been the manufacturing and sale of fear in elections (Goodin 2006; Lean 2012). Rather than interrogating if there was a crisis or threat, media instead asks: is the threat/crisis serious (Bourdieu 2010)? So, to

¹⁵ I thank Tim Rosenkranz (New School for Social Research) for this reference.

¹⁶ I came to the idea of designer democracy through 'media-centred democracy' in Lilleker (2006: 110–13) where he mentioned 'designer politics'. Concerned as I was with democracy, I wondered: why not 'designer democracy'? A search on Google Scholar about it yielded a few results, but they did not adequately explain what it means (for example, Tetreault 1997).

¹⁷ For a critique of Sen's notion of argumentative tradition in Indian society and politics—which Mehta nearly embraces wholesale thereby effacing how the media routinely molests and erases voices not loyal to the so-called national mainstream—see Ahmad (2017a: Chapter 1).

Modi's assertion, 'I will not let the nation be eliminated', Sharma could have asked: was there a threat to India and did it have a name?

That the threat was 'Islamic terrorism' did not require naming because media had naturalized it. As noted earlier, post 9/11, Modi had congratulated the media for their use of the term 'Islamic terrorism'. When Zakaria (2006) objected, Modi dismissed his objection. For the 2007 UP elections, BJP released a film on compact disc, 'targeting Hindu sentiments in a big way'. It began with a female voice-over juxtaposed with images of a Hindu goddess superimposed on a map of India, and photographs of trains, jeeps, settlements set on fire by 'Muslim terrorists': 'Mother India is crying aloud today. Oh my sons! [P]rotect me from being ... enslaved again. Through terrorists and by ... dividing us, Pakistan wants to tear India apart ... people of India have to decide if they again desire slavery or Ram Raj [Hindu rule].' (cited in Ahmad 2017b: 69). The film also referred to a terrorist attack on the Akshardham Temple in 2002. Modi won decisively in elections following the attack on the Akshardham Temple. Pakistan was blamed for the attack, and many Muslims were arrested. In May 2014, the Supreme Court acquitted those arrested, observing: 'Instead of booking the real culprits ... the police caught innocent people.' (quoted in Nair 2014: 15). The question remains: who attacked the Akshardham Temple? That Sharma did not raise any such question reflected 'invisible censorship' of neoliberal polity (Bourdieu 2010).

Effects of Rumours and Mediated (Un)truth

Demonstrating the connections among rumour, media, and democracy, this chapter has argued that rumour is also a tool wielded by the powerful. Modern media has not replaced orality; hence rumour, much in the same way that anonymity considered central to rumour is not absent in news. As I have shown, rumour and propaganda inform each other. To substantiate this argument, I used qualitative data from the coverage of 2014 elections by television channels and social media. Media's narrative of Gujarat's 'spectacular' development resembled rumour because almost none of those who fervently spoke of development had seen or known its source (rumour). Amid the mass-mediated rumours of development, the fact that Chandola and Millat Nagar in Ahmedabad (where Modi lived) had no electricity,

road, water, or public toilets and that people like Jabbar Sheikh earned US \$3 a day to support his family of five (Langa and Gadhavi 2014) were suppressed to sustain the rumour of development. The context facilitating the rumour of development was marked by the emerging interrelationships among media, elections, and neoliberal economy. This chapter suggests how designer democracy might capture this new dynamic.

An anthropology of rumour, media, and democracy must also ask: what do rumours do? In 2014 elections, rumours generated a regime of truth. Drawing on Foucault, Hall (2006: 169) avers that central to a regime of truth is its effect of ‘regulating relations of power’. Rumours of development were intended to simultaneously erase Modi’s involvement in the 2002 pogrom and portray Muslims as the enemies of development by branding them as ‘terrorists’. Without waiting for evidence, the media’s constant blaming of Muslims for terrorism since 9/11 (Ahmad 2017c) fashioned a regime of truth that India was at war with a Muslim enemy—external and internal. In the 2004 Gujarat elections, the politics of enmity was in full display as BJP published posters with photos of the president of Pakistan, Parvez Musharraf, and Modi depicted as enemies (Bunsha 2006). This was enacting Schmittian politics—creating Hindu–Muslim antagonism (Schmitt 1996; Khare 2014).

A significant strategy in creating this regime of truth was the mythologizing of Modi as a warrior of the Hindu cause. Contra the incumbent ‘impotent’ prime minister, Manmohan Singh, media depicted Modi as someone with a ‘56-inch chest’ (that is, macho-muscular), as the saviour of India (Srivastava 2015). Like God Ram, Modi had left home. A celibate, king of Hindu hearts, vegetarian, yoga practitioner (Marino 2014; Mehta 2006), as a child Modi sold tea at a railway station. It should be noted that the railways had no record of Modi as a tea seller and this myth was floated only in 2014 (*Times of India* 2015a). Bird and Dardenne (2009) note how mythology and news are intertwined. They discuss Barthes, who located sources of myth, inter alia, in newspapers, advertisements, and films. By classifying what is newsworthy, media generate myths to create a reality (Lule 2001). Media mythologized Modi precisely in this sense.

There were three factors that enabled the BJP win in 2014. For the first time, the RSS held a secret two-day pre-election workshop

on 'Islamic fundamentalism', specifically for journalists, where even Sufism was depicted as 'violent' (Narayanan 2014). This pre-election move aimed at orienting media to fashion and play the game of religious dualism in order to secure majority votes. Second, for the first time since Emergency, television showed the RSS becoming directly involved in campaigns to galvanize 'Hindu voters'. In a religious address, the RSS chief appealed to Hindus to vote for Modi. Finally, the very reach of television, social media, and mobile phones had dramatically expanded. In 2009, there were 60,935,069 Internet users; by 2014, the number had grown over four times to 243,198,922 users (*Internetlivestats.com* 2015). Likewise, household television ownership increased from 110 million in 2009 to 234 million in 2014. Of these, households with access to cable and satellite connections (that is, corporate media) had more than doubled from 70 million in 2009 to 145 million in 2014 (Rajagopal 2015: 91; *Tamindia.com* 2014). Telephone subscriptions also more than doubled from a little over 400 million in 2009 to 933 million in 2014 (of which 905 million were wireless subscribers) (Jeffrey and Doron 2013: 7; *Times of India* 2015b). In 2014, 185 million Indians had mobile Internet (Sardesai 2014: 242). That scholars noted the centrality of television to elections as early as 2004 (Mehta 2008) by no means devalues the mobilizational repertoire predating satellite television and social media.

One of the concerns of this chapter has been the relationships among truth/untruth, democracy, rumour, and media. Nietzsche's (2003[1891]: 37) Zarathustra screamed, 'They vomit their gall and call it a newspaper.' The 2001 case of 'children overboard' in Australia confirms Nietzsche's observation. The navy, media, and Prime Minister John Howard all told untruth. In October 2001, a boat with asylum seekers attempting to reach Australia was turned back. The government claimed that parents in the boat threw their children into water to blackmail the government to let them land in Australia. Across the board, Australian media published this story. To certify its 'truth', the government released photographs. That parents threw their children overboard was a rumour, which was proven months later, but John Howard was re-elected nevertheless. Rather than question this story, the *Herald Sun* conducted a poll asking: should people throwing their children into the sea be welcomed as refugees? Over 90 per cent said

'No'. All prime ministers of Australia, 'from Menzies to Howard lie' (Maddox 2008: 17; also see Macken-Horarik 2003).

Some may say that Australia is an exception. But this practice also exists elsewhere. Berlusconi and his media empire named Fininvest exemplify the constitutive relationships among democracy, rumour, and media (Ginsborg 2005: 28–56). More research is needed to study such relationships at work everywhere, from the oldest (the US) to the largest democracy (India) and those in between—Australia, the UK, France, Canada, Italy, to name only a few (Ginsborg 2005; Hirst and Schutze 2004; Saul 1997; Thussu 2004).

In his book on Berlusconi, Ginsborg (2005: 1) recalls the reply when he asked a professor what it had been like to be a historian in Italy during the rise of Fascism: 'I did not really notice.' This chapter is thus an attempt to highlight the relationship among media, untruth, and subversion of democracies, especially vis-à-vis the 'War on Terror', and how rumours are important to that subversion. It is hoped that scholars of media, democracy, and scholars in other disciplines may shed more light on this chapter's hypothesis.

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MODI AND THE SPECTRE OF TERRORISM

Crafting the Hindutva Icon

Manisha Sethi

For years, 'terrorism' has remained one of the mainstays of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral campaigns. It has sought to project itself as the sole political party that is uncompromising on issues of national security, and thus the only one capable of rebuffing forces of terrorist violence. Largely, the invocation of this threat (Islamic) and the nation (Hindu), which is in need of protection, follows the party's ideas about true and authentic citizens.

Narendra Modi's campaign in 2014 too drew upon the BJP's traditional stances. In addition, it emphasized his distinctive image and history as the chief minister of Gujarat, as the one who ruthlessly crushed terrorist conspiracies and delivered due punishment to infiltrators and internal enemies alike. His reputation as the Hindu *Hriday Samrat* (loosely translated as 'Emperor of Hindu Hearts') rested on the mass violence against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and the low tolerance he is supposed to have exhibited towards Islamist terrorism during his tenure as the chief minister of the state.

As such, Modi's electoral success in the years leading up to the 2014 general elections punctures the celebratory narrative of Indian election studies as well as the easy isomorphism between the political, welfare, and care. 'Fear' is an unlikely, indeed unspoken, companion to

democracy. Attention to how terrorism was invoked by Modi and his team places us squarely within the logic of ‘warfare’ alluded to in the title of this volume, and which has been described in the ‘Introduction’ as the process which ‘constructs and produces a sharp fence between “us-friends” and “them-enemy”’.

Modi unabashedly declared himself to be a ‘Hindu nationalist’ at the start of his 2014 campaign. Yet, the constraint of national elections also implied that Modi had to appear less sectarian and more accommodative and statesmanlike. This dilemma is encapsulated in the Modi campaign’s slogan: ‘*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas*’ (with everyone, development for everyone). While it appeared to be a break from the earlier majoritarian politics, and a sign that Modi had changed since 2002, it was also meant to be a riposte to ‘pseudo-secularists’ who advocated for special protections for minorities. Likewise, while his rhetoric on terrorism was more muted than earlier—making no direct allusions to Muslims, as was his wont in state—politics, this was also the constellation of symbols that Modi and BJP turned to perforce in elaborating their political and ideological blueprint.

The remarkable success of Modi-led BJP spurred a slew of analyses from a variety of perspectives. A special issue of *Studies in Indian Politics* (2015), devoted to understanding these ‘unprecedented’ elections, was largely an exercise within the election studies framework employing quantitative and qualitative techniques to track the process from the start of the campaign to the conclusion of the results—focussing on regions, as well as different social groups. Others examined the centrality of Modi in the party’s campaign in what has been seen as one of the most personalized elections ever (Jaffrelot 2015). Other collections focussed more narrowly on the mediatized populism of Modi’s campaign in 2014, examining voter mobilization and image creation through cyberspace and television (*Television and New Media* 2015). In particular, Sanjay Srivastava (2015) explored how a variety of popular discourses of masculinity gathered on the person of Modi, and how the image of his forceful masculinity was disseminated through the media. However, none of these analyses, in dissecting Modi’s and BJP’s campaign, the role of the media, and the construction of Modi’s masculine personality really look at the way in which the trope of terrorism was deployed by Modi.

This chapter examines the extent to which the discourse of terrorism entered Modi's election campaign and the role it may have played in sweeping the Modi-led coalition to power. It argues that terrorism as an election issue was carefully calibrated by Modi's managers: raised directly in one place, elliptically in another, and spoken about through codes and signs elsewhere. A spectre of imminent threats was raised, the dangerous other identified, the outgoing government lambasted for failing to quarantine the danger, and an alternative 'Gujarat model' of battling terrorism held up. The process of communicating these threats and dangers was, first, Modi's speeches and BJP's publicity material, and then the extensive reportage, commentary, and analysis focussed on the persona of Narendra Modi.

We are not arguing that these fear appeals were the only reasons that swept Modi to power. However, these do constitute an important element of the wider ensemble of ideas and images that Modi's media team circulated. The central theme was that of the powerful, decisive leader, in contrast to the opposition, and most certainly the genial and soft-spoken Manmohan Singh, who was dubbed *mauni baba* (the one who stays silent) by BJP's propagandists. In fact, terrorism was not an isolated theme, but it criss-crossed with other issues, such as women's security, price rise, the drug problem in Punjab, and so on, all feeding into the construction of the forceful Modi persona. The message was that the country was tottering on the verge of a grave crisis—things were falling apart and only one man could fix them.

Terrorism remained quite key, rather than peripheral, to defining this persona, and in reiterating the BJP's idea of India as essentially a Hindu nation. One of the most mediatized elections ever, I will also examine the part played by the mass media in cementing this discourse of fear and Modi's vigour as a leader.

The chapter is divided into various sections. In the first section, I briefly lay out the contours of the relationship between fear appeals about terrorism and electoral behaviour in democracies. In the second, I trace the lineage of such fear appeals in Indian elections, particularly in the 1984 general elections, which took place in the shadow of the Punjab insurgency and Indira Gandhi's assassination. In the third and fourth sections, I map the deployment of terror and fear tropes in Narendra Modi's election campaign of 2014. In the penultimate section, I describe the crafting of the Hindu image in the 2014 elections.

Fear and Democracy

I must preface the discussion with the disclaimer that the term ‘terrorism’ is not being deployed here as it appears in the mainstream media and political discourse. It is instead used here fundamentally as a discursive strategy and political language with its elaborate system of ‘assumptions, symbolic systems, rhetorical modes and tropes, metaphors, narratives and meanings’ (Jackson 2005a: 147).

Political speeches and rhetoric around terrorism—addressed to voters during periods of elections or more generally to citizens at other times—may be directed to produce feelings of anger and righteous indignation (De Castella, McGarty, and Musgrove 2009: 21), or alternatively a ‘climate of fear’ and anxiety (Jackson 2005b: 120), or even a combination of all of these. For example, as the 2016 US elections unfolded, the danger posed by immigrants, especially Hispanics and those of Muslim origin, came to acquire central significance. The Republican nominee, Donald Trump, bludgeoned his way through the primaries by consistently provoking predominantly White anxieties, repeatedly warning about looming terror assaults, and attacking the Democrats for sympathizing with terrorists. The gun attacks in San Bernardino (2 December 2015), Orlando (12 June 2016), and across Europe were grist to his demagogic mill. Trump’s speech which followed the shooting in the Orlando gay club combined many of these themes:

We need to respond to this attack on America as one united people, with force, purpose, and determination. But the current politically correct response cripples our ability to talk and to think and act clearly.... I don’t know if you know this, but just a few weeks before San Bernardino, the slaughter, that’s all it was a slaughter, Hillary Clinton explained her refusal to say the words ‘radical Islam’.
(*Time* 2016)

Typically, at the core of fear appeals are the relational themes of danger and threat; statements that construct images of an evil and dangerous other through ample use of words such as ‘repugnant, appalling, terrible, and cruel’. These larger events are connected to more personal losses and concerns, such that each attack, or possible attack, becomes no longer distant but appears at once intimate. Simultaneously, they raise an alarm about the inability to cope with the threat—a threat that

is shown to have changed established rules and requires new regimes of control and discipline (De Castella, McGarty, and Musgrove 2009: 13). These invocations of a Hobbesian fear—the cry of ‘war of all against all’ supplemented by visions of impending doom, social breakdown, and collapse of government and civil society—advance the political agenda of leaders, be it re-election to office or creating an environment conducive to absolutism in the form of tougher legislation, government usurping emergency powers to suspend human rights, and so on (Goodin 2006: 170–5).

The relationship between terrorist threats—or what have been called fear appeals—and electoral outcomes has not been studied adequately. Though the few studies that do exist suggest that ‘terrorist violence’ leads to an advantage for the right-wing political party, which is seen as more committed to combating terrorism.

A study of elections in three countries—US presidential elections in November 2004, British parliamentary elections in May 2005, and the Russian elections in 2003 (lower house) and Putin’s election in March 2004—the first elections held in the aftermath of 9/11, showed strikingly different results. While voters in the US and Russia were more receptive to the fear rhetoric purveyed by political parties and candidates, in Britain they displayed a great deal more cynicism about political messaging on terrorism. Even in focus groups that were held just after the 2005 London transport bombings, there was little acceptance of a wide frame on security that would parallel the broad sweep of America’s ‘War on Terror’ (WoT) (Oates, Lee Kaid, and Berry 2010: 2).

A series of experiments based on ‘terror management theory’ (TMT), conducted by separate groups of psychologists, concluded that reminders of death and destruction (what experimenters called ‘mortality salience’) worked to the advantage of George Bush in the 2004 elections. These experiments undertaken prior to the polling established that respondents—both Democrats and Republicans, primed on mortality and 9/11 salience—were likely to favour Bush over the Democrat John Kerry. These findings were seen to support the claim that the success of Bush’s election campaign was based on constant references to 9/11, allusions to impending death, and the need to make ‘the right choice’ to avert disaster. The researchers concluded that ‘President Bush was re-elected as a result of terror management processes’ (Cohen et al. 2005: 181).

The most striking case is that of Spain, which saw a terrible attack on 11 March 2004, just three days ahead of its national elections on 14 March. The results dealt a blow to the incumbent Popular Party—it is believed widely because of its support to the US' WoT) policy—while sweeping the Socialist Party into power. The pre-poll surveys had predicted a clear Popular Party victory and a post-poll survey conducted by the Observatorio Político Autnómico showed that 64 per cent of Spaniards believed that 'the PSOE [Partido Socialista Obrero Español or the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party] would not have won the elections if the events of 3/11 had not occurred', compared to 23 per cent who believed the Socialists would have won anyway (Michavila 2005: 8).

In fact, one of the Western countries to go to elections immediately after 9/11 was Australia. Prior to the attacks, John Howard's coalition government was losing popularity and the pre-elections opinion polls showed a substantial lead by the Australian Labour Party. However, two events, close to each other, appear to have transformed the electoral results. The first was what is called the 'Tampa crisis' in late August 2001, when the freighter *MV Tampa*, which was ferrying rescued Afghan asylum seekers, was not allowed to enter Australian waters. This refusal was seen—and approved—widely as a toughening of the Australian policy on 'illegal' asylum seekers. Within a month, the twin towers in the US were brought down, and Australia emerged as one of the most steadfast supporters of the US-led WoT, and later its ally in the Iraq War. These two events mutated the electoral landscape with questions of international security overwhelming domestic issues, thereby shifting the advantage from Labour to the Coalition. This advantage was well recognized by Howard who brought the elections dates forward to capitalize on the anxieties and concerns triggered by the attacks and the general climate against asylum seekers, both of which were seen as interconnected (De Castella, McGarty, and Musgrove 2009: 12–13; Denmark, Ward, and Bean 2007: 93).

Fear, Terror, and Elections in India: A Preliminary Historical Account

In the absence of a study of voters' responses, especially one that accounts for how appeals to fear about terrorism may resonate

differently across groups and regions, I am wary of drawing any definitive conclusions about the impact that such appeals may have had electorally. But following the editorial ambition to flesh out the ‘visions of life’ (see ‘Introduction’) that are proffered during elections, I make preliminary connections amongst these elements, focussing mostly on the process of electoral advertising and campaigning.

The events preceding the general elections of 1984—namely, the protracted insurgency for a separate Sikh homeland, Khalistan, leading up to the assassination of the incumbent prime minister, Indira Gandhi, by Khalistani partisans—propelled the issue of terrorism to the forefront of election campaign. Riding the wave of sympathy, Rajiv Gandhi called for revenge (Singh 2004: 302) and stoked the fear of further violence and dismemberment of the country by invoking the apparition of ‘Sikh terrorism’. He repeatedly emphasized that only his party, the Congress (I), was capable of ensuring the ‘unity of India’ (Chima 2008: 109–10).

But what is truly striking is that the advertising campaign planned for English print media was oriented to evoke subliminal fears even *before* Indira’s killing. The campaign was planned in August 1983, more than a year before Indira Gandhi was killed (Balakrishnan 2009), and yet it played upon, indeed fed into, a suspicion of the ‘other’—in this case, the Sikh. These advertisements implied that only a vote for Congress would be a vote for a government capable of dealing with separatism with a strong hand.

The advertisements raked up fears and harnessed the unease and mistrust between communities, as seen in Figure 2.1.

In 1983, according to the designer, when these advertisements were being given shape, the US had announced its “Star Wars” missile defence scheme (March 1983); 3,000 Tamils had been massacred in a genocide in Sri Lanka, giving new impetus to the Tamil separatist movement (July 1983) and Punjab had been afire all year long, leading up to Operation Bluestar (June 1984)’. In short, ‘confrontation was everywhere!’ Years later, recalling the advertisement campaign, Balakrishnan wrote, ‘We correctly guessed that in this era of uncertainty and turmoil, what the newspaper-reading swing voter wanted was the peace and quiet that only a strong and impartial government could provide’ (Balakrishnan 2009).



Figure 2.1 Congress Advertisements in 1984

Source: Balakrishnan (2009), *Outlook* magazine.

So even though, ostensibly in the advertisers' mind, these advertisements were meant to deflect precisely these sorts of tensions by asking the electorate to vote for a party that would not allow such suspicions to be routinized, in the prevailing climate, these could hardly be seen as innocent appeals for communal amity and brotherhood.¹ Indeed, they exacerbated the worst kinds of suspicion of the 'other' and fell within the typical TMT strategies that psychologists have noted.

By the time these advertisements were released, the Golden Temple had been raided, Indira Gandhi had been assassinated, and thousands of Sikhs had been massacred in Delhi and elsewhere. To the advertisers, it was a prophecy foretold. The campaign had suddenly found resonance.

The Road to the 2014 Elections

In the 2002 Gujarat assembly elections, Modi himself had carefully calibrated the Godhra train-burning as a terrorist attack, and the accused became the first to be charged under the new anti-terrorist

¹ It is interesting that this article was reproduced by a Sikh website with a different and arguably more appropriate headline, 'Manufacturing Fear or How We Helped Rajiv Manipulate the Electorate in 1984' (Sikhchic.com 2012).

legislation, Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) (Mitta 2014). Throughout his tenure as Gujarat's chief minister, he had kept alive the threat of 'Islamic terrorism' as a potent electoral issue. The POTA cases against purported Islamist terrorists conspiring to assassinate Modi surged and a series of encounter killings of alleged Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operatives took place in the state. A phalanx of senior officers of Gujarat Police and the then home minister (and current president of the BJP), Amit Shah, were arrested for the encounter killings.

The POTA cases and the encounter killings allowed Modi to successfully portray himself as the target for Islamic militants as well as their nemesis. Even the investigations into and arrests of officers charged with such crimes were turned by him into a political opportunity. In an election rally in south Gujarat in 2007, he exhorted:

Modi: What should be done to a man who stored illegal arms and ammunition? You tell me what should have been done to Sohrabuddin?
Crowd: Kill him, Kill him.

Modi: Well, that is it. Do I have to take Sonia Gandhi's permission to do this? Hang me if I have done anything wrong. (NDTV 2007)²

Though the Supreme Court issued him a contempt notice for justifying the alleged encounter, which was under investigation under the eye of the apex court itself (*Business Standard* 2007), Modi continued to cast himself as the only political leader with the will to combat terrorism, and who, in fact, was being punished for this. In another rally, he mocked the furore over fake encounters:

These days on TV and newspapers, everywhere there is a storm being whipped up. Encounter, encounter, encounter, encounter, Sohrabuddin, Sohrabuddin. These Congress people are dancing in the funeral procession of Sohrabuddin. But I told them before, and repeat it again. They cannot dance their way into his funeral to Gandhinagar [state capital].

I speak very calmly on this issue. In this hall itself I had come after the *bomb blast in the train*. I had said this then also, and say it again—on this land of Gujarat, I will not allow merchants of death to live peacefully ... I know there is a price to pay for this. But for my 5.5 crore

² Translation of all speeches from original Hindi to English is by the author.

Gujaratis, let this one man pay the price. I am ready and willing to do that. (YouTube n.d., emphasis mine)

In this speech, Modi referred to the Godhra train-burning as a 'bomb blast' to emphasize, in the public's mind, the 'terroristic' nature of the violence—even though, by then, the POTA Review Committee had discharged the accused from the purview of the POTA and the trial was being conducted under the ordinary Indian Penal Code.

Playing and preying on fears does not always necessarily yield a bountiful electoral harvest. Through 2007 and 2008, there were a series of explosions across many cities in India. In 2007, there were multiple blasts in Hyderabad, including at the Mecca Masjid; in May 2008, an explosion rocked the magistrate's court in Hubli in Karnataka; explosions in Malegaon in Maharashtra and serial blasts in Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Jaipur followed. The apocalyptic year concluded with mayhem in Mumbai. On 26 November 2008, a group of armed gunmen entered Mumbai from Pakistan through the sea route and caused mayhem—gunning down people at multiple locations, including railway stations, the Jewish Chabad House, tiny cafes, and upscale hotels visited by the local and international business elite. This operation carried on for almost three days and during that period, television news carried footage of nothing else but the attacks and its aftermath. This was also the year in which investigating agencies, for the first time, acknowledged the existence of violent extremist groups allied to Hindutva ideology, thus complicating the narrative of terrorism in the country. The Mumbai Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) sensationally arrested a female ascetic, with a past history as an activist of the BJP's student wing, and a serving army officer, accused for the Malegaon bombings.

In 2008, five states went to polls under the shadow cast by these violent strikes and developments. The BJP was determined to make terror a major poll issue, seeking to project the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government as being 'soft on terror' and itself as the one party truly devoted to national security. In Karnataka, the first state to go to polls—with voting spread over three phases—the first day of voting on 10 May coincided with the Hubli court blasts. While the BJP sought to capitalize on this, the Congress retaliated with the accusation that the BJP had engineered the blasts to polarize the electorate, and demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) enquiry (Oneindia.com 2008a, 2008b).

The speeches of party leaders, especially its 'star campaigner'—next only to L.K. Advani—Narendra Modi, were laced with references to terror strikes and Malegaon arrests. These were themes that had been Modi's staple in Gujarat and foreshadowed a style that would become familiar to all in 2014.

In a speech in favour of BJP's candidate in Delhi, Modi bemoaned the inability of the incumbent government (which he described as 'Delhi Sultanate') to stem the tide of terror attacks due to the top minister's preoccupation with his wardrobe ('busy with fashion parades'). He compared this to his own record in handling terrorism ('We skinned these terrorists, yes, we skinned them'). Finally, he condemned the government for arresting an armyman on terror charges (YouTube 2008).

In his typical style, he equated the UPA government with the medieval Muslim Sultanate rule, lampooned their ministers as inept dandies, showed them to be aligned with Pakistani interests, and contrasted this with the Gujarat model of combating terrorism. However, the response of the audience was largely listless.

Just three days before the polling in Delhi on 29 November 2008, the attack in Mumbai unfolded. The BJP saw it fit to release a full-page advertisement, with bold type lettering against a blood-spattered background: 'Brutal Terror Strikes at Will: Weak Government, Unwilling and Incapable. Fight Terror, Vote BJP' (Rediff.com 2008).

Not only did the BJP hope to win Delhi but also Rajasthan, where voting had been scheduled for 4 December, fairly close to the Mumbai attacks. With the unrelenting television coverage around Mumbai events, the party sharpened its attack on the UPA's policy on terrorism in the hope of emerging as the sole custodian of nation's security.

There was, however, a dissonance between the terror attacks and the results, the former providing no clear advantage to the BJP, which had won Karnataka in May, and though it emerged as the winner in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in November–December, it lost Delhi and Rajasthan. In fact, to political analysts, the electorate appeared to have decisively rebuffed the BJP's terror poll plank (Mahaprasta 2008; Mishra 2008).

A post-poll survey conducted by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)–Lokniti in 29 of the 70 assembly seats in Delhi showed that spurt in terrorism made little difference to voters' choices. The Congress retained Delhi despite 80.5 per cent believing that

terrorist violence had increased over the previous five years. Slightly over a quarter of the respondents reposed their faith in Congress in combating terrorism, while a marginally higher percentage of respondents (28.1 per cent) trusted the BJP. An overwhelming 94.2 per cent had heard of the Mumbai attacks that had immediately preceded the voting but of these, 85.7 per cent said that it made no impact on their voting choice. What it may have done is strengthen the resolve of committed voters and shifted some loyalties around, but the effect in the end may have cancelled itself out. Shift from Congress to BJP post-Mumbai was 18.3 per cent; from BJP to Congress was 6.1; from any other party to Congress was 8.7; and from any other party to BJP was 4.3 per cent (CSDS-Lokniti 2008).

Clearly, in Delhi, the attraction of BJP's fear appeals was low. A possible reason could be that the Mumbai attacks triggered an outrage against politicians, who were seen as protected by their security details, while the common citizens were left to fend for themselves. This resentment was reflected in an Amul advertisement, for instance (see Figure 2.2).

Where the politician himself became the object of derision, it was difficult for BJP to distinguish itself from the Congress, and possibly, the bold advertisement it released was taken as yet another instance



Figure 2.2 An Amul Ad Created after the Mumbai Terror Attacks with the Caption 'War of Terrorism Unleashed in Mumbai'

Source: Amul (2008).

Note: Copyright courtesy Amul and daCunha Communications (2008).

of staking political gains in a tragedy. But most of all, other issues such as water, inflation, and corruption continued to remain relevant (*Tribune* 2008).

Nonetheless, the BJP included a prominent section on national security and terrorism in its manifesto for the 2009 general elections. Titled, 'Fear Shall No Longer Stalk This Land', it intoned that the four years of UPA government had rendered the country weak and vulnerable (BJP 2009). It recalled the serial blasts that shook urban India during the preceding two years and lamented the repeal of POTA (2002), the extant anti-terror legislation by the Congress-led alliance. The manifesto also ridiculed the prime minister for spending 'sleepless nights agonising over the plight of terror suspects'—the reference being to the prime minister's publicly stated concerns about the arrest of an Indian national, a medical doctor by the name of Dr Mohammad Haneef, in Australia in July 2007, on suspicions that he had participated in the failed plots to bomb London and Glasgow airports. The prime minister said that he had a sleepless night after he saw Dr Haneef's mother and sister speaking on television (*Hindu* 2007). Though the charges were swiftly dropped for lack of evidence, the BJP used the then prime minister's concerns as proof of his party's sympathies for terrorism.³

Another familiar trope in the manifesto was Afzal Guru, the man convicted for the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. The perpetrators of the attack were killed by the security forces and Guru was convicted and sentenced to death for providing material support to them, on the basis of circumstantial evidence. However, many legal experts held that he was denied a fair trial (Haksar 2007). Over the years, BJP had consistently dared the UPA government to execute Afzal Guru.

The secret execution of Afzal Guru in February 2013, when a besieged UPA government was tottering into the last phase of its tenure, was a cynical and calculated move to deprive not only Guru his last legal resort but also the BJP of an emotional pitch on this issue.

³ Ironically, the Haneef case, one of the first in which Section 23CA of the Crimes Act, introduced through the Anti-Terrorism Act (2004) was mobilized, became also the prime example of how problematic and prejudiced the emerging terror jurisprudence could be (Clarke QC 2008). Nonetheless, from Australia to India, a globalization of the politics of fear was rampant, pushing anti-terror legislation to the forefront of political campaigns.

Fear and Terror in the 2014 Elections

Strong and charismatic leaders—from Nehru, to Indira Gandhi, to BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee—have always dominated post-Independence electoral politics and campaigns. The BJP's catchline, '*Abki baar Modi Sarkaar*' (this time, Modi government), for the 2014 general elections was hardly novel or different from Congress' '*Jab Tak Suraj Chand Rahega, Indira Tera Naam Rahega*' (Indira shall live on, till the end of eternity) or even the BJP's '*Ab ki baari Atal Bihari*' (This time it is the turn of Atal Bihari). And yet, the rise of television news, social media, and new technologies, and the effective harnessing of these by Modi's election team—for example, all of Modi's election speeches were telecast live through a feed provided by the party and the use of three-dimensional (3D) hologram, which allowed Modi to 'magically' address multiple rallies simultaneously, a first for election campaigning anywhere in the world (*Telegraph*, 2 May 2014)—turned the 2014 elections into more quasi-presidential than ever.

The 2014 general elections—analysts and commentators told us during and after the campaign—were primarily about 'development' (for a critique of this glib position, see the 'Introduction' as well as Chapter 6). However, beneath and alongside the development talk was a deliberate and unrelenting invocation of 'vote banks', biryani (*NDTV* 2013), Pakistan, pink revolution—standard code words, all for elliptically raising the issue of 'Islamic terrorism'. It was also directly referred to in speeches by Modi as well as by others. It is to be noted that the general elections were not taking place against the backdrop of any major or spectacular violent event, so the emotional register that the campaign around terrorism deployed was different from merely the fear appeal. Appeals about terrorism were part of the larger politico-ideological constellation that comprised of militarized, muscular nationalism embodied by Modi, as well as ideas about citizenship and exclusion.

The issue of beheading of an Indian soldier by Pakistani combatants in January 2013, when the election season was heating up, enabled the BJP to excoriate the UPA's 'weak' national security policy, especially its defence minister, A.K. Antony. The first public address by Modi, in a careful choice of symbolic posturing, after the formal announcement of his nomination as the PM candidate was at a rally of ex-servicemen

in Haryana, where he touched upon his themes of national security, Pakistan, and terrorism.

The blasts at Modi's Gandhi Maidan rally at Patna (27 October 2013)—and at the Bodh Gaya temple before that—provided fodder to Modi and his campaign team to assert how 'vote-bank' politics had turned the pseudo-secularists effete and pusillanimous, and, in fact, hand in glove with the terrorists. Modi alone could be counted upon to deal with terrorism. In his Bodh Gaya speech (27 March 2014), he said:

On this land, which gave the world the message of peace, which lit the lamp of mercy and compassion, the enemies of our country chose this land to carry out terrorist attacks. They shed blood on this land. But brothers and sisters, the government here [of Bihar] is not at all worried about this. All that worries them is that their vote bank should not be threatened. Let the bombs explode, let people die, let terrorism spread its tentacles—I should retain my power. These people have ruined Bihar. They have also ruined the country. You tell me, brothers and sisters, should not terrorism be ended in this country? Should not terrorists be punished? Should not we free our country of the scourge of terrorism? Can those sitting in Delhi attain this? Can those sitting in Patna do this? Who can do this? Who can do this? Who can do this? (YouTube 2014a)

The crowds exulted: 'Modi'.

Modi constantly projected other parties and leaders as hand in glove with the enemy, that is, Pakistan. In many cases, he hinted that they suffered from feeble loyalty because of their non-Hindu religious affiliation. In his Jammu rally (26 March 2014), playing upon words, he said Pakistan had found reliable friends in three 'AKs': the first was the AK-47 gun; the second was A.K. Antony, the then defence minister; and the third was AK 49, alluding to Arvind Kejriwal whose government in Delhi lasted 49 days and who was contesting against him in the Lok Sabha elections on the Varanasi seat. Modi alleged that Kashmir was missing from the map of India displayed on the website of Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) (YouTube 2014b).

Having dispensed with his opponents thus, he tweeted a photograph of himself atop a horse with the caption '*Jai Mata di*' (Glory to the mother goddess), again making the link between religion and nationalism. While it was easy for Modi to gesture towards A.K. Antony's alleged

Pakistan love, Kejriwal, a caste Hindu, presented a different problem. Nonetheless, Modi's local supporters, taking a cue from Modi's AK 49 speech, circulated images of Kejriwal morphed as Osama bin Laden (see Figure 2.3).

Modi's speech at Bodh Gaya (given earlier) also highlighted a communication strategy deployed by Modi's campaign, that is, to create a seamless link between terrorism and other issues. In Gaya, he linked it to '*rozi roti*', that is, issues of livelihood and survival, by reminding the voters that an attack on the famous pilgrimage site would ruin the tourist trade and rob the locals of the means of employment.

Again, in Punjab, he forced drug menace—the single most important poll issue—into the terrorism frame by calling it narco-terrorism. 'The people who cannot defeat us in wars, those who cannot destroy us by the bombs and bullets of terrorists, those who fail to break our country internally, such inimical forces have now taken to new route, which is very dangerous, and that is narco-terrorism,' he said at an election rally at Gurdaspur (*Indian Express* 2014c).



Figure 2.3 Photo of Kejriwal as Osama Bin Laden Circulated on Social Media during the 2014 Elections

Source: *daijiworld.com* (2014).

Similarly, Modi's campaign attempted to weld together corruption—an issue already in popular currency through the protracted anti-corruption movement and its domination in the media—and terrorism when he mocked that Indian Mujahideen (IM) and the CBI would fight the elections on behalf of the Congress (Girri 2013).

For the first time perhaps, a political party put up election posters at the Indo-Pak border at Wagah. The BJP put up posters with the tag line: '*Dehshat ko denge jad se ujaad, ab ki baar Modi sarkaar*' (We will root out terrorism; this time Modi government), with Modi's finger raised in imaginary warning to the neighbours (*Indian Express* 2014b).

He himself boasted in his Silchar rally: 'The whole of Assam is disturbed because of the Bangladeshis. And on the other hand, the whole of Pakistan is disturbed because of me.' (YouTube 2014c).

Modi gave interviews to news channels detailing his plans to bring back the underworld lord Dawood Ibrahim from Pakistan, which so far—he was at pains to emphasize—other governments had failed to do. Modi's singling out of Dawood Ibrahim amongst the other underworld figures—say, Chota Rajan, once Ibrahim's trusted lieutenant before he branched off on his own and the two became sworn enemies—is not difficult to understand. Ibrahim, a Muslim, is said to have funded the serial blasts in Mumbai in 1990 and has been allegedly given refuge in Pakistan. Rajan, on the other hand, is projected as inhabiting 'nationalist underworld'. Thus, discussions around Ibrahim travel comfortably between the frames of crime and terrorism.

His interviews became opportunities for further programming spin-offs, and this brief answer morphed into Modi's 'Operation D' in the newsrooms, adding further to the persona of the omnipotent leader. One show on a news channel, known for its proximity to Modi and BJP, relayed how Dawood Ibrahim was reacting to Modi's forceful enunciation of 'Operation D'. Continuously, the anchor told the audience that Dawood, and indeed the entire underworld 'from Karachi to Dubai', was shaking in its boots at the impending victory of Modi in the elections. It claimed that Dawood had set up a media-monitoring cell to track the speeches of Narendra Modi because Modi had vowed to strike a deathly blow to Dawood's dirty business. The channel was convinced that the fate of Osama bin Laden awaited Dawood under Modi's coming reign: 'Dawood is watching Modi's interview repeatedly, Dawood is trembling with fear at Modi's determination and intent, and, Dawood is glued to *Zee News*' (*Zee News* 2014).

In another studio interview, asked how he would have responded to the 26/11 crisis were he in charge, Modi had this answer:

First, I would have done what I did in Gujarat. It wouldn't have taken any time for me to do that. (Applause)

I say it even today, Pakistan should be responded to in its own language. What is this business of writing love letters that has been going on. This should be stopped immediately. (Applause) (*India TV* 2014)

The Crafting of the Hindutva Icon

Modi was able to skilfully establish the outgoing UPA government—indeed, all the secular parties—as comprising impotent, spineless sissies, and himself as a strong, decisive leader devoted to the security of the motherland, who was striking fear in the hearts of Pakistan, terrorists, and anti-national gangsters.

However, Modi's decisiveness, strength, and capacity derived from the fact that, unlike his opponents, he was unencumbered by the demands of secularism. Even the names of his rallies had the resonance of drumbeats in a holy war: the rallies in Uttar Pradesh (UP) were called 'Vijay Shankhnad' (blowing of conch shells to announce victory).

Not only did he represent the Hindu nation and would undertake everything to defend it, he claimed to represent Hindus everywhere—a transnational Hindu community, whose homeland was India. In Silchar in Assam (22 February 2014), for example, he explicated:

Two kinds of people have come from Bangladesh: one, who are coming here as part of a political conspiracy to fulfill a political design; the second are those whose lives have been made difficult in Bangladesh. Their lives have been ruined.... Their daughters' honour is not safe there. I want to ask 125 crore countrymen as to what crime these families have committed. Those who live in Bangladesh but their daughters are being raped, their land is being grabbed, they are being driven out—where they have lived till yesterday, they are being pushed out. Where is that Hindu supposed to go?

If there is repression on Hindus in Fiji, where will that Hindu go? Will he come to India or not? If in the USA, a Hindu are oppressed, and if this Hindu—be they from any country, bearing the passport of any country—has only one place to go, and he goes there, will our government unleash the same repression on him, as has been done elsewhere, like what is happening in Bangladesh? (YouTube 2014c)

Modi had begun this discussion by asking the crowds in his trademark style: 'Brothers and sisters, these infiltrators who have come from Bangladesh, should we not expel them? Should we not expel them? Should we not expel them? Come on: tell me with all your force.' The crowd screamed, 'yes' (YouTube 2014c). Modi was thus projecting himself as a universal Hindu Hriday Samrat, leader of Hindus everywhere—from Bangladesh to Fiji to the US. This transnational community was then pitted against the 'infiltrators'.

The BJP candidate in Silchar lost, but due to the fact that Modi's election rallies were telecast live, with his speeches almost unedited, the impact of these rallies and speeches was much beyond that localized space.

It was precisely this quality of Modi—his alleged zero tolerance for terrorism—that was claimed to have put him in the cross hairs of the terrorists. Everywhere Modi turned, it seemed, there were gangs of jihadi assassins awaiting him. Given the Gujarat experience, it was not a surprise that the BJP was keen to make terror threat to Modi a poll issue. On 20 March, the BJP, citing media reports of Intelligence Bureau (IB) alerts regarding the threat to senior leaders (a euphemism for Modi), held a press conference. Its spokesperson, Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, asked if 'the Home Ministry has taken cognizance of these reports and if they are taking any measures to ensure safety of our leaders' (BJP 2014a).

The following day, a delegation of BJP leaders met with the home minister to submit a memorandum, which read:

It has come to our notice that several sections of the media have reported, based on IB sources, that there is a threat to our leaders and this threat could even lead to kidnapping. It was suggested in these media reports that the motive behind such a heinous act could be to obtain the release of the terrorist Yasin Bhatkal. (BJP 2014b)

The BJP may have thought that it could dust and polish its old strategy that had reaped political dividends in Gujarat. On 22 March, an English daily reporting the alleged increased threat to Modi cited an unnamed source saying: 'IM wants to expand terrorist activities in north and some communally sensitive parts of India. But if Narendra Modi becomes prime minister, its activities will not run for long. So, they don't want Modi as prime minister' (*DNA* 2014).

This brings us to the role that media played, especially with regard to the hype around terrorism. Did it broadcast and amplify

the fear and anxiety around terrorism? Anyone familiar with national security reporting and commentary in the Indian media will be aware of the tone of sensationalism and hyper-patriotism, besides its credulous acceptance of the government and investigating agencies' claims.

News stories about 'IB alerts' attributed to unnamed sources kept circulating throughout the campaign. In January 2014, a journalist known for his closeness to the national security establishment announced that Modi was at most risk among all politicians, facing multiple threats from 'pan-Islamic and Sikh fundamentalist terrorist groups', after a red alert was apparently issued to the UP Police on 21 January, two days before Modi's Gorakhpur rally (Gupta 2014).

In March, the arrest of four alleged operatives of IM unleashed a barrage of reportage whose burden was to prove the high risk Modi countenanced from Islamic terrorists. A large section of the media seemed convinced that it was Modi who was the target of these alleged terrorists. Indeed, there seemed to be an almost pathological desire to link these arrests to Modi.

One newspaper wrote confidently that the terror module 'had plans to carry out terror attacks during the election rally of BJP prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi' (*Indian Express* 2014a). Another newspaper quoted 'sources' to likewise declare that 'the terrorists had the BJP's PM nominee Narendra Modi on their radar' (*Times of India* 2014). It got a little carried away and told us that the Delhi Police would 'submit its report to the Ministry of Home Affairs, requesting to beef up the security apparatus of Narendra Modi during campaigning.'

However, in the press conference held by the special commissioner of police and in the police press release, the Delhi Police indicated that the investigation was at a preliminary stage and still 'in progress'. The special commissioner made no reference to threats to Modi, nor did he recommend the augmentation of Modi's existing security details (NDTV 2014). The Delhi Police, in its press conference, did not link it to any particular politician. On being asked if terrorists were planning an attack on the election rallies or specific candidates, the police replied that they were not ruling anything out. Regardless of the fact that Modi was not as much as mentioned, the Modi angle was attributed to the Delhi Police in a daily's headline: 'Indian Mujahideen terrorists could

attack Modi: Delhi Police' (*Deccan Chronicle* 2014). The story inside, however, had no such quote from the Delhi Police.

Similarly, a news portal reported, 'The police claim that their main target was Modi who has several rallies lined up in Rajasthan' (Nanjappa 2014), despite the fact that the police clearly had made no such claim. 'Conspiracy to attack Modi foiled' was the headline of a Hindi daily (*Jagran* 2014). This newspaper dropped even the pretense of being informed by undisclosed and 'highly placed' sources to spin a story full of vivid details: according to this news item, the attack was to take place during the filing of nominations in Banaras and that the terrorists had even conducted a 'recce' (reconnaissance) of the district headquarters.

Another Hindi newspaper's bold headline was: 'Engineering students turned out to be terrorists; used to read Quran in front of the landlord'. Following online outrage against this blatantly communal headline, it was changed to a more sober one: 'Six terrorists affiliated to IM arrested from the state' (JTSA 2014).

This reporting was a deliberate attempt at polarizing the electorate. Moreover, the constant appearance of 'IB alerts' in the media served as an excellent device to pump the image of a leader with the '56-inch chest'.

Modi's speeches and the reportage around terror threats to him crafted the tough, muscular, macho Hindutva icon who would rein in 'Islamic terrorism'. Every potential and foiled attack burnished his image.



This chapter aimed to draw out the connections between fear appeals about terrorism and elections, and more specifically the place of such fear rhetoric in the spectacular electoral success of Modi's campaign. Drawing upon speeches, electoral advertising, and communication strategies devised by Modi and his team, the chapter demonstrated that such an appeal was, in fact, quite significant to the ensemble of images and ideas circulated in the course of the campaign. In the figure of Modi merged several narratives: Hindu pride, potent manhood, and othering of the Muslim. Even as it did not appear starkly as a central motif in the

campaign, terrorism remained an important subtext of creating the all-powerful, invincible heroic leader, of consolidating a majoritarian vote behind this leader through subtle and crude signs and tropes which identified a community as an internal enemy, casting political rivals as complicit in weakening of national security in deference to 'vote-bank' politics. Most of all, it situated this crisis of national security and terror threats within the matrix of a larger crisis of governance and offered Modi as the only panacea.

However, our survey of the history of the relationship between fear appeals and election campaigns in the earlier section illustrates two things. One, Modi was not the first to employ appeals about terrorism while seeking votes in 2014; in fact, there is a lineage that stretches back to the Congress election campaign in 1984. Modi himself has deployed these appeals extensively in his election campaigns in Gujarat quite successfully. Second, and more significantly, there is no certain congruence between fear appeals and electoral outcomes. The same slogans and speeches which Modi purveyed in 2014 failed to arouse either anxiety or anger among the voters in 2009, even though the past year had seen a series of deadly explosions across the country. The rhetoric around terror lost to other material issues (incidentally, they had worked quite well in Gujarat assembly elections between 2002 and 2007). Nonetheless, when combined with general frustration about the real or perceived ineptness of the incumbent government, the appeals to impending terror threats found resonance in 2014.

Though prediction is a risky business, it is interesting to observe how these issues played out in the assembly elections held after the 2014 general elections. In Bihar, for example—which, remember, had seen explosions in Modi's rally as well as a blast at the Bodh Gaya temple, and provided Modi with ample ammunition to label his opponents as weaklings and beholden to secular vote banks (see Modi's speech given earlier), and where the BJP alliance had won an unprecedented 31 out of 40 seats—the BJP was roundly defeated by the Grand Alliance in the assembly elections which took place in October–November 2015. This happened despite the BJP and its top leadership deploying the stock images of Pakistan, national security, Islamist terrorist groups, and vote-bank politics in their speeches as well as the full-page advertisements (see Figure 2.4) that appeared in newspapers.

लालू-नीतीश जवाब दो- पच्चीस सालों का हिसाब दो

वोटों की खेती के लिए, आतंक की फसल सींचना क्या सुशासन है?

सवाल राजनैतिक नहीं, केवल नैतिक है... हे सुशासन के मसीहा...आज बताइये.. क्यों आतंकवादियों पर आपकी ऐसी नजरें इनायत रहती हैं कि देश भर के आतंकी गुट बिहार में अपनी पनाहगार बना लेते हैं? क्यों इंडियन मुजाहिदीन से लेकर सिमी और जैश ए मोहम्मद से लेकर हिजबुल आपके शासन को अपनी नापाक हरकतों के लिए मुफ्ती मानते हैं? क्यों इंडियन मुजाहिदीन का तहसीन अख्तर अलकायदा का लैपटॉप लिए मधुबनी, समस्तीपुर और मुजफ्फरपुर में आतंक के बीज बोता रहता है और आप सुशासन की डींगें हांकते रहते हैं? आतंकवादियों के प्रति आपकी नरमी के कारण ही चंपारण, दरभंगा, मधुबनी, सहरसा, मुजफ्फरपुर और पूर्णिया में आज आई.एस.आई और लश्कर ए तैयबा के आतंकी खुले आम पनप रहे हैं।

गुजरात, महाराष्ट्र, कर्नाटक, आंध्र प्रदेश और उत्तर प्रदेश में बम विस्फोटों के मोस्ट वांटेड अपराधी यासीन भटकल को जब भारतीय जासूस अपनी जान पर खेल कर नेपाल से उठा लाए तो क्यों आपकी पुलिस उसे हिरास्त में लेने से ना नुकर करती रही? जब आपकी पुलिस के ए डी जी भी उसकी गिरफ्तारी के लिए चंपारण कूच करते हैं तो कौन उन्हें तुरंत पटना लौटने पर विवश कर देता है? और जब तक एन आई ए के अफसर दिल्ली से पटना नहीं पहुंचते आपका दुलमुल रबैया बना रहता है... इस रबैये से आप क्या हासिल करना चाह रहे थे? एक देशद्रोही को भागने का मौका देना चाहते थे या एक समाज को अपनी रहनुमाई का एहसास दिलाना चाहते थे? नेपाल बार्डर से लगातार बिहार लाया जा रहा आई एस आई का असलहा और जाली नोट क्यों अपनी उदासीनता से बे रोकटोक आ रहा है? क्यों लश्कर ए तैयबा के ओमर मदन की गिरफ्तारी पर आपकी पुलिस को मौन रहने के निर्देश दिए जाते हैं? क्यों आपकी नाक के नीचे आतंकी फसीह महमूद पनपता है और सज्दी अरब में पकड़ा जाता है?

केंद्र की चेंतावनी के बाद भी आप श्री नरेंद्र मोदी और उनकी पटना रैली के लिए उपयुक्त सुरक्षा नहीं देते हैं और 8 निर्दोष जानें बम धमाकों का शिकार हो जाती हैं...क्या देश के खिलाफ सिर उठाता हर आतंकी आपके लिए केवल वोट बटोरने का माध्यम है? या प्रदेश-देश की सुरक्षा के प्रति भी आपकी कोई जिम्मेदारी है?

सुशासन का दम भरने वाले मुख्यमंत्रीजी, जरा बताइये...
कब तक समाज विशेष के वोटों की खातिर देश की सुरक्षा से समझौता करते रहेंगे?



[जवाब नहीं तो वोट नहीं]

भारत

Figure 2.4 BJP's Advertisement in the Run-up to the Bihar Assembly Elections, 2015

Source: Catch News (2015)

Note: It read: 'Is it good governance to sow terrorism to reap electoral gains?'

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GURUS AND THE HINDU NATIONALIST POLITICS

The Baba Ramdev–BJP Partnership in the 2014 Elections

Pralay Kanungo

The Sanskrit word guru (*gu* and *ru*) commonly refers to a teacher who enlightens the disciples by dispelling darkness of ignorance. In Vedic times, the ruling elites sent their children to ascetic gurus to receive education and training in multifarious spheres, not just warfare and governance, but encompassing a wide range of activities—from religious and philosophical to scientific and spiritual. As gurus came to be perceived as mediators between gods and humans, they enjoyed an exalted position being compared with Param Brahma (Ultimate Reality), thus acquiring a status of worship for themselves. Since then, gurudom has passed through many stages of evolution and transformation. Yet, as gurus' guidance remained an indispensable obligation to access knowledge, specially the spiritual one, some elements of this perception survived into the present day. The rise of new religious movements across the world further legitimized the aura and authority of the guru (Copley 2000). Gurudom, in fact, is 'multifarious' (Copeman and Ikegame 2012)¹ and

¹ Here, the term 'guru' is also applied to Hindu sanyasis, sadhus, and babas, who impart various kinds of knowledge to their disciples: from religious and spiritual to physiological and political.

interestingly, gurus sometimes even go beyond the human world: for instance, a sacred book, an effigy, or even a flag can be a guru.²

Contemporary Hindu gurudom is plural and diverse; all sorts of gurus—traditional, modern, and postmodern, and disseminating all hues of Hinduism, from esoteric, spiritual, and physical, to philosophical, pragmatic, and patriotic—are pervasive in the Hindu public sphere, in India as well as overseas (Forsthoefer and Humes 2005; Spurr 2016; Zavos et al. 2012). New Age spiritual movements are not confined to the West alone; they are very much vibrant in India too. Since the onset of neoliberal consumerist economy, India witnessed a dramatic rise of the middle class, market, and media (see Chapters 1 and 9). Material prosperity brought in many anxieties as well. As the upper and middle classes became conscious of their spiritual and physical health, all of a sudden many New Age gurus—anticipating the emergence of a booming market—surfaced with their market-friendly packages to attract disciples and followers.

As the guru market became crowded, these New Age entrepreneurs were smart enough to realize that in order to succeed in a highly competitive market, they should not merely be authoritative and charismatic but also innovative and unique. After all, each brand or trademark had to be distinct from the rest and have something special to offer. One such charismatic guru, who became a household name very fast through television, was Baba Ramdev, a ‘modern yoga revolutionary’ (Sarbacker 2013), who successfully marketed a potent recipe of yoga and Ayurveda.³ The surging popularity of Ramdev nurtured his political ambitions, and also propelled political parties and leaders to seek his support to win elections as he had the potential to swing the opinion of his large base of followers.

Reflecting on Ramdev’s life-journey, world view, and political activism, particularly with reference to his anti-corruption crusade, this chapter argues that though Ramdev’s Hindu revivalist and nationalist ideas were closer to the Sangh gospel in many ways, he had his own

² The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) worships Bhagwa Dhvaj (the saffron flag) as its guru.

³ Incidentally, much before the arrival of Ramdev, some RSS followers, such as Dr Karandikar, had been popularizing yoga and Auyrveda at the local level (Hoyez 2011).

political ambitions and agenda as well. While analysing the convergence and complexities between the two agendas, it aims to understand why, setting aside his own political ambitions, Ramdev decided to have a partnership with Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 elections. Was it conviction or convenience? Ideological or quid pro quo? How did Ramdev craftily communicate a Hindu nationalist message to his disciples through his yoga discourse, appealing directly for support to Modi?

Gurus and Hindu Nationalism

Hindu nationalism's alliance with gurus such as Ramdev was not a new development. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the fountainhead of Hindu nationalism, had developed a close connection with Hindu gurus since the early days of its foundation in 1925, both in terms of philosophy and mission. As K.B. Hedgewar founded the RSS to unite Hindus and pronounced India as a Hindu *rashtra* (Hindu nation), and his organization kept claiming to be the true inheritor of the philosophical and ideological legacies of some celebrated Hindu sanyasis such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Dayananda, a natural alliance emerged between the Sangh and the gurus. Thus, when the RSS was struggling to get a foothold in a new place, many Hindu gurus, organizations, and other notables came forward to provide initial logistics to the RSS *pracharaks* (full-time organizers) to facilitate their mission. Hedgewar cautiously treaded the terrain between the warring Arya Samajis and Sanatanis, managing support from both sects.

M.S. Golwalkar, popularly called Guruji, cultivated the Sangh–guru relationship further, which culminated in the foundation of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1964 in partnership with Swami Chinmayananda. In the political sphere, despite differences, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Ram Rajya Parishad of Swami Karpatri Ji Maharaj collaborated. The 1966 *Go-raksha Andolan* (Cow Protection Movement) brought many gurus and sadhus close to the Sangh Parivar, and the VHP provided a Hindu ecumenical platform to accommodate diverse Hindu sects, sadhus, and gurus and articulate their grievances and demands. In the mid-1980s, a large number of sadhus and sanyasis got actively involved in the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, and subsequently, some became

key players in Hindu nationalist politics (Katju 2003; McKean 1996). With the installation of Hindu nationalist governments in New Delhi (1998–2004) and in many other states, the Sangh–guru alliance became more interdependent as both needed each other's patronage. Thus emerged a bonding between public Hinduism and Hindutva (Kanungo 2016), and many prominent New Age entrepreneurs such as Baba Ramdev and Sri Sri Ravishankar (Tollefsen 2011) became close with the Sangh Parivar.

The Making of Baba Ramdev

Many interesting accounts are available on Ramdev's life history (Deka 2017; Pathak-Narain 2017; Raj 2010). He was born in the mid-1960s⁴ as Ramkishan at Said Alipur village in Haryana in a backward caste Yadav farmer's family. As Ramkishan got a paralytic attack in his childhood and developed physical deformities, instead of going to the field to assist his parents, he took refuge in the village library. Two books particularly inspired him to change the course of his life: one was on yoga; and the other was *Satyarth Prakash* by the Arya Samaj founder, Swami Dayananda. One day he fled from home and enrolled himself at the Khanpur Gurukul (residential school where knowledge is imparted following *guru-shishya parampara* ([teacher–pupil tradition]) in Haryana where he learnt Pannini's Sanskrit grammar, the Vedas, the Upanishads, and Ayurveda. There he met his future associate, Balkrishna. From Khanpur Gurukul, he moved to Kalwa Gurukul, where he was rechristened as Ramdev and got further training in yoga and Sanskrit literature and grammar from Acharya Baldev.

As the boys at Kalwa Gurukul used to tease him for his physical deformity and squint eye, he became more determined to prove his physical fitness and overcome his physical disability. He mastered complex yogic breathing exercises and postures and ascetic practices at the gurukul. From Kalwa he moved to the Himalayas in search of moksha and spent three years near Gangotri, meditating, practising yoga, and studying Ayurveda. There he introspected on his future

⁴ The exact year of birth remains unclear as no official record is available. Ramdev also does not reveal his exact age, perhaps deliberately, leaving room for speculation, as a yogi can defy age.

course; for him, life took a turn from *swayam* (self) to *samasthi* (collective) and he realized that his knowledge 'will be fruitful only when it is of any use to the people' (Deka 2017: 11; Raj 2010: 83). Thus, he followed the path of Swami Vivekananda, who opted to become an activist sanyasi (Kanungo 2012) more than a century ago with his powerful message, '*Nara Seva Narayana Seva*' (service to mankind is service to god). To pursue this objective, Ramdev returned from the Himalayas.

Back in Haridwar in 1993, he became a disciple of Shankar Dev of Kripalu Bagh Ashram, which had played an important role during the freedom struggle by giving shelter to revolutionaries such as Ras Behari Bose. On 9 April 1995, he finally deserted his white clothes and took vows of renunciation by wearing saffron robes. Thus was born Swami or Baba Ramdev. Divya Yog Mandir Trust⁵ had been registered by then, with Shankar Dev as convener, Ramdev as president, Balkrishna as general secretary, and Acharya Karamveer as trustee.

Carrying Yoga and Ayurveda to the Masses: Televangelism

To start with, Ramdev taught yoga at Haridwar to two students; then he moved to Surat where he got 200 students. Ramdev's yoga module and schedule were innovative. A 30-minute morning breathing exercises module coupled with a few yoga postures promised to give benefits in a month's time. Moreover, it claimed cure for some common ailments like diabetes, obesity, and heart diseases. This module perfectly fitted into the busy schedule of the modern life of the middle

⁵ On 5 January 1995 Ramdev, Balkrishna, Shankar Dev, and Karamveer registered the Divya Yog Mandir Trust in Kankhal, Haridwar, with the mission: 'Teaching yoga to the masses in practical way, in order to help people achieve the good health, sound minds and great bliss' (Pathak-Narain 2017: 37). The main aim of the trust, as listed on its website, is to impart the practical and functional training of Astang Yog, Raj Yog, Dhayan Yog, Hath Yog, Ashan and Prananyam, and so on, as received from the ancient tradition propounded by *rishis* and *munis* (wise seers and sages) to put an end to extreme suffering by curing diseases and to receive a calm state of mind and extreme happiness (divyayoga.com, last accessed on 11 December 2017).

class; in addition, Ramdev's saffron attire, bare chest, pleasant persona, simplicity, wit, and vernacular expression made yoga more entertaining, attractive, lively, and popular.

In 1995, he organized a mega camp at Delhi which was attended by 10,000 people. The number of *shivirs* (yoga camps) and followers steadily increased as his teaching method was simple and promised instant results. These yoga camps provided an opportunity for Ramdev to demonstrate his teaching skills to a large community for the practice of yoga postures (*asana*) and breath control (*pranayama*) and yoga philosophy. These camps served as key sites where negotiation between tradition and modernity took place, involving a large audience. The people here followed synchronous practices: while maintaining one-on-one relationship with the guru at an individual level, they simultaneously became part of a large community, sharing similar experiences and ritual practices. A yoga shivir is a spectacle; highlighting its performativity aspects, Joseph Alter (2008) shows the way in which yoga, nationalism, and politics intersect in the practice of modern yoga in India. Ramdev's yoga shivir was no exception.

Ramdev's yoga shivirs were free as they were organized by some of his patrons. In the Delhi yoga camp, he got his first donation of Rs 5,000 from a follower. Ramdev reluctantly accepted and used that money to produce an Ayurvedic medicine called Mahasudarshan Churna and went with Balkrishna to Assam to treat people suffering from deadly *kala-azar* (black fever/visceral leishmaniasis). Divya Yog Mandir Trust, after coming under full control of the duo in 1997, expanded its activities enormously. Ramdev continued to travel across the country, holding camps, teaching yoga, and providing Ayurvedic treatment which claimed to cure almost every ailment. In 2002, one of the owners of television channel Sadhna TV attended a yoga shivir and shortly thereafter started televising it. Ramdev's daily yoga show called 'Om Yog Sadhana' became very popular. The show was then moved to the channel *Aastha TV*, where it was aired with the title 'Yog Shivir'. In the television shows, Ramdev primarily taught pranayama, the art of deeply inhaling and exhaling in several postures. His fitness programme promised 'amazing' health benefits. Besides, he also taught some basic mantras, such as chanting 'Om', and gave some formal instructions on meditation (*dhyana*). Ramdev

emphasized how various practices of asana and pranayama affect diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and digestive ailments, and how they target particular organs, such as the kidneys and liver (Khalikova 2017: 105–22).

Ramdev not only became popular in north and east India but also penetrated to south India with his yoga-training camps in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. He inspired different state governments, such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh, to make yoga a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. Each month, about 75,000 people came to his weekly yoga camps; another 60,000 visited his permanent camp at Haridwar. In a short span of a few years, by 2005, the television viewership of his yoga camps rose to a million. The yoga shivir, as a ‘spectacle’, when televised live, effectively captured the consciousness of the viewers, thereby catapulting Ramdev to fame and increasing his popularity and career trajectory further. Divya Yog Mandir Trust started receiving about 1,000 phone calls and 1,400 letters and emails every day (Chakraborty 2007: 1174).

Ramdev’s popular television show ‘Om Yog Sadhana’, being telecast in multiple languages, covering some 170 countries, reached a viewership of 85 million; besides, hundreds of millions followed his teachings (Raj 2010: 109). Eventually, Ramdev took over the ownership of the Aastha Network. His unprecedented success as a tele-guru was acknowledged by the *New York Times* (2010), which referred to Swami Ramdev as a ‘yogic fusion of Richard Simmons, Dr Oz, and Oprah Winfrey, irrepressible and bursting with Vedic Wisdom’. Undoubtedly, Ramdev’s career ‘mirrored those of famous American TV gurus associated with fitness, health, and popular wisdom’ (Sarbacker 2013: 356).

Within a short span of time, an ordinary yoga practitioner, who was once selling *chyawanprash* (cooked ayurvedic medicine made of herbs, spices, sugar, honey, and so on) on a bicycle, became a celebrated tele-guru by using the media astutely. Although history of public yoga camps can be traced back to the early twentieth century, it was Ramdev who brought yoga from the private and group domain into the national mainstream (Khalikova 2017: 109). Thus, an anonymous Ramdev became a household name, and his discourse and demonstration of yoga became a part of the everyday life of millions in India and abroad. Ramdev’s celebrity status allowed him to negotiate the worlds of personal health and public space, forcefully promoting his vision

of modern yoga as a perfect remedy to contemporary ills of both the person and the nation (Chakraborty 2006, 2007).

Ramdev's Discourses: Social Transformation of the Nation

Ramdev's teachings can be contextualized in the tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalist yoga, as he conceived yoga not only as a spiritual tool for personal rejuvenation but also as a tool for social and political regeneration and moral and ethical reconstruction of the nation (Gooptu 2016). While marketing the recipe of yoga and Ayurveda on television, Ramdev simultaneously amplified his discourses and vision in texts as well. Ramdev's manifesto of spiritual and social transformation was illustrated in his *Jeevan Darshan* (Philosophy of Life 2009), in which he articulated a vision of yoga nationalism in his pursuit of social transformation within and through his community of yoga practitioners. Drawing on Patanjali (the great Yoga philosopher), he described yoga as being 'the eradication of negative moods', which leads to finding 'solace in the merging with the soul'. 'We can say that the controlled practices which result in the meeting of *Atma* and *Param-atma* (Soul and the Supreme Soul) is Yog' (Ramdev 2008: 1). Ramdev's vision of yoga was inextricably tied together with his vision for the Indian nation.

In a section entitled 'National Religion' in *Jeevan Darshan*, he argued that 'there is no greater religion than duty towards the nation. There is no God greater than the nation. National interest is above everything. I will not betray the nation for my personal, political, economic, and family welfare. I will contribute my body, mind, wealth, life, and vote for national interest' (Ramdev 2009: 12). This discourse echoes the RSS pledge for the nation. Ramdev observed: 'Nation-god is the greatest god.... Every individual should have gratitude, respect and pride towards the nation.' Ramdev further warned: 'Those who do not love the soil, culture, civilization, and the people of the nation have no right to stay in this country' (Ramdev 2009: 16).⁶ Thus,

⁶ Later, this aggression had a violent manifestation. Responding to All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen's (AIMIM) Asadduddin Owasi's statement that he would not raise the slogan 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' (Victory for Mother India) even if a knife was put to his throat, Ramdev said he would have 'beheaded' people for refusing to chant the Bharat Mata slogan.

Ramdev's aggressive nationalism conformed to the Arya Samaj and the Sangh ideology.

Ramdev's vision of nation was reflected in his television-mediated religiosity and advocacy for physical culture which promoted 'a somatized religio-nationalism' as an alternative lifestyle (Chakraborty 2006: 389). The use of religious symbols and tropes connected to the nation by a Hindu ascetic aided the ideological work of Hindutva. Ramdev's distinction lay in his linking of civic bodies to the nation's body politic (Chakraborty 2007). His daily lessons, combining spiritualism with physical fitness, simultaneously sought to improve the health of the 'self' as well as of the nation. Alongside, Ramdev's discourses on the control of desire and adoption of swadeshi gave a new twist to nationalism in the era of globalization.

Crafting a Political Agenda: Transforming the Nation

Ramdev could see the effect of his charisma and massive following. His dramatic rise as a television guru also saw the making of a 'yoga empire', institutionalized in the form of Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust launched in Haridwar in 2005. Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust expanded its business and by 2011, the total value of this trust was around 1,100 crores (11 billion rupees) (*Hindu* 2011).⁷ With growing cultural and economic capital, his political ambitions grew as well. Thus, he conceived another institution called Bharat Swabhiman Andolan (BSA) Trust, to expand his activities into the social and political spheres. However, being a political novice, he was looking for a political strategist. In 2008, he found a young, dynamic social activist Rajiv Dixit, who was committed to swadeshi economics and had already created a national network through his Azadi Bachao Andolan. Dixit's oratory and leadership quality were his greatest assets. Getting isolated in his organization due to some alleged corruption charges, Rajiv was looking for a platform as well. Thus, they both came together to launch a political mission that was to be anchored in swadeshi economics.

The BSA got an impetus under the dynamic leadership of Dixit. Here, the spiritual resources of yoga and the health benefits of Ayurveda

⁷ By 2017, Ramdev's Patanjali empire had crossed Rs 10,000 crores (100 billion) (*Economic Times* 2017).

were craftily woven with the pressing problems of the Indian nation, from multinational exploitation, government corruption, and economic disparities, to water management, poverty alleviation, and population control. Ramdev articulated his mission to transform the nation into the 'India of his dreams' by setting five major goals: (a) 100 per cent voting; (b) 100 per cent nationalist thought; (c) 100 per cent boycott of foreign companies; (d) 100 per cent domestic production (*swadeshi*); and (e) 100 per cent yoga orientation in the nation (BSA 2012).

These goals were augmented by five vows taken by yoga practitioners: (a) voting for patriotic and honest people; (b) uniting patriots; (c) boycotting foreign goods and purchasing domestic goods; (d) adopting nationalist thought in public while observing 'Hindu, Islam, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, or other religious traditions' in private life; and (e) making the entire country yoga-focussed and removing society's ills by removing 'self-confusion'. The India of Ramdev's dreams manifested itself as: healthy India; clean India; Independent India through Indian lifestyle; India free from hunger, unemployment, and poverty, with population control; and India free from political corruption and with 100 per cent voting (BSA 2012). He also called for the 'honor of the five mothers'—birth mother, mother India, Veda mother, mother cow, and mother Ganga (Ramdev 2009: 27–8). Though the document pledged to an inclusive Indian nationalism, yet it had some distinct Hindu elements.

As Ramdev had already accumulated significant cultural and economic capital, he was getting impatient to convert BSA into a political party. He had received patronage from influential businessmen and political figures, including well-known members of the Sangh Parivar. Rajiv Dixit, the national secretary of the BSA, had also received enough national recognition. Moreover, the context of the rising anti-corruption discourse provoked Ramdev to launch a political party to 'cleanse' the political system and change the contours of Indian politics and jurisprudence. Thus, the Bharat Swabhiman Party was launched in March 2010 and Ramdev declared that he would file candidates from all the 543 parliamentary constituencies of India.

Curiously, the yoga guru's political party advocated capital punishment for those guilty of dowry deaths, corruption, rape, cow slaughter, murder, adulteration, and terrorism. The BSA was 'engaged in the task of fighting corruption and social evils', whilst encouraging 'healthy

living' and contributing to building a 'powerful but cultured' nation. Ramdev termed homosexuality as a 'curable disease' and advocated a policy of zero tolerance for pre-marital and out-of-wedlock sex. His party promised 50 per cent representation to women. The party also pledged to strive to get back—for the people of India—258 lakh crore (258,000 billion) rupees of black money stashed away abroad, as well as unearth the 60 lakh crore (60,000 billion) rupees of black money hidden within the country. The party was committed to development and agreed to utilize the money to streamline the economic system and provide a fillip to development projects; it also promised to bring a 'positive change' in the laws by discarding the laws laid down by the British that were still in operation in India.

The party's commitment to swadeshi was obvious. Ramdev claimed to revive Gandhi's legacy: 'Bapu's work will be done by Baba'; his objective was to promote the use of indigenous goods in our daily routine. He further claimed that his trust had already adopted around 600 villages in the country that would be made self-dependent and 'free of fear, poverty and corruption'. This motto echoed an earlier BJP poll-slogan which emphasized to free India from '*bhookh, bhaya* and *bhrashtachar*' (hunger, fear, and corruption). Ramdev also objected to the use of the term 'saffron terrorism', which he thought was an insult to our nation as saffron is also the colour of our national flag: 'Nobody should make any comment on any culture or civilisation. Saffron is the colour of non-violence, nationalism, humanism and spirituality' (DNA 2010).

After launching the party, Ramdev and Dixit started 'Bharat Nirman Yatra' which was scheduled to travel 100,000 kilometres (km) covering around 50,000 villages in 600 districts across the country and meeting around 2.5 crore (25 million) people. But sadly, while touring in Chhattisgarh in 2011, Rajiv died suddenly; he was barely 43 and his death was mysterious (Pathak-Narain 2017: Chapter 19). Dixit's death might have been a setback for Ramdev's political ambitions. But that was temporary as the political context was ripe for his immediate intervention.

The Anna Movement: Ramdev's Political Move

At that time, discontentment was growing across the nation as India was experiencing a crude form of crony capitalism and

unprecedented scandals and corruption by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. First in the list was the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in September 2010, followed by allegations that the public might have lost as much as US \$40 billion in the allocation of 2G bandwidth with licences in 2008. Nira Radia tapes exposed the clandestine dealings between corporations, politicians, and journalists. It was not just these scandals; the overall economy was deteriorating too. The growth rate had slowed down, adversely affecting real estate and industry, as well as causing high inflation and increasing food prices. Besides, the destitution of the marginalized was getting acute and the distress in agriculture led thousands of farmers to commit suicide.

In this backdrop, Anna Hazare launched his Jan Lokpal agitation demanding transparency, probity, and accountability in public life. This movement challenged the Congress rule, which was dominated by the status quoist elite, fixers, and power brokers. The agitation caught the attention of the nation, getting support not only from common citizens and swathes of the upper and middle classes but also from the electronic media, Bollywood stars, even corporate India. Ramdev, quickly grasping the potential, lent support to the Anna Movement and joined the April 2011 Ramlila Maidan agitation, becoming an integral part of the anti-graft national movement.

Besides Ramdev, the other celebrated guru who joined Anna was Sri Sri Ravishankar. The Sangh Parivar also extended its support to the Anna Movement in the initial phase; besides the RSS, the VHP, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, and other affiliates joined the movement. RSS leader Ram Madhav shared the stage with Anna. *Organiser*, the RSS mouthpiece, reported: 'But all had only one identity "I am Anna" and *tiranga* was their symbol.' Baba Ramdev, on 17 August, met the President of India and requested him to accept the demands of Anna Hazare. Later, he went to Tihar Jail to meet Anna (*Organiser* 2011: 2). Thus, at Ramlila Maidan converged two shades of colour, white and saffron, represented by the white-clad Gandhi-like Anna and the saffron-clad guru Ramdev.

Like Anna's, Ramdev's followers also came from the middle class. While Anna's supporters were mainly middle and upper class, most of Ramdev's followers perhaps belonged to the lower of the middle; they were primarily provincial, less polished, and perhaps

less economically secure, and yet somewhat socially privileged. Ramdev's modest social and economic background cannot not be discounted while analysing his support base. This support base, having a desire for authority, found in the religious guru image of Ramdev a more natural attraction than in the quasi-secular image of Hazare. However, the common connecting thread between their constituencies was the concern for corruption; both were looking for 'purity' in politics, which could be brought in by some charismatic and authoritarian personality.

Anna's movement was called off with the formation of a joint committee of civil society and government representatives to draft the Lokpal Bill. However, Ramdev continued to raise more strident demands with regard to getting back the black money to India, including the way money had allegedly been siphoned off into Swiss bank accounts. He also clarified that instead of launching the political party, he would begin a nationwide agitation against corruption from 4 June 2011.

Ramdev's demands were rhetorical, extreme, and all over the place. He demanded that the 1894 Land Acquisition Act be 'banned' altogether as these laws allowed large-scale transfer of agricultural land of farmers impacting food security. His charter of 10 demands also included demonetization of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes; thus, Modi's demonetization measure in 2016 did not come out of the blue. Ramdev further demanded death or lifetime imprisonment for those convicted of corruption, although this constituted a quantum leap from the maximum sentence of seven years that was permissible under the existing law (*Times of India* 2011c). On black money, he called for an ordinance declaring accounts of Indians in tax havens as 'national property', and also demanded the stashing of black money in those places be declared as '*raj droh*' (state crime).

By June 2011, he had worked out plans to hold public gatherings in New Delhi that would be part yoga camp and part protest rally (Deb 2011). The beleaguered Congress accused him of land-grabbing and Congress leader Digvijay Singh called him a thug and a money launderer (*NDTV* 2014). Ramdev got further publicity and support from this accusation and his demands became more radical. Finally, he gave an ultimatum to the government that he would start an indefinite fast on 4 June 2011.

Ramdev's Ramlila: Banishment and Return

Ramdev was carried away by the surge of support for his cause and he wanted to take solo action. Hence, he was careful not to involve the Sangh Parivar leadership; moreover, it would have created suspicion in the government circle. In any case, he thought the government would concede to his demands and, therefore, he wanted to take the sole credit rather than share it.

Ramdev kept on insisting that his mission was not political. In a statement, he said: 'Being a sanyasi, I want to do something for the nation. Corruption is eating into the lives of Indians and depriving them of their due share in the national wealth. Eradication of corruption and saving the nation is my mission.' He wanted to use the weapon of 'dharma' to create awareness among the public about corruption and make them desist from such practices.

The Congress government made a conciliatory gesture by dispatching some of its senior ministers, including Pranab Mukherjee, to meet Ramdev when he arrived at the Delhi airport. The government, by its public gesture of appeasement towards Ramdev, was trying to drive a further wedge between the Hazare and the Ramdev camps. These two camps already had an uneasy relationship as the Anna camp was critical of Ramdev's proximity to the RSS and was vigilant enough not to allow the Sangh–Ramdev alliance to take control of the anti-graft movement. However, the government's efforts to placate Ramdev did not succeed and he began his fast on 4 June 2011.

Tens of thousands of Ramdev's followers gathered at the venue. Shortly after midnight, the government sent in a team of riot police. In the midst of lathi charge and the firing of tear gas shells, Ramdev was forced to flee wearing feminine attire. He was arrested and externed from the capital for 15 days. The government began an investigation into his business affairs, including his acquisition of the island of Little Cumbrae. The Congress accused Ramdev of having connections with the Sangh Parivar (*Times of India* 2011a).

The government's police action on Ramdev at Ramlila Maidan brought together rival factions of civil society, besides exposing the centre and Congress leadership to sharp attacks from political opponents. The India Against Corruption campaign condemned the 'barbaric and unprovoked' action and demanded an explanation from the prime

minister. It stated that 'the brutal assault of the government reminds one of 1975 Emergency'. Hazare said that instead of '*gore angrez* (white Englishmen)' shooting down Indians in the Jallianwala Bagh incident, '*kale angrez* (black Englishmen)' had attacked people. Justice Santosh Hegde described the action as violation of 'fundamental rights of citizens' (*Times of India* 2011d). Anna Hazare sat on a one-day hunger strike on 8 June as a mark of solidarity to endorse Ramdev's demand for an ordinance to declare Indian funds illegally stashed abroad as national assets and to provide for means to bring the money back.

The Making of an Open Ramdev–Sangh Parivar Alliance

The government justified its action as inevitable. While keeping its distance from the police operation, the Congress stressed the threat from 'communal forces', particularly targeting the Sangh Parivar. This accusation, in a way, made the bonding between Ramdev and the Sangh stronger. Narendra Modi described this event at Ramlila Maidan as 'Ravanlila' and castigated the Congress leadership which had earlier gone to greet Baba Ramdev at the Delhi airport, and then had allowed the police to beat up innocent women and children. Modi also compared this action to the Emergency days of 1975 and alleged that this was carried out at the behest of Manmohan Singh and on behalf of the 'Delhi Sultanate' and 'not by the Sheila Dixit Government'. He further prophesized: 'The dark night of this June 4 is the beginning of the end of the Delhi Sultanate' (*NDTV* 2011). Modi was simultaneously targeting two objectives: Ramdev's support and exposure of the central government.

The VHP firebrand leader Pavin Togadia dubbed this as 'an attack on Hinduism': 'It was not a swoop on Baba Ramdev and his supporters, but a direct attack on the faith of millions of Hindus' living across the globe (*Economic Times* 2011). From Jaipur to Kanpur, BJP workers staged protests condemning the police action on Ramdev and burnt effigies of the prime minister, Sonia Gandhi, and Kapil Sibal to register their protest against the police action. At Kanpur, BJP leader Vinay Katiyar undertook fast in protest and demanded that President Pratibha Patil summon the two houses of Parliament to discuss the matter immediately. Hindu Mahasabha members burnt the effigy of Digvijay Singh who had called Ramdev a 'thug'. Thus, the Sangh Parivar stood firm

behind Ramdev and signalled that it would come out in the open for his protection.

Buoyed by the Parivar's support and drawing upon a clear, calibrated strategy, Ramdev returned to Ramlila Maidan after two months on 9 August. It was symbolically important as the 'Quit India' movement was launched on that date. Interestingly, this came out less than a week after another protest in New Delhi by Hazare, which fizzled out for lack of popular support. Instead of Gandhian Hazare, Yogi Ramdev became the legacy of that struggle which was geared to oust the UPA government. Thousands of people gathered in central Delhi to shout and sing support for 'Baba' Ramdev, who was staging a protest fast there. The Team Anna members were missing; this time a confident Ramdev was in full control, in alliance with the Sangh Parivar. Making a mockery of the UPA government, he said, 'India could have won gold if there was a competition for corruption in the Olympics.' He thundered: 'Many people say I have no agenda. The agenda is to save the country ... I want the current prime minister to demonstrate his political honesty and political will on the issue of black money' (*Financial Times* 2012). The Congress politicians called him a front for Hindu fundamentalists, but Ramdev was not perturbed.

The success of the second Ramlila mobilization made Ramdev think of reviving his plan to gear up his political front to offer 'an option' to the common man in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in 2014. He declared: 'This government has lost the moral right to continue because of the way the common man is being burdened with taxes and inflation. People need a healthy option', and announced that 'in order to stem corruption we have to enter the political arena and the parliament.' Ramdev was eyeing at least 100 seats in the Parliament. 'We need at least 100 people in the Parliament who will work towards freeing the country from corruption, black money and social, economic injustice. For this we are getting like-minded people together' (*Times of India* 2013a). He was in search of like-minded people and had been in touch with the former army chief, General V.K. Singh, Lieutenant General Hoon, and Kiran Bedi.

The Rationale of the Alliance

Both Ramdev and the Sangh Parivar needed each other. Ramdev had clearly learnt a lesson from his solo mission that politics was a different

ball game than yoga. His attempt had not only been humiliating and a loss of face, but it also threatened his booming business interests. The state machinery was too powerful to be cowed down by his charisma. Though he had cultivated wide political connections across political parties, and had benefitted from their largesse, yet, during this critical time, no political leader or party could come to his rescue due to their political compulsions and complex political permutations. Hence, he had to make an alliance with a political force and the Sangh Parivar was the ideal choice.

The Ramdev–Sangh connection had evolved over time. Being a post-Ram Janmabhoomi product, Ramdev did not have any role in the Ayodhya Movement. However, Haridwar and Rishikesh, the popular yoga destinations of India and the world, had remained under VHP domination for decades. The VHP had been organizing its Dharma Sansads⁸ periodically and many Hindu nationalist gurus such as Swami Satyamitranandagiri of Haridwar's Bharatmata Mandir exerted influence in this region. More importantly, the VHP also provided a useful business link by connecting the yoga gurus of Haridwar and Rishikesh with potential clients from India and abroad. These clients, the VHP's financial patrons, primarily from the business community and the diaspora, made periodic visits to these holy cities to join yoga camps and donated liberally to the gurus and their ashrams. When these yoga gurus went to conduct programmes in other cities in India and abroad, they needed the VHP's patrons in those places. Thus, a symbiotic relationship developed between the VHP and Ramdev in the struggling years of his career. Besides using various patronage routes, Ramdev had also benefitted from the VHP channel in India

⁸ Dharma Sansad (Religious Parliament): In 1984, with the objective of consolidation and mobilization of Hindu religious leaders for the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement, the VHP convened its first Dharma Sansad in New Delhi in which 558 Hindu *dharmacharyas* (religious experts) and *dharmagurus* (religious teachers) belonging to 76 *panths* (sects) participated. Since then this Parliament has convened periodically, passing resolutions on various issues, such as ban on cow slaughter, conversion, untouchability, Hindu unity, Hindu vote bank, Ram temple, Bangladeshi refugees, Kashmir, Islamic terrorism, and so on. In November 2017, VHP's Dharma Sansad was held at Udupi, Karnataka, in which more than 2000 Hindu religious leaders had participated.

and abroad. Hence, to show his gratitude, he had also taken part in some VHP programmes and activities.

Moreover, Ramdev's adherence to the political ideology of the Arya Samaj had close proximity to the Hindu nationalist ideology. Ramdev's campaign against the multinationals and strong commitment to swadeshi economics found a close fraternity with the Sangh affiliate organizations such as the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, and others. Ramdev also maintained a close link with the Sangh's one-time blue-eyed boy and a swadeshi proponent, K.N. Govindacharya (Naqvi 2011).

The Sangh Parivar at that juncture was not confident of its solo mission in the next general elections and was looking for consolidation of anti-Congress forces as alliance partners. Its experiment with Anna Hazare was disappointing. Though it extended full support to Hazare, the latter publicly rebuked the saffron organization. This led to RSS's withdrawal of support to Anna, which became a big factor behind the failure of the second edition of the Anna Movement. Further, the launching of a new political party by Anna's aides, Kejriwal and others, was also a setback to the BJP's political ambition (*India Today* 2012). In this context, Ramdev allegedly met some senior RSS functionaries, who favoured the new alliance. The BJP had reportedly conducted a series of secret parleys with Ramdev before he embarked upon his second agitation on 9 August. While Ramdev bargained for the BJP to support some candidates that he wanted to put up during the 2014 general elections, the BJP and the RSS in return asked Ramdev to campaign against the Congress across the country. Thus, the deal was struck and the Sangh Parivar sent the cadres to fill the Ramlila Maidan and its leaders shared the stage with Ramdev.

Baba Campaigns for Modi and the BJP

After the BJP declared Narendra Modi as its prime ministerial candidate, VHP leader Ashok Singhal got it endorsed at the VHP's Dharma Sansad. Thus, all the gurus and sadhus affiliated to the VHP extended their support to Modi. Ramdev also quickly endorsed and compared him with Rahul Gandhi who was *bechara* (poor), *nabalg* (child), and 'confused', with no 'vision'; hence, he could not be relied on and given such a big responsibility as to run the country (*Times of India*

2013b). He also castigated Manmohan Singh as 'ineffective, insensitive and weak': 'Singh neither laughs nor cries, neither shows happiness nor sadness. He never boosts enthusiasm among the people of the country. Being a sardar, he is not *asardar* (effective). He is an honest person who is surrounded with corrupt men' (*Times of India* 2013b). In contrast, Ramdev presented Modi as a symbol of development, bravery, honesty, and good governance.

Ramdev also said that he and the members of the trust and other wings would play a crucial role in formation of the government. 'I will not fight election but I and my people will surely play an important role in forming a government. We will select and send one honest prime minister and 300 members of Parliament in coming election to rule the country' (*Times of India* 2013b). Ramdev was obviously making this claim on behalf of the BJP and was also simultaneously trying to bargain some seats for his followers.

Ramdev undertook a tour to propagate Pantanjali Yogpeeth and boost women's empowerment, which was, in fact, a political campaign tour as he kept attacking Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in his rallies. Addressing the Confederation of Indian Industry, Rahul Gandhi compared India with a beehive, which, despite being complex, offered opportunities. The BJP leaders, particularly Modi, found an opportunity to attack Rahul for insulting 'Mother India' by this comparison. Sarcastically calling Rahul a 'minor', Ramdev asked people to forgive him as he did not know that the nation was not a beehive, but Mother. Ramdev also said that women, culture, language, and land of our country were incomparable. Indirectly referring to Sonia Gandhi, he said that there was no need of an 'imported daughter-in-law' to run the nation and made the accusation that the daughter-in-law was taking away all valuables from the *sasural* (house of husband) to her *maayka* (bridal house) (*Times of India* 2013b).

While touring Uttar Pradesh to mobilize support for his campaign against corruption, he said that Mayavati 'will be better Prime Minister than Rahul' as she had more political and administrative experience in comparison to Rahul Gandhi (*Times of India* 2011b). Ramdev also said at a programme in Lucknow that Rahul visited Dalit homes 'for honeymoon and picnic' (*Indian Express* 2014). Dalit leaders accused Ramdev of crossing the limits of decency and demanded that he should be penalized heavily for his shameful conduct. Ramdev, due to

his caste background, had a comfortable equation with both Mulayam Singh Yadav and Lalu Prasad Yadav. His reference to Mayavati and Dalits shows that he still remained within the framework of the caste logic despite being a sanyasi. Modi's Other Backward Class (OBC) background might have been another factor behind his decision to support him and the BJP. After the Congress faced a crushing defeat in elections in four states in December 2013, Ramdev saw 'a strong anti-Congress wave' sweeping across the country and people, being 'fed up with corruption, misrule and failure of UPA government on all fronts', were 'itching for a change'. Comparing Modi with Rahul Gandhi, Ramdev observed that while 'Modi built his stature due to his hard work, dedication and vision, Rahul inherited it' (*Indian Express* 2013). He blamed the Congress for not taking steps to curb rising prices, crime, and corruption, for not providing jobs to unemployed youth, and for not bringing back the black money stashed in foreign banks.

Since the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was emerging as a thorn in Modi's path, Ramdev trained his guns on it as well. On the success of AAP, Ramdev said it was the result of anti-Congress sentiments of the people and the party is yet to acquire 'political stature' at the national level. He, however, said that Arvind Kejriwal did not follow the 'guru-shishya' (teacher-disciple) tradition and fell apart with Anna Hazare, who led the agitation for Lokpal (*Indian Express* 2013). He also claimed that he shared the credit with Anna for the passing of the Lokpal Bill, and though Anna led the agitation, it was he (Ramdev) who had propelled it to the national level and provided a national platform to the agitation.

Ramdev described Narendra Modi as a person who has his 'fingers on the pulse of people'. He said, 'Modi has worked for people and we are supporting him as has taken up our cause [*sic*]' (*Indian Express* 2013). Under Modi's leadership, BJP tasted success in the recent assembly polls and seemed to be on its way to forming a government at the centre. So, though he did not formally merge the Bharat Swabhiman Party with the BJP, he fully supported Narendra Modi as he felt that Modi was the only leader capable of leading the non-Congress nationalist forces. During the campaign, he further lashed out at the Congress leaders, saying that while they remained silent on several key issues, they were vocal on the matter of homosexuality. Thus, very much in

line of his approach towards the Dalits, Ramdev's message on gender reflected the conservative Hindu mindset.

Ramdev had a spectacular journey, challenging all odds from his childhood to his youth—physical, social, economic—and emerging as a charismatic and popular yoga guru. While imparting his innovative style of yoga to his followers, he also disseminated his vision of nation and commitment to swadeshi and social transformation. The success of his entrepreneurship, which skilfully marketed yoga and Ayurveda, gave him enough spiritual and economic capital to explore his political ambitions. Broadly subscribing to the ideology of the Arya Samaj and having a commitment to swadeshi economics, he plunged into the national political stage when the nation was reeling under crony capitalism and corruption by the Congress-led UPA regime and was looking for saviours. He found a perfect partner in the Gandhian Anna Hazare and got a perfect launch, being a part of his popular agitation.

With Anna's movement fizzling out and the civil society groups joining together for an alternative political experiment—which later culminated in the formation of the AAP—Ramdev decided to break away from Anna's followers and go solo to harvest his own political capital. When this experiment was crushed by the high-handedness of the state and his business empire was threatened, he found little option but to look for a durable and committed political partnership. He learnt that charisma alone was not adequate to sail through in politics. The yoga disciples cannot be converted into political cadre overnight and yoga camps cannot be turned into political battleground.

The very amorphous nature of his social trust and the death of his political aide further compelled him to be grounded and channelize his personal political ambitions in a different way. Though Ramdev had cultivated close relationships across a wide political spectrum—from the BJP and the Congress, to the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal—at this juncture, he could also see that a political change was in the offing and it would be pragmatic to be in a partnership with the Sangh Parivar as the BJP, under the leadership of Narendra Modi, would be a strong contender for the next ruling regime in Delhi.

Hence, he went all out for the BJP, overlooking his old ties with other political forces, and curtailed his political ambition, preferring to play the role of a kingmaker. Instead of launching his own party and contesting in all the parliamentary seats, he was satisfied with the nomination of a few of his choices as BJP candidates, one being Bollywood singer Babul Supriyo. Thus, he campaigned vociferously against the Congress, unleashing personal attacks on Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi and showering praises on Narendra Modi. The BJP won and Narendra Modi became the prime minister. Ramdev's business kept growing by leaps and bounds after 2014.

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THE GUJARAT MODEL AND THE RIGHT-WING SHIFT IN 2014

Zoya Hasan

The 2014 general elections heralded a major shift in Indian politics. For the first time since Independence, India elected a right-wing party to power at the Centre and in several states. The three-time Gujarat chief minister, Narendra Modi, a Hindu nationalist, won the election on the basis of his much-publicized Gujarat model and his track record of development represented by it. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became the dominant force in Indian politics as it captured all or most of the seats in some states and reduced the Indian National Congress' share to 44 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha. Coupled with the near obliteration suffered by parties on the left, it is not difficult to conclude that the centrist, secular, and progressive voices had lost out (P. Sharma 2014). The steep fall of the Congress and Modi's arrival with an absolute majority signalled a shift in the discursive and ideological space of Indian politics to the right. The cornerstone of BJP's campaign was that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had ruined the economy and that the Modi-led BJP will make it boom just as it had done in Gujarat. The overwhelming defeat of the Congress prompted major debates about the country's development trajectory and social policies and whether these were appropriate for promoting the twin objectives of growth with equity—as against the

Gujarat model, which led to a boom in the state's economy. However, the public debate in the course of the election campaign was not about policy alternatives but the UPA's development record, which compared to the Gujarat model, was found wanting. The UPA's policy initiatives and achievements were drowned out by the propaganda about the Gujarat model during the campaign.

This chapter seeks to understand the shift to the right as it unfolded in the BJP's 2014 campaign through an investigation of the politics of the Gujarat model. It explores the role of the Gujarat model in shaping and establishing the contours of a BJP-dominated political system in conjunction with the exclusion and isolation of minorities. It proceeds by discussing the genesis of this model, the backing of influential capitalists and media which was critical to its success, its social and economic impact, and its contribution to the reinvention of Modi as a man of development to counter the criticism of his inaction in the mass violence of 2002 in Gujarat. It highlights the limitations and inconsistencies of this model and contrasts it with the development policies of the UPA government. However, for a variety of reasons, the Congress failed to take its own achievements to the public at large. In addition, the chapter also examines the elitist and communal dimensions of this model, which have been a source of considerable disenchantment.

The Gujarat model was the BJP's favourite example of economic success and it used the economic performance of the state to boost its election campaign in 2014. The BJP website (BJP 2014) described the Gujarat model as a 'vision that India awaits'. The vision of the Gujarat model listed out more jobs, low inflation, higher income, faster growing economy, better education, better safety, and better life.

The Gujarat Model

The Gujarat model refers to a period during Modi's chief minister-ship (2002–3 to 2011–12) when the state experienced a big jump in its growth rate. The driving force of this model was Modi's 'innovative interpretation of neoliberal policies' (Hirway 2017). Politically, Gujarat witnessed an extraordinary centralization of power under this model. Shekhar Gupta (2017), a noted media commentator, observed that Modi ran the state as though it was under president's rule. The

Gujarat Assembly was called only when constitutionally required; it was convened for just 31 days every year from 2007 and 2012 (Rajshekhar 2017).

This model was the pivot of Modi's politics around which the 2014 Lok Sabha elections was contested (but not in Banaras where Modi contested from; see Chapter 6). It was the anchor for his campaign speeches. The Congress tried to fence him into the 2002 riots, but he brilliantly reworked the script by shifting the focus to economic growth. Thus, for the first time, the main contender for the post of prime minister was a chief minister who canvassed by publicizing his past record of development in his state. Modi began his campaign for the prime ministership soon after he won the state assembly elections for the third time in December 2012, claiming that he would replicate at the national level what he had achieved in Gujarat in terms of development. Modi's transformation from a regional politician to a decisive leader, with a clear development agenda, was nothing short of extraordinary (Jaffrelot 2015). From 2013 onwards, he focussed entirely on the Gujarat model. Addressing the 2013 India Today Conclave in Delhi, he projected the Gujarat model and what it stood for—from the automated toll booth at the Maharashtra border, to the various decentralized initiatives on water and waste management (Sheth 2014).

The reinvention of Modi as 'development man' had started in 2005 when the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) ranked Gujarat as the best in the country for economic freedom. For a start, it is ironic that the RGF was involved in assessing the performance of states on economic freedom (Guruswamy 2013). The Gujarat government was quick to take advantage of this praise from the Congress-dominated think tank by taking out full pages in the national newspapers, advertising this 'honour'. For Modi, this was a self-goal gifted by the Congress 'whose left hand obviously did not know what the right hand was doing' (Guruswamy 2013). The other event that helped him in making a mark on the national scene was the shifting in 2008 of the Tata Motors factory for the Nano car from Singur in West Bengal to Sunand in Gujarat, advertising in the process the ease of doing business in Gujarat. It was given sops of Rs 30,000 crore (300 billion) to shift the Nano car plant to Gujarat. This was in addition to getting land at throwaway prices, free electricity, and tax breaks.

He thus established himself as a pro-business, pro-growth, pro-industrialization chief minister who had enticed an industry leader scorned by politicians in West Bengal. The hard selling of Modi and his promise of development started from here; he created 'development' as a brand. The shift of the Nano project was the defining moment when the 'vibrancy' of the Gujarat model was sanctified. Soon the captains of industry were queuing up in Ahmedabad to issue the certificates of excellence to Modi.

The BJP's strategy with its new focus on development was based on the realization that the BJP cannot win elections by relying exclusively on Hindu nationalism, which only appeals to a narrow constituency and scares away a much wider number of voters concerned about the social consequences of communal politics. For Modi, however, the relentless projection of the Gujarat model was also a shield. It built his reputation for being an efficient technocrat with a no-nonsense style of working. While this certainly burnished his image, especially with the corporate sector and the business community (see Chapter 1), it also made him more widely acceptable by putting a cover on the 2002 violence. It was his best defence against the criticism for his role in the 2002 violence. Although judicial inquiry had cleared him of any legal responsibility for the mass violence, he was not able to wipe off the stain. With his projection as the 'development man', he managed to shrug off responsibility for the anti-Muslim pogrom, prompted by the massacre of Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya on the Sabarmati Express.

The Corporate Sector and the Middle Classes Fall for Modi

The Gujarat model, which is essentially a corporate model of development based on partnership between the corporate sector and the government, fits very well with the corporate sector's own view that the primary role of the state is to promote business interests. Indeed, Gujarat's growth has been achieved through privatization and handing over the control of the economy to the corporate sector. Sectors such as ports, roads, rail, and power have been handed over to corporate capital. It extended to making land easily available for commercial development. Not surprisingly, Modi quickly emerged as the favourite prime ministerial candidate of the business elite. Surveys conducted

before the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 had claimed that 75 per cent of the top corporate leaders wanted Modi to be the prime minister (Rajalakshmi and Deshmane 2017). Throughout his election campaign, Modi stressed on the need for ease of doing business and more concessions to be given to business groups. This is just what the corporate sector wanted to hear. In the event, several top names from the world of business that were critical of the Gujarat government after the violence of 2002 were seduced by his 'pro-capitalist' economic agenda and began to lavish praise on Modi. Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), said he was proud of his Gujarati roots and that 'in Narendra Bhai, we have a leader with a grand vision' (NDTV 2013). 'Today people are talking about the China model of development in Gujarat. But the day is not far when people will talk about the Gujarat model of growth in China,' proclaimed Anand Mahindra, chairman of Mahindra Group, at the 2013 Vibrant Gujarat Summit (*Times of India* 2013).

Influential corporate sector leaders, such as Mukesh Ambani, Ratan Tata (former chairman of Tata Sons), Anand Mahindra, and Sunil Mittal (chairman of Bharti Enterprises), expressed happiness with Modi's nomination which they said would ensure India's development. In fact, they openly supported his candidacy even before he was officially nominated as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, which in all probability tilted the scales in his favour even within his own party. This was the first time that the corporate sector explicitly supported a single party and a single prime ministerial candidate. Even as the support of corporate capital propelled Modi to the top, what it also signified was his readiness to accommodate the demands of capital to expand in any way it wanted. This can be judged from the staggering subsidies offered to Tata for its Nano plant and other projects. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report for 2012–13 had come down heavily on the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat for causing a loss of Rs 580 crores (5.8 billion) to the state exchequer by bestowing 'undue' favours to large corporate entities, which included RIL, Essar Steel, and Adani Power Ltd (APL) (*Indian Express* 2013).

In consequence, the 2014 elections saw an unprecedented amount of funds flow to the BJP, which, 'according to one independent estimate, ended up spending more than Rs 5,000 crore [50 billion] on just advertising (Gurtoo 2014), only a little less than the \$986 million that

United States President Barack Obama spent on his 2012 presidential campaign in a country where the per capita income is more than 30 times that in India' (*Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)* 2014: 7). The *EPW* rightly called it 'the biggest corporate heist in history'. In addition to the corporate sector, Modi garnered the support of the urban middle classes who—obsessed with high growth—saw Modi as the leader who can facilitate it. His focus on growth struck a chord with these groups and the youth, the lower middle classes, and the less well-off. For these groups, his aggressive style of leadership was an antidote to the Congress leadership, which, they felt, was weak and feckless.

Modi and the Media

Modi advertised himself as the 'development man'—an idea that the media lapped up, thereby underlining the mutually reinforcing relationships between media and politics. The media was keen to promote the Gujarat model of development to bolster their predetermined narrative about Modi as an efficient leader and the idea that Gujarat and its citizens had flourished because of efficient governance, particularly in the realm of economic policies. Most media houses had no compunction about either refusing to interrogate the claims of his achievements in Gujarat or promoting the idea that people have to move beyond Gujarat 2002. The Indian media did not raise questions about the Gujarat model as a whole and whether, given its blemished record, it could be a prescription for the country's economic advancement. In fact, the foreign media was more critical about his record than the Indian media, which proved to be gullible. The Indian media was openly one-sided in its support for the Gujarat model as proof of his leadership skills. The bewildering variety of actors and networks which define the media landscape in India were completely overshadowed by the persona of Modi, amplified by saturation coverage of the leader, spread out over more than six months, which was unprecedented even by global standards (Bhushan 2014). Television news channels had little time for anyone other than Modi, whose decisive leadership was seen as the country's only hope against the UPA (Rukmini 2014).

The media became the main campaign platform of the Modi blitzkrieg which dominated the 2014 elections. For weeks, any speech by

Modi in any remote district ran live on several channels. A study by the CMS Media Lab—which is associated with the research organization, Centre for Media Studies (CMS)—found that Modi dominated over a third of the prime-time news telecast on five major channels (Rukmini 2014). The paid news phenomenon acquired a new dimension altogether, with entire media houses under pressure to act as the wind in the sails of the Modi wave. Voters with higher media exposure were then more likely to vote for the BJP in the 2014 elections, as per the trend seen in the previous Lok Sabha elections (Rukmini 2014). In short, media exposure influenced the political preferences of people and this invariably went in favour of the BJP. The media's response to the Gujarat model was a crucial reason why it became a major talking point in the run-up to the 2014 general elections, that is, showcasing Gujarat's huge success in delivering both growth and development and even improving its social indicators rapidly, thus vindicating the claims made on behalf of the Gujarat model.

Impact of the Gujarat Model

The economic achievements of Gujarat were substantial—it was among the top states in terms of per capita state domestic product or gross state domestic product (GSDP). The state's development took off after Modi's energetic execution of economic liberalization policies. According to Indira Hirway (2017), this 'strategy had three important components: quantum jump in infrastructure to facilitate inflow of corporate investment, quantum jump in governance to address the requirements of corporate units, and unprecedented rise in incentives and subsidies on investments to the corporate sector to attract investments. Infrastructure development focused on roads, airports and power—and through reforms, 24-hour availability of power.' It facilitated a growth rate that was above the national average but in line with the growth rates of other states such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Kerala. However, it is also a fact that Gujarat was already a relatively developed and rich state before Modi became the chief minister. Achyut Yagnik and Suchitra Sheth (2005) note that historically Gujarat was the first region in the Indian subcontinent to encounter the East India Company when flagship Hector dropped anchor at Surat in 1608. Again, it is worth noting that one of the

earliest textile mills in Asia was founded in Ahmedabad as early as in 1861. Gujarat had always been rich in mercantile resources because of the sea gateway, thanks to which Surat became a trading hub much before Bombay did. Contributors to a collection of essays co-edited by Hirway, A. Shah, and G. Shah (2014) demonstrate that Gujarat's growth was a continuation of past trends, which in turn were largely due to its advantages in agriculture and manufacturing, aided by the easy availability of land and infrastructure facilities such as electricity. But Modi made it appear as though the growth story had no previous history and context and that he was its only architect. In fact, he has been saying the same about national economic development—that there was no economic development before 2014 and that development in India started only after Modi came to power. He credited himself for everything that Gujarat had achieved from the early 1990s. Likewise, once in power in Delhi, he began crediting himself for a range of projects and schemes, which had been started by previous governments, as his own initiatives.

The Gujarat model was heavily reliant on attracting large private investments through huge concessions in the form of fiscal subsidies, easier land acquisitions, tax exemptions, and stricter labour laws. Modi successfully sold the idea that attracting investment to a state amounted to development. As a result, Gujarat became a very popular destination for Indian business. Big business played a key role in the development of the state, but this was often at the expense of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which actually declined due to lack of bank support (Jaffrelot 2017). A large number of companies were set up, but the state could not create enough jobs. Hence, Christophe Jaffrelot described the Gujarat model as a model of jobless growth or 'growth with minimal development' (*Financial Express* 2017). Formal employment remained almost stagnant between 1999–2000 and 2009–10. At last count, only 6.8 per cent of the workers are in formal employment (this percentage is declining as against rising trend in most other states) and close to 93–4 per cent workers are in the informal and traditional sectors, with low incomes and low social security. The wage rates in Gujarat are almost the lowest as compared to other major states in India, with the rank declining over the past decade or so (Hirway 2017). The capital-intensive model of industrial investment, with very little employment generation and low levels of social

expenditure, relative to other states, is responsible for this (Ghatak and Roy 2017).

This model of growth is neither sustainable nor equitable. A striking feature of this model is its poor performance with regard to human development. There is broad unanimity on this, ranging from the Raghuram Rajan Committee's report (Raghuram Rajan Committee 2013) to Hirway (2017), both of which point to poor social indicators. Gujarat remains far behind several other states on the human development index, reflecting comparatively low social expenditures. The state's social indicators have not improved significantly despite relatively high growth rates because, as Hirway (2017) observes, 'after huge incentives to corporate units, the Gujarat government is left with limited funds for education, health, environment, and employment for the masses'. Gujarat's social indicators are generally much worse than other states with similar per capita gross domestic product (GDP), and indeed have worsened in some cases (Ghatak and Roy 2017). The state's high growth has increased inequality, and this is also associated with stagnant or even declining material standards for a significant proportion of the people (Ghosh 2017). Poverty rate continues to be one of the highest (16.63 million) among the heavily industrialized states; the condition of its poor people has remained the same. This suggests that the benefits of growth have been concentrated within a small percentage of the state's population—the urban rich, the middle class, and the upper castes—while the rural and urban poor and the lower castes have been marginalized (Jaffrelot 2014). Its high growth is not reflected in improvements in employment, wages, health, or education. It fares poorly in terms of infant mortality rate, sex ratio, and child sex ratio. This is not surprising. The Gujarat strategy to attract industries by providing public resources to industrialists leaves very little money for broad based social development; in fact, the 'pro-corporate' strategy works in terms of worsening the human development indices (Patnaik 2013).

The BJP Campaign Powered by the Gujarat Model

For the past several years, Modi and the BJP have constantly harped on the Gujarat model claiming that it was a perfect formula for growth and that it could be extended to the rest of the country.

Modi wooed voters by telling them that he could replicate the model across the country by giving them *achhe din* (good days), if he came to power. No leader had sold Gujarat as a model quite the way Modi did in 2014. It impressed voters across the country, especially the middle classes who were disenchanted with the growth deceleration after the 2008 economic slowdown and the numerous crises facing the UPA government.

Notwithstanding the tardy progress made by the state in terms of human development, Modi and his team of spin doctors were able to paint a very rosy picture of Gujarat's overall development (Guha-Thakurta 2016). It was the promise and slogan of the Gujarat model that swept Modi to power and gave India its first majority government in 30 years. This was facilitated by effective media management, which concealed the negative aspects of the Gujarat model from voters in the rest of the country in 2014. The electorate fell for the tall claims made on behalf of the Gujarat model and voted for someone who they thought would generate positive economic transformation and productive employment generation across the entire country, using the magic he had supposedly already produced in Gujarat (Ghosh 2017). Facts did not matter in this debate and were not allowed to come in the way of support for this model. Consequently, many voters went to the polling booths under the impression that Gujarat resembled developed countries such as Germany or Japan and that letting Modi take charge of the country was a chance for the whole of India to follow suit. The Gujarat model dominated the public debate on the development trajectory, even though it is obvious that no state model was ideal for the nation's development and this neoliberal, pro-corporate model was even less worthy of emulation in India as a whole. Nevertheless, it was the apparent success of this model that acted as a launching pad for Modi and elevated him to the national scene in 2014.

The Communal Dimension of the Gujarat Model

No discussion of the Gujarat model and its application to the rest of India would be complete without taking note of the communal dimension, that is, the 2002 mass violence and the isolation of Muslims in its aftermath. The Gujarat model, no doubt, stands for growth, enterprise,

mercantilism, and new forms of business, but it also stands for communal fault lines and sectarian conflicts. However, communal conflict and social inequality did not figure in Modi's campaign speeches; he did not 'reach out to the minorities to assuage any misgivings they may have had about him as a prime minister' (*EPW*: Editorial, cited in Pal 2014; cf. Chapter 8).

More than 1,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat within the span of a few days in February–March of 2002 and thousands of families uprooted and displaced since then (Lokhande 2015). Mass violence is a common occurrence in India, but the well-documented complicity of the state government, its ministers, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), and Bajrang Dal, and large sections of the police and bureaucracy was nevertheless a development of great significance. Martha Nussbaum (2008: 50–1) summarized the state's role when she wrote: 'There is by now a broad consensus that the Gujarat violence was a form of ethnic cleansing, that in many ways it was premeditated, and that it was carried out with the complicity of the state government and officers of the law.'

A key element of the Gujarat political model, which has been replicated increasingly in states such as Uttar Pradesh (UP) and even nationally, is rendering the Muslim vote irrelevant, which in turn is followed by rendering their presence invisible in the public sphere. The BJP did not field a single Muslim candidate in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and yet, it won a national majority. This strategy of subordination and isolation of Muslims was started in Gujarat. The BJP had not fielded any Muslims in the Gujarat Assembly elections despite their being the largest minority in the state, constituting one-tenth of its population. It won a majority without minority support in Gujarat; it was able to do the same in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, and later in the UP Assembly elections in 2017. In UP, too, the BJP neither gave tickets to Muslims nor got their support in any substantial way—yet it won a landslide majority in the state. The UP Assembly election was particularly important because it showed that the BJP could win a legislative majority without minority support even in states such as UP, where Muslims constitute 20 per cent of the population. Minorities were thus pushed out of the system—first, by

rendering them irrelevant electorally and then, rendering them invisible in the public sphere owing to their electoral inconsequentiality. Making Muslims invisible in the public sphere is not unexpected but in a political system like ours—where relationships with the state are often mediated by representatives (and representatives from one's own communities)—this does exclude Muslims from the political mainstream. However, the expectation that Muslims should be made politically irrelevant in India finds deep resonance with the Hindu base of the party, which seems to agree with the BJP's charge that the Congress party panders to minority communities for electoral gains and this needs to be eradicated (Daniyal 2017).

By contrast, the BJP does not seek Muslim votes, preferring to rely solely on Hindu support. Thus, if there was one obvious feature of the 2014 elections, it was the BJP's successful consolidation of the Hindu vote, with religion often deciding voter preference (see 'Introduction'). This strategy was so successful that all parties started chasing the Hindu vote. Hence, even the Congress party did not want to be openly associated with Muslims in the 2017 Gujarat assembly elections given that this would be used by the BJP to polarize society.

Despite these exclusions, the media highlighted the development dimension, and clearly underplayed Hindutva as the key issue in the elections (Ahmad 2014). The corporate media presented the 2014 elections as a shift away from identity politics to development politics. Unlike previous elections held in the aftermath of the mass violence of 2002, which figured prominently in the election campaigns, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections saw Modi concentrate on his record as a pro-growth, decisive leader and efficient administrator. This led most right-wing commentators to believe that Modi had gone beyond communal politics. According to Swapan Dasgupta (2014), this was evident from his speeches, which were replete with references to governance and development, with very little mention of issues of identity politics; the promise of 'achhe din' was centred on jobs, opportunities, efficient government, and better facilities for the citizen.

However, rapid economic growth of India was not his only priority in 2014. Polarization was actively fuelled by communal appeals, with Modi taking the lead in pushing a shift towards Hindu consolidation. At a rally in Ghaziabad (UP), he accused the UPA government of promoting cow slaughter and promoting meat export, adding further that the

number of slaughterhouses was increasing and incidents of cattle being stolen from villages were also on a rise. He said: 'When the country was waiting for another green revolution, the Congress was planning for a 'pink revolution (meat export)' (Balchand 2014). In the last leg of his campaign, Modi slipped in Lord Ram's name, speaking with the Hindu god and a temple as his backdrop.

While it is true that the aspiration for development played an important part in Modi's victory, the bulk of BJP's parliamentary majority in 2014 had come from UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Gujarat where the Hindu sentiments and anxieties were systematically stoked. This shows that development cannot always be separated from identity politics. It was not always overt communalism or straightforward development rhetoric; it was a heady cocktail of both elements, couched within a discourse of 'development' that defined the Modi strategy.

Public Anger against the Congress

The much-hyped Gujarat model failed to benefit the majority of people, yet Modi successfully sold it not just to Gujaratis but to voters in several other states as well. Public dissatisfaction with the UPA government was so huge that it was enough to persuade voters to believe Modi's promise of development, suspending the memory of the 2002 riots and accepting the new branding of Modi as 'man of development'.

Importantly, Modi's success was built on turning the campaign into a presidential-style one with a single target: the Gandhi family. Through this strategy, he put the Congress leadership on the defensive, further stoking anti-Congress sentiments which were fuelled by failures of the UPA government and the inability of the ruling party to gauge the public mood, which was heavily tilted against the Congress, and the depth of their yearning for change. The Congress leadership also underestimated Modi's appeal to large sections of society whose aspirations were shaped by economic change triggered by migration, electronic media, cell phones, and better rural connectivity in general. This period also saw a decline in economic growth, a high rate of inflation, fewer jobs, corruption on a massive scale, terrorist attacks, inadequate public services, and so forth. The humongous corruption scandals and the government's dismal record on inflation control and

employment generation eclipsed its achievements by way of rights, improvement in human development, and social security legislation, which were drowned by the promises of the Modi machine and the campaign against the government's policy paralysis (*EPW* 2014). Around the same time, civil society was mobilized to launch a fight against corruption.

The massive anti-corruption movement in 2011, led by Anna Hazare, hit the credibility of the government as there was widespread criticism that it was unable to check corruption. Several top-level leaders associated with the government were found guilty. This was a turning point in cementing hostility towards the Congress. While in 2011 the fallout of the movement was difficult to gauge since elections were only in 2014, it was clear even then that the government had alienated vast swathes of voters across the social divide, and earned the wrath of the middle classes and young men and women voters of the future. The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)-Lokniti pre-poll survey (March 2014) provided an important indicator of the debacle facing the UPA with more than half the respondents stating that 'UPA should not be given another chance' (Syal 2014). According to the survey, price rise, corruption, lack of development, and unemployment were the four main causes for the poor image of the UPA and the resulting discontent among citizens.

At the same time, the mistake that the Congress made was to ignore the facts of its own success. Despite economic slowdown and inflation, there was a significant improvement in the well-being of people. They were far better off than they were at the turn of the millennium. Poverty declined faster than at any other time in India's history (P. Sharma 2014). The poverty ratio declined by at least 15 percentage points (Ghatak, Ghosh, and Kotwal 2014). In the initial years of UPA rule—from 2004 to 2009—the gap between the rich and the poor shrunk appreciably, as 40 per cent of the population experienced upward mobility (Ghatak, Ghosh, and Kotwal 2014). Over these years, some 15 per cent of the total population, or 40 per cent of the poor in India, moved above the poverty line. This was, in part, because of the UPA government's welfare measures that enshrined a new set of socio-economic entitlements through legally enforceable rights. These rights were not abstract but extended to the everyday survival of marginalized groups. Programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), as well as the Right to Education and the Forest Rights acts tried to make overall economic growth more inclusive. However, the party found itself paralysed as Manmohan Singh was mercilessly attacked for speaking too little and acting too late. As one commentator observed, the 'UPA record was defensible' but 'nobody in the government defended it, and nobody out of the government admired it' (M. Sharma 2014), partly because the government kept its success under wraps.

This was the first election when political parties had a conscious media strategy, but the Congress had none.¹ During the election campaign, the Congress did not defend its own record, which was not as bad as the BJP had presented it. With his powerful oratorical and communication skills, Modi tapped into the resentments and frustrations of voters. The top two Congress leaders, on the other hand, were mostly silent, reluctant to respond, or publicize their achievements. In the circumstances, the Congress came across as half-hearted and timid. It seemed like the party had given up the fight even before it had begun. Not surprisingly, the UPA did not meet the expectations of what leaders should be—as Manmohan Singh was considered too quiet and too diffident—while the electorate wanted decisive and macho leaders. The BJP attacked the UPA government, with no effective rebuttal from the Congress and its leaders.

Interestingly, the debate on the Gujarat model of development resurfaced during the election campaign for the 2017 assembly elections (Hasan 2017). However, this time it came under considerable criticism. While the Gujarat model proved extremely persuasive in 2014, three years later, people seemed to have a more sceptical take on it and what lies beneath it. The expectations of the people were that the Gujarat model will create jobs, which it did not. Big industries came, but with their level of automation, they did not create enough jobs for people. The model did not work as well as the BJP leaders might have expected. The state's economic growth, powered by both mercantile and manufacturing activity, had stalled. In short, it had become clear to people that 'this is not a development model

¹ The Congress held a special session on the use of social media by party members on 22 August 2013; see Upadhyay (2013).

that will bring about the greatest good to the most number of people' (Ghatak and Roy 2017).

Questioning the Gujarat model, the Congress president, Rahul Gandhi, punctured the mythology built around it with pointed attacks on the government's economic policies and the inadequate development in Modi's home state, highlighting joblessness and decelerating economic growth. For the first time in more than two decades, people freely criticized the Gujarat model. In fact, the Congress campaign for the 2017 assembly elections was based on busting the 'myth of Gujarat model' through jokes, caricatures, and parody (Hasan 2017).

In the 2014 elections, India elected a Hindu nationalist party to power with an absolute majority. The greatest success of Modi lay in his ability to refashion his image and that of his party by projecting a 'developmentalist' stance. Frequently used expressions such as Gujarat model, governance, decisive leader, and so on in the campaign helped to dovetail religious nationalism with economic progress, which resulted in a widespread belief that in the trade off between Hindu nationalism and development, the BJP had opted for the latter (Rajagopal 2015). The Gujarat model helped in creating the impression that Modi had steered clear of divisive rhetoric and gone beyond the communal agenda, as though there was a contradiction between economic growth and communal politics, when in fact Hindu nationalism and development are often intertwined. This interweaving of neoliberalism and religious chauvinism lacked electoral legitimacy previously, but gained acceptability thanks to the 2014 campaign, which justified it as an expression of the will of the majority even though the BJP received only 31 per cent of the vote.

Those who read Modi's election victory in 2014 as a vote for the Gujarat model are not entirely mistaken. The 2014 election was fought and won on the success of the Gujarat model. Many people bought into the rhetoric of increased growth under the Gujarat model regardless of its social costs and exclusions. In retrospect, the critical issue was not the growth output of the Gujarat model but the inability of the Opposition to question the claims of this model during the 2014 election campaign. The Congress failed to mount a systematic critique of the Gujarat model, in part because it was derived from the neoliberal

policies initiated by the Congress but with one key difference—the Congress government pursued a dual policy combining high growth and redistribution. Under the UPA, there was a consensus about the goals of economic policy, which was to pursue growth-enhancing policies while attempting to redistribute the benefits of that growth directly to the poorest. However, the Congress failed to highlight the uniqueness of the UPA model in contrast to Modi's Gujarat model, which focussed on growth to the neglect of human development and social equality. It is only when it was in Opposition that the Congress mustered the courage to break its silence on the Gujarat model and questioned the limits of this model. Perhaps that is why it went missing from the BJP's campaign in the 2017 assembly elections.

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COMMUNAL VIOLENCE, ELECTORAL POLARIZATION, AND MUSLIM REPRESENTATION

Muzaffarnagar, 2013–14

Hilal Ahmed

This chapter asks a straightforward question: do incidences of communal violence contribute to electoral polarization, especially with regard to Muslim voters?¹

Questions of this kind are not entirely new. There are a number of commentaries, official reports, and well-researched academic books on communalism in India that directly or indirectly look at the nature

¹ The workable conceptualization of the term ‘polarization’ given by Joan Esteban and Gerald Schneider is useful here. For them, polarization refers to ‘the extent to which the population is clustered around a small number of distant poles.... It stands for the idea that the tensions within a society of individuals or states result from two simultaneous decisions: identification with other subjects within the own group of reference and distancing oneself from one or several other competing groups’ (Esteban and Schneider 2008: 133). From our point of view, the discursive formation of Muslims as a group is very important. Various events, actors, and processes contribute to the making of a Muslim community in a specific context. The electoral politics, we must note, is one of the factors in this regard.

of violence-centric electoral politics. The contributions of Paul Brass (2004), Ashutosh Varshney (2002), and Steven Wilkinson (2004) are noticeable in this regard. However, our understanding of Muslim electoral politics is very limited. The assumption that violent events persuade Muslims to vote tactically at the national level is often evoked to substantiate the claim that communal violence always determines Muslim electoral preferences. The idea of the 'Muslim vote bank' is also an expanded version of this argument (Ahmed 2014). We are told that the 'Muslim vote' is very decisive in electoral politics because the 'winability' of a candidate at the constituency level and the 'sustainability' of any political coalition at regional/national level inextricably depend on Muslim support.

Such explanations do not pay attention to other crucial sociological factors, such as region, class, caste, gender, and education, among Muslims. Although one cannot deny the psychological impact of communal violence on Muslim communities, the Muslim socio-political heterogeneity, in any case, should be taken as a vantage point to study various forms of Muslim electoral politics. This kind of exploration might help us in unpacking the contextual specificities of various violent events and to identify the discursive constitution of 'polarized' socio-religious communities of voters at the local level (see 'Introduction').²

Focussing upon the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013, this chapter attempts to revisit the idea of electoral polarization in the context of the 2014 general elections. The chapter critically evaluates the merit of a twofold claim: communal and targeted violence against Muslims produces electoral polarization; and violence of this kind could only be prevented if the number of Muslim Members of Parliament

² The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 could be identified as a decisive contemporary moment in this regard. Although the organized violence on communal lines continued to take place at regular intervals after 1992, the intensity and pace of these riots changed quite significantly. For instance, one might observe two kinds of violent events that took place in this period: the riots with low intensity (in terms of casualties and impact) and the riots with high intensity, targeting a particular community (such as those in Gujarat in 2002 and Muzaffarnagar in 2013). Interestingly, in both cases, the violence was concentrated mainly in specific region/state and did not spread out.

(MPs) and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in legislative bodies increases.³

The chapter is divided into six sections (including this introductory section). The following section, about the contemporary official meanings of communal violence in India, examines a few official sources such as annual reports and other related documents published by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), election reports published by the Election Commission of India, the Uttar Pradesh (UP) assembly reports, and the Parliament of India publications. The third section discusses the events of 2013 in Muzaffarnagar. Using detailed ethnographic data-interviews and group discussions conducted in the Muzaffarnagar region in 2014–15, an attempt has been made to make sense of the local discourse of violence. The fourth section pays attention to the quantitative survey data (Lokniti 2014) to look at the relationship between violence and political choices. The fifth section examines the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral campaign of 2014. Finally, the concluding section recapitulates the main findings of the chapter. I argue that violence against Muslims does play an important role in influencing Muslim self-perceptions in various contexts; yet, Muslim electoral preferences are not always determined by 'communal' considerations.

Contemporary Meanings of Communal Violence

The question 'What is communal violence?' in my view is rather problematic in two ways. First of all, it is technically difficult, if not impossible, to evolve any well-ordered generalization on the basis of a larger number of violent incidents. Although one may identify a pattern or what Brass (2004) calls 'riot system', there is a strong possibility that actual events might deviate significantly from any given model, especially if one studies the local context and the everyday culture of social groups. Second, the mode of violence—the manner in which the act of collective violence is performed—makes our task much more complicated. The standard definition that communal violence is a form of violence that is perpetrated across ethnic or communal lines

³ There are 23 Muslim MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha.

does not tell us the precise nature of collective action that results in a violent event.

It does not, however, mean that the grand narrative of communal violence in contemporary India is irrelevant. Communal violence is more than a conflict between two or more religious communities. In fact, in recent years, communal violence has come to be understood primarily as violence against religious minorities, especially against Muslims. Hence, it is important to reformulate the question. Instead of evoking an all-encompassing concern—what is communal violence—we might ask another basic question: what are the ‘official’ meanings of communal violence in contemporary India?⁴

This reformulation, as we shall observe, might help us in tracing the complex trajectory of communal violence: the stories/interpretations of the occurrence of an event; the legal articulation of an event into a communal riot by law-enforcing agencies at the local level (such as police and local administration); the compilation of various events of communal violence by official agencies (such as MHA); and finally, the legislative debates around this database.

Let us begin with the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill, 2011 (PRS Legislative Research 2011). This bill, as it is well known, was drafted by the National Advisory Council in the context of the Gujarat riots of 2002. Although the bill was finally withdrawn by the government on 5 February 2014,⁵ the legislative discussion on the bill offers us a comprehensive interpretation of the term ‘communal violence’ in recent years.

Section 1(c) of the bill says: “Communal and targeted violence” means and includes any act or series of acts, whether spontaneous or planned, resulting in injury or harm to the person, and/or property,

⁴ The description of communal events in the MHA annual reports in the post-1992 period is a good example in this regard. For the first time in post-colonial India, ‘communal riots’ as a separate category of violence was officially recognized. In fact, the MHA reports of 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 classified communal riots as Hindu–Muslim riots and Hindu–Christian riots. However, this classification has not been in practice since 2012.

⁵ See MHA. Available at <http://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/draft/NAC%20Draft%20Communal%20Violence%20Bill%202011.pdf>, last accessed on 11 November 2016.

knowingly directed against any person by virtue of his or her membership of any group.’ Elaborating the term ‘group’, Section 1(e) further clarifies: “Group” means a religious or linguistic minority, in any State in the Union of India, or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.’ The bill, most importantly, makes a serious attempt to offer a legal interpretation to those causes that often lead to communal violence at various levels. Section 1(f) says:

[H]ostile environment against a group means an intimidating or coercive environment that is created when a person belonging to any group ... is subjected to any of the following acts: (i) boycott of the trade or businesses of such person or making it otherwise difficult for him or her to earn a living; or, (ii) publicly humiliate such person through exclusion from public services, including education, health and transportation, or any act of indignity; or, (iii) deprive or threaten to deprive such person of his or her fundamental rights; or, (iv) force such person to leave his or her home or place of ordinary residence or livelihood without his or her express consent; or, (v) any other act, whether or not it amounts to an offence under this Act, that has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. (PRS Legislative Research 2011)

This unequivocal evocation of the context of violence and identification of possible victims stems from the 1990s policy discourse of affirmative action that transformed the under-representation of marginalized groups into a political issue. The bill contextualizes the state as a point of departure to identify the hierarchical position of social groups. Hence, religious and linguistic minorities—Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs)—at the state level are demarcated as groups that require protection against targeted violence. In other words, the bill seems to respond to various government and non-government reports that show that poor and marginalized communities are the main victims of organized violence. The Bill, thus, emphasizes the relative marginalization of certain groups at the state level and, at the same time, calls upon the central government for a determined and possible administrative reaction. The introduction of the Bill, for instance, says:

To respect, protect and fulfill the right to equality before law and equal protection of law by imposing duties on the Central Government and

the State Governments, to exercise their powers in an impartial and non-discriminatory manner to prevent and control targeted violence, including mass violence, against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and religious minorities in any State in the Union of India, and linguistic minorities in any State in the Union of India; to thereby uphold secular democracy ... (PRS Legislative Research 2011)

There were two kinds of broad criticisms of the Bill. It was argued, particularly by Hindutva groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), that the Bill is intentionally anti-Hindu. A letter submitted to the governor of Andhra Pradesh on 10 November 2011 said, 'In the guise of protecting minorities, it (the Bill) assumes that the majority community, that is, Hindus is always the initiator and perpetrator of riots and violence, anytime, anywhere they may happen in the country' (RSS 2011). The letter also raised two other issues: the misuse of certain provisions of the Bill and an overtly global Islamic threat that presumably helps Muslims in India to act against Hindus. It noted:

[T]he Bill is also ill conceived because it has taken into consideration the majority and minority situation in India. It has totally forgotten that religion is a globalised issue now and that there are global strategies to devour smaller religions. The fund flow from outside India seems to have been totally lost sight of by the framers of this bill. Samuel Huntington's studies have to be kept in mind on this issue. (RSS 2011)

Broadly speaking, these criticisms are not entirely new. The RSS's perception of Indian Muslims as a global threat to Hindus has been expressed in a variety of ways. The late 1980s' discussion on the desecration of Hindu temples by Muslims in medieval India to the recent debates on 'love jihad', the RSS has evoked the global Muslim homogeneity as a reference point to assert the claim that the militarization of Hindus is necessary for self-defence.

The second kind of criticism was more technical. The BJP, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), and even the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]), along with other regional parties, criticized the bill from the perspective of federalism. In a discussion on the Bill in the Rajya Sabha, BJP leader (who was also the leader of the House) Arun Jaitley said:

I oppose the introduction of the ... Bill. My opposition is essentially on one ground, lack of legislative competence with the Parliament to

enact this Bill. It is based ... on the three Entries on the Constitution. List 2 of the Seventh Schedule: Public Order is Entry No. 1; Police is Entry No. 2; Entry No. 41 is State Public Services. Therefore, the law and order power, the police power and the power to regulate services of the State is entirely with the State Government.... These powers of the State are being encroached upon under this Bill.... The Central Government has absolutely no jurisdiction.... [F]ederalism is an important component of Indian Constitutional law. It is a part of the basic structure.... Chapter by chapter this Bill seeks to encroach upon those areas as far as the States are concerned. (Rajya Sabha Debates 2014)

Unlike the BJP, which simply tried to focus on the procedural aspect of the Bill, the CPI(M) took a delicate stand on this issue. Sitaram Yechuri said:

[W]hether the Central Government or the Parliament of India has the legislative competence to enact such a Bill which will intrude into the rights of the States, and is, therefore, violative of the federal principle of our Constitution ... On this issue of communal violence, etc. there can be little dispute. The question is of the competence of the legislature to enter or encroach upon the rights of the State. (Rajya Sabha Debates 2014)

The CPI(M)'s ambivalence is quite understandable. Communal violence is an important political agenda for CPI(M) that actually defines its ideological position in the post-1992 period; at the same time, the state-level competitive politics makes it difficult for the party to ignore political centralization.

This brief discussion offers us two broad inferences. First of all, it is officially accepted that 'communal violence' is no longer a conflict between two or more communities. The conventional administrative view that recognizes rioting as a violent manifestation of an 'unlawful assembly' has been gradually replaced by a much-nuanced interpretation of communal conflicts.⁶ The distinction between an encounter

⁶ Section 146 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is very relevant here. It says, 'Whenever force or violence is used by an unlawful assembly, or by any member thereof, in prosecution of the common object of such assembly, every member of such assembly is guilty of the offence of rioting' (NCW, n.d.)

between two groups and organized violence targeting a particular group has been made so as to legally capture the environment in which certain set images of communities are evoked to construct a discourse of communal confrontation. That is the reason why communal violence is also seen as a form of 'targeted violence'.⁷

Second, this discussion shows that the official meanings of communal violence have also been shaped by the post-1990 debates on social marginalization and exclusion. The Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill, 2011, seems to establish a very crucial link between marginalization and targeted violence. Although this Bill did not become a law, the definition of the 'group' invoked by the Bill ('a religious or linguistic minority, in any State in the Union of India, or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes') undoubtedly responds to the emerging discourse of affirmative action. Precisely for this reason, the question of representation of marginalized groups in various spheres, in this case Muslims, emerges as an important vantage point.

The Event: Muzaffarnagar 2013⁸

The Muzaffarnagar violence, in which more than 50 people were killed, is described, explained, and even analysed in two different yet connected ways.⁹ There is an event-centric portrayal of this violence. We

⁷ The question of targeted violence is also dealt with in Section 153 of the IPC, 1860, though rather narrowly. It says:

Wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot—if rioting be committed—if not committed. Whoever malignantly, or wantonly, by doing anything which is illegal, gives provocation to any person intending or knowing it to be likely that such provocation will cause the offence of rioting to be committed, shall, if the offence of rioting be committed in consequence of such provocation, be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both; and if the offence of rioting be not committed, with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to six months, or with fine, or with both. (NCW n.d.)

⁸ This section is an elaborated and revised version based on the author's 2013 article (see Ahmed 2013).

⁹ Officially, 39 people died and 25,000 were displaced; however, the Report of the Fact-Finding Team (hereafter RFFT), coordinated by the Centre for the Policy Analysis, contradicts the official figures (Milli Gazette 2013).

are told that the trouble began in the last week of August 2013, when a teenage Hindu/Jat girl was harassed by a Muslim boy in Kaval village of district Muzaffarnagar. The two brothers of this girl killed the Muslim boy; however, they were lynched in retaliation (see Chapter 1).¹⁰ This is not a rare incident in this highly crime-prone district of Uttar Pradesh (UP) (see Table 5.1).¹¹ Media reports and even serious academic research show that family rivalries and community honour often lead to series of murders in Muzaffarnagar area (Naqvi 2013). However, the subsequent events of this episode transformed it into a typical 'communal' clash.

It was reported that although the local officials had banned public meetings by imposing Section 144 on 30 August 2013, a public meeting was still held in the city after the *juma* (congregational prayer). Many district and state-level Muslim leaders associated with the Indian National Congress (hereafter Congress), Samajwadi Party (SP), and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) attended this meeting and delivered inflammatory speeches. Consequently, communal tension increased. In the meantime, a fake compact disc (CD), which claimed to have captured the killing of the Jat boys, was posted on social media, and this led to further polarization. In protest, a *mahapanchayat* (large-scale public

Table 5.1 Crime against Women in Muzaffarnagar in 2013

Rape	Kidnapping/ Abduction	Dowry Deaths	Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage Her Modesty	Insult to Modesty of Women	Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives
49	214	25	125	0	270

Source: See <https://data.gov.in/catalog/district-wise-crimes-committed-against-women>, last accessed on 12 August 2015.

¹⁰ Although there are various accounts of this incident, this is the most acceptable story so far (Milli Gazette 2013).

¹¹ Crime, especially against women, is an important administrative concern in this region. It is also found that women are treated as a 'symbol of community's pride' (see Table 5.1).

congregation) of thousands of Jat farmers was called on 7 September near Kaval village (also see the 'Introduction', regarding another village, Kakra, affected by the 'riot').¹² The local BJP unit, it is informed, was directly responsible for organizing this rally. As expected, the mahapanchayat was addressed by local Hindu leaders, who delivered equally provocative speeches. After the scheduled programme, when people were headed home, they were attacked by a mob and 12 people died in this wave of violence. To control the situation, the state government deployed the army. However, the organized killings did not stop for the next two days and the death toll went up to 39. Many people left their homes and took shelter in the camps.

This narrative revolves around a few empirically grounded anxieties: how did the political leaders get permission from the district administration to organize two massive rallies, especially when Section 144 was imposed? Why did the state government fail to arrest the political leaders who organized these meetings, despite the fact that their names were mentioned in the subsequently filed first information report (FIR)? The scope of these questions is further increased by underlining a few conspiracy theories: a secret alliance between the SP and the BJP for sharing Muslims and Hindu votes in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections; a game plan of the ruling Congress to divert public attention from basic issues; and the BJP's attempt to capture the Jat constituency. These inferences are either debated as 'explanations' and/or as 'conclusions' (Milli Gazette 2013).¹³

There is another, ostensibly grand, and perhaps much-refined political narrative of this violence, which seeks to establish an observable connection between the events of Muzaffarnagar and the emerging configurations of Indian politics. The debate on the elevation of Narendra Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate—and his subsequent victory in the Lok Sabha elections, especially in UP; the failure of the Akhilesh Yadav-led UP government in controlling the riots; the increasing communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims in north India; and the Vishva Hindu Parishad's (VHP) famous Ayodhya Yatra of 2013—which was followed by debates on

¹² This was the second mahapanchayat; a relatively small gathering was organized on 30 August 2013 by the Jat community.

¹³ The RFFT also present these inferences as 'conclusions'.

love jihad, Muslim population, nationalism, and even 'Bharat Mata ki Jai': these have been seen as inseparable fragments of highly polarized Hindu communal politics. This narrative evokes the 'history' of Hindutva politics, especially its violent manifestations during the peak days of Babri Masjid–Ram Mandir controversy, as a legitimate reference point.

The political–moral significance of these explanations should not be underestimated, particularly when a large number of people (mainly Muslims) have been affected and a certain kind of rightist Hindu essentialism is taking concrete political shape.¹⁴ However, we need to problematize this violent incidence further—not merely to understand the contextual and sociological nuances that provide a background to the main events, but also to make sense of the language of a new Hindutva politics, which paved the way for BJP's rise as the most powerful political force after 2014.

There are, in my view, three crucial aspects which need to be underlined in this regard: (a) the social structure of the Muzaffarnagar district, especially in terms of caste configuration among Hindus and Muslims and the changing religiosity, which has affected the public presence of religious identities in a significant way; (b) the proliferation of a different media—mobile phone—which has reconfigured social relations, especially in rural areas in recent years; and (c) the specificity of the political idioms, which are employed by the BJP and the VHP to describe this incident—either as a question of dignity and pride or as a problem of governance.

Caste and religiosity are inseparable facets of community identity in western UP (see Table 5.2). Yet, the complex amalgamation of religion and caste has somehow not been given adequate attention in recent discussions. We are told that it is a standard communal riot between 'Hindus and Muslims', though some sensitive observers call it Jat–Muslim conflict. After all, Muzaffarnagar is a Muslim-dominated district and as per the latest census, Muslims constitute around 42 per cent of the population of the district.

However, Jat and Muslim are not homogeneous entities. In an interesting study of Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU), Gaurang R. Sahay makes

¹⁴ Officially, 6 Hindus/Jats and 33 Muslims were killed. Most of the displaced people were Muslims (Milli Gazette 2013).

Table 5.2 Religious Configuration of Muzaffarnagar District

Hindu	2,382,914	57.51 %
Muslims	1,711,453	41.30 %
Christian	6,495	0.16 %
Sikh	18,601	0.45 %
Buddhist	1,516	0.04 %
Jain	16,345	0.39 %
Others	60	0.00 %
Not stated	6,128	0.15 %

Source: MHA (2011).

an interesting observation about the complex identity formation of farmers in this region. He notes:

In ... districts of Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Baghpat, Moradabad, Bijnor, and Bulandshahar, where the BKU has a strong support base, the most numerous agricultural caste is Jat, followed by Gurjar. These are also the 'dominant castes' in this area. Both Jats and Gurjars belong to two different religious communities, namely, Hindu and Muslim: there are Hindu Jats and Muley Jats, and Hindu Gurjars and Muley Gurjars. (Sahay 2004: 405)

The sociological configuration of various communities takes us in two directions: the internal social diversity of religious groups (especially in caste terms) and the subtle and enduring modes by which this diversity is transformed into polarized entities in religious terms. Let me take two examples to elaborate this point. In an ethnographic study of two Jat-dominated villages of Muzaffarnagar in the post-Babri Masjid period, G.K. Lieten notes:

The Hindutva storm which has been blowing over UP from 1990 has prompted some of the brahmins and jats to adopt overtly religious practices. The village temple, which had been lying unused, except for an occasional visit by brahmin ladies on their fasting day, has been renovated and a loudspeaker now helps to broadcast 'kirtans' in the morning hours. The form is religious, the content is political. It is aimed at awakening the Hindus. (Lieten 1996: 1412)

This is an interesting observation which underlines not merely the emergence of a new form of religiosity but also a different sort of public

presence of an identity. It does not, however, mean that Hindutva politics has completely engulfed local sensibilities. Of course, the social and political distinctiveness of contemporary Jat identity is often represented predominately in 'caste' terms, especially in relation to agrarian issues and/or demand for reservation; yet, the 'religious' expressions of caste-based customs and ritual practices of Jat communities cannot entirely be ruled out.¹⁵ Thus, as it appears, the slow and gradual processes by which the boundaries between caste-culture and religion-politics are eroded seem to have transformed the Bahu-Beti Bachao (save sisters, wives, and sisters-in-law) mahapanchayat of 7 September into a struggle to protect Hindu dignity from love jihadis!

The questions of Muslim caste diversity and public presence are equally important aspects (though this point has been entirely ignored in most of the discussions) to understand the victimhood of Muslims in these riots. Like the Jat community, the Muslim community of Muzaffarnagar is also deeply divided on caste basis. There are Ashraf Muslims (upper caste), on the one hand, and a number of non-Ashraf communities, on the other.¹⁶ The presence of the Muslim caste system can easily be seen in the Muslim-dominated villages of Muzaffarnagar where mohallas are marked on caste lines.¹⁷

The rise of Muslim Pasmanda politics in the region is also significant. The Pasmanda Kranti Abhiyan, a movement to mobilize backward Muslims of UP, began in 2012, which had a very interesting slogan: *Dalit-Pichhda ek samaan, Hindu ho ya Musalman* (Dalits and backwards are same, whether they are Hindus or Muslims). In fact, the

¹⁵ Talat Asad's criticism of W.C. Smith's distinction between faith and cumulative tradition is relevant here. Asad says: 'Faith is inseparable from the particularities of the temporal world and the traditions that inhabit it. If one is to understand one's own faith—as opposed to having it—or to understand the faith of another, one needs to deploy the relevant concept whose criteria of application must be public—in a language that inhabits this world' (Asad 2001: 214).

¹⁶ I use terms Ashraf and Pasmanda to underline the political significance of these categories. For an excellent discussion on the use of the category 'Ashraf', see Ahmad (1967).

¹⁷ The conflict in Kaval village, it was found during the fieldwork, was essentially between Muslim Qureshis and the Hindu Jats.

first phase of this movement reached its completion on 30 September 2013. According to the official pamphlet of the Abhiyan:

Pasmanda movement seeks to eradicate Hindu–Muslim differences and conflicts in the country by emphasizing the significance of caste. Muslim politics often talks of electoral alliance between Muslims and Dalits, and/or Muslims and backwards. On the contrary, Pasmanda politics attempts to create socio-political unity between Dalits and Dalits, between backwards and backwards—irrespective of their being Hindus or Muslims. (Pasmanda Kranti Abhiyan 2013: 8; author’s translation)

This pamphlet also expresses the fear that backward Muslims have been the main victims of communal riots and police atrocities so far. This anxiety is not at all speculative. As per an unofficial estimate, most of the Muslims who died in this violence were the backward poor. This does not, however, mean that the caste/class of Muslim victims was ascertained by the attackers before killing them! Obviously, all Muslims were identified as the enemy community in this entire episode. Nevertheless, the point is this: the marginalized, poor, and backward sections of Muslims are the soft targets of communal violence.

If the Pasmanda politics poses a serious challenge to the dominant communal and secular politics of UP, the Tablighi Jamaat—religious reform movement—brings in an equally powerful discourse of Islamic religious unity and public manifestation of religiosity. It is important to note that the Tablighi Jamaat is a self-claimed ‘apolitical’ movement, as it strongly discourages formal participation in this-worldly affairs. Yet, the ideas, norms, and practices of Tablighi Jamaat have affected the public presence of Muslim identity in a significant way. For instance, having a beard without moustache, wearing a long kurta with relatively short pyjamas (or *tahmad*), and white skullcap are observable markers of a typical Islamized identity of a male Muslim in this region.¹⁸

This Muslim visibility is substantiated by another powerful symbolic pointer: the green minarets of mosques in the villages (see Figure 5.1).¹⁹ The outcome of this apparent Muslim visibility was

¹⁸ For an informed discussion on Muslim dress, see Tarlo (2010).

¹⁹ For an elaborated discussion on this point, see Ahmed (2012).



Figure 5.1 An Advertisement for 'Ready-to-Use Minarets' in Muzaffarnagar
Source: Author.

obvious: it was much easier for the rightist Hindu leaders to point out Muslims as Talibanis and Muslim villages as 'mini Pakistans'.²⁰

In fact, this is precisely what the fact-finding team found:

Wearing the skull cap and beard has been a custom for several among those of the Muslim faith in the district. But in the two months preceding the September violence, many among them reported being publicly upbraided for displaying emblems of loyalty towards the Taliban, which supposedly made them sympathizers or even participants in what is constructed in the media discourse as the global *jihad*. (*Milli Gazette* 2013)

The post-riots reconstruction work, particularly the construction of affordable houses for the victims—Fida-e-Millat Nagar by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (JUH)—should be seen in relation to the evolving mosque-centric Islamic religiosity (see Figure 5.2). In fact,

²⁰ Nazima Parveen (2014) traces the history of this idea of 'mini Pakistan'.



Figure 5.2 An Under-Construction Mosque near the Resettlement Colony of Muslim Riot Victims

Source: Author.

organizations such as the JHU emerged as legitimate actors for raising Muslim concerns at various levels. It is worth mentioning that the land to construct the Fida-e-Millat Nagar was purchased by the JUH with help of the United Kingdom (UK)-based Muslim charitable organization, the Indian Muslim Federation (UK) (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). The JUH then donated these plots/partially constructed houses to the victims. However, this was not pure donation; the owners of these houses were asked to repay a part of the cost of these houses in interest-free instalments.²¹ The emergence of civic organizations such as JUH, as representative voices for the Muslim cause, is an important phenomenon.²²

²¹ Many residents of Fida-e-Millat Nagar talked about this mechanism during various phases of the fieldwork.

²² The India Exclusion Report 2015 also underlines the inability of civil society organizations to make effective intervention in the post-riot scenario (Hassan 2016: 200–1).



Figure 5.3 Fida-e-Millat Nagar, Muzaffarnagar

Source: Author.



Figure 5.4 Reconstructed Housing for Riot Victims

Source: Author.

This brings us to the second point: new media. The question of fake CD/multimedia messaging service (MMS) circulation through mobile phone networks was discussed as a passing reference.²³ We have to understand the fact that technology, especially the camera phone, has affected every aspect of social and cultural milieu in western UP (see Chapter 1).

The conventional distinction between 'informed cities' and 'ignorant villages' does not reflect the changing constitution of what is called 'rural India', especially the villages situated near big cities or special economic zones (SEZs). The mobile phones, along with direct to home (DTH) service, have increased the influence of dominant discourses (see Figure 5.5). The 'live' and/or still images of sacred religious places, dream destinations, critical events, and even global wars (apart from 'not to be discussed' issues such as localized pornography) have created many 'visual-yet-imagined communities'. These images are often regarded as 'evidence' to ascertain the veracity of events and claims.

This might have been the reason why the politically motivated elements could successfully use mobile network for organizing the



Figure 5.5 DTH Dish in a Muzaffarnagar Village

Source: Author.

²³ The RFFT also has a section on media, but the emphasis is entirely on the 'production of rumours' (Milli Gazette 2013).

so-called Bahu–Beti Bachao mahapanchayat. The much-talked-about fake MMS, thus, should be seen in this much wider ‘mediatized’ context of Muzaffarnagar, which was further exploited by the BJP in the 2014 electoral campaign (see Chapter 4).

The reactions and explanations offered by Hindutva groups are very relevant to understand the making of a new Hindutva. The carefully drafted press release of the BJP,²⁴ which was the main opposition party at the centre and was keen to capitalize on the administrative failure of the government, concentrated on the inability of the SP government. This standard response, it seems, revolved around the party’s official line in late 2013 on ‘effective governance’. Interestingly, the sophisticated rhetoric of governance, which primarily aimed at addressing the growing urban middle-class discontent, was clearly an important feature of new Hindutva politics that began during the 2014 election campaign.

This point requires elaboration. We must remember that Narendra Modi began his electoral campaign with a few slogans that were also publicized on his official website:

Government has only one religion—India first! Government has one holy book—the Constitution. The Government must be immersed in only one Bhakti—Bharat Bhakti! The Government’s only strength is Jan Shakti! Government’s only ritual is the well-being of the 125 crore Indians! The only code of conduct of the Government should be ‘*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*’ [unity of all and development for all]! (Narendramodi.in)

This rather ‘neutral’ quote has to be seen in relation to the RSS’s interpretation of the idea of India. The pamphlet, *Why Hindu Rashtra*, published by the RSS, says: ‘Anyone who is the national of this country, irrespective of being a Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava, Sikh, Jain, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, Buddhist, or Jew by way of his creed or mode of worship, is a Hindu.’²⁵ This Hindu-based oneness is further reiterated in 2009, when RSS’s Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) passed a

²⁴ The press release is available at http://bjp.org/images/pdf_2013/press_h_dr_sudhanshuji_sep_11_13.pdf.

²⁵ See http://www.archivesofrss.org/index.php?option=com_book&task=showFile&bookid=8.

resolution saying: 'The ABPS demands that all reservations, concessions and privileges based exclusively on religion must be abolished. It urges the countrymen to make the society aware of the impending dangers of such policies and exert pressure on policy makers to abandon them.'²⁶ In a broader sense, this is an important feature of contemporary Hindutva: it does not talk of Hinduism but asserts that Hindutva means Indian-ness, and refuting Hindutva means negation of indivisible Indian-ness. This position was further evoked during the later controversies of love jihad, Muslim population growth, and more recently, the 'Bharat Mata ki Jai'.

However, the state-level BJP took a very different position. Uma Bharti, the then UP in-charge of the BJP, was quick to underline the fact that there could be 'more tension' in UP if politicians from her party are arrested for instigating the riots (NDTV 2013). The focus of these claims was the *localized spontaneous nature* of this event—an 'action-reaction theory'—which might be used to take political advantage of growing communal hostility in UP. The debates in the UP legislative assembly on the riots substantiate this point.

The VHP, on the other hand, was quite vocal and as expected, more polemical. They identified 'love-jihad' as the main reason behind the violence and urged the government to enact a law to curb the activities of love jihadis.²⁷ Hindu dignity and pride was central in this assertion.²⁸ This provocative explanation reproduced communal stereotypes and re-established hegemonic values in an overtly patriarchal tone after the 2014 elections during the national-level love jihad controversy.

²⁶ See http://www.archivesofrfs.org/index.php?option=com_prastav.

²⁷ VHP's (2013) press release says: 'When harassment of women by love-jihadis becomes unbearable in the villages, the bahu-betiyan bachao andolan emerges out of the wounded society' (लव जेहादियों के गाँव-गाँव शीलहरण की घटनाएँ जब बर्दास्त के बाहर हो गईं तो उनके विरुद्ध समाज का रौद्र रूप 'बहु, बेटियाँ बचाओ' आन्दोलन के रूप में खड़ा हुआ है।). Available at <http://vhp.org/press-release/%e0%a4%b5%e0%a4%bf%e0%a4%b6%e0%a5%8d%e0%a4%b5-%e0%a4%b9%e0%a4%bf%e0%a4%a8%e0%a5%8d%e0%a4%a6%e0%a5%82-%e0%a4%aa%e0%a4%b0%e0%a4%bf%e0%a4%b7%e0%a4%a6-%e0%a4%95%e0%a5%87-%e0%a4%b8%e0%a4%82%e0%a4%b0-2>, last accessed on 24 August 2018.

²⁸ For an elaborated discussion on Hindutva's notions of pride and freedom, see Katju (2011).

Muzaffarnagar Violence and Muslim Electoral Responses: 2012–14

The Muslims' electoral response to the Muzaffarnagar violence introduces us to a very different picture. At the time of riots, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was in power at the Centre and there was a majority government led by the SP in the state. The SP had already won the 2012 UP assembly elections with a comfortable margin (see Table 5.3). CSDS-Lokniti (2012a) showed that the SP's electoral success was an outcome of overwhelming Muslim support. In fact, the caste divide among Muslims, discussed in the previous section, did not seem to affect the popularity of the SP among Muslims (see Table 5.4).²⁹

The considerable increase in the number of Muslim MLAs in the 2012 UP assembly was another important aspect of the SP's victory (see Table 5.5). There were a total of 64 Muslim MLAs in the Vidhan Sabha, out of which 40 belonged to the SP.³⁰ This significant Muslim

Table 5.3 Configuration of the 2012 UP Assembly (party and vote share-wise)

Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Vote Share (%)
Samajwadi Party (SP)	401	224	29.15
Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)	403	80	25.91
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	398	47	15
Congress	355	28	11.63
Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD)	46	9	2.33
Peace Party of India	208	4	2.82
Nationalist Congress Party	127	1	0.33
Independent		14	
Total		403	

Source: Election Commission of India (2012).

²⁹ This does not mean that caste is an unimportant electoral category among Muslims. The SP's management of Muslim castes in ticket distribution has been very effective so far. This is what I also observed during the fieldwork.

³⁰ This does not mean that the SP was the only party that provided opportunity to Muslims to fight the elections on its tickets: there were Muslim MLAs from the BSP, the Congress, and the Peace Party too.

Table 5.4 Muslim Voting Preference in the 2012 UP Assembly Elections

	Cong–RLD	SP	BSP	BJP	Others
All Muslims	19	39	20	7	15
Muslim General	27	41	12	3	17
Muslim OBC	13	38	27	9	13

Source: CSDS-Lokniti (2012b).

Note: Figures are in percentages; OBC, Other Backward Class.

Table 5.5 Muslim MLAs in the 2012 UP Assembly

Party	Number of MLAs
SP	40
BSP	16
Independents	3
Peace Party	3
Congress	2
Total	64

Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of information given on the UP State Assembly website. Available at <http://uplegisassembly.gov.in/ENGLISH/index.html>.

presence in the assembly (which is almost 15 per cent) is not at all insignificant if we compare it with the total Muslim population of the state (there are 27.15 per cent Muslims in UP according to the 2011 Census (MHA 2011)).

The political configuration in Muzaffarnagar, in terms of Muslim legislative presence, also reflects a very similar pattern. The district was represented by two Muslim MLAs, one Muslim MP, and two MLAs from non-BJP parties.³¹ These MLAs had won the 2012 assembly elections very comfortably (see Table 5.6). The Election Commission statistics show that all of them secured more than 30 per cent votes in their respective constituencies. If we compare these figures with the sociological background of electorates (the data generated by the CSDS-Lokniti at assembly constituency level), these victories look more perceptible. If

³¹ The BJP had only one MLA from Muzaffarnagar in 2012. The party also did rather poorly in the 2009 general elections when BSP's Kadir Rana won that seat.

Table 5.6 Political Configuration of Muzaffarnagar District

Assembly Constituencies (2012 Election)	SC*	ST*	Muslims*	MLA	Party	Vote Secured** (%)	Runner Up
Khatauli	16.5	0.0	33.7	Kartar Singh Bhadhana	RLD	27.4	BSP
Budhana	9.6	0.0	30.4	Nawazish Alam Khan	SP	35.4	RLD
Charthawal	15.1	0.0	39.5	Noor Salim Rana	BSP	31.2	BJP
Muzaffarnagar	9.2	0.0	35.2	Chitranjan Swarup**	SP	34.9	BJP
Sardhana	20.5	0.0	32.6	Sangeet Som	BJP	29.9	RLD
Parliamentary Constituency				MP	Party	Vote Share** (%)	Runner Up (%)
Muzaffarnagar, 2009				Kadir Rana	BSP	36.96	RLD, Anuradha Chaudhary: 34.19
Muzaffarnagar, 2014				Dr Sanjeev Baliyan	BJP	58.9	BSP, Kadir Rana: 22.7

Source: * Lokniti data on delimitation of assembly constituency, CSDS Data Unit (2014).

** Election Commission of India (2012).

Note: *** Passed away on 19 August 2015; bye-election took place on 26 February 2016. Kapil Dev Aggarwal of the BJP (65,378 votes) defeated SP's Gaurav Swarup Bansal (58,026 votes).

this is the case, then the question arises: why did these elected representatives fail to act effectively during and after the 2013 riots?

Muzaffarnagar Violence and BJP's Election Campaign

To understand the aforementioned puzzling question, let us look at the reception of this riot in electoral politics. The BJP, which began its 2014 electoral campaign with the slogan *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas* at the national level, used a completely different political language in Muzaffarnagar. Making an obvious reference to the riots in an election speech, Amit Shah, the BJP president, said that the 2014 Lok Sabha polls were an opportunity to seek 'revenge for the insult' inflicted during the riots in Muzaffarnagar (*Times of India* 2014). Although an FIR was filed against him for using the word 'revenge', the BJP continued to highlight Muzaffarnagar riots as 'Hindu subjugation'.³² On the other hand, the SP leaders did not use the riots as a main electoral agenda, though the narrative of Muslim victimhood had always been evoked to re-establish the party's image as a Muslim saviour.³³

The BJP's electoral campaign requires some elaboration, especially in the context of media-centric discourse of violence, which was discussed in the previous sections. The party used marketing strategies to evolve what came to be known as 'Brand Modi'. The campaign somehow underplayed the conventional modes of political mobilization. Even the party's electoral manifesto was not prioritized as a legitimate political statement.³⁴ Instead, the campaign was centred on two main

³² For instance, BJP MLAs shouted the slogan 'हिन्दुओं पर अत्याचार बंद करो' in the UP Assembly on 16 September 2013, when the assembly met for the first time after riots. See UP Legislative Assembly (2013).

³³ The manifesto of the SP did not mention Muzaffarnagar riots, though the recommendations of the Sachar Commission and justice for the victims of Gujarat (2002) were highlighted prominently (see <http://www.samajwadi-party.in/pdf/SAPA-GP.pdf> last accessed on 20 April 2016).

³⁴ This does not entirely mean that the political campaign did not get into the conventional mode of electoral mobilization. The BJP's manifesto actually talked of job creation and urbanization in a significant way. The point I would like to stress upon is that the media-centric campaign of the party brought in newness to the mobilization process that gave them more visibility.

aspects: Narendra Modi as a national-level visionary leader and a new discourse of development.³⁵

Modi's image-making exercise was, in any case, a difficult task, particularly with regard to Muslims in UP. He was infamous as a right-wing politician after the 2002 anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat. To counter this communal portrayal of Modi, a twofold process was initiated. On the one hand, the party establishment started highlighting the Gujarat model of development to project Modi as a decisive leader with a clear development agenda. At the same time, efforts were made to contradict the media discourse on 2002 riots. It was forcefully argued that Modi had been victimized by the left, liberal, and secularist elements, who did not pay attention to his positive administrative capabilities.³⁶

This image-rebuilding project also relied heavily on another important tool—the mobile phone. Since the prime mover of the campaign was audio-visual media, it became easier to capitalize on the emerging mobile phone users in various contexts, especially in rural and semi-urban areas such as Muzaffarnagar. The rural poor and middle classes that had not yet been exposed to mainstream public discourses of urban centres were actually introduced to Narendra Modi and his message of development through mobile phones. In a broader sense, the Modi campaign directly responded to an emerging rural modernity in a significant way.³⁷

In order to expand the scope of this media campaign, particularly in remote rural areas where mobile phones had not yet created an impact,

³⁵ According to media reports, senior BJP leaders Piyush Goyal and Ajay Singh handled the overall media strategy of the campaign. Experts from advertising industry, such as Piyush Pandey of Ogilvy and Mather, Prasoon Joshi of McCann Worldgroup, and Sam Balsara of Madison World, were given certain responsibilities to design the campaign. Advertising agency Soho Square, part of the WPP Group, handled television, radio, and print campaigns. In fact, they came out with slogans such as 'Ab ki baar Modi sarkar' (This time, Modi government) (Pande 2014).

³⁶ Madhu Purnima Kishwar's series of online articles, called 'Modinama', which were later published in a book, *Modi, Muslims and Media: Voices from Narendra Modi's Gujarat*, are a revealing example of this kind of image-making exercise (see Kishwar 2014: 211–34).

³⁷ One finds an interesting discussion on mobile phones in a recent article by Ann Grodzins Gold. She talks about 'rural modernity'—an emerging cultural form in which the dividing line between 'modern' and 'traditional' is highly

the party used a three-dimensional (3D) hologram—a new mode of electoral mobilization.³⁸ A London-based company, Musion, was given the task in this regard. According to the Musion website:

Having successfully worked with Musion during his 2012 campaign, Narendra Modi again chose Musion to consult, design and manage these holographic addresses. In order to reach more people, Narendra Modi will be using our holographic technology to address multiple audiences simultaneously across India. A 3D life-like hologram of the politician will be projected onto stages at a staggering 3500–4,000 events in just 45 days before voting ends. The events will enable Narendra Modi to extend the reach of his campaign's message and provide multiple opportunities to appear before his electorate in 1,500 locations and, in doing so, personally address 100 million voters. (Available at <http://musion.com/?portfolio=narendra-modi-campaign-2014>, last accessed on 8 January 2015)

Narendra Modi's recorded speeches and his poll promises were converted into 3D hologram packages. These holograms were transported to various locations through mobile vans.

The local BJP in Muzaffarnagar district used these 3D holograms in their own spatial settings. The party volunteers were given the task to 'explain' the recorded message of Modi to voters. This opportunity was used to contextualize the message in the backdrop of Muzaffarnagar riot. In many such meetings, Modi's Hindutva image was evoked to justify not merely the 2013 violence but also the 2002 post-Godhra incident.³⁹ Since there was virtually nothing objectionable in Modi's original message, these local meetings could not become an issue for model code of conduct.

This innovative Modi-centric campaign, it seems, worked very well for the party. CSDS-Lokniti (2014a) showed that the rural voters with high media exposure voted for the BJP. On the contrary, the voters who had very less or no media exposure went with other parties. In any case, however, the BJP performance among less media-exposed voters

ambiguous. Her ethnographic details tell us that a sense of 'loss' described by villagers cannot be understood simply as loss of tradition; rather 'modernity in multiple manifestations is omnipresent in rural setting ... with the understanding that tradition itself is always evolving' (Gold 2012: 27).

³⁸ I am thankful to my colleague Ravi Vasudevan for introducing me to this aspect of Modi's campaign.

³⁹ I gathered this information during my fieldwork in Muzaffarnagar district.

is better than the SP or the Congress. This trend was repeated in the urban areas as well. The BJP's voters in these constituencies had a relatively higher media exposure.⁴⁰

Does this mean that the BJP's strategy worked well and it was able to secure the benefit of electoral polarization in UP? The 2014 Lok Sabha elections, at least at the surface level, point towards this conclusion. The BJP made an impressive comeback in UP by winning 71 Lok Sabha seats with a remarkable 42 per cent vote share while the SP managed to win only 5 seats with 22 per cent votes (Table 5.7).

These figures should be re-read with regard to Muzaffarnagar violence. Tables 5.7 and 5.8 show that there was a clear difference of judgement among Hindu and Muslim voters of UP in identifying the main culprit for the riots in Muzaffarnagar. As expected, the BJP was held responsible by a majority of the Muslim respondents, though a sizeable number of Muslims also identified the SP as the main wrongdoer. On the other hand, only 8 per cent of UP's Hindus blame the BJP for the violence. This divided opinion underlines the fact that Hindu and Muslim communities of the state did not respond to the riots in a homogeneous manner. Although the BJP was successful in creating a winnable constituency of voters in UP through its media-centric campaign, the Muzaffarnagar riots could not become a state-level electoral issue. In fact, it was used as 'administrative failure' of the SP government by the BJP to mobilize voters.

The Muslim voting pattern also underscores this broad inference. We do not find any serious change in the Muslim electoral responses

Table 5.7 Handling of the Post-riot Situation by the SP Government

	Overall	Hindu	Muslim
Fully satisfied	11.5	11.4	11.4
Somewhat satisfied	33.2	35.1	26.1
Somewhat dissatisfied	7.3	6.5	10.0
Fully dissatisfied	32.9	30.7	41.1
Cannot say	15.2	16.3	11.4

Source: Lokniti (2014).

Notes: ¹ Figures are in percentages.

² Q. Are you satisfied with the way the UP government has handled the aftermath of the Muzaffarnagar riots?

⁴⁰ For a longer discussion on media and locality aspect in 2014 election, see Alam and Ahmed (2017).

Table 5.8 Muslim Voting Preference in the 2014 UP Lok Sabha Elections

	Congress–RLD	SP	BSP	BJP–Apna Dal	Others
All Muslims	11	58	18	10	3
Muslim General	13	58	7	16	6
Muslim OBC	10	59	25	5	1

Source: CSDS-Lokniti (2014b).

Note: Figures are in percentages.

in 2014. Like the 2012 assembly elections, the SP emerged as the first preference for Muslim voters; but the BSP, the Congress, and even the BJP–Apna Dal alliance received significant Muslim votes this time. This fragmentation of Muslim political opinion tells us that Muzaffarnagar riots failed to produce any Muslim electoral polarization (see Tables 5.9 and 5.10).

Table 5.9 The 2014 Lok Sabha Elections in UP

Name of Party	Vote Share (%)	Seats Won
BJP	42.30	71
SP	22.20	5
BSP	19.60	0
Congress	7.50	2
Apna Dal	1.00	2

Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of Election Commission of India statistics; https://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/AE2012/Stats_Report_UP2012.pdf, accessed on 10 October 2017.

Table 5.10 Who Was Responsible for the Muzaffarnagar Riots?

	Overall	Hindu	Muslim
SP	44.9	50.0	23.8
BJP	13.3	8.4	34.3
BSP	7.6	8.4	4.9
Congress	4.2	4.6	1.9

Source: Lokniti (2014).

Notes: ¹ Figures are in percentages.

² Q: In your opinion which party is most responsible for the Muzaffarnagar riots? (1st Party). The response ‘Cannot say’ is not shown.

The discussion in this chapter shows that the Muzaffarnagar violence was an outcome of a few context-specific trajectories. The two main communities—Hindu Jats and Muslims—are highly divided on caste and class lines. The cultural milieu of the district is equally shared by both the communities—even crime against women is not specific to any particular social group. However, at the same time, there were constant efforts by a section of religious elite to polarize as well as transform these virtually fuzzy communities into religiously marked cultural entities. This religious segregation—Tablighi Jamaat among Muslims and revival of temple-centric religiosity among the Jats—worked well and paved the way for the rise of religiously distinctive and socially polarized communities. Consequently, Muslims became visibly Muslims and Jats became visibly Hindus in the course of time. In this highly tensed social context, a fight between two families acquired a clear communal meaning. The nature of subsequent violence, however, cannot be called an encounter between two identifiable communities. The Muslims, who were relatively poor and marginalized in the district, were targeted, killed, and subsequently displaced in a much more organized and systematic manner. This pattern of violence underlines the two prime features of contemporary communalism, discussed in the second section of this chapter with regard to the Prevention of Communal Violence Bill, 2011: communal violence as a form of targeted violence and as a reflection of social exclusion.

The BJP and the Hindutva groups politicized these events more directly. They continued to evoke these riots for electoral gain in the 2014 elections, especially in western UP. The ‘subjugation’ of Hindus, especially the victimhood of Hindu women, was used systematically by the BJP leaders to call upon the voters to support the party. On the contrary, the SP formally tried to maintain a distance from this event; yet, Muzaffarnagar is recognized as an important reference point to substantiate the story of communalism and Muslim victimhood.

In this context, two distinctive features of Muslim electoral responses need to be highlighted. First, the anti-Muslim targeted communal violence in Muzaffarnagar could not force the Muslims of UP to vote as a group. A sizeable number of Muslims even voted for the BJP alliance. This fragmented voting pattern should not be seen as a kind of defensive Muslim politics. The Muslim communities of voters, we must remember, are constituted at the constituency level. These

communities of voters adjusted themselves with the requirements of competitive electoral politics in a local setting. There is a strong possibility that this localized electoral polarization of Muslims may or may not be affected by immediate events, such as communal violence. This is precisely what happened in Muzaffarnagar. The widespread displacement of the victims of communal violence affected the constitution of the Muslim community of voters in the Muzaffarnagar district in 2014. Despite the Election Commission's drive to include the names of riot-affected people in the electoral rolls, a significant number of displaced Muslims could not cast their votes.⁴¹ On the other hand, Muslim communities of voters in other constituencies of UP, as it appears from the survey data, responded to constituency-specific electoral issues.

Second, the Muslim voting pattern in 2014 must also be seen in relation to the aggressive BJP campaign. The Modi-led BJP spoke of Muslims in two distinct ways: Muslims as a closed and homogeneous social group—which does not satisfactorily respond to the nation's patriotic demands—and Muslims as an unimportant constituent of a larger national community (therefore, they should not be treated exclusively as a minority group). Although the 'nationalism' of Muslims could not become an important issue in the 2014 campaign, the party leaders tended to evoke the 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas' slogan to avoid specific questions related to Muslim backwardness and marginalization.

The strategy of the BJP to ignore Muslims in a more direct fashion, interestingly, was not countered by any political force. In fact, the SP, BSP, and the Congress did not make any attempt to project Muslim exclusion or violence against Muslims as a national-level concern. In such a scenario, the focus shifted to constituency-level Muslim concentration: for the BJP, Muslims were to be avoided to configure a new Hindutva constituency; and for others, Muslims were to be roped in to recreate conventional winnable alliances (such as Yadav Muslims for the SP, Dalit Muslims for the BSP).

The constituency-centric Muslim electoral responses are also linked to the question of Muslim representation and its effectiveness. The argument that if Muslims are represented by Muslims, the

⁴¹ This information was collected during my fieldwork. I am thankful to a group of local journalists, especially Mr Wasim Tyagi, for helping me to conduct group discussions in various relief camps.

magnitude of targeted violence against them would decrease, simply cannot be substantiated in the case of Muzaffarnagar. There was a significant Muslim presence in the UP assembly at the time of riots. Muzaffarnagar district itself was represented by two Muslim MLAs and one Muslim MP.

This failure of efficacy points towards the structural logic of representation in the Indian context. I have argued elsewhere that Muslim representation can be seen in a formal as well in an informal sense. The elected Muslim representatives—MLAs and MPs who may or may not be elected exclusively by Muslim electorates—characterize the formal form of representation. This form corresponds to the constitutional principle that electorates residing in a territorially defined constituency constitute a homogeneous community (of voters), whose political interests are identical, and therefore it should be represented by its own member(s). Unlike the formal electoral representation, the informal representation does not depend upon the participation of common Muslims as legitimate stakeholders. In this case, the ‘Muslim presence’ is evaluated differently: the Muslims in government institutions, public bodies, decisions-making forums, influential individuals, and religious and civic organizations are marked as an expression of inclusiveness (Ahmed 2016: 364–8).

In the case of the Muzaffarnagar riots, the formal form of representation could not work for two possible reasons. First, the compulsions of competitive politics (party line and so on) could not allow the Muslim MLAs to act exclusively as Muslim representatives.⁴² Second, and perhaps most importantly, the elected Muslim representatives did not evoke any grand imagination of Muslimhood. They responded to their immediate constituency—the community of Muslims they identified themselves with. In other words, the Muslim heterogeneity in UP prevailed over the imposed Muslim homogeneity.

But, at the same time, the informal form of representation functioned differently. The Muslim social-religious organizations—particularly the JUH—emerged as legitimate stakeholders in post-riots reconstruction work. This kind of ‘informal form of representation’ worked at the bottom level of society and received favourable state recognition.

⁴² Kadir Rana’s speech in the post-Juma prayer in the rally on 30 September 2013 is the only reported incident when a Muslim representative spoke directly as a Muslim.

This brings us to the main argument of this chapter. There is a highly complex and multi-layered relationship between the communal and targeted violence against Muslims and the actual Muslim voting behaviour. No doubt that communal violence does shape the contours of Muslim identities in various contexts, but it does not *necessarily* determine Muslim electoral preferences.

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DOES SPACE MATTER IN ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY?

Analysing Mother Ganga's 'Call' to the BJP's Prime Ministerial Candidate

Bikramaditya Kumar Choudhary

On 24 April 2014, while filing his nomination from Banaras, Mr Narendra Modi invoked Mother Ganga and Lord Shiva rather than his vibrant Gujarat model of 'development' to launch his electoral campaign. He rationalized his choice of Banaras as follows: *Na main āya hūñ, na mujhē kisi ne bhēja hai; mujhē māñ Ganga ne bulāya hai* (Neither have I come nor have I been sent by anyone; Mother Ganga has summoned me). Along with the established traditional imageries of the city, he chose its 'modern' icons such as Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya (1861–1946) too. After landing in Banaras, he first garlanded the statue of Malviya, the founder of Banaras Hindu University (BHU), two-time president of the Indian National Congress (in 1909 and 1918) as well as the Hindu Mahasabha (in 1922 and 1923). The route through which Modi's cavalcade passed on the day of nomination—from BHU to the collectorate—reverberated with slogans such as *har har Modī, ghar ghar Modī*. These slogans equated Modi with Mahādēv (Lord Shiva) to signify the presence of Modi in every home in the same way as Lord Shiva's. Such an equation had never been made in the past. The slogan 'har har' always had and has 'Mahādēv', no one

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else. During the campaign, 'Mahādēv' was replaced by 'Modi'; thus, 'har har mahādēv' became 'har har Modi'. The slogan—replacing Mahādēv with Modi—became so contentious that, fearing a backlash, Modi himself appealed for its withdrawal. The opposition parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Indian National Congress (hereafter Congress), and the Samajwadi Party (SP), objected to this metaphorical equation between Modi and Lord Shiva. So did certain sections of the population from Banaras. The controversy reached a climax when the SP supporters observed a purificatory ritual by washing the Malviya statue with milk, claiming that the mere touch of Modi had polluted the sanctity of Malviya (*Business Standard* 2014).

Evidently, Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) effort was to cast the image of Banaras along a specific line to suit its interests. However, Banaras as a city-space is far more diverse than the singular, exclusive identity BJP tried to project. Banaras has multiple, overlapping identities. However, during the elections, the city's mosaic antiquity was mobilized in hierarchical forms, superimposing one identity over others. There are scholarly works to suggest the various ways the city's historical identity is constructed and the city's timelessness manifests its mythical identity (Choudhary and Prakash 2016; Desai 2007). Such mythical identities are constructed and utilized to create a particular kind of historicity of space to reproduce, manipulate, and perpetuate a self-serving and normative 'history' about Banaras as a city-space. In the 2014 elections, the BJP chose to use both these identities—Lord Shiva and Ganga—to mobilize the electorate. The mobilization worked as BJP won the seat with a margin of about 36 per cent higher vote share, compared to the previous election when Murli Manohar Joshi of BJP won by a margin of only 2 per cent (Bhowmick 2014). The construction and use of 'myths' about Lord Shiva and the Ganga prompt many questions: why was the Gujarat model of development, invoked at the national level, not mobilized in Banaras? Why did the mythical categories, instead, become prominent in Banaras? How, in Banaras, the real (the caste and religion) and the imagined (such as satisfying the 'want' of Mother Ganga) were fused together?

Against this backdrop, the chapter asks a less-explored but key question having multiple possible articulations: why did Modi decide to contest the election from Banaras? Why did he choose a constituency outside his home state, Gujarat? Instead of his mediatized

and self-proclaimed image as an efficient administrator and symbol of development, why did he invoke a religious–mythical vocabulary to justify his choice for Banaras? Manisha Sethi (see Chapter 2) discusses in detail the connection between Hindutva and the electorate and the processes that led to the victory of BJP in 2014. Weaving insights from the disciplines of cultural–social geography and election studies, I analyse how a specific religious imagery of Banaras was projected at the cost of other identities in the 2014 elections. Different forms of media, including social media, played a crucial role in the construction and sustenance of such identities (see Chapter 1). To demonstrate this argument, I use sources such as newspaper reports (Hindi and English), television broadcasts (Hindi and English), and online videos of election campaigns. Drawing on Foucault’s idea of heterotopia (explained later), I use these sources in a discursive framework to show how a specific, exclusionary notion of space (here Banaras) was used to serve a polarizing political goal to secure power.

Space, Culture, and Power: Many Identities of Banaras

This section analyses histories of Banaras created by multiple power blocks and how one specific notion of its antiquity is reproduced and manipulated as a normative ideal. Historical narratives, historical truths, and the encompassing historical identities are better understood in a discursive field of power. It is, therefore, important to examine different notions which are associated with Banaras, often presented as a timeless, sacred, and Hindu city (Eck 1998; Gaenszie and Gengnagel 2008). As recent scholarship suggests, history is intrinsically connected to knowledge production predicated on power. Constructed historical analysis based on the Foucauldian paradigm is used to analyse the spatial identity formation in Banaras. Foucault’s ‘archaeology’ centres on historical ‘interruptions’ and discursive formations in which the ‘normative’ (projected identity) is constructed in opposition to the ‘pathological’ (practiced identity). Here, the ‘self’ is produced through ‘pathological others’ that play an important role in understanding the ‘projected’ and ‘practiced’ identity of the city (Choudhary and Prakash 2016). When we analyse Banaras, the self is produced through others (projected identity) and, at the same time, the other

(that is, the projected identity) is produced through the self. During the campaign, Modi's proclamation about the mythical call can be read as a claim of that 'divine self', which reduces 'others' (opposition candidates, particularly) to mere mortals. The conceptualized 'self' is so deeply ingrained in us that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us (Foucault 1982). The purification of Malviya's statue by the SP workers can also be read as an act of creating the 'other'. In enacting the purificatory ritual, the SP workers probably did not realize that they served and advanced the very purificatory politics at the heart of BJP. Likewise, the participation of the AAP in various rituals associated with the city of Banaras strengthened the exhilarated ritualistic political atmosphere created by the BJP.

It is well known that identity is constructed through different processes at different times. To understand Banaras as a city is to study the past episteme and power relations constructing histories at the local level and extrapolating such productions in its exteriority. Writing about the connections between history and power, Michel de Certeau (1984: 68) pertinently observed: 'Before knowing what history says of a society, we have to analyze how history functions within it. ... It plays the role of censor with respect to current social, economic, political postulates of analysis'. For Certeau, the past is not 'given', but constructed in narrative forms. History has its role in society and is tied to power and knowledge, and can culminate in homogeneous and self-serving identities. Contra its mobilization by the BJP during elections, Banaras's historical identity is neither seamlessly continuous nor homogeneously produced, as it has been shaped by different forces at different times. As evident from the accounts of Orientalists, colonialists, theologians, and nationalists, the 'history' of Banaras bears witness to its discursive character, shaped by a projected metanarrative. The metanarrative is often constructed to project 'one' particular space (here Banaras) as sacred. By extension, other spaces become not-so-sacred. That is, once the sacrality of a space has been instituted and stabilized, its status can rarely be questioned. The only battle, then, remains as to who owns that particular space, rather than question the idea of 'sacred space' itself. Different shades of scholarship on Banaras seem entrapped in this discourse, as a result of which epistemological questions about sacredness and spatial distinctiveness are hardly raised.

The existing literature on Banaras produces a historical identity forged in a sacred and Hindu fabric. Diana Eck's *Banaras: City of Light* (1982), while providing insights into the city's contemporary understanding, reinforces the projected identity of Banaras as a timeless, sacred, and predominantly Hindu space. Eck (1982: 23) writes that 'everything on earth that is powerful and auspicious is here, in this microcosm ... and all of time is here, they say, for the lords of the heavenly bodies which govern time are grounded in Kashi [Banaras]'. After a decade-and-a-half, in the journal article, 'The Imagined Landscape', Eck (1998) attempts to recontextualize the 'sacred history'. Revaluating her earlier work, she described *Banaras: City of Light* as imagined. In her second book, however, existing socio-political complexities are not adequately treated. Valorizing Banaras's sacred history is not a new phenomenon. Its antecedents go back earlier, during the period of British colonization. Michael Dodson (2012: 7) writes that 'arguably, it was the "idea of Banaras," conceived as a certain sort of eternal, religious city, which was more important to the mature British colonial state ... due to its usefulness in authorizing a range of ideologically charged projects'. Exemplifying the power/knowledge matrix, the British helped forge a specific, normative 'history' of Banaras as 'sacred' and 'Hindu'.¹ The late eighteenth-century upheavals, such as the 'annexation policy of British', 'the Buxur War', and 'the emergence of Banaras as a seat for the dethroned pensioners of erstwhile rulers', restructured the city-space of Banaras. It created a palimpsest that achieved its commercial realities through trade and also experienced the revival of religiosity among people. The projected identity propagators, including academics, used the notion of sacred to produce hegemonic blocs constituting a 'Hindu' self-pitted against a 'Muslim' other. This process efficiently assembled an economically, socially, and politically self-serving 'history', projecting Banaras as 'sacred Hindu space'. Analysing the reconfiguration of Banaras's urban space that coincides with Banaras's 'historical timelessness', Desai (2007: 22) explains how, in the late eighteenth century, 'Banaras was reorganized, physically and imaginatively, to reinforce its role as a

¹ Based on colonial and Orientalist writings, Dodson (2012: 7) further notes: 'Banaras, in other words, was an exemplar of Hinduism ... a "pure" India as well, somehow untrammelled by "foreign" (meaning "Islamic") influence.'

premier pilgrimage destination within the Hindu belief system'. From the discussion so far, it is thus amply clear that the scholarship on Banaras establishes the city as a distinctive 'space' and helps maintain its projected identity as sacred and timeless (Garland 2014).

Identity is verily mobilized as a normative ideal to meet a political end and it is not necessarily a result of lived experience. As mentioned earlier, the image of Banaras—in popular as well as in academic discourses—is that of a Hindu space, sacred and timeless; and this image is based on the exclusion of 'the other'. Banaras has a significant Muslim population—about 30 per cent and with more than 1,350 Muslims shrines (Singh 2009: 1). There are also people belonging to many other faiths: Buddhism, Aghorpanth, Kabirpanth, Sikhism, and Ravidasiya, to name a few. However, its histories, mythologies,² and identities are appropriated, following the Foucauldian notion of power, by those monopolizing power/knowledge. Further, a stratified population privileging the dominant and subjugating the 'other' is clearly evident throughout the history of Banaras. Despite having more than 30 per cent Muslims and a sizeable proportion of other faiths and sects in Banaras, through a political and social process (particularly after the economic competition in the late twentieth century),³ the city continues to be projected as a predominantly sacred Hindu space, contemporaneously as also historically. In contrast, the plurality of the city is quite evident in its everyday life and among city dwellers. History, however, is often made to proliferate in a monolithic manner. This process allows unscrupulous representations rooted in power to construct a relatively motivated history. As Raman (2010: 32) explains, the current Hindu-centred historical construction of Banaras must be

² Mary Searle-Chatterjee has done an interesting study on the appropriation of mythologies and their connections to identity formations. She writes: 'Perceptions of the past [mythologies] may provide a basis for religious division or mobilization even when cultural differences are few' (Green and Searle-Chatterjee 2008: 158).

³ Searle-Chatterjee explains that in the last decade 'there have been considerable changes in Hindu-Muslim relations because of new economic competition from a rising class of middle-level Muslim merchants.... The growth in Hindu-Muslim tensions is rooted in economic and social competition. It expresses itself in increasing emphasis on discordant myths of the past ... (Green and Searle-Chatterjee 2008: 156–7)'.

seen as a melding of past traditions through manipulations of power. Through a distinct process, accompanied by the codification of religion, language, and nationalism in a new 'identity',⁴ the 'history' of Banaras was successfully rewritten.

The recent neoliberal turn in the cityscape of Banaras is visible through spatial reconfigurations that include gigantic shopping malls close to 'sacred ghats' (riverfronts used as anchors for boats as well as staircases during the holy bath in river Ganga), the 'new' commodity market through the streets that leads devotees to the temple of 'antiquity'. Banaras as an explicit historical entity reinforces a specific formation process while concurrently obscuring the city's multiplicity. At the same time, the transformation of spaces within the city limit suggests market-based conformist tendencies of urban processes. The 2012 Buddhist Conclave, organized by the Ministry of Tourism, was to be held at Sarnath, the place Buddha is believed to have given his first sermon. However, the hotelier lobby ensured that the conclave remained in the current city of Banaras, where most hotels are located, rather than Sarnath, the sacred Buddhist place which is about 10 kilometres (km) away from Banaras. The growing spectacle of the 'Ganga aarti',⁵ a Hindu ritual, also illustrates the triumph of the market. Earlier, the devotee and the divine used to talk to each other along the calm flowing water of the Ganga; but now business has taken over the ghats where the evening ritual of aarti is performed. Since the past few decades, these spaces (ghats) are being used for a performative spectacle, where paid pundits (ritual specialists who are Brahmins) perform aarti for the pilgrims—natives and foreigners. During an interview with me, an older priest who has witnessed these spatial transformations

⁴ Vasanthi Raman (2013: 39) further explains: 'Thus a schism developed along religious lines among elite classes, which till then had been composite. In the twentieth century this process led to the three-fold assertion of the identities of language, religion and nation.... It helped to consolidate a Hindu identity that had at its core an othering of the Muslim one.'

⁵ 'Ganga Aarti' can be understood as invoking of the holy spirit and valorization of the holy river. The faith in the river has a longer association with people all along the river. The spectacle of the aarti commenced at Banaras in the late 1980s. Consequently, many trusts relating to the aarti were formed, all competing with one another.

remarked: *Ab naqal zyada hai, bhakti kam* (now duplication has taken over devotion).

The marketization of religion is not unique to Banaras, nor is the ritual of aarti; rather, it emanates from neoliberal economic practices. In the context of religion and neoliberalism, Meera Nanda (2011: 108) rightly argues that 'religion is not only good for business ... it is best business of all' and that 'the rich and the poor alike are turning to gods and gurus; pujaris, astrologers, *vastushastris* (set of individuals who advise on the building designs), spiritual advisers are all doing a thriving business'. Though Nanda's argument is perceptive, it remains somewhat soft vis-à-vis the market forces, which considerably shape the aura around religious spaces. Without going into further discussion about the market as the supreme force in reviving religiosity or religion and religious leaders (babas, pandas [specific priests who extend a helping hand in the performance of various religious rituals at the Hindu sacred places], and gurus), let me share the findings of my study in Banaras. In the course of the fieldwork (conducted in several phases during 2014–16; still unpublished) for an ongoing project 'Between Projected and Practiced Identities', we found out that the market was more important a driving force in religious rituals than rituals in the market. The economic supremacy that is partly performed through religion is also driving a section of the population towards collusion with corporate-sponsored communalization, manifest in the 'othering' of the population. This dynamic has created an ideal around which political mobilization is possible and is being operationalized. Those who claim to challenge such a political mobilization end up being part of a binary where 'other' has already been constructed, and it ultimately consolidates the constructed cohort rather than dissipating such constructions. The current 'sacred', 'Hindu', and 'timeless' history is therefore both a result and a procedure in promoting a particular narration, which bolsters the current power structures, economies, and cultural hegemony.

The Myth of Moral Hope

The continuous cultural hegemony and power structure of Banaras narrate a different mythical and phenomenological situation. This can be studied through different narratives following the historical

timeline. History and power, as discussed earlier, are very complex phenomena that describe contradictions in historical discourses. Thus, the current power structure in itself does not describe the real as it is rooted in knowledge to construct self-serving history, but it perpetuates a different history based on economic and cultural hegemony. The city of Banaras is an anticipated hope of cultural hegemony and dominant narration of the past that excludes the real ingredients and practices of the city with a multiplicity of identities. Katie Milestone (2008) recognizes this dynamic when she describes Banaras as a 'represented city'⁶ in terms of the relation between popular culture and the city. Because of the current power structure and its economic and cultural hegemony, Banaras is promoted as a sacred 'Hindu' space to serve the interests of elites. The depiction of Banaras as a 'mythological hope'⁷ and the 'ultimate salvation' is to serve a particular motive that discards the real diverse space which the city is. The 2014 election and Modi's candidature from Banaras is but an example of such a 'mythological hope'. The mediatized branding throughout the election campaign made the common people believe that Modi was a 'hero'.⁸ Roland Barthes (1991: 22) has written about the creation of 'hero' in the society. Here the perpetuated image of Modi by various media, in Ronald Barthes' conception, is a sign of 'unpredictable image'. Its aim is to make the image comprehensible as well as elusive. The

⁶ Milestone (2008: 1166), while writing on the representation of cities, noted that Manchester had altered dramatically over the past decades but, in many ways, the city represented in Coronation Street remained static: 'There is a little sense that the contemporary *Coronation Street* is connected with the affluent cosmopolitan, multicultural, regenerative Manchester.' Lefebvre made similar articulations in his categories of space (Choudhary and Prakash 2016).

⁷ Roland Barthes, in his inspiring study on mythology, describes how mythology creates a different image of a society that represents a sort of mythical idea and belief. He writes that in French wrestling, the process of creating heroes is very different. It is based on ethics and not on politics. What the public is looking for here is the gradual construction of a highly moral image: that of the perfect 'bastard' (Barthes 1991: 142).

⁸ *Business Standard*, in its online edition (12 May 2014), had published an article titled, 'The Making of Brand Modi'. It shows how media shaped Modi as a brand and how it became a success story for brand consultants and advertisement agencies (Joshi and Gupte 2014).

image was constructed as a hybrid that had a mystical and a promised 'hope'. I would like to mention two examples of such promised hope during the BJP's election campaign: the 'transformation of Ganga Ghats at Banaras as River Front of Saba[r]mati' in Ahmedabad; and 'turning Banaras into the cultural capital of the world' (*Hindu* 2014). Geographically speaking, the first promise is a challenge to the electorate's rationality. Sabarmati is a non-perennial river; at both ends of the riverfront—upstream and downstream—the river does not flow. It is a place of water storage rather than a flowing river. If the Ganga passing by Banaras became like Sabarmati, it would mean its death and, therefore, people will reject such proposals. This projected image was manufactured by the BJP and it disingenuously implanted in the common people the belief that Modi has Ganga's blessings, which gives him the power and charisma to change the fate of the city.

The image of Ganga is charismatic for the people of Banaras. It is an amalgamation of real and mythical characteristics of the Ganga that constitutes the fabric of life in Banaras. The river Ganga has historically been used for navigation. It has been a lifeline for traders. At the same time, it has a mythical and ritual significance. The combination of the real and the mythical, of the actual and the imagined, is close to what Foucault (1984) called heterotopia. Butler (2011), in her work on materiality, has explained the process that elevates certain rocks as gods, while all rocks are not considered equivalent to replica of a god/goddess. The river Ganga does not only represent a river flowing in its plains, meandering and forming a part of the everyday life of the city, but it also includes the mythical image of the city. The image of Banaras is synonymous with Ganga and has been propagated in a deterritorialized backdrop of the city's sociocultural life and beliefs, so it represents a heterotopia. In Barthes's conception, the represented images of Banaras and Ganga are constituted by the loss of the real essence of history that often fails to reflect the twists in history and sidesteps the class antagonism.⁹

⁹ Neil Smith (1996: 11) discussed frontier myth and the basis of Barthes' (1972: 129) conception that 'myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things'. He pointed out: 'Deterritorialization is equally central to mythmaking, and the more events wrenched from their constitutive geography, the more powerful the mythology. Geography too becomes a cliché' (Smith 1996: 11).

The represented and mediatized images of Modi and of the city of Banaras acted as a final authority invoking hyped gestures and signs. The so-called legend of a represented image of Modi along with river Ganga constructed different contexts and a different identity of the city that forces back the human mind into mythical folklore. The relationship of both the images was contextual and imparted the idea that Modi as a future hero had the potential to be a great humanitarian. The projected image of Modi as the progeny of Mother Ganga constructed the image of a mythical mother and her son. This was done with the motive to introduce Modi as a messiah and an upholder of the city's dreams. The electorate seemed to get motivated by a different power structure and hegemonic social order which were being perpetuated by a represented image of both Modi and river Ganga. The images of Modi and Ganga, therefore, may be seen as a symbolic representation of 'the unseen majority'. Heterotopias exist in the memories of a larger population through the represented space. The represented space here is Ganga and its image as a celestial river brought down to the earth by collective efforts of sages and gods to salvage the dead souls. This image continues to live in the memories of the people and a mere river becomes holy. In the particular case of Banaras, the sacred got connected with Modi as a progeny of Ganga. The people could not follow the basic and lived history of their association with the river; instead, they fell for the projected sacredness invoked by the ruling class from time to time.

The images of Modi and Ganga mythically describe some context of natural phenomenon with a history interwoven into class antagonism. These images grip human beings at a time and in a context when they are not able to learn from and discover nature's secrets.¹⁰ But the myth is not always and merely religious. It may acquire collective emotion through collective festivities.

¹⁰ In *Myth and Reality*, D.D. Kosambi, an influential Marxist intellectual specializing in ancient history, examined Indian myth and its implication about the Indian culture. He wrote: 'A myth may grip us by its imagery, and may indeed have portrayed some natural phenomena or process at a time when man-kind had not learned to probe nature's secrets or to discover the endless properties of matter' (Kosambi 1962: 44).

The image of river Ganga as a mother and Modi as a progeny was therefore a substitute of Banaras's secular hope that evoked an 'uncanny memory'¹¹ of conspirators and imparted the hope of charismatic power. Bourdieu refers to it as 'cultural capital', in which culture cannot perform without its antagonistic characters and charismatic hope. It always narrates the memory of dominant classes and their daily life. Conceptualizing the form of capital, Bourdieu (2011: 241–58) pointed out that cultural capital existed in three forms: in the 'embodied' state in a form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the 'objectified' state in a form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, and so on); and in the 'institutionalized' state in the form of objectification. He noted that cultural production as a distinguished field constructs 'the space of position and position-taking'¹² in which social agents perform and acquire their social base. In such position-taking, social agents also express a particular manifestation of corresponding political acts. The 'images' of cultural goods are a manifestation of social agents that correspond to a particular kind of act and perpetuate their concerns to improve the position in the existing power structure. The blurring of the image of Modi and river Ganga during the election campaign itself is a political act and corresponds to economic relations and positions in existing power structure. According to Bourdieu, 'position-taking' is defined in relation to the 'space of possible', which is objectively realized as problematic in the forms of actual or potential 'position-taking' corresponding to the different positions

¹¹ 'Uncanny' is a Freudian concept that is very close to the rare psychological feeling. Sigmund Freud conceptualized it on the basis of mental and material life. He wrote:

[Uncanny] undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror; it is equally certain, too, that ... it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread. Yet we may expect that it implies some intrinsic quality which justifies the use of a special name. One is curious to know what this peculiar quality is which allows us to distinguish as 'uncanny' certain things within the boundaries of what is 'fearful.' (Freud 1919: 217)

¹² In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bourdieu has critically examined the entire genre of art and literature and has pointed out that various genres of art and literature exist as a social agent and require a particular social base for their position or status in a society. Bourdieu (1993: 30) calls it 'the space of position and the space of position-taking' in which a particular form of art and literature are expressed.

(Bourdieu 1993: 31). What it means is that the represented image of Modi in association with the represented image of river Ganga as a mother is an ideological as well as a political act. The act also corresponds to an economic reasoning whereby a social agent positions herself in a possible space. This particular situation is polemical and creates a hypothetical situation referring to different values and different moralities to equate charismatic images of the Ganga in Banaras to a fractured history that defines Ganga as a mother. In this process, a 'mother' becomes a 'mythical mother', rather than a real mother who needs material basis for existence. Also, the river that needs ecological basis and care for its existence has been reduced to the mere 'idea' of a mother. In Bourdieu's terms, it is the social agents who strategically struggle and occupy different positions to defend or improve their positions in the given power structure. Following Bourdieu, the relationship between represented images of both river Ganga as a mother and Modi as a son describes the power structure that is both objective and problematic.

Banaras as a city of represented images of Modi and river Ganga corresponds to different position-taking that could be realized and re-examined on the basis of its actual relation within the existing power structure. However, we cannot ignore its material basis and special position that corresponds to its economic and political reasoning. As David Harvey (2001: 51) notes, space is a 'thing in itself', with an existence independent of matter corresponding to economic and political reason.¹³ The basis of position-taking of object or represented image, economics, and political reasons became sources of power structure and imparted objective control over the space, as Harvey (2008) enunciated in his discussion on 'new public space'.

Banaras as a space symbolized the represented images of Modi and Ganga as the main mobilizers of the masses. Space and spatial aspects in themselves are therefore not eternal; rather they represent different meanings of history and social class structure. But the question is how

¹³ Harvey is concerned about the relationship between space, economy, and political reason. He argued emphatically that in relation to architecture and art, space as a matter generates a specific sense of social relations, aesthetics, and special sense in its meaning and symbolic structure. He acknowledges that the meaning of emerging 'public spaces depended in large measure upon the private interests (such as landowners, developers, construction interests and workers, commerce of all kinds) they supported' (Harvey 2008: 21).

space is close to societal contradictions that show the basic characteristic of a society? The answer to this question opens up debate on the relationship between society and space. Henri Lefebvre (1991: 26) viewed space as a social product. He further pointed out that space served as a tool of thought and of actions. In addition to being a means of production, Lefebvre maintained that space was also a means of domination. As far as Banaras is concerned, the image of Modi and river Ganga is the manifestation of social agents struggling to control or increase their position within the structure, which is political and economic in the same breath. Thus, societal contradiction is a driving force that apparently determines the relationship between space and society. From a less pessimistic standpoint, abstract space harbours specific contradictions. Such specific contradictions stem, in part, from the old contradictions thrown up by historical time (Lefebvre 1991: 52). The contradiction at hand is the inherent reason that maintains the dialectical relation between space and society.

From Agenda-Setting to Fractured Polity: Banaras as a Mobilized Space

I have already discussed how represented images contribute to the creation of a mythical narrative and how space, as a matter of fact, is controlled and determined by the economic and political factors. Harvey (2008) has suggested that the mode of production and processes entailed therein create their own space to share the separate value and ethics of the living society. Represented symbol or image is not beyond the objective space and mode of production; it often maintains a dialectical relation with the mode of production and creates its own position to construct a new power relation.¹⁴ Therefore,

¹⁴ Lefebvre has discussed different aspects of space and its production. To him, there is no doubt that medieval society—that is, the feudal mode of production with its variants and local peculiarities—created its own space. Medieval space built upon the space constituted in the preceding period and preserved that space as a substrate and prop for its symbols; it survives in an analogous fashion today. He further writes that capitalism and neo-capitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the ‘world of commodities’, its logic, and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state (Lefebvre 1991: 61).

the represented image of Modi and river Ganga as well as Banaras as space is a substrate of economic and political reason embedded in the existing power structure.

The 2014 election was nothing but a battle for occupying positions in the existing power structure. The images of Modi and river Ganga, constructed through various media content, were symbolic means that constituted Modi as a hero for the people of Banaras. Modi's image and its mythical caricature composed numerous behaviours that were charismatic and very close to the legends of Indian history. The plethora of images was linked to mythical narratives that frequently constituted superficial beliefs and new forms of hegemonic social relations.¹⁵ Modi's candidature and his represented image through various media contents was an ideological and political act to maintain the power structures as a sacred history of the city of Banaras.

Elevation of the represented image of river Ganga and Modi to the 'place of power'¹⁶ constitutes the 'heterotropic idea' that underlines

¹⁵ Banaras has always occupied and corresponds to the centre stage in India as a nodal region of various religious beliefs, culture, ideology, and idiosyncrasies, imparting a particular test to the entire region of Purvanchal (Bayly 1983). The large expanse of the river Ganga flowing in its plain, that forms the backdrop to the everyday life of the city, constitutes different lives and identities of a living society. Banaras is also called Kashi. According to Desai, Kashi is associated with Lord Shiva, and within the Hindu religious tradition, it is a place where people come to die. For Hindus, dying in Kashi or Banaras is to venerate the dead. The ghats of Ganga are central to its religious life (Desai 2003). River Ganga is seen as a mother and creator of life: it is where the creation of life and the cremation of the life gone by unfold side by side. The Ganga ghat is equally claimed by the Muslims in their day-to-day life. The Ganga has never been anything but an amalgamation of cultures, religious beliefs, and ethos. It has been a living force in the lives of Banarasis, Hindus, and Muslims alike, and not just a celestial-sacred Hindu entity as often projected.

¹⁶ The term 'place of power' refers to an abstract symbolic position that constitutes both economic and political reason. Saul Newman (2004) stated that in classical political theory, power was embodied in the figure of the sovereign. In monarchical society, for instance, power was invested symbolically in the body of the king, the incarnation of the divine.

its economic and political reasons. Following Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias',¹⁷ we can conceptualize the image of Modi and river Ganga. The Ganga is a composite space that constitutes an objective relationship between the real and utopian idea. This follows the idea of a mirror as a metaphor for duality and contradictions. By constantly invoking resemblances between the Ganga and himself, Modi opened up an intermediate space between the internal space and the real external spaces which, in Foucault's terms, is a sanctified space that informs the spatial experience of the contemporary period. This in-between space is what Foucault calls heterotopia, that is, the 'other space' that is at the same time utopian and real. Heterotopia seems like a means to escape the norms and structures that imprison human imagination (Harvey 2000). In an obvious criticism of Foucault, Harvey argues that if escape is the norm, then all sites of alternative ways of doing things are in some sense heterotopic, including Disneyland, cemeteries, concentration camps, and so on. Harvey (2000) further argues that if heterotopias are disturbing and undermine received forms of sense and meaning, and if geographical knowledge is inherently heterotopic, then geographical and spatial understandings undermine and disturb other forms of rational understanding. Whether rationality is at stake or not, the very possibility of an instant relationship between the mirror and the person standing in front of it makes the person realize its dissipation into the person inside the mirror and the image becomes real, although it is utopian. To cite one example, consider the claim of the mayor of Banaras: *Desh ki janta aur Kashi ki janta apne aap ko Modi maan rahi hai* (The people of the country and the people of Kashi are seeing themselves as Modi) (CNN IBN 2014). The claim is unreal, but such pronouncement creates possibility of heterotopias where the boundary is blurred. This is similar to Foucault's image produced in the mirror and the mirror itself as utopia which is unreal. It cannot be pinned down on a surface and yet it is 'very real' in terms of how one

¹⁷ To Foucault, heterotopias are real places that do exist and which are formed in the very founding of the society. Heterotopias are like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites and all the other real sites that can be found within a culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (Foucault 1984).

occupies the space on the other side of the mirror. This is a realization of one's presence over and above the false image.

While investigating the relations between globalization, conceptions of the Indian nation, and the construction of 'Hindu-ness' (or Hindutva) as a locus of distinctive identity and meaning, Deshpande (1998) sees the history of these relations linked to spatial strategies having an ideological bearing (pan-Indian Nehruvian elite) in the construction of heterotopias. For Deshpande (1998), this is the sense in which spatial strategies attempt to tie an imagined space to a real place in such a way that these ties also bind people to particular identities and to the political/practical consequences they entail. Ganga here stands for a particular identity and as the mirror; in this case, a utopian reality that is symbolic of the heterochronies (slices of temporal and spatial assemblages) of Banaras. Modi tries to situate himself in and draws a similarity between Ganga and himself through various images, like that of a mother and a son or one with similar origins, that is, from Shiva. There is the creation of a mirror image containing Modi and Ganga that is utopian and mythical. At the same time, it is also very real considering the significance of the connections drawn and the importance of Ganga as a sanctified space.

In his introductory speech as a candidate, Modi focussed on his linkage to Banaras by drawing resemblance between Banaras and Vадnagar (his birthplace) and also between himself and Ganga (YouTube 2014). His speech was not to constitute Banaras as a real city but as a utopia. *Maa* Ganga (Mother Ganga) is a pronounced voice for an ideal mother, like god, who does not exist. Therefore, the call from Mother Ganga to Modi is not a nominal sentence, but it is a heterotropic idea, which, as a metaphor/mirror in Foucault's terms, is the constitution of duality and contradictions. In his speeches, Modi invoked through heterotropic imagination the mighty enterprise Ganga and its mythological roots significant to every Banarasi. He indicated how the river, which is the *dharohar* (treasure) of the city, had called him to be a part of its rich culture: *Jaise ek balak maa ki god mein wapas aata hai, waise main anubhuti kar raha hoon* (I feel what a child feels when he comes back to the mother's lap) (NDTV 2014). Sentences such as these wove a connection between Ganga and Modi as the mother and son, an image that is culturally laced with rich emotions. The theatrical invocation did not

end here. Consider another line from Modi's speech: *Main Somnath ki dharti se aaya hun* (I come from the soil of Somnath [another name for Lord Shiva]) (YouTube 2014). Mythologically, it correlates how Ganga was released from the tresses of Shiva to flow on the earth. This was done in a bid to legitimize his connection with the mythological source of Ganga.

As a candidate in Banaras, the crucial rallying point for Modi was largely the mythical aspects rather than his image of a 'development man' as the chief minister of Gujarat. Once in Banaras, a materialist icon of the 'Gujarat Model of Development' turned into a mythologist battling for the throne (YouTube 2014). Following the understanding of the space of emplacement as outlined in Foucault's (1984) idea on other spaces, the Ganga becomes the space of emplacement, the platform on which Modi played out a victorious battle of election by creating the 'other space', a heterotopia that linked the sacred and the profane. He created an illusion, a place of illusion, a linkage between the Ganga and Modi, a sense of illusive freedom for the people who rose to the occasion to elect Modi from the city of Banaras. The election rallies which are the display of unconstrained power also got aided by the image of Ganga. It was (mis)used to create a sense of illusion and to paint a larger-than-life image of Modi. The foppish similarity drawn between Ganga and Modi made his rallies appealing to people.



Space and spatial articulations, this chapter has argued, are central to our understanding of politics and elections. Banaras stands as a testimony to this argument. In the 2014 election campaign in Banaras, Modi was not depicted as a 'development man'; instead, his projection was mythological and utopian. Banaras was invoked as a sacred space imbued with Hindu mythological meanings and characters. Among other factors, it was the invocation of this imagery that paved way for the victory of the BJP that rode on the Hindutva wave to sweep elections across the country. In this chapter, I have discussed how space, religious mythology, and rituals criss-crossed one another to form a potent mobilization enabling Modi to win. I hope that other scholars and observers will further contribute in comprehending the spatial signification of space to the analysis of elections and democracy—an

initiative that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been undertaken so far, at least not in the way I have framed it here.

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CASTE AND CULTURAL ICONS

BJP's Politics of Appropriation in Tamil Nadu

R. Thirunavukkarasu

The 2014 Lok Sabha (People's House–Lower House of the Indian Parliament) election results were quite significant for several reasons. The clean sweep by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the all-India level, ending the 'coalition politics' at the Centre, which had been effectively navigating the Indian political trajectory for well over three decades, forced the political pundits to redo their political calculations. Well before the elections, there were repeated assertions by the cheerleaders of the BJP that 2014 elections would be a watershed contest as the party and its prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, have launched one of the most formidable campaigns in modern electoral politics in India. In fact, the BJP had declared that it was steering a massive wave of people's support in its favour.

The wave did yield expected electoral dividends in many states of India but failed to come out with any promising results in some states. The verdict in favour of the BJP has been characterized in a variety of ways. From 'spectacular victory' to 'triumph of development politics', the euphoria among some scholars has been quite palpable. Some have even gone to the extent of saying that Modi's 'rich' experience as the chief minister of Gujarat encouraged the electorate to repose their

faith in him (Palshikar, Kumar, and Lodha 2017). The large number of rallies and public meetings that Modi addressed in the run-up to the election has been cited as galvanizing moments for the BJP. The alleged economic mismanagement of the previous Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government has also been cited as a major source of BJP's 'spectacular' victory.

The polarization campaigns and sporadic communal riots that the BJP and the Hindutva brigades have indulged in are, however, conspicuously missing in many of the analyses. The systematic efforts by the Hindutva forces to create a permanent and culturally sanctioned binary of 'us versus them' needs to be scrutinized to comprehend the truth behind the otherwise obvious reality. The BJP's consistent efforts to consolidate the Hindu majority as 'we' against the religious minorities (especially Muslims) as 'they' seems to have paid rich dividends electorally in some parts of India.

The BJP's—as also its Hindutva affiliates'—inalienable agenda for several decades has been to establish a permanent fissure between the so-called majority Hindus and the religious minorities in India. For example, during the campaign for the 2014 elections, multiple methods were employed by the BJP to reap dividends, including a thorough exploitation of the media to manufacture lies camouflaged as ideology (as elaborated in Chapter 1). Equating terror with Muslims, as seen in many of BJP's campaign materials, was yet another attempt to stigmatize Muslims as the 'other' (pointed out quite persuasively in Chapter 2). Similarly, river Ganges was conferred a much holier and sacred status in BJP's campaign (see Chapter 6) to win the Hindu electorates' support. In short, it has all along been a highly charged atmosphere of communal polarization.

The larger question, however, is which section of the Indian electorate agreed to endorse all these manoeuvres by the BJP and why did they do so. The *differentia specifica* (specific one in the midst of many) has to be the trope of this analysis. It is obvious that some sections of the electorate rejected the fiercely articulated communal polarization of the BJP because there is visibly no cultural sanction for that. To be precise, political choice is essentially an unambiguous reflection of the cultural–social value structure. Interestingly, endorsing secularism and multiculturalism as a value and retaining it as the principle of modern democracy squarely rests upon a community's cultural–social value structure. That is to say,

the quest to appreciate democracy and reject pseudo-democracy would be largely determined by the sociocultural history of a community. This chapter, while highlighting BJP's politics of appropriation of Tamil cultural icons, also tries to explore why Tamil Nadu, as Paul Wallace (2015) underlined, resisted the Modi wave in 2014 elections.

The BJP's near-total sweep in many north Indian states was viewed as a foregone conclusion, while its not-so-impressive performance in the southern states was perceived as a puzzle by many. Of the four southern states—except Karnataka, where the party wrested 17 seats out of 28—the BJP's electoral performance in the other three states was quite dismal (Election Commission of India 2014a). The most stunning result for the BJP came from Tamil Nadu where the party, despite having alliance with several regional parties, managed to win only one seat. Thus, in spite of its meticulous efforts to knit an umbrella alliance with as many as seven regional parties in Tamil Nadu for contesting elections in seven Lok Sabha constituencies, the BJP managed to wrest only one seat—the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat—where it has had a recognizable proportion of vote share ever since the first major communal riot broke out in the early 1980s.

The BJP's electoral experiments in the state have not yielded impressive results so far, except on occasions when the BJP struck an alliance with either of the two major Dravidian parties: the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). Quite akin to the national scenario, Tamil Nadu also has Hindus as the majority community, with both Christians and Muslims constituting 6.12 per cent and 5.86 per cent of the population, respectively (according to the 2011 Census).¹ The state is best known for its several magnificent Hindu temples and elaborate Hindu religious traditions. Many of its Hindu temples attract devotees not only from Tamil Nadu but also from the neighbouring states and from north India. Therefore, it is no wonder that the BJP's rank and file is puzzled as to why it has not been able to make political inroads into the state's political arena. In fact, terming the BJP as an insignificant political player in the state is a cliché. The larger question, however, is to unravel the nature of political structure in the state that has effectively prevented the BJP and its affiliated outfits from gaining electoral dividends. More importantly, the larger tactics and modus operandi

¹ See <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/33-tamil-nadu.html>.

adopted by the BJP in neutralizing its political adversaries and advancing its electoral advantages have offered fresh challenges.

This chapter aims to explore the two-way process adopted by the BJP: 'vernacularization' and 'pan-Indianization'—while tracing the genealogy of the BJP's electoral performance and its *modus operandi* to expand its support base in the 2014 elections. The BJP's strategy seems to rest not only on 'vernacularizing' itself to be recognized as a party of Tamils, but also simultaneously attempting to pan-Indianize some of the unique iconic elements of Tamil society. The goal of this two-way process is to expand its support base in a highly competitive political landscape where the Dravidian legacy and Tamil nationalist sentiment enjoy near-perfect hegemony.

This chapter has been organized into various sections. The initial section focusses on the electoral performance of the BJP over the years. The subsequent sections concentrate on the nature of contemporary Tamil Nadu politics and its inherent anti-BJP character. In order to exhibit its Tamil tilt, the political manoeuvring that the BJP has been undertaking since the late 1980s is delineated subsequently. Thus, both the vernacularizing and the pan-Indianizing processes are scrutinized. Part of this chapter draws on interviews conducted with a select group of BJP workers and strong sympathizers in the city of Madurai between May and June of 2016.

BJP's Electoral Performance in Tamil Nadu—The Strenuous Journey

While analysing the rise of BJP in south India after the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, political scientist James Manor (1992: 1267) concluded: 'The BJP and the Jan Sangh have always performed wretchedly here. If we are looking for signs of promise for this party (BJP), we need to look elsewhere.' This quote is not simply a hollow cynicism of a scholar. Beneath what appears as sarcasm remains a strong political structure that, at least for quite some time, has retained an antagonistic orientation towards BJP's ideology. The BJP has not been able to gain acceptance in Tamil Nadu, whereas it has received substantial support in many north Indian states. Oliver Heath (1999: 2515) characterizes all the four south Indian states as BJP's tertiary zone, the primary zones being predominantly north Indian states, such

as Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh (UP).

The disinterest among the Tamil Nadu electorate towards the BJP stems from the history of the state. From the first assembly election in 1952 till 1991, during which time ten elections were held, the BJP and its ancestor, Jan Sangh, never won a single assembly seat in Tamil Nadu. They remained merely insignificant players. While Jan Sangh was a formidable force in Delhi as it performed remarkably well in the 1952 and 1956 elections, it did not even contest in Tamil Nadu. In the 1962 elections in Tamil Nadu, in which it contested, its vote share was as low as 0.1 per cent. In the 1991 elections, for the first time, BJP's vote share in the state reached 1.7 per cent. Against all odds, and in particular riding a powerful anti-incumbency wave against the AIADMK government of Jayalalithaa, in the 1996 assembly elections, BJP managed to open its electoral account from Padmanabhapuram constituency in Kanyakumari district when its candidate was elected. In 1996, BJP's vote share doubled to reach 2.9 per cent. As recently as the May 2016 assembly election in Tamil Nadu, BJP's vote share did not even cross the 3 per cent mark (Election Commission of India 2014b).

The 1989 Lok Sabha elections were the hallmark of the BJP's steep surge in terms of electoral support at the national level. From an embryonic stage, the party began its victory march by winning 85 seats with 11 per cent votes polled at the all-India level. In the previous 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the party could win only two seats. Thus, the massive leap forward in terms of electoral performance was termed as a significant step as the party began to assert its place in the pan-Indian political landscape. However, in spite of its euphoria, BJP's performance in Tamil Nadu was quite abysmal. In 1989, BJP contested only in three Lok Sabha constituencies and won none; its vote share was a mere 0.29 per cent—not even a force to reckon with. The 1991 Lok Sabha elections witnessed the emergence of the BJP as an alternative to the Congress party at the all-India level when it won 120 seats with 20 per cent of the votes polled. In Tamil Nadu, the party barely managed to get 1.6 per cent votes. In contrast to the steady increase in the party's vote share at the all-India level, a similar increase was absent in Tamil Nadu. In the 1996 Lok Sabha elections, for the first time, BJP's efforts elevated the party to the treasury bench, even though its ecstasy lasted for

just 13 days. The same year, in Tamil Nadu, BJP crossed 2 per cent of votes for the first time (Election Commission of India 2014b).

The 1998 Lok Sabha elections were indeed a turning point as far as Tamil Nadu's political history was concerned. As part of its all-out effort to knit a larger coalition across the country, the BJP struck an alliance with one of the major Dravidian parties of Tamil Nadu. The AIADMK of Jayalalithaa established an alliance with the BJP and other smaller parties in the state. The BJP was allotted five Lok Sabha seats and the party won three. The BJP's vote share drastically increased to 6.8 per cent for the first time. Similarly, in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP struck an alliance with the DMK. In that election, the BJP contested six Lok Sabha constituencies. It won 4 seats with its vote share touching 7.1 per cent (Election Commission of India 2014b).

However, in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP's performance in Tamil Nadu was no different from its all-India performance; notwithstanding its alliance with AIADMK, BJP could not win a single seat and its vote share declined to just 5 per cent. In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP was left with no major alliance partner. It contested for 18 seats on its own for the first time; the party did not win a single seat and its vote share remained at 5 per cent. In spite of its current status as a formidable pan-Indian party, BJP's inability to wade through the highly competitive political atmosphere in Tamil Nadu requires scrutiny (Election Commission of India 2014b).

Politics in Contemporary Tamil Nadu: A Brief Genealogy

In 1967, when the DMK unseated the Congress party in the state, electoral politics in Tamil Nadu underwent a paradigm shift. It was not merely an electoral victory for DMK, it was equally a triumph of Tamil language pride vis-à-vis Hindi hegemony, as the 1965 anti-Hindi agitations across the state remained quite fresh in public memory. The 1965 spontaneous agitations against the union government's decision to impose Hindi over non-Hindi-speaking states had effortlessly brought the DMK to power and perhaps earned a tag for the DMK as a guardian of Tamil pride (Hardgrave 1964–5: 411). Within a decade, the AIADMK—under the leadership of popular film star M.G. Ramachandran—arrived on the scene. Consequently, both the ruling and opposition spaces were occupied by parties of same ideological genesis.

Thus, Tamil pride, anti-Hindi (which effectively means anti-north India), and anti-Brahmanism acquired a near-hegemonic influence in electoral politics too. There is an invisible consensus among all major political parties in Tamil Nadu that their politics and campaign strategies ought to be in favour of a Tamil identity. Both DMK and AIADMK held that their visible 'Tamil-centric' politics alone could fetch them credibility as political parties. As recently as 2014, one of the virulent advocates of Tamil language pride in contemporary Tamil Nadu politics—Vaiko, leader of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK)—argued that the then BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government was making a 'consistent effort to impose the culture of the North on Tamil Nadu' (Yamunan 2014).

Thus, Tamil language pride became an ideology to which all major political parties began to show their uncompromising allegiance. In such a context where Tamil language pride and Tamil antiquity acquired unprecedented acceptance in the political arena of Tamil Nadu, the BJP was depicted as well as perceived by the people of Tamil Nadu as a party antagonistic to the spirit of Tamil/Dravidian cultural nationalism. Indeed, the very name of the party keeps the ordinary masses in Tamil Nadu away from BJP. During an interview with me, M. Karthikeyan, a small-time entrepreneur and enthusiastic supporter of the BJP for the last eight years in Madurai, said: 'The Hindi name of the party should be translated into Tamil and the party's name must be "Indhiya Makkal Katchi" (meaning Indian People's Party)'.² There is also a general perception among the people of Tamil Nadu that the BJP is a party of/for Hindi-speaking areas. This perception rests on the fact that none of the BJP's prominent leaders at the all-India level are from Tamil Nadu; the only exception being the late Jana Krishnamurthy who briefly held the position of national president of the BJP in 2001 and 2002. Even though he was from Madurai in Tamil Nadu, his Telugu family background effectively designated him as a cultural outsider in the state.

Since the early 1980s and starting from Kanyakumari, the BJP has been attempting to expand its support base in many parts of the state. A small fisherfolk hamlet, Mandaikkadu in Kanyakumari district, witnessed the first major communal riot between Hindus and Christians in

² Twenty-two BJP supporters were interviewed for a week in Madurai during May and June of 2016.

the early 1980s. This incident was only a spark as communal tension also began to erupt in other parts of the state, though with low intensity. By the late 1980s and the early 1990s, Tamil Nadu began witnessing sporadic communal violence in Ambur, Dindigul, and Nagore. In August 1990, the first instance of communal tension erupted in Chennai (then Madras) over the Veer Vinayaka idol procession in Triplicane area, which has a sizeable Muslim population (Geetha and Rajadurai 1990: 2122). Except in Kanyakumari district, where the BJP sought to derive political mileage out of Hindu-Christian conflict, in the rest of the state it tried to score political points over Hindu-Muslim tension.

Sowing Hindutva in Tamil Nadu

Efforts to reap political dividends by engineering communal tensions between religious communities have almost become a template for bigots and the BJP. The party has been trying its best to create 'Hindu consciousness' among the people of Tamil Nadu with virtually no positive results. What is the nature of the political structure in the state that has been preventing communal tensions from getting a wider acceptance? Is there something embedded in the political consciousness of the people of Tamil Nadu that is not serving the interests of parties like the BJP?

In the post-Babri Masjid demolition time, when many parts of the country were communally surcharged and riots were recurrent phenomena, Tamil Nadu was remarkably peaceful with virtually no major incident of reported communal riots. However, in no way does this mean that communal mobilization by both Hindu and Muslim religious organizations was absent. In 1993, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) office was targeted by a bomb blast which killed 11 people, but it did not result in any communal violence. The killing of a police constable in Coimbatore in 1997 resulted in a brutal backlash against Muslims. The subsequent bomb blast orchestrated by Al-Umma left more than 50 people dead and 200 injured (Subramanian 1998). The state government banned the organization and effectively neutralized its rank and file. The industrial hub—as Coimbatore is best known—has remained quite peaceful since then. Many thought that the BJP would begin its electoral lead from that city as the party won that Lok Sabha seat both in 1998 as well as in 1999. However, the subsequent elections have proved that the BJP is

no longer a powerful political entity because its candidate was pushed to the third or fourth place.

In spite of intensive efforts by the BJP and unconventional responses from radical Muslim groups, the inability of the BJP to reap political and electoral dividends is quite palpable. Since contemporary Tamil society is best known for its virulent anti-Brahmanism, anti-Sanskrit/Hindi stand, and subsequently anti-north sentiments, the BJP is perceived by many in Tamil Nadu as the party of/for Brahmanical values and Sanskrit/Hindi supremacy. In contrast, BJP often accuses the Dravidian movement for encouraging and spearheading secessionism. However, what BJP fails to realize is that Tamil nationalist thoughts have had a long trajectory in the cultural-political landscape of the Tamil society and are traceable to the colonial era.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the anti-colonial movement almost endorsed the sacred status for Sanskrit. Relentless campaigning by many Congress leaders that the true nature of Indian civilization rests upon the timeless Sanskrit tradition beginning from the four Vedas further inferiorized Tamil language and the speech community. As recently as 1994, in a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court of India eulogized the role of Sanskrit as follows:

The stream of our culture would get dried if we were to discourage the study of Sanskrit. It is well known that Sanskrit is the mother of all Indo-Aryan languages and it is this language in which our Vedas, Puranas and Upanishadas have been written and in which Kalidas, Bhavbuti, Banbhata and Dandi wrote their classics. Teachings of Shankracharya, Ramanuj, Madhwacharya, Nimbark and Vallabhacharya would not have been woven into the fabric of Indian culture if Sanskrit would not have been available to them as a medium of expressing their thoughts. (Indiankanoon.org n.d.: para 11)

Based on the aforementioned premise, the Supreme Court directed the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to include Sanskrit as an elective subject in their curriculum. While the Supreme Court upheld the need to retain the secular character of the state, it further said that promoting Sanskrit was in no way antithetical to our constitution.

We entertain no doubt in our mind that teaching of Sanskrit alone as an elective subject can in no way be regarded as against secularism. Indeed, our Constitution requires giving of fillip to Sanskrit because of what has

been stated in Article 351 in which while dealing with the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi it has been provided that it would draw, whenever necessary or desirable, for its vocabulary, primarily on Sanskrit. Encouragement to Sanskrit is also necessary because of it being one of the languages included in the Eighth Schedule. (Indiankanoon.org n.d.: para 19)

In the quote cited earlier, the status and role of Sanskrit is made abundantly clear to the people of India. It therefore clearly amplifies the level of reverence with which parties such as the BJP would look at Sanskrit.

According to the vanguards of the BJP, Sanskrit is not only a language. Rather, it is a storage of India's glorious past and it is the only vehicle for India's promising future—a status and an honour that no other Indian language has been accorded by the BJP and its affiliated organizations. Therefore, preserving Sanskrit or its progeny, Hindi, is indeed a paramount responsibility of Hindu nationalists.

In India, nationalism and patriotism are often seen as antagonistic to regionalism and vernacularization. The unifying forces of India are the Hindu religion and the Sanskrit language and both are depicted as mutually complementary to each other. Therefore, celebrating both of them is considered necessary to be a nationalist. The Sanskrit Commission that was set up way back in 1956 laid down the foundation as to how India would proceed further in the future in terms of its language and cultural policies (Ramaswamy 1999: 339–81). Over time, a new cultural epithet—'Hindu/Brahminism–Sanskrit/Hindi is equal to India'—effortlessly became a dominant political discourse, which very strongly began to define the nature of nationalism. This discourse, in turn, also defined who would be deemed an anti-national. In this dominant, exclusivist discourse, the subjugated subaltern masses who have been up against Brahmanical values and Sanskrit/Hindi supremacy stand no more than as inferior subjects.

The Hindutva brigade—represented politically by the Jan Sangh and later, the BJP—has been a strong advocate of this breed of nationalism. For the BJP, Brahmanical values/the spirit of hierarchy and Sanskrit supremacy are quite fundamental in constituting modern Indian nation-state. The party does seek to incorporate people from the subaltern masses into some positions in the organizational hierarchy—Bangaru Laxman in the late 1990s became its president, the first Dalit to hold that position. There may be many from the

downtrodden communities to occupy positions within the party. However, no one within the BJP is expected to criticize Sanskrit or its Brahmanical ideology. Subservience to this basic tenet perhaps is non-negotiable. Any transgression of that tenet, as the party activists have clearly and often pointed out, would invite grave consequences. The recent atrocities committed by Hindutva elements against religious minorities and Dalits must be looked at against this background.

Dravidianism—Legacy of a Counterculture

The Self-Respect Movement by E.V. Ramasamy (also known as Periyar; hereafter Periyar) in Tamil society had successfully turned these issues into a formidable ideological debate in the public realm from the 1920s onwards. The movement and its subsequent political manifestation—Dravidar Kazhagam (DK)—did not only challenge the hegemony of Brahmanical values and Sanskrit supremacy but also laid down the foundation for the nature of modern Tamil polity. The configuration of modern Tamil polity in the discourse of the Dravidian movement squarely rested upon the unassailable principles of a counterculture celebrating Tamil antiquity and anti-Brahmanical cultural values. Celebration of the vernacular was central to the Dravidian movement and the political culture it unleashed. This celebration resonated with Gramsci's (1985: 168) assertion that 'the vernaculars are written down when the people regain importance'.

To be precise, the Brahmins' overt allegiance to the supremacy of Sanskrit and their desperation to assert themselves as the custodians of Sanskrit/Hindi tradition was not the major bone of contention for Periyar. The key contention was the sacralization of the Sanskrit/Hindi tradition as the locus in India's civilizational legacy. This self-styled sacralization of that legacy was aided by the contributions of British Orientalists, thereby effectively inferiorizing non-Sanskrit/Hindi language traditions. For Periyar, self-respect and dignity were non-negotiable elements for a nation. In other words, Brahmanical supremacy relied on three major sources—caste, religion, and language. Periyar sought to debunk these sources.

Periyar categorically stated that *jati* (caste) had no genesis in Tamil tradition as the names of all four varnas had non-Tamil origins. Similarly, Brahmanical Hinduism and Sanskrit remained outside the purview of Tamil sociocultural boundary. Therefore, the Self-Respect Movement

and Periyar faced only mild resistance when they characterized the Brahmins as the 'cultural other' of Tamil political culture. Periyar's intervention was not only academic, but received popular support as well.

Almost all the Brahmin leaders in the Tamil Nadu Congress unanimously endorsed Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's proposition to declare Hindi/Hindustani as the 'national' language. This endorsement angered non-Brahmins within and outside Congress (Irschick 1986). Periyar felt deeply disillusioned with the Congress and with Gandhi for their overwhelming support to many aspects of what he regarded as a highly regressive, irrational ideology, such as *varnashrama dharma* (obligation on the basis of hierarchy) and Brahmanical Hinduism.

It was not only the organizations and parties owing allegiance to the Dravidian legacy that worked towards the celebration of the vernacular and the subaltern upsurge, but also other people with different ideological orientations—for example, Pandit Iyothedasar (1845–1914), a leading figure in the Tamil–Dalit–Buddhist revivalism, and M. Singaravelar (1860–1946), the first trade unionist in colonial Madras Presidency—also contributed to the consolidation of the spirit of the Self-Respect Movement. The ideology of caste, Brahmanical values, and Sanskrit supremacy thus effectively became the 'cultural other' in contemporary Tamil society.

The task for the BJP, therefore, is quite arduous because it firmly swears in the name of an unjust social order as India's cultural legacy and in Sanskrit supremacy. The powerful fabric of non-Brahmin consciousness—that includes religious minorities such as Christians and Muslims—also looks quite formidable for the BJP to break in order to achieve electoral success. Concocting stories of Islamic rulers persecuting Hindus in Tamil Nadu is effectively not possible as major parts of Tamil society were never under direct Mughal rule. Thus, establishing what the BJP calls Hindu consciousness seems to be a near-impossible task.

Anthropologist Thomas Hansen (1996) maintains that the BJP and the Sangh Parivar have made ideological adjustments to meet the regional requirements and have thereby vernacularized themselves. This argument about 'vernacularizing Hindutva', however, is difficult to notice in Tamil Nadu, or having begun fairly recently. To begin with, the Dravidian legacy provided a strong counterculture to the Hindutva ideology. The Dravidian parties promoted a unique network of associations. Since the beginning, the DMK encouraged formation of

several fronts within the party—fronts associated with farmers, trade unions, engineers, lawyers, traders, fishermen, minorities, and so on. The Dravidianist regimes also bestowed state-sponsored entitlements, in terms of education and employment opportunities, to the downtrodden communities as well as to the intermediate castes. Dravidianism, argues Narendra Subramanian (1999a: 731), became an ally of pluralism (also see Subramanian 1999b).

This accommodative character of the Dravidian parties effectively prevented any move for sectarian politics to gain popularity in Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian mechanism of prevention can be better explained in terms of the spread and strength of its civic networks and associations—a mechanism similar to the one identified by Ashutosh Varshney (2002) in his study of ethnic violence in India. The inability of the RSS and the BJP in gaining political mileage in Chennai slums was on account of the presence of Dravidian civic networks in the slums. In contrast, it was owing to the absence of such networks in Bengaluru slums that Hindutva organizations managed to make inroads there (Chidambaram 2012). The Dravidian movement not only prevented Hindutva organizations from acquiring political legitimacy and ideological acceptability by providing strong ideological foundation, but also made strenuous efforts to be more accommodative in their quest to establish an inclusive society. Organizational pluralism—which became an inalienable party-building mechanism for the Dravidian parties—thwarted, to a large extent, sectarian political parties from gaining a foothold in Tamil Nadu.

In this context, the BJP's efforts to vernacularize itself and sneak into the well-entrenched network of associations of the Tamil body politic are indeed formidable challenges. The foremost effort by the BJP is to establish an ideological compatibility between being a Hindu and being a Tamil. The move to prove that Tamil is not antithetical to the identity called 'Hindu' has not been an easy enterprise for the BJP. The celebration of Vinayaka Chaturthi (or Ganesh Puja) has been a key medium through which the BJP aimed to expand itself in the state.

Vernacularizing Hindutva and Inventing a Hindu Public Through 'Vinayaka Chaturthi' Festival

From the 1990s onwards, Vinayaka Chaturthi became a tension-generating affair in Tamil Nadu as this festival was organized either by the

BJP or other fringe elements working in tandem with BJP. The purpose of the festival was to mobilize people in support of the Hindutva ideology. Until the 1980s, Vinayaka Chaturthi was widely celebrated, with elaborate rituals, within people's homes. It was never a public event. By the early 1990s, it became an important public event for the RSS and its affiliated Hindu organizations. In Tamil Nadu, it was the Hindu Munnani (HM; Hindu Front) which spearheaded this event. Reliable information about the nature and caste/class composition of this organization still seems to be sparse; however, one can say that the HM's support base comprises diverse sections of the society (Fuller 1996).

During interviews conducted by this author, local BJP activists and RSS sympathizers confessed that the purpose of Vinayaka Chaturthi was to build Hindu consciousness. As the interviews progressed, their uncompromising prejudices against Christians and Muslims became quite obvious. A. Muthuraj, a store owner in the suburbs of Madurai city and a strong BJP sympathizer, remarked: 'Look at the Christians and Muslims, how organized they are; but we the Hindus are totally disorganized, only a patriotic Hindu unity will make our country a superpower in the global arena.' For him, celebrating Vinayaka Chaturthi was a way of actualizing that utopian notion of Hindu unity. He claimed that the more reach and influence Ganesh Puja would acquire, the stronger the country would become. To Muthuraj, celebrating Vinayaka Chaturthi was not merely for Hindu unity; rather it was equally about patriotism and nationalism.

Sekar alias Rajasekar—a middle-level staff member in a private bank—highlighted the hidden agenda of Hindutva in organizing the festival. An English-educated middle-class man in his mid-thirties, Sekar had been a BJP supporter for nearly a decade. The 'minority appeasement' policies of the successive governments, he claimed, moved him to support the BJP. When asked why communal disturbances surface in some areas of Tamil Nadu only during the time of Vinayaka Chaturthi, he elaborated:

The pseudo-secular parties and the media often highlight when one or two non-Hindus extend some help to the Hindu pilgrims during the Sabarimala or Palani Murugan festivals. But during Vinayaka Chaturthi, people are cynical and sarcastic. Vinayaka Chaturthi is truly an all-India festival. Unlike other Hindu temple festivals in Tamil Nadu, Lord Ganesh is a pan-Indian deity; Hindus from all regions and languages worship Him. Lord Ganesh is also an embodiment of the Indian spirit; that's why the anti-national/anti-Hindu elements create trouble.

As stated earlier, since the Vinayaka idol procession in Madurai was unknown until recently, BJP and its affiliated organizations worked tirelessly for its grand success. Asked what kind of slogans were raised during the procession, many interviewees stated that no Hindi slogans, such as '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*' (Hail Mother India) or '*Jai Shri Ram*' (Hail Shri Ram), were raised. The slogans raised instead were in Tamil and not so controversial, related to national unity, Hindu people's unity, saving the country from Islamic terrorism, and so on. In their activities and mobilizational repertoire, activists such as Sekar said that they avoided any resemblance with 'north India'. Obviously, their aim was to localize or vernacularize their appeal.

In nearly all of their meetings, one rarely came across the portraits of BJP's iconic leaders—Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Deen Dayal Upadhyay, or for that matter, the Guruji, M.S. Golwalkar. Instead, along with those of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani, the portraits of Subramaniya Bharathi, Bhagat Singh, Muthuramalinga Thevar, and B.R. Ambedkar were visible. The inclusion of Muthuramalinga Thevar is curious. 'When the secessionist Dravidianists were gaining ground in Tamil Nadu politics, it was none other than Muthuramalinga Thevar who firmly opposed their atheism and separatism', one of the party supporters asserted. Rajapandi—a BJP supporter from the locally dominant Piramalai Kallar caste—quoted Thevar's famous statement: 'Spiritualism and nationalism are my two eyes'.

Candid confession by Rajapandi that not only he but many others who supported the BJP might not actually know Mukherjee and Golwalkar was not lost on the BJP, which understood the local dynamics and never projected their 'all-India' leaders in Tamil Nadu. Instead, Subramaniya Bharathi and Muthuramalinga Thevar—the well-known 'Tamil' icons—adorned their party meetings and functions. Similarly, district-level as well state-level leaders of BJP always insisted on addressing public meetings in chaste Tamil—a legacy of Dravidianism. A striking difference between the north Indian and Tamil Nadu versions of the BJP is thus visible.

While many of the party supporters who were interviewed were unwilling to endorse the usual stand of the party to celebrate Sanskrit supremacy over other Indian languages, including Tamil, others felt that by saying no to learning Hindi, their generation had committed

a blunder. 'The Dravidian party leaders always spoke against Hindi but they did send their children to schools where Hindi was taught. Their hypocrisy has hampered the employment opportunities of many Tamil youth', a BJP supporter told me. In criticisms such as this, it was evident that knowing Hindi gave an extra advantage to the Tamil youth in search of employment opportunities outside Tamil Nadu.

However, the disappointment among the rank and file of the local BJP was quite visible when the BJP supporters said that 'Vinayaka Chaturthi is organized virtually by all Hindus in Tamil Nadu, but grand celebrations are not organized voluntarily by labour associations, lawyer associations, and government staff associations in their respective work places.' They also stated that during the Ganesh idol procession, slogans about the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Mathura temple dispute, uniform civil code, and abrogation of special status to Jammu and Kashmir were not usually welcomed by many. At the same time, they maintained that organizing festivals such as Vinayaka Chaturthi would play a vital role in galvanizing Hindu consciousness.

Since nationalism remains one of the fulcrums of the BJP, it is pertinent to know what attracts people to BJP in Tamil Nadu. Interviewees were least bothered about the party's core ideology and many had not read any literature authored by the BJP's celebrated figures. Therefore, one would be tempted to say that some local issues had likely encouraged them to come closer to the party. However, once the conscription had taken place, the supporters were asked to reorient themselves ideologically.

Caste Conflicts—The Precipitating Factor

When the HM appeared on the political landscape of Tamil Nadu in the early 1980s, the actual agenda was quite obvious. It aimed to protect the Hindu dharma. On 4 April 1981, a lesser-known Hyderabad-based Urdu newspaper—*Rahnuma-e-Deccan*—carried a story of 180 Dalit families converting to Islam in a small village called Meenakshipuram in the erstwhile Ramanathapuram district in southern Tamil Nadu. A few days after the story was published, a local Tamil press from Chennai published the news as headlines, which created ripples across the political spectrum in the country (Kalam 1990). Scores of leaders,

including the top BJP leaders, made a beeline to Meenakshipuram. The Dalits' resolve to bail themselves out of caste bondage by converting to other religions, especially Islam, was perceived as one of the biggest challenges to Hindutva. The HM, as the name itself unambiguously suggests, was desperate to vernacularize Hindutva ideology. It declared that the Hindu society was under severe threat and pleaded to all the Dalit families to revert to their 'roots'.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the conflict between Dalits and other dominant castes in many parts of Tamil Nadu had reached its peak. The anti-untouchability act became the bone of contention for many dominant castes. The Thevars, one of the dominant castes in southern Tamil Nadu, sought to repeal the act by organizing meetings on behalf of the Thevar Paeravai (Thevar Federation). Violent attacks against Dalits became a recurrent phenomenon. While attacking the Dalits, Muslim business establishments were also attacked.

Given the tacit understanding between Dalit organizations and Muslim groups, the dominant castes such as the Thevars resorted to a much broader scale of violence: "The pattern of looting and attack on Muslim shops has a close resemblance to the Coimbatore riots in 1998 that was led by the Hindu communal outfits such as the Hindu Munnani and Hindu Makkal Katchi. Tellingly, the posters of the Thevar Federation carried the symbol of "Om" and the *lotus*' (Jeyaranjan and Anandhi 1999: 15; emphasis mine). The new-found bonhomie between Dalits, represented by Puthiya Tamilagam (PT; New Tamil Land), and Muslims, represented by the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK; Tamil Nadu Muslim Progressive Federation), caused deepening tension among the dominant castes.³

The heightened conflicts between the Dalits and the locally dominant castes resulted in new forms of political realignment. Some of the dominant castes, such as the Thevars in southern Tamil Nadu, the Gounders

³ Names of the political parties could surprise many. For instance, Puthiya Tamilagam (PT) is the New Tamil Land. Muslims devised a party which is no longer Muslim League; it is TMMK—declaring themselves as descendants of the Dravidian legacy.

of western Tamil Nadu, and the Kallars of the Kaveri delta region, were at loggerheads with the Dalits as the new wave of Dalit assertion began to wreck the structure from within. Interestingly, all the above-mentioned dominant castes are major supporters of the AIADMK. In the recently concluded 2016 assembly elections, the AIADMK retained its electoral strength in the south, west, and Kaveri delta regions. Also, the AIADMK under Jayalalithaa remained Hindutva's favoured party. The HM or other Hindutva groups always extended their support to many of Jayalalithaa's political moves as these groups believed that she would help the Brahmanical Hindu spirit to revive itself (Fuller 2001: 1607).

A formidable support from some dominant communities to the AIADMK heightened antagonism towards Dalits in their subregional turf. When the anti-Brahmin agitations turned the DMK into a party of the non-Brahmin elites, the split in the DMK provided space for the intermediary castes to rally behind the AIADMK. Since its inception, the AIADMK had been a rallying point for some dominant communities, such as Thevars, Gounders, and Kallars. Their aspirations did not find enough space within the DMK. The AIADMK under Jayalalithaa went overboard to articulate the aspirations of its loyal caste groups in the changing power structure. Now with heightened antagonism towards Dalits, these communities needed strong political support, which the AIADMK provided. However, if these communities find their interests being articulated by any other party, it is quite likely they would unhesitatingly gravitate towards the new political dispensation. Given the current political scenario, the BJP may take advantage of that new dynamic.

The assumption that the non-Brahmin elites—the DMK's mass base to a great extent—would eventually turn towards the BJP if the latter appropriated some of DMK's much-hyped slogans, such as those related to social justice and Tamil antiquity, is certainly untenable (Pandian 2000: 1806). In western Tamil Nadu, where the Gounders are a dominant community, the influence of Brahmanical Hinduism is almost negligible as the region historically never encountered the supremacy of great tradition/Brahmanical religious practices. In southern Tamil Nadu—AIADMK's strong support base—the Thevar community was never historically under the direct subjugation of Brahmins. It is basically the non-Brahmin elites who had always had an antagonistic relation with Brahmins in the sociocultural and political arenas. Therefore, the DMK's core supporters have every reason to reject the BJP as

an alternative political dispensation to advocate their aspirations. In contrast, AIADMK's core vote bank—Thevars and Gounders—would find it smooth to transfer their loyalty to a party such as the BJP, especially in the post-Jayalalithaa era of Tamil Nadu politics. Among these communities, the BJP is thus accelerating its expansionist strategies. Appropriating local icons has become a campaign practice in the BJP.

Pan-Indianizing Tamil Culture—New Social Engineering and the BJP's Madurai Conference

In the revised order of 2016, the Tamil Nadu government announced 76 castes groups designated as Scheduled Castes or SCs (Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission 2016). Of these, however, only a few were actually dominant both in terms of numbers and access to resources. In southern Tamil Nadu, the Pallar caste among the Dalits is a significant force to be reckoned with, whereas in the northern part of the state, the Parayar community holds a similar position within the Dalit category. After the Lok Sabha elections in 2014, in which the much-hyped Modi wave did not yield greater dividends, the BJP attempted to unleash a new form of social engineering to carve out a political space for itself. In a highly competitive political atmosphere, almost all major caste groups have their own exclusive political parties. For example, the Vanniyars have Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) in northern Tamil Nadu. The Pallars of southern Tamil Nadu have also been aspiring to have their own political articulations. The PT is one such attempt under the leadership of Dr Krishnasamy.

The BJP's attempts to cull support from across caste groups seem quite unlikely to succeed as caste identity has become very formidable. Thus, a new political manoeuvring becomes inevitable to entrench into the caste-based body politic in southern Tamil Nadu. In this context, in association with the Devendra Charitable Trust, the BJP organized a conference in Madurai in August 2015. S. Gurumurthy, leader of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (an RSS frontal organization), was instrumental in organizing this conference. The BJP's national president, Amit Shah, went all the way to Madurai to address the gathering. While endorsing the organizers' long-time demand of designating seven castes—Pallar, Kudumbar, Pannadi, Kaalaadi, Kadayar, Devendrakulatar, and Vadhiriyaar—under one single SC tag as Devendrakula Vellalar, Shah and the Hindutva organizations resolved to make inroads into southern Tamil Nadu (*Hindu* 2015)

At that meeting, Amit Shah lauded the Devendrakula Vellalar community members for their initiative to be categorized as 'Descendants of Lord Indira' and for taking pride in their caste. He further said, 'I have heard of caste groups that try to get categorized lower down on the social status ladder to obtain benefits, but here is one that seeks social recognition as a caste of higher status' (*Times of India* 2015). The real political adventure by the BJP was to have representatives of the four dominant caste groups, namely, Nadars, Reddiyars, Naickers, and Thevars, to endorse publicly the community's demand to be designated as Devendrakula Vellalar (*New Indian Express* 2015).

The significance of this move is quite clear. A community which has been subjugated by the dominant castes now asserts itself politically; the slight upward mobility for this community comes along with a sense of the Sanskritization process as the community members want a Sanskritized name for themselves. This would most likely be followed with elaborate ritual practices during local temple festivals in which the community wants to have a say. Now with BJP endorsing their aspirations politically, the party's approval for its cultural/social reorientation towards a more Sanskritized lifestyle would also be inevitable. However, there are several organizations working for the welfare of the Pallar community within the community itself. Many of them have not endorsed the process of sanskritization. Leader of the PT Dr Krishnasamy—an important voice within the Pallar community—had asked the state unit of the BJP to clarify why the party supported the resolution (*Hindu* 2015). Suspicion about the ulterior agenda behind BJP's new adventure was quite palpable among many within the Dalit communities.

Way back in 2003, Jayalalithaa's AIADMK government banned animal/bird sacrifice in Hindu temples. The executive order was based on the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Cruelties to Animals Act, 1950. While many parties severely condemned the order, some supported it. Parties opposed to the order claimed that animal/bird sacrifices had been part of the non-Brahmin communities' religious practices and Jayalalithaa wanted to impose her hidden Brahmanical agenda. Contrary to popular expectation, S. Gurumurthy, an RSS ideologue, strongly criticized the order. Gurumurthy said: 'It is not the culture of Bharat to assert that this is the only way god has to be worshiped; or these are gods and others are satan. That is the tradition of Christianity and Islam' (cited in Pandian 2005: 2314).

In contrast, the BJP supported the ban. To seek divine blessing for Atal Bihari Vajpayee's return to power, a BJP functionary sacrificed two goats at a local temple in Madurai. He lost the party position within BJP. Since all major political parties—the DMK, the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the Congress—opposed the ban of animal sacrifice in Hindu temples, the BJP extended its full support to the ban. Through the debate on the ban, the BJP wanted to define Hindu identity. Both the secularists and religious bigots brought rituals, temples, and religious texts into the public domain—a moment which the BJP was waiting to seize for its political advantage. Such a moment facilitated the BJP's efforts to vernacularize itself as some of its local leaders claimed to be vanguards of Hindu religious texts.



The contemporary political structure of Tamil Nadu is premised upon a powerful and near-hegemonic discourse of non-Brahmanism and Tamil antiquity. The political assertion of non-Brahmin castes and the unequivocal celebration of Tamil language pride have been well knitted. This has led to the emergence of an indomitable political community. This community's collective consciousness seeks to define the sociocultural 'other' in terms of the latter's affinity to Brahmanism and Sanskrit tradition. When an organization or a political party is perceived to be closer to the ideological orientations of both Brahmanism and the celebration of Sanskrit language, it becomes the 'other' in Tamil political culture. Thus, the popular Tamil nationalist sentiments and the Dravidian legacy have offered enormous resistance to the spread of the BJP in Tamil Nadu as the party is perceived by a large section of the masses as a party of Brahmanical values and a custodian of Sanskrit language.

The BJP's electoral performance for the last three decades in Tamil Nadu has unambiguously displayed the abysmal approval rate for the party. Thus, the party's desperation to transform itself to be an acceptable political party remains quite elusive. Given this challenge, the BJP has devised a new mechanism. In order to shed its apparent north Indian image, the party has been busy vernacularizing its campaign strategies, picking up issues which are sentimentally Tamil. It has

been projecting local Tamil leaders, who were part of the anti-colonial struggle but not connected to Hindutva ideology even remotely, to transform its image into a Tamilized party. Since the Dravidian legacy has established Tamils as a political community where all Tamil speaking people, irrespective of their religious affiliations, become part of it, the BJP's desperation to create communal cleavage by orchestrating communal riots did not yield the expected electoral dividends, except in a few constituencies. Even in those constituencies, the party could not win on its own organizational strength, but managed to gain sizeable popular support base.

It was only in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections that the BJP won a few seats due to its electoral alliance with two of the major Dravidian parties in the state. Simultaneously, it has tried to pan-Indianize some of the important Tamil iconic figures. This process effectively neutralizes the Dravidian parties' hegemonic grip over those iconic figures. Once this grip is loosened, the party can be expected to manufacture a different narrative about these Tamil icons as seminal contributors to the Indian civilizational legacy, rather than Tamil cultural and linguistic antiquity. This two-way process is expected to benefit the BJP.

Unlike in north India, the BJP's electoral journey in Tamil Nadu has not been impressive. However, from a meagre 1 per cent vote share in 1989, it reached 5 per cent in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections; one cannot therefore write the BJP off. Given its very weak organizational structure in many parts of the state and its highly fragile ideological foundation, its electoral future is likely to be a turbulent one. The *modus operandi* which it has relied upon—'vernacularization' and 'pan-Indianizing'—is expected to change the electoral fortunes of the party in the state. However, given the robust stature of the Dravidian legacy, the party's shrewd moves might go futile.

It is nevertheless necessary to observe the performances of not only the BJP but also of other parties, including the Dravidian parties. In a highly competitive political landscape, carving out its own unique space may be an arduous task for the BJP. However, there is always the likelihood of any of the major Dravidian parties merging with the BJP in the near future. The Dravidian parties have given enough space for several caste groups to assert themselves, both politically and economically. The inherent nature of clientalism in the Dravidian parties would

soon reach its saturation point. Then, the inevitable option for those castes is to embrace a broader ideological orientation. At that moment, the BJP's very aggressive pan-Indian articulations may come closer to the interests of those caste groups. However, there is no guarantee that either regionalism or pan-Indian nationalism would be a permanent force to reckon with.

When the regional bourgeoisie exhaust all their exploitative avenues, it is logical to expect them to go 'national'. Thus, the Dravidian parties—which have been best known for protecting the interests of the regional elites—may lose their political relevance when aggressive pan-Indian market policies get intensified. It is therefore logical to expect that caste groups which were patronizing regionalism may shift their loyalty to a party known for protecting pan-Indian interest groups.

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HINDUTVA'S REACH OUT TO MUSLIMS IN THE 2014 ELECTIONS

A Historical Analysis

Mohammad Reyaz

With electoral mobilization reaching its climax in the first quarter of 2014, Delhi was dotted with posters saying: '*Na doori na khaai, Modi hamara bhai*' (Muslims have no differences with Narendra Modi, our brother). Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind (henceforth Bharatiya Janata Party's [BJP] Jamaat), not to be confused with Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, had put up those posters.¹ The BJP's Jamaat is one among many organizations that the saffron party and its ideological fountainhead, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), have been promoting for many years in order to 'reach out' to the Muslim community. Besides the minority cell of the party, Muslim organizations such as the All India Organization of Imams of Mosques (AIOIM) and the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) also worked to make the BJP acceptable to Muslims. The MRM's mentor Indresh Kumar is a senior RSS functionary. (Though not formally charged, Kumar was linked to

¹ To avoid any confusion over the similarity of names, this chapter will henceforth refer to this Jamaat led by Maulana Suhaib Qasmi as BJP's Jamaat and use JUH for the original Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind.

the 2007 Samjhauta Express blast.) Individuals such as businessman Zafar Sareshwala and journalist-turned-politician M.J. Akbar were also engaged in such mobilizations.

The BJP scored a landslide victory in the 2014 elections. They won 282 seats by themselves. A grand total of the BJP and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners' seat tally summed up to 336 out of 545 seats (*Firstpost* 2014). So, did these overtures towards Muslim voters really play a role in helping the BJP win? Or did the BJP win without Muslim votes? Based on my fieldwork as a ground reporter during the 2013 assembly elections in Rajasthan and Delhi and the 2014 parliamentary elections, as well as interviews with some political leaders and other stakeholders of the aforementioned organizations, along with a perusal of their literature, this chapter aims to examine three key questions. First, the saffron brigade often accuses other parties of 'pseudo-secularism' and 'minority appeasement'. Where do these initiatives fit in their larger politics vis-à-vis seeing Muslims as the 'other'? Second, are Hindutva leaders willing to broaden their ideological and political horizon, or do they still see Muslims through their old narrow prism? How do Muslim leaders associated with the Sangh Parivar perceive their identity vis-à-vis the saffron party? Finally, were BJP's outreach programmes towards Muslims during the 2014 general election effective?

To answer these questions, I have divided this chapter into three parts. In the first part, while briefly describing the Hindutva ideology, I historically situate its relation to and engagement with Muslims before the 2014 general elections. In the second part, I focus on the run-up to the last general elections, assessing the Sangh Parivar's reach among Muslims and the role of the BJP's Muslim leaders. The conclusion emerging from the analysis, in the third part, is that despite 'Muslim fronts' being marginal in the BJP, they are increasingly becoming a critical asset for the party. Clearly, BJP's move to co-opt Muslims in the 2014 elections was not its first attempt. Its antecedents are traceable to earlier elections, most notably during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led alliance government. In fact, the antecedents go even further. To comprehend them holistically, a brief account of the RSS ideology and history vis-à-vis Muslims is in order here.

The RSS, Hindutva and Muslims

For the Hindu nationalists of colonial India, as depicted in Bankim Chandra's *Ananda Math*, British colonizers were not necessarily their enemy; but Muslims were perceived as the 'other' (Noorani 1999). This exclusivist nationalism was carried forth by the RSS and its ideologue, Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar (1906–1973). Established in 1925, the RSS aspired to carry India to the 'pinnacle of glory by reorganizing the entire society and protecting the Hindu Dharma' (Rss.org 2012). At best, Golwalkar was willing to give Muslims the status of 'second-class' citizens:

The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge with the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights. (Golwalkar 1939: 104–5)

According to Hindutva ideologues, there is no distinction between Indian and Hindu culture, with religious minorities eventually 'assimilated by their paying allegiance to the symbols and mainstays of the majority as those of the nation' (Jaffrelet 2007: 5). The long-term project of the Sangh Parivar is to create a Hindu *rashtra* in which Muslims automatically become the 'principal enemy' (Kanungo 2003: 21). Muslim minorities—or their alleged 'foreign' ancestors—have often been vilified in the dominant metanarrative. Positing that 'hegemonic discourse in India has corrupted the history', Paul Brass (2004: 3) argues that 'in this discourse, Muslims in India are seen as conquerors destroying a great Hindu civilization, ignoring the fact that probably 95 per cent of the Muslim population of the country is of indigenous origin'.

Such a conceptualization of India resulted in pogroms, such as Nellie (1983), Hashimpura (1987), and Gujarat (2002), and riots across India, such as in Bhagalpur (1989), those after the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992, in Muzaffarnagar (2013), and others. In many ways, Golwalkar's exclusivist ideology still discernibly echoes in speeches of contemporary Hindutva leaders. Victims

of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots have recounted to this author that anti-Muslim slogans, such as '*Musalman ke do hi asthan, Pakistan ya qabristan*' (Muslims have only two places, Pakistan or graveyard), were chanted by rioters. Integral to the Hindutva ideology or 'Hindu nationalism' is the issue of Muslims' loyalty to India. In the aftermath of the Partition, even several Congress leaders, opinion makers, as well as newspapers had openly asked Muslims to refrain from 'disruptive tactics', prove their loyalty by chanting 'Vande Mataram', and even lay down their lives against Pakistan, if needed (Pandey 1999: 620). Even the first deputy prime minister of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875–1950), had no qualms in openly telling Indian Muslims that the 'mere declaration of loyalty to Indian Union will not help them at this critical juncture. They must give a proof of their declaration' (cited in Hasan 1987: 73; also see 'Introduction').

Minority Politics

In the face of such a hegemonic narrative after the Partition, Muslim leadership in India attempted to adapt itself to the changed political situation. They made a conscious effort not to antagonize the 'forces of *Hindu Raj*' and hoped for 'protected minority' status and not equality (Afzal 2014: 8–9). After the initial chaos following the Partition, the Congress party, under the visionary leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), appeared to be accommodative towards different sections of the society. Muslim leaders who had aligned with the Muslim were often mocked as *sarkari Musalman* (establishment Muslims), as they ignored community issues and needs in lieu of personal gains (Ashraf 2015). Interestingly, when Babri Masjid was demolished on 6 December 1992, not a single Muslim minister out of three—C.K. Jafar Sharief, Ghulam Nabi Azad, and Salman Khurshid—in the then P.V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress government or any Muslim Member of Parliament (MP) resigned in protest.² Similarly, no minister or Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) offered his/her resignation or openly demanded justice for the victims of 2013

² The lone Congress leader to publicly leave the party was, ironically, M.J. Akbar, who joined the BJP in 2014 and later became a minister.

Muzaffarnagar riots (Uttar Pradesh [UP] assembly had 69 Muslim MLAs, 43 from then ruling Samajwadi Party [SP]) (Ahmed 2012). In fact, over the years, several government-commissioned reports and independent studies have confirmed the socio-economic and political exclusion of Muslims.³ While majority of Muslims remain poor, with limited access to education or other developmental projects, Muslim leadership often busies itself with issues such as personal laws or triple talaq (divorce), rather than raising those that will tangibly benefit the community.

Back in the 1970s, when a strong alternative to the Congress emerged for the first time during the rule of Indira Gandhi, several popular and aspiring leaders, including many Muslim leaders, deserted the Congress to rally under the leadership of the Janata Party's Jayaprakash Narayan (1902–1979). Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), the predecessor of the BJP and erstwhile political front of the Sangh Parivar, too, became part of the confederation that helped in mainstreaming the Hindutva party in many ways, as their leaders shared power in the post-Emergency government of Morarji Desai.

As the Sangh Parivar participated in mainstream politics for the first time through its BJS members, they faced the 'dilemma' of choosing between pragmatism of 'power politics and ideological purity' (Kanungo 2003: 188). The parting of BJS from the coalition led to its reincarnation as the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980. It was a short-lived 'synthesis of ideology and realpolitik' under the presidency of Vajpayee and was also reflected in the BJP's new flag that was half saffron and half green. The Hindutva party has always claimed to be 'secular' in the true sense and scorned what L.K. Advani famously termed as 'pseudo-secularism' of other political parties, including the Congress, aimed at a particular 'vote-bank' and 'minority appeasement'.⁴ The BJP, in contrast, spoke of 'positive secularism'

³ Refer to Sachar Committee Report (2006), Kundu Committee Report (2014), Living Realities of Muslims of West Bengal (2016), and other similar works.

⁴ The word 'pseudo-secularism' was probably used first by Anthony Elenjmittam in *Philosophy and Action of the R. S. S. for the Hind Swaraj* (1951: 188–9, in Aravindan 2016) to refer to Nehru's politics, but it was L.K. Advani who popularized it later.

and, in 1983, its national executive even passed a resolution on 'communal harmony and social cohesion'. Ironically, it was the Congress under Indira that played the Hindutva card more visibly from 1982 onwards, thereby forcing BJP to go back to the Hindutva ideology after winning only two seats in the 1984 general elections. Advani replaced Vajpayee as the party president in 1986. He vehemently opposed the 'minorityism' for promoting 'minority complex' which, according to Advani, was both against national and minority interest (Kanungo 2003: 189, 198–9).

It should be mentioned here that the earlier incarnation of Hindutva—the BJS—had a Muslim face in Arif Baig (1935–2016), who became famous after defeating Congress leader Shankar Dayal Sharma (1918–1999) on the Janata Party ticket in the post-Emergency elections of 1977. Baig went on to become a cabinet minister in the Morarji Desai government (Khan 2013). He was also one of the founding members of the BJP. At the peak of the Ram Mandir movement in 1989, he won the Lok Sabha election from Betul in Madhya Pradesh. However, before he died in 2004, it was Sikander Bakht who was the best-known Muslim face of the BJP (Radhakrishnan 2004). In an interview, Bakht had said, referring to India, 'If this was not a Hindu-dominated country, I would be living in a theocratic state' (Bhaumik 1998). He began his political career with the Congress, and when he married a Brahmin girl in 1952, the Hindu nationalists got a pretext to attack his Qureshi community (engaged in the business of meat), who till date are at the receiving end of communal politics and cow vigilantism (Parveen 2016: 166). Ironically, while alleged love jihad is one of the core issues for the Hindutva forces, many of their Muslim faces, including Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Shah Nawaz Hussain, are married to Hindus. Nonetheless, Bakht was a popular Qureshi leader, who defected to the rebel Congress group in 1969, and was jailed during the Emergency. Later, he won the general election in 1977 on a Janata Party ticket from Chandni Chowk and became a minister in the Desai-led government. Like Baig, Bakht was also a Muslim founding member of the BJP, and he later rose to become the vice president of the party. For seven years, he even served as the leader of the opposition in the Parliament's Upper House. A critical turn in the BJP's fortune came when it took up the cause of Ram Janmabhoomi in 1989, which had been so far spearheaded by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Journalist Pankaj Pachauri (1990) noted: 'After loitering around in the arena of mainstream politics like a vagrant child, the BJP has finally returned to the RSS family fold.' Advani's *rath yatra* (tour on a Toyota driven bus, designed like ancient chariots in Hindu epics) (September–October 1990) played a big role in creating a communal frenzy in the country that eventually resulted in the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992, and consequent rioting in several parts of the country. Although the symbolic Muslim faces remained in oblivion during this period, they did not ditch the party.

The biggest beneficiaries of communal–political turmoil and simultaneous Mandalization⁵ of Indian polity were regional parties such as the SP, the Janata Dal, and the Telugu Desam Party, which offered Muslims a small share of power and security in lieu of votes. In the 1990s, when the Congress once again began to crumble and the BJP consolidated its base, Muslims continued to stick to those regional parties.

BJP's Muslims

According to Mukul Kesavan (2013), the Congress is 'a pluralist party that is opportunistically communal', but the BJP is 'an ideologically communal ... party that is opportunistically "secular"'. The saffron party's attempts to attract Muslims stemmed from the realization that Hindutva alone would not give the BJP electoral majority. In the run-up to the 1996 general elections, the BJP established their Minority Morcha under the leadership of Baig (Afzal 2014: 322). Their office-bearers were mostly Muslims. For example, in December 2015, except for two Christian members, all were Muslims. In December 1997, former national captain of the hockey team and Congress MP, Aslam Sher Khan, and some other state leaders joined the party (Khan and Rajasthan's Abrar Ahmad left the BJP to rejoin the Congress in 1999). However, the BJP could still get only 161 seats in the 1996 Lok Sabha elections (Kantha 1997). They did emerge as the single-largest party, but fell short of the majority mark. Sensing that hardliner Advani was

⁵ Caste-based politics of leaders of backward castes seen as rebellion against the dominance of upper castes, referred to as Mandalization of politics after the Mandal Commission that recommended caste-based reservation to fight historical discriminations.

not acceptable to their prospective regional allies, the most 'liberal' face of the party—the purported 'right man in the wrong party'—Vajpayee was sworn in as the prime minister in May 1996. However, he, too, failed to get the majority support as BJP still remained untouchable for the 'secular' parties. Thirteen days later, he resigned before facing the floor test, and subsequently the United Front government was formed. It was then that the BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) prior to the 1998 general elections, on the basis of a common minimum programme (CMP) that temporarily kept the three core, but contentious, issues of the saffron party—Article 370, Ram Mandir, and uniform civil code—in cold storage. Many saw this as a dilution of the BJP's agenda, a compromise to remain in power. In fact, two successive alliance governments up to 2004 appeared to have worked fairly well, except the major blemish of the 2002 Gujarat pogrom.

Vajpayee had made Bakht a minister in his short-lived government in 1996. He served as minister and leader of the Rajya Sabha in two successive NDA governments from 1998 till 2002, when his term in the Upper House expired. Later, Bakht became the governor of Kerala. He was also given the second-highest civilian award, Padma Vibhushan, in 2000. In the first NDA government (1998), besides Bakht, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi (who had won from Rampur) was also sworn in as a minister of state. In the 1999 general elections, Naqvi lost but another Muslim candidate, Shahnawaz Hussain, won from the Muslim-dominated Kishanganj constituency in Bihar. Being the only Muslim minister from BJP after Bakht, he was elevated to the cabinet rank in 2003, a year after the Gujarat pogrom and months before the next general elections of 2004. After Baig and Bakht—both now deceased—Naqvi and Hussain remain important Muslim faces of the party.

Rapprochement with Muslims

Once the NDA government was formed in 1999, Muslim rapprochement deepened, because of the alliance compulsion and Vajpayee being very conscious of his image as a statesman. He promoted himself as the BJP's liberal face, and did not mind wearing the skullcap or hosting iftar feasts. He was an MP from Lucknow, which has a sizeable Muslim population. This was also the time when both the BJP and the RSS were investing considerably in influencing wider sections of the society.

Once in power, the BJP and Hindutva forces did not shy away from using appeasement tactics. It should be reiterated here that sarkari Musalman, earlier associated with the Congress, persisted during the NDA regime too. While ordinary Muslims remained as vulnerable as before, if not more, some 'Muslim leaders' and eminent personalities extended their support to the 'party in power'.

The BJP consequently tried to maintain a distance, at least publicly, with the VHP. They spoke of accepting the court verdict on the title suit in the Babri Masjid–Ram Mandir land dispute. They also attempted, unsuccessfully, to have back-channel talks with different stakeholders for an amicable solution. Similarly, on uniform civil code, they assured of a decision only after building a consensus (Afzal 2014: 332–410). However, due to mutual distrust and ideological conflict, it did not materialize. Another critical turn in Indian polity came in 2002 with the Gujarat pogrom, when Vajpayee had reminded Gujarat's then chief minister Narendra Modi of his *rajdharm* (duties of a king) (Majumdar 2011), only to retract later. However, he prevailed over the conservative section of the party to nominate A.P.J. Abdul Kalam (1931–2015), a Muslim scientist famous for developing India's missiles, as the president of India (2002–7). After the Gujarat pogrom, some senior RSS functionaries hoped to go 'mainstream' and dispel 'false propaganda' against the Sangh Parivar. To end this, a group of 'nationalist Muslims' and RSS functionaries assembled in Delhi on Eid Milan, in December 2002, and formed the MRM. This event was organized by Padma Shri Muzaffar Hussain and his wife Nafisa. Hussain, a senior journalist, was then the vice president of the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL), while Nafisa was a member of the National Commission for Women, Delhi. The inaugural meeting of the MRM was attended by K.S. Sudarshan (the RSS *sarsanghchalak* [head of the RSS]), M.G. Vaidya (RSS ideologue), Indresh Kumar and Madan Das (both senior RSS leaders), Maulana Jameel Iliyasi (president of AIOIM), Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (chairman of Islamic Markaz, Delhi), Maulana Mukarram (*Shahi* (royal) Imam of Delhi's Fatehpuri Masjid), several Sufi scholars, and many educationists. The organization was initially named as 'Rashtravadi Muslim Andolan: Ek Nayi Raah' (Nationalist Muslim Movement: A New Way). It was later renamed as the Muslim Rashtriya Manch in March 2005.

Though it was a 'collective initiative', Indresh Kumar is considered to be the architect of MRM. A glimpse of how the MRM approaches Muslims can be gleaned from this extract from its website:

When we share the same ancestors, culture and motherland where is the scope for confrontation? Once the Muslims and Hindus understand and realize the spirit and soul of India, all artificial barriers will automatically vanish.... The Muslim Rashtriya Manch ushered in a new era among the Indian Muslims. A new thinking has emerged amongst them who now link up their future with the future of this country. With this the image of RSS as diehard, communal, fundamentalist Hindu organization began to fade and some Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders started coming openly in embracing RSS as their 'true friend' and Indresh Kumar as their *messiah*. (MRM 2016; emphasis mine)

The 2004 General Elections

On the eve of the 2004 general elections, some Muslim intellectuals formed another pro-BJP platform, 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Himayat Committee' (Committee to Support Atal Bihari Vajpayee; hereafter committee). The committee comprised Khawaja Iftikar Ahmed (chairman of All India Muslim Majlis-e-Shura and principal, Senior Secondary School, Aligarh Muslim University [AMU], Aligarh), Mahmoodur Rahman (former Indian Administrative Service [IAS] officer and former vice chancellor, AMU), Manjoor Ahmed (former Indian Police Service [IPS] officer and the then vice-chancellor of Dr Ambedkar University, Agra), Dr A.A. Khan (former IAS officer), and many Muslim professors of the AMU, University of Delhi, Jamia Millia Islamia, and Jawaharlal Nehru University (Mohan 2004). Wahiduddin Khan and Jamil Ahmad Ilyasi, who had participated in the inaugural meeting of the MRM, were also members of the committee. The presence of Sudheendra Kulkarni, the then officer on special duty to Prime Minister Vajpayee, and Tirlochan Singh, the then chairman of the National Minorities Commission, at the committee meeting held in Delhi indicated direct support from the BJP-led government. Iftikar Ahmed, the convener of the committee, believed that after India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, it was only Vajpayee who had 'succeeded in winning the hearts of Muslims'. Khan had urged for a 'political U turn' for Muslims (Imam 2004). The committee members embarked upon 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Himayat Caravan', a 17-day bus tour in

the Muslim-dominated areas of UP. Vajpayee addressed some meetings along the way and stressed the need for Hindu–Muslim unity (Afzal 2014: 322). Established in 1976, AIOIM also worked to promote the BJP. Reminding how the so-called secular parties had betrayed Muslims, the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Ahmed Shah Bukhari, spoke of a ‘new mindset’ and urged for *sulah* (reconciliation) (Salam 2004). The Shahi Imam of Kolkata’s Tipu Sultan Mosque, Maulana Nurur Rahman Barkati,⁶ was also an invitee for the committee meeting in Kolkata, but he opted out at the last minute. Senior Congress leader Najma Heptullah⁷ and Arif Mohammad Khan, a key Congress leader who later joined the Janata Dal and subsequently the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), also joined the BJP. Khan unsuccessfully contested the 2004 elections on a BJP ticket. Commenting on these developments, senior journalist Harish Khare wrote:

After six years of benign Vajpayee leadership, combined with the bitter lesson that was administered to the minorities in Gujarat after the Godhra massacre, the Muslim community as a whole can be presumed to have realised the futility of giving offence to the majority community.... The unstated assumption is that the matters have been so arranged that a section of the Muslim community is willing to change its views and preferences on terms dictated by the Sangh Parivar. On its part, the Parivar’s ‘take it or leave it’ approach towards Muslims remains unchanged. (Khare 2004)

Nonetheless, the ‘India Shining’ campaign of 2004 failed as voters favoured the slogan ‘Congress *ka haath, aam aadmi ke saath*’ (Congress’ [symbol and symbolic] hand, with the common man). Thus, despite fatwa and all acts of ‘rapprochement’ by the BJP, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) won the elections. The BJP had assiduously promoted Vajpayee as a moderate face right from the beginning. As he aged, Advani, who had the image

⁶ Maulana Barkati is known for his proximity to the Trinamool Congress’ Mamata Banerjee, who was then an NDA partner.

⁷ Heptullah, grand-niece of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was one sarkari Musalman of the Congress who was a member of the Upper House from 1980 onwards, but shifted allegiance in 2004.

of a hardliner, the 'iron man', was promoted as the new 'consensus candidate' for the 2009 elections.⁸ To reposition himself as a more inclusive leader, he went to Pakistan in 2005 and praised Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948). During his Karachi visit, he called the man held responsible for the Partition of India 'secular' and an 'ambassador of Hindu–Muslim unity' (Ramaseshan 2005). This statement angered the RSS (Vyas 2005) and despite the efforts made, the NDA still lost ground to the UPA in 2009. Despite his defeat, Advani still fathomed a chance and continued working on his image makeover. With the BJP continually losing ground on the national front, the Gujarat chief minister rose in stature and tripped Advani. Meanwhile, two consecutive defeats (2004 and 2009) made people think that the BJP's Muslims had been unsuccessful in reaching out to the community, thereby reducing them to remain as fringe elements within the Hindutva party.

Vikas Purush Modi Emerges as a National Leader

As the chief minister of Gujarat, Modi had earned prominence for his 'action–reaction' theory on the 2002 Gujarat riots, and built his politics primarily on anti-Muslim rhetoric (Khetan 2011). *India Today* described him as 'hero of hatred' (29 April 2002) and 'master divider' (6 January 2003) (*India Today* n.d.). Though never directly charged in any court of law, the taint of 2002 still remains on him. As summarized by the apex court in its observation in 2004: 'The modern day Neros were looking elsewhere when the Best Bakery and innocent children and helpless women were burning, and were probably deliberating how the perpetrators of the crime can be protected' (Venkatesan 2004). Modi made it a point to never visit relief camps such as Juhapura, which were installed after the riots. Much later, he began promoting himself

⁸ The right-wing Hindutva politics is modelled in such a dichotomous way that in contrast to one leader as a hardliner, another appears relatively moderate and liberal, and hence acceptable. Advani made Vajpayee appear 'liberal'. Later, Advani became acceptable in comparison to Modi by NDA allies; even liberal columnists began eulogizing him. Similarly, the rise of Yogi Adityanath and other fringe groups have made Modi appear 'statesman-like'. All this while, what had once been considered fringe gradually got streamlined and 'acceptable'.

as the *Vikas Purush* (development man), an image he used during the 2014 elections (see Chapter 4). Once elevated as a national leader, the fringe Muslim fronts within BJP began promoting an inclusive image of Modi.

In June 2010, the BJP organized a two-day national executive meet in Patna, Bihar. A day before Modi's visit, full-page advertisements were published in various newspapers as follows: 'Muslims in Gujarat enjoy better education, employment opportunities, financial stability, health facilities, infrastructure.... Muslims in the land of Modi are prosperous and enjoying a better life.' One of the photos used in the advertisement, showing Muslim girls learning computers in Gujarat, however, was a 2008 photograph from Azamgarh, UP (Falahi 2010). In 2011, Modi organized the made-for-TV *sadbhavana* (goodwill) fast in Ahmedabad which backfired after he refused to wear the skullcap offered by one of the clerics greeting him (*Times of India* 2011). In June 2013, at the behest of Zafar Sareshwala, the Citizens for Accountable Governance (CAG) invited about 30 leaders from the minority community to speak at a youth conclave, which Modi attended. Though most of the Muslim leaders refused to attend, few did turn up, including retired IAS officer Syed Zafar Mahmood, also former officer on special duty with the Sachar Committee and president of Zakat Foundation of India. Mahmood posed some uncomfortable questions in his presentation (Reyaz 2013a). In Delhi, the BJP used the 'development plank' to woo Muslims, where Vijay Goel greeted the audience with *Assalam-o-alaikum* (the Islamic greeting) and talked of *Ganga-Jamuni Tahzeeb*⁹ (Ali 2013).

BJP's Reach Out to Muslims during the 2014 elections

Once Modi overcame opposition within the party, he was acknowledged as the prime ministerial candidate of the NDA, except by Bihar's Janata Dal (United) (JD[U]) which opted out of the alliance (and rejoined in July 2017). The BJP, however, balanced the JD(U) loss with the return of Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (LJP).

⁹ Ganga-Jamuni Tahzeeb: Syncretic culture that flourished in northern India due to the coming together of ancient Hindu culture and Islamic culture of Persians and Mughals, so named after the two famous rivers whose valleys comprise most of the important urban centres of north India.

Ironically, Paswan had ditched the NDA for the UPA after the 2002 Gujarat riots. The BJP went into an 'overdrive to win Muslim hearts' in its goal of winning '272-plus' seats (Shah 2014). It purportedly identified 100 seats where Muslims votes were sizeable. Muslim fronts floated by the BJP worked hard to give Modi a facelift. Gujarat's Asifa Khan, a former confidante of Congress leader Ahmed Patel, became the minority face of BJP (S. Ahmed 2014). Sareshwala, too, became a regular fixture in Delhi's political circles. In the run-up to the elections, he organized several programmes—often in collaboration with nondescript organizations, in different Muslim pockets. A newspaper report observed: 'While not many in the BJP may be optimistic of these "outreach" plans influencing the Muslim vote, the party is aiming at a strategy to mitigate the community's distrust towards it and its PM candidate' (Shah 2014). Modi reportedly told his party workers: 'We should not divide communities but ensure all sections are represented' (*Times of India* 2013).

The 2014 manifesto of the BJP promised equal opportunity, 'peaceful and secure environment, where there is no place for either the perpetrators or exploiters of fear', besides education and jobs for Muslims, particularly girls, without 'discrimination' (Reyaz 2014a). While in 1998 the BJP had talked of 'One Nation, One People and One Culture', its manifesto in 2014 resolved to preserve 'the rich culture and heritage of India's minority communities; alongside their social and economic empowerment' (Reyaz 2014a; also see Chapter 11). Once it became clear that the BJP/NDA might win and form the government, several groups and individuals began realigning themselves with them. Much to the displeasure of leaders such as Naqvi, JD(U) leader Sabir Ali changed his tune to praise Modi (*Times of India* 2014). Monazir Hassan of JD(U), too, joined the BJP (expelled in 2015 allegedly for 'anti-party' activities). Earlier a vocal critic of the RSS-BJP's divisive politics, journalist-turned-politician M.J. Akbar also joined the BJP on the pretext of building 'political bridges' (Bal 2015).

Fellow journalist Hartosh Singh Bal (2015) termed Akbar's decision to join the BJP as his 'compulsive thirst for power'. Akbar had allegedly met Modi in Gujarat, after which he 'assiduously cultivated' the relationship. It should be noted that Akbar had earlier nursed good relations with Advani. He justified his new-found love for BJP and Modi by saying that 'only one person (is) best suited to lift the

nation out of a septic swamp', and that 'in 10 years, no other politician has gone through so much scrutiny as Modi' (Akbar 2014). Many of Akbar's critics, including this author, have written against his 'intellectually bankrupt explanation' (Reyaz 2014b). To remind the readers, Akbar had earlier described the 2002 Gujarat riots as 'state-sponsored terror'. In an article titled, 'Why Modi Deserves Nishan-e-Pakistan', he wrote:

Neither served the interest of Pakistan remotely as much as Modi has done in the last four weeks. For Modi has been trying to destroy the idea of India as a nation in which every citizen is equal irrespective of his faith.... He valued tragedy on different scales, offering what might be called a two-price theory for death: A Hindu life was worth twice the life of a Muslim. (Akbar 2002)

Like Bakht, Naqvi, and Hussain, Akbar was now expected to not only defend but also advocate for Modi and the BJP in media.

As the election campaign began, the media increasingly focussed on one small area, often close to the dais, during live coverage of Modi's numerous rallies. It was to highlight a group of visible Muslim supporters of the BJP: women in veils and bearded men sporting skull-caps. The AIOIM, MRM, BJP's Jamaat, and BJP's Minority Morcha were assigned the task of making arrangements for Muslim presence in rallies made for TV. Amin Pathan, then president of the Rajasthan BJP's Minority Morcha, played an important role in mobilizing Muslim supporters. It was reported that at his behest, skullcaps and veils were distributed before a BJP rally in Jaipur (Dutta 2013). In Meerut, the BJP's Muslim supporters offered namaz on the dais and even prayed for Modi's victory, which angered the BJP's state unit chief, Laxmikant Bajpai (Panwar 2014). Modi had earlier succeeded in bringing on board Bohra Muslims, the trading community concentrated mainly in Gujarat and Maharashtra. He had met the Dawoodi Bohra leader, Dr Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, in 2012 (Gujaratindia.com 2012). In 2014, he also met Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, Burhanuddin's successor (Narendramodi.in 2014). About 2,000 Bohra community members reportedly joined the BJP on Modi's birthday.

So far in this chapter, I have situated the anti-Muslim politics in the metanarrative of the country that is premised on seeing Muslims as the 'other'. I have then progressed towards the Hindutva politics of the Sangh Parivar vis-à-vis Muslims and given a brief historical sketch

of some Muslim individuals and groups who joined the Hindutva fold despite the anti-Muslim rhetoric of the latter. The next part of the chapter is based on focussed interviews that I conducted in December 2015, in New Delhi, with some of the BJP's Muslim leaders to understand their thought processes as well as their position within the party.

Outreach among Muslims through Hindutva

To understand the BJP's Muslims better, let us take the example of Mohammad Irfan Ahmed (not to be confused with the co-editor of this volume), one of the Minority Morcha's vice presidents. He joined the BJP in 1990 when the Ram Mandir movement was at its peak. In an interview with this author, he stated that 'it was a difficult decision' to join the BJP.¹⁰ He rationalized his decision on the grounds that the BJP was a national party, and hence open to all. As the conversation went on, he said: 'Ram Mandir was not really a BJP issue, but the party took it up in reaction to the Mandal card of V.P. Singh. Jawaharlal Nehru, Arun Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi, N.D. Tiwari, all of them helped the cause of the Ram Mandir. However, the so-called secularists of this country accuse BJP for all the mess.' In Ahmed's view, the BJP leaders undoubtedly participated in the 'movement', but they were not responsible for the demolition of the Babri Masjid. He instead blamed the then prime minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, for failing to act on time. His defence of the BJP is similar to Bakht's who, in a 1997 interview to *The Asian Age* (whose editor at that time was M.J. Akbar), had opined:

The Babri tragedy happened in December 1992. What did the other parties call us till then? They used to call us communal. By the way, what did BJP have to do with Babri Masjid? Who raised this controversy? Syed Shahabuddin [the diplomat-turned-parliamentarian who died in 2017]. When did he raise it? February 1986. Why did he raise it? Because there was a lock on the door which was opened on court's order. Where was the court? Uttar Pradesh. Who was ruling Uttar Pradesh? Vir Bahadur Singh of Congress. Who was ruling at the Centre? Rajiv Gandhi. (Ghosh 1997)

¹⁰ All interviews mentioned here were conducted in December 2015 in New Delhi.

Elaborating on the mobilization work he undertook during the 2014 elections, Ahmed said: 'Everywhere I go, I urge Muslims not to engage in petty politics. Congress never wants them to focus on development and employment but entangles them in frivolous issues for "vote bank" politics.' Stressing that everyone born in this country has equal rights and are equal citizens, he lamented that Muslims did not get enough opportunities for their own progress due to the policies of the Congress and other secular parties. In contrast, he highlighted schemes like increasing the number of Haj terminals (for Muslim pilgrims) initiated by the Vajpayee government. He claimed that in Varanasi—Modi's constituency—he camped for 12 days and attended local *chaupals* (village squares where meetings are held) and other mobilization programmes in Muslim pockets. Due to such mobilization by people like him and notwithstanding the propaganda against Modi by his rivals, Ahmed estimated that about 17 per cent Muslims voted for the BJP.

Did the BJP's Muslims not face criticism regarding its dubious role in the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, the 2002 Gujarat riots, or the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots when they approached the Muslim community? They did. And Ahmed's strategy to respond to such criticism was as follows: 'When they ask us about two riots, I question them about 70 thousand others. I ask them about the Bhagalpur and Hashimpura cases which took place when the Congress was in power.' To 'dispel all false propaganda', Ahmed continued, BJP specially sent its Muslim cadres—many of them the 'ulema-type' (implying Muslim clerics, at least in appearance)—from BJP-run states to Muslims in other states. Those BJP cadres carried the party brochures and other propaganda literature.

The MRM's national convener, Mohammed Afzal, was proud that the RSS acknowledged it both as a 'nationalist organisation' and as a 'Muslim organization working for the nation'. He admitted that the RSS was a Hindu organization, but he praised it for the 'commendable work' it did for the Hindu community. Let me quote an excerpt from the conversation I had with him:

This is my complaint to our fellow Muslims: Why don't they look up to the RSS as an inspiration and emulate it for community welfare. Remember, our faith says that if in this world we do not live properly, our *aaqhrat* (the hereafter) will be ruined. But our clerics are

so enamoured with aqhrat that they ignore the worldly affairs.... Across the country, I have been asked about the Gujarat riots and Ram Janmabhoomi. Muslims in Gujarat have moved on, they do not want to talk about it.

I mentioned Maulana Suhaib Qasmi and his Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind (or BJP's Jamaat) early on in the chapter. The alumni of Darul Uloom Deoband, an Islamic seminary in western Uttar Pradesh, are called Qasmi (after its founder Qasim Nanotawi). As a graduate of Deoband, Suhaib was a Qasmi, but he ran a separate organization: Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind. He claimed that it had over 5 lakh (half a million) members, all of whom had been BJP members since 2011. He also headed the ulema wing of the MRM and had received much media attention. In an interview at the India Islamic Centre, he told me: 'Since the last 60 years, Muslims have been seen with suspicion in this country and their patriotism is questioned. Our organization aims to dispel such doubts. We believe that some forces sowed enmity between Muslims and Hindus, which we need to eliminate. To meet this goal, we formally registered our organization in 2008.' He blamed Muslims for making 'heroes' out of 'perceived communal villains', urging that we need to relook at the meaning of 'secularism'. An excerpt from our conversation would explain his understanding of Muslim politics:

We first abused Vajpayee but then he became secular; then Advani was targeted but he also became secular and acceptable; following which Vinay Katiyar, Uma Bharti, Bal Thackeray were targeted; for a few years Praveen Togadia was made *hero* and now Modi! In fact we have already begun saying that he is still acceptable, but his team members are loud-mouthed.

Qasmi claimed that during the 2014 elections, BJP's Jamaat was asked to focus on about 25 seats in UP, the Kashmir Valley, Assam, and Bihar. He also took credit for the 'change of heart' in certain Muslim pockets, citing the example of the Darul Uloom Deoband polling booth, where he claimed that the BJP got about 100 votes, while in the Bareilly *Khanqah* (the building complex of a Sufi shrine) booth, the saffron party got nearly 200. (This claim has not been independently verified.) He had actively worked in Varanasi as well, and had even tried to mobilize the crowd, holding placards

in big gatherings or speaking to media as a 'Deoband cleric' (see Figure 8.1).

The BJP used social media actively to its advantage in the 2014 campaign. Asma Khan Pathan, a councillor and BJP's district president from Kheda in Gujarat, was very active on social media, countering attacks on Modi and the BJP. She played a vital role in motivating BJP's social media activists. Tufail Ahmed, senior journalist and political commentator of Indian origin who had served as director of South Asia Studies Project at the Middle East Media Research Institute, became the party's unofficial mouthpiece. Right-wing social media trolls often shared his articles to target Muslims and liberals. He wrote in 2013, 'It was good for India to lose the 1857 war; if the British had lost, Indians would have continued to be governed by kings and nawabs, and under shari'a courts that existed during the Mughal era' (Ahmed 2013). Pakistan-born political commentator and author of *The Hindu is Not My Enemy*, Tarek Fateh was equally active on social media. They all claimed to hold a mirror to the purported unpatriotic and unthankful Indian Muslims.



Figure 8.1 Maulana Suhaib Qasmi (second from left in white kurta) of Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind Mobilizing Varanasi's Voters for BJP, 2014

Source: Photograph courtesy Afroz Alam Sahil.

Failed Outreach?

Despite all these overtures, a key feature of the 2014 election result was a further marginalization of Muslims in the Parliament. Their numbers declined from 30 in 2009 to 23 in 2014. Representation of Muslim MPs in the Lok Sabha has anyway remained disproportionately low, ranging between 20 and 30, except in 1981 and 1984, when it reached 40 and 50 respectively (Ansari 2006). In 2014, the BJP had fielded seven Muslim candidates. Among them, only Shahnawaz Hussain was a strong contender; but he, too, lost by a small margin from Bhagalpur. Consequently, the BJP did not have a single Muslim MP in the 16th Lok Sabha. It, however, did send three Muslims—Naqvi, Heptullah, and Akbar—to the Upper House. Heptullah and Naqvi were inducted into the cabinet in 2014. In 2016, Akbar was made a minister after Heptullah was appointed as the governor of Manipur.

According to the National Election Studies (NES) data collected by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), about 8 per cent of Muslims had voted for the NDA in 2014. If accurate, this figure is almost double of what the BJP got in 2009 general elections (Sardesai 2014). It should be noted here that according to the same NES data, in the elections of 1998, 1999, and 2004, about 7 per cent Muslims had voted for the BJP and its allies (Kumar 2014). Thus, overall, there has been a marginal increase in the number of Muslim votes in favour of the BJP. Elsewhere, I have reported on how Muslim votes were made ineffective due to fragmentation among various parties, while the larger consolidation of Hindu voters across caste lines helped the BJP script a historic victory in 2014 (Reyaz 2014c). In states such as Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, where politics remains bipolar between the Congress and BJP due to absence of regional parties, the dynamics of Muslims' voting pattern and leadership are much more complex. For example, during the 2013 assembly elections in Rajasthan, I found that riding on the 'inclusive' image of Vasundhara Raje, the BJP had hoped to gain Muslim votes (Reyaz 2013b). Of the four Muslim candidates that the BJP had fielded, Habibur Rehman and Yunus Khan won from Muslim-majority Nagaur and Deedwana constituencies. In states such as Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, where the opposition had practically become ineffective, Muslims publicly expressed their support for the Hindutva party. Based on her fieldwork in Gujarat, Raheel Dhattiwala (2014)

noted: 'Motivations of support varied for those Muslims who had joined the party as members, from those who were supporters/campaigners for the party. For Muslim party members, political patronage of a party deemed to stay in power in the State was a strong incentive to vocally support the BJP as opposed to value rational incentives for the supporter/campaigner.' One of the respondents told Dhattiwala that Muslims voted for the BJP to get rid of their anti-national image. According to the CSDS data, however, the Congress hugely benefited in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in terms of votes in states where the fight was bipolar (Kumar 2014).

In this chapter, I had proposed to examine three key issues. Is there a contradiction between the BJP's outreach programmes towards Muslims and their condemnation of similar initiatives by other political parties as 'Muslim appeasement'? How do the Sangh Parivar's leaders—Muslims as well as Hindus—engaged in such programmes, view Muslims' identity and their political participation? And finally, how effective were these outreach programmes in drawing Muslim voters towards the BJP?

I have elaborated in detail on the inherent contradiction in the BJP's rapprochement towards Muslims, while also pointing out that in the 2014 general elections the efforts of the BJP's Muslims could not yield the desired outcome. This does not imply that BJP's Muslims have no role in the saffron party. The BJP's Muslims might not have been able bring in vote swings in the 2014 elections but they did succeed in countering the narrative of the BJP being virtually untouchable for Indian Muslims. For such Muslims in the party, joining the BJP guaranteed 'easy recognition' (Hebbbar 2013). However, the BJP has been using such Muslim 'leaders' and workers to project itself as 'inclusive'. At the grass root level, the Sangh Parivar and its Muslim affiliates have been working diligently to spread their reach.¹¹ They

¹¹ The RSS/BJP that was once dubbed as the party of upper castes, is using similar tactics more successfully among Dalits and adivasis, as well as in the southern and north-eastern parts of the country (see Chapter 7 for its outreach in Tamil Nadu).

occasionally show up in skullcaps and veils at different meetings and conventions organized by the Sangh Parivar/BJP. They demand uniform civil code and ban on 'oppressive' practices such as triple talaq; they also lead campaigns against eating beef, to build the Ram Mandir at the disputed site in Ayodhya, and so on. The number of the BJP's Muslims has steadily increased in both national and policy circles. Besides old guards such as Hussain and Naqvi, Akbar has also become a popular face on television channels. In many ways, the MRM, BJP's Jamaat, Minority Morcha, and other groups work in tandem towards achieving the same goal. Journalists such as Tufail Ahmed and Tarek Fateh have begun to receive much media attention. Ahmed's absurdity—for instance, 'it was good for India to lose the 1857 war'—is ignored, perhaps even praised by many, because he participates in Islamophobia to become a poster boy of the sarkari Musalman. He has suggested that the Modi rule is an 'opportunity for Muslims' as 'Indian adherents of Islam have much to gain by behaving more like citizens of a secular republic and less like people with a separate identity' (T. Ahmed 2014).

Muslim leaders of the BJP have a limited role in decision-making of the party, but they see themselves as a bridge between the community and the BJP government. Sareshwala, for example, enjoys the confidence of Modi. In an interview, he noted how he sees himself as a 'bridge' and that he has worked to 'connect the Muslims with the government, so [that] there is no vacuum' (Deshpande 2016). He further argues that Muslims cannot 'remain in confrontation or agitation mode' forever and the 'air of distrust' must end for the dialogue to begin.

The Sangh Parivar's disdain for Lord Macaulay is known because of his education policies that aimed at producing 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect' (Biswas 2012). However, they are trying to use similar tactics to produce a new generation of Indian Muslims who toe their Hindutva agenda. In a speech in Kerala in September 2016, Modi invoked the Hindutva ideologue and BJS founder Deen Dayal Upadhyaya: 'Fifty years ago, Pandit Upadhyaya said, "Do not reward/appease (*puraskrit*) Muslims, do not shun (*tiraskrit*) them but purify (*parishkar*) them". Do not treat Muslims like vote *ki mandi ka maal* (vote banks) or *ghrina ki vastu* (object of hatred). *Unhe apna samjho*

(regard them as your own)''' (Ramaseshan 2016). As this quote shows amply, RSS will accept only those Muslims as their 'own' who agree to be 'purified'. In the RSS vocabulary, the word purification means conversion of Muslims to Hinduism. The RSS pet project of *shuddhikaran* (purification) is premised on the notion that ancestors of majority of Indian Muslims were Hindus and they should therefore reconvert to Hinduism (*ghar wapsi*). This purification project entails that Muslims must openly embrace their Hindu heritage as well as support the Sangh Parivar's agendas, such as performing yoga, chanting Vande Mataram, sacrificing their choice to eat beef, occasionally perform the *aarti* (a Hindu ritual) (see Figure 8.2), and campaign to build the Ram Mandir at the disputed site (BBC Hindi 2016).

Raipur's Mohammad Faiz Khan can likely qualify as Hindutva's poster-boy. According to a report in *The Times of India*, Khan, a Muslim by faith, recited *gau kathas* (songs praising cows) and organized campaigns against cow slaughter. Wedded to the RSS ideological programme, he regarded cow as *Vishwa Mata* (mother of universe) (Singh 2015). As noted earlier, the genealogy of promoting Muslims such as Faiz Khan is much older. However, it began with new fervour during Vajpayee's tenure. We may see the circle of sarkari Musalman



Figure 8.2 Screenshot from a *BBC Hindi* (2016) Report on Varanasi's Nazneen Ansari Performing the Hindu Ritual of *aarti* for Lord Ram (a framed photograph of RSS' Indresh Kumar can be seen on the wall)
 Source: *BBC Hindi* (2016).

expand in the future. The party that scorned 'minorityism' and culture of sarkari Musalman seems to have no qualms in proselytizing Muslims to become what it deems as *aadarsh* Musalman (ideal Muslim), like Faiz Khan.

A corpus of academic work on the RSS, BJP, Hindutva politics, and its inherent anti-Muslim ideology, has been produced in the last few decades. To the best of my knowledge though, there is no academic work so far on the Sangh Parivar's outreach among and towards Muslims or on the BJP's Muslims, except scant mentions here and there and some news articles. Through this chapter, I have attempted to fill this void in the hope that more academic work in posterity would focus on saffronized Muslims as well to understand better the dichotomy of the Hindutva politics through different prisms.

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MEDIA, CORPORATES, AND DEMOCRACY

Lessons from the 2014 General Elections

Sudhir Pattnaik

Indian politics became increasingly corporatized after the advent of neo-liberal economy under the Narasimha Rao–Manmohan Singh regime. However, the corporates faced strong resistance from the poor who refused to part with their land, forest, and natural resources; the resistance to a mighty corporate, Vedanta, by the Dongria Kondhs, a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) in Odisha, was its leading example. Such democratic struggles and popular mobilization compelled the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to adopt some pro-people policies to address these popular movements. Thus, a few legislations were adopted including the Right to Information Act, 2005; the Forest Rights Act or the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006; the Right to Education Act, 2009; the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Act, 2013; Indian Companies Act, 2013, the National Food Security Act, 2013 (also Right to Food Act); and the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2012. As these policies put constraints on the march of the corporates, they were obviously unhappy;¹

¹ Most of these progressive policies were prepared by the National Advisory Council (NAC) under the initiative of some leading civil society activists; the prime minister and finance minister accepted it, though grudgingly.

they apprehended that such measures were against corporate interests and would derail the capital-driven development.

Immediately after the passing of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, corporate mobilization against the UPA-I started. The Forest Rights Act and the Land Acquisition Act, which were designed to ensure people's rights over their land and forest, threatened investment capital, putting a big question mark on the future of corporates. Against this backdrop, this chapter will discuss how the corporates welcomed Narendra Modi's candidature for prime minister, and how the media, which was largely under corporate control, played a key role in the 2014 elections, defining the contour of democratic discourses and practices. Interestingly, Modi's charisma was unable to dent the support base of Odisha's Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, who was backed by corporates and media due to his long-standing collaboration with these forces and agencies.

The Context: Corporate–Modi Connection

Narendra Modi's Gujarat model of development was an ideal to which corporates aspired. In Gujarat, disregarding people's rights, the Modi government handed out large tracts of land to the corporates literally for free or at a ridiculously low prices as an 'incentive' to industry. However, the UPA's LARR Act provided for a 'consent' clause which instructed that 'land can only be acquired with the approval of 70% of the land owners for Public Private Partnership projects and 80% for private entities' (*Hindu* 2015). Hence, corporate anger against the UPA intensified and simultaneously, a pro-Modi sentiment gathered momentum.² Modi, as the supreme leader of his party and the chief

² Immediately after assuming the office of the prime minister, Modi initiated a process for amending the LARR Act, 2013. On 30 December 2014, his cabinet recommended for promulgation of presidential ordinance to amend the LAAR Act, 2013 and the president obliged. After repeated promulgation of this ordinance each time it expired, the government ultimately had to withdraw the amendment bill since it did not have the required strength in the Rajya Sabha—the Upper House of the Indian Parliament. The main purpose was to remove the 'consent' clause for certain types of industrial projects. The removal of consent was the main demand by Indian corporations engaged in large-scale land acquisition for their respective investment-based projects.

minister of Gujarat, was not bound by any institutional mechanism, such as the central National Advisory Council (NAC), which could create obstacles in the allocation of resources to corporations.³

In Gujarat, though Modi doled out large tracts of land, the media did not make it an issue. For instance, consider the largesse offered to Gautam Adani.⁴ As per reports, the state government allotted a staggering 14,305 acres—equivalent to 5.78 crore square metres—of land in Kutch to the Gautam Adani-controlled Adani Group at prices ranging from Re 1 to Rs 32 per square metre (*DNA* 2012). However, this did not find enough space in the media and quietly faded into the background. On the other hand, Modi earned accolades in the media as a business-friendly leader.

In the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit in Gujarat in 2009, major Indian corporate leaders joined hands to promote the 'Gujarat model of development' across the country. Writing a week after the Summit, Salil Tripathy (2009) stated that Anil Ambani and Sunil Bharti Mittal hoped 'to see Gujarat's chief minister, Narendra Modi, as India's prime minister. Kumar Mangalam Birla, Mukesh Ambani and Shashi Ruia have joined the chorus of approval'. Anil Ambani quoted his father, the late Dhirubhai Ambani, who called Modi '*lambi race ka ghoda* (one for the long haul)' (Tripathy 2009). This was yet another indication of how Indian corporates view the institutions of prime minister and Indian democracy. The corporates would always prefer a strong authoritarian leader under a single political party, rather than a committed democratic leader constrained by a coalition government.

Since the first Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit in 2009, corporate houses had started to project Modi on a larger stage. Sharing the dais with Modi, Mukesh Ambani said: 'You have made India and Indians proud by putting Gujarat on the global map' (*Business Standard* 2011). In the 2013 Vibrant Gujarat Summit,

³ Soon after he became prime minister, Modi dismantled the NAC.

⁴ Adani shares a special relation with Modi. 'In 2003, when most industry heavyweights stayed away from an investment meet that Modi had organized, a group of Gujarati business barons led by Gautam Adani saved the day for him. While doyens of India Inc. warmed up to Modi much later, Modi never forgets people who stood by his side when it mattered the most' (Mehta 2014).

Mukesh Ambani said, 'In Narendra Bhai, we have a leader with a grand vision,' while his younger brother, Anil, described Modi as 'a king among kings' and went on to do a comparison: 'October 2, 1869, Porbandar, Gujarat—the birth of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the father of the nation; October 31, 1875, Nariyal, Gujarat—the birth of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's man of steel; December 28, 1932, Chorwad, Gujarat—the birth of Dhirubhai Ambani, India's greatest entrepreneur; and September 17, 1950, Vadnagar, Gujarat—the birth of Narendra Modi.' He continued: 'Narendra Bhai has the Arjuna-like clarity of vision and purpose' and his skills have 'acted as a huge magnet for investors and entrepreneurs from India and across the world in the past decade' (*Times of India* 2013).

It was not just the Indian corporates who found in Modi a powerful ally; even the global businesses, which were earlier reluctant to invest after the 2002 Gujarat riots, joined the chorus. The list included: Patricia Hewitt, chairman of the United Kingdom (UK) India Business Council; Ron Sommers, representative of the United States (US)–India Business Council; and Konstantin Markelov, chairman of the regional government of a Russian province, Astrakhan. Markelov even wished Modi good luck for victory at the national level (*Times of India* 2013). They welcomed Modi as he offered an investment opportunity to the global capital which was going through a period of stagnation. The successive Vibrant Gujarat summits helped Modi consolidate his business-friendly image further. Thus, a corporate consensus was developed around Modi.

When the corporates decided to throw their weight behind Modi, the corporate media obviously had to go all out for him. In fact, since 2009, Modi had been systematically cultivating a relationship with the corporate media and had built a close partnership with them. With this partnership, the dramatization of democracy was scripted with an open and undeclared support for Modi from the media, more particularly the electronic media. The Gujarat model was never critically questioned and got celebrated in the news, on panel discussions, and in advertisements. The period since the first Vibrant Gujarat Summit up to the months preceding the 2014 elections was enough to influence the media-consuming middle class of India, the opinion makers in the society; moreover, the Brahmanical, patriarchal, and feudal elements among the middle class were already the followers of Hindutva.

Evolution of the Corporatized Media

Indian media has gone through a big transformation since Independence, particularly in the post-liberalization period. The conventional concern of media had been how to sustain itself if the scale of operations is locally unmanageable. This was where business and state advertisement support played a major role without interfering in the editorial autonomy of newspapers. With the arrival of modernized printing and broadcast technology, those who wanted to take advantage of it to expand their reach had to look for big capital as the conventional sources of advertisement revenue proved to be rather inadequate. This was the time for corporates to extend their large hand. Meanwhile, many new developments took place in the arena of media. Small private operators (for instance, 'The World This Week' by NDTV) were allowed space on official broadcast channels such as *Doordarshan*. As the private operators had to mobilize revenue for the production of the programme, as well as for buying telecast time and space, corporate sponsorship was inevitable. Gradually, foreign media collaborations reached the Indian soil to reap benefits of the new liberalization policy, which resulted in forging different alliances. *The Times of India* in print and NDTV in the broadcast sectors were the pioneers in the field of corporatization. The telecast of the first-ever private analysis of elections was initiated by NDTV.

In his book *More News is Good News: 25 Years of NDTV*, Prannoy Roy (2016) discussed how corporations extended their support for the first-ever private news broadcast. He wrote:

The first tectonic shift in India's broadcasting policy came in 1995. We at NDTV had been pressing the government to allow us to report on India news. One evening, the risk-taking, genuinely enlightened head of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting told us he had decided to give us a chance and allotted us a nightly half-hour slot for national news. He added that the government wouldn't pay us a penny for the costs of production. We started our rounds of private companies with the plea: 'Please fund the first-ever private news programme in India ... it's the beginning of a new era.' The response was terrific. Mr Ratan Tata was the first to say yes and five others followed and we were ready to go with three years' funding and editorial independence assured. On 5 February 1995, we aired India's first-ever private news broadcast. (Roy 2016: 4)

Kisan Pattnaik, the veteran socialist leader, was opposed to private news broadcasting. In an article 'From Profession to Tamashagiri [Theatrics]', he wrote: 'The world is not without alternatives' (Nayak 2017: 12). However, the dependence on corporate sponsorship grew phenomenally over the years, which transformed and diversified media at national and regional levels. From a position of supporting private media initiatives, corporations gradually shifted their focus to influencing the content. This shift occurred because the corporate interest in extractive industries directly clashed with the livelihood issues of the poor in the resource-rich regions, which led to powerful resistance movements against mining corporations. In order to deal with these movements the corporates needed control over local and regional media. Paranjy Guha-Thakurta (2012) aptly observed: 'It was no longer the case that media houses would criticize the corporates and still get advertising revenue. On the other hand, most media houses entered into partnerships with leading corporates wherein they published stories that were friendly to the advertisers.'

The transformation of corporations from advertisement providers to passive patrons of media, and then becoming de facto media owners, greatly impacted electoral processes. In fact, election campaigns started to begin in the media much before the dates for elections were announced. Moreover, media campaigns ran in such a way that the news consumer became an innocent victim without his knowledge and would decide in favour of or against a political party well before the elections.

The Sangh–Modi–Corporate–Media Nexus

For the first time after Independence, a prime ministerial candidate for the general elections (2014) was decided not by a political party, but by two external forces outside the political party: first and foremost was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS); and the second was the corporate world. This marked the beginning of an era of political outsourcing in Indian democracy. For the RSS, its lifelong political ambition to rule India was going to be fulfilled through Modi, a long-serving *pracharak* (one who has renounced family to become a full-time RSS worker). Atal Bihari Vajpayee—a towering leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a former prime minister—was also from the RSS. However, he was never considered by the hardcore RSS workers to be a true

Sanghi (a committed cadre of the RSS) due to his moderate political position. Thus, the RSS pushed for Modi's selection by influencing the internal decision-making process of the BJP.

The role of the RSS in Modi's selection demonstrates, contrary to the claim by the BJP, that the latter had never been autonomous from the former (the RSS). In fact, it was in a two-day long meeting of the RSS, 8–9 September 2013, that Modi's selection was made. Besides the RSS and the BJP, 13 other Sangh affiliates, including the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), participated in that meeting. Though the decision of Modi's candidature was challenged by veterans such as L.K. Advani and Sushma Swaraj, they could not stop his selection. The RSS leader Manmohan Vaidya, who was mediating between the Sangh and the dissenters, announced that 'RSS has already made its position clear on the key issue and it was for BJP to take a decision' (*Livemint* 2013).

Sangh's choice of Modi had strong approval from the corporate world, which was convinced that the Indian state would ensure the growth of their capital under Modi. In the corporatized Indian democracy, electoral victory seemed impossible without making an alliance with capital. Hence, corporate capital and the Sangh cadre came together. A friendly corporate-controlled media endorsed the corporate alliance with the RSS.

Media's Anti-Corruption Campaign as Preparatory Ground for 2014

To understand the 2014 elections and its outcome, it is important to take into account two important developments that took place between 2010 and 2012. The first one was a petition filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court of India for irregularities in awarding 2G spectrum licences in which, as per the estimate of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the state lost Rs 1.76 trillion. Second, an alliance called India Against Corruption was formed under Anna Hazare, in 2011, to fight corruption. The coal scam and the Commonwealth Games scam gave further boost to the anti-corruption movement. The success of this movement led to the launching of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its electoral victory in Delhi.

The campaign against corruption was obviously directed against the Congress. It received huge popular support and the electronic media

and corporate houses played a key role in patronizing and popularizing this campaign. The live 24×7 telecast of the anti-corruption campaigns from Jantar Mantar or Ramlila ground in Delhi attracted a large number of people from all classes and raised the hope that corruption could be wiped out from India. News presentations and panel discussions were so designed that even the Indian intelligentsia came to believe that the time had arrived for a change. This media campaign, begun in 2011, was so subtle and deceptive that a majority of Indians did not realize that the campaign for the 2014 general elections had already started. The media literally dragged out the youth in metros such as Delhi to join the anti-corruption campaign.

A campaign for a corruption-free India was cleverly manipulated by the media to support a campaign for Congress-free India. Along with that, the corporate media went on to create a positive image of Modi, making him a symbol of the Gujarat model of development in such a way that it would become acceptable to most people. This was ideally facilitated by the prevalent atmosphere characterized by allegations of scams and corruption in the Congress-led UPA government. Given that the Indian media played such an ideological role, a number of pertinent issues affecting the common citizens of the country did not get any media attention; for instance, the issue of farmers' suicide across regions. Media knew well enough which issues to downplay and which to highlight. On 12 December 2013, there was a massive assembly of workers in Delhi organized by 11 central trade union organizations to protest against the anti-labour policy of the government. The media roundly blacked out the protest and instead ran 24×7 shows on Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign, as other issues would have diluted the anti-Congress thrust of the campaign. The other reason behind the erasure of the labour protest by the media was obviously the fact that the protest was directed against capital. It needs to be stressed that the media was selective in picking up issues, conveniently ignoring the corruption in the BJP-ruled states.

Media's Modi Campaign

The media abandoned anti-corruption campaigns the moment it achieved its objective of discrediting the ruling regime beyond repair. Soon the BJP emerged as the favourite alternative. The corporates and

the media decided to put all their premium on the BJP. The campaign strategy was clear from the day of the selection of Modi as BJP's prime ministerial candidate that it would promote a leader-centric model of campaign, which would only help in the concentration of power in the hands of the future prime minister. Not surprisingly, every other party leader was sidelined. A strong leadership, rather than ideology, became the focus of the media's attention, resulting in least concern shown to the discussion of manifestos by different parties (see Chapter 11). In short, the focus was cast squarely on Modi's charisma. Thus, the media systematically established the Modi phenomenon in such a way that the electorate started believing that Modi was a great leader who could win the elections on his own. Simultaneously, the media gave wide publicity to the Gujarat model of development through news, advertisements, and panel discussions while remaining silent about the 2002 Gujarat riots. Clearly, the strategy worked in favour of Modi.

The media sold the dream of the Gujarat model of prosperity to the common people by selectively presenting data, stories, and narratives about Gujarat. Middle-class intelligentsia also fell into the trap as the media never critically questioned the working of the Gujarat model of development (see Chapter 4); rather, the media went on spreading fairy tales about the model. Besides corruption, the media also harped on dynasty politics—associated with the Congress—to appeal to the youth to look for a better alternative.

The 24×7 news channels created a perception among people that Modi was a strong and stable leader and that he would ensure India became free of scams and corruption. Such a perception became effective and plausible because the media contrastingly presented the incumbent Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as dull, docile, and ineffective. The media deliberately downplayed the achievements of the Manmohan Singh government's pro-people legislations and policies (most of which were later continued, with decorative changes in their names by the Modi government), and often ridiculed him as the 'yes man' of Congress president Sonia Gandhi. A prime minister-centric model of election campaign, in the style of the US presidential elections, was designed and the media devised a model that eulogized Narendra Modi at the cost of his opponent, Rahul Gandhi. Media campaigns by the BJP eventually won in the absence of a similar campaign strategy by a demoralized Congress.

Thus, the image of Narendra Modi as a strong leader who could deliver a Gujarat-type development model did create hopes and aspirations. The media preferred to promote personality-centric politics without allowing any critical questioning. The national media, which was earlier critical of Modi's role in the 2002 Gujarat riots as the chief minister of Gujarat, conveniently shifted to Modi's contributions to a shining Gujarat which rolled out a red carpet for the corporates, expecting that the same will be repeated nationally if Modi became prime minister. In addition, the 2014 elections were the first of its kind which witnessed a global campaign involving large participation of the Indian diaspora through social media platforms. The Indian diaspora made generous financial contributions to the BJP's campaign (*Diplomat* 2014). Indeed, the media played a big role in articulating the agenda of the dominant aspirant political party in such a way that there was no space available to the masses to critically question the usefulness, relevance, and implications of what the media was talking about.

Modi made serious preparations for his campaign. After sidelining the BJP veterans, he built a core group with his trusted corporate and media partners and his lieutenants such as Amit Shah and a few leaders from the RSS. Through this coterie, the media played a deterministic role in shaping the public opinion of Modi and the BJP, and simultaneously running down the opposition completely. Consequently, Modi was able to earn a positive pan-Indian image within the shortest possible time. This was a remarkable turnaround for Modi, who had previously barely occupied a notable position in the BJP's organizational hierarchy. It was the media which enlarged the scope and space for Modi, generating wider acceptability as the future prime minister among the party cadre, sympathizers, and the common people at large.

While celebrating Modi and his model of development, the media completely ignored the communal politics of the Sangh Parivar. The left and the progressive forces were repeatedly run down because they raised critical questions vis-à-vis the BJP. The common perception of the media as neutral and autonomous became a misnomer. As discussed earlier, one of the reasons behind the media's complete swing towards Modi was the interest and power of influential industrialists. Both print and electronic media faced tremendous hardship much before the general elections of 2014; some electronic channels were in a terrible financial condition. Their dependence on capital support increased so

much that they did not care to defend their autonomy. The media's economic reliance on influential industrialists turned it into a propaganda machine for the powerful corporate–Modi combination, which in turn promised immense financial benefits to the media.

As the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) predicted, 'Indian politicians are expected to spend around \$5 billion on campaigning for elections next month—a sum second only to the most expensive U.S. presidential campaign of all time.... India's campaign spend, which can include cash stuffed in envelopes as well as multi-million-dollar ad campaigns, has been estimated at 300 billion rupees' (Gottipati and Singh 2014). The CMS added that the amount to be spent on the 2014 general elections would be triple the expenditure made on electioneering in the last national poll in 2009, 'partly a reflection of a high-octane campaign by pro-business opposition candidate for prime minister, Narendra Modi, who started nationwide rallies and advertising last year' (Gottipati and Singh 2014). The CMS study further noted that 'India's projected campaign spending is only rivalled by the \$7 billion spent by candidates, parties, and support groups in the 2012 U.S. presidential elections' (Press Trust of India [PTI] 2014).

It is estimated that the pro-business Modi campaign had given the media Rs 50 billion for the purpose of advertisements and event management. The media had diversified into various forms and often gave the deceptive image that it offered an alternative medium for free expression. With this image, it simply ensured good advertisement revenue from diverse sources by convincing the clients that it could reach out to all sections with any message. About 114,820 publications registered with the Registrar of Newspapers in India, 892 TV channels—with 403 of them broadcasting news and current affairs programmes—and hundreds of web-based news portals operating from within and outside India had become a fertile area for invasion by corporate interests (Sarma 2017; *Indiantelevision.com* 2016).

There was nothing surprising, therefore, when Krishn Kaushik (2016) wrote that 'five Indian news media companies—NDTV, News Nation, India TV, News24, and Network18—are either indebted to Mukesh Ambani, the richest Indian and the owner of Reliance Industries, or to Mahendra Nahata, an industrialist and associate of Ambani, who is also on the board of Reliance's new telecom venture, Reliance Jio.' The amount of loan given by such corporates to these media ventures enabled

them a control over these channels of a range varying from 20 per cent to 70 per cent, putting citizens' right to know truth at considerable risk. The state of affairs also raises questions about monopolistic practices that may be in conflict with the competition laws of India' (Kaushik 2016).

Modi Captures Social Media

Social media such as Facebook (launched in March 2004) and Twitter (launched in July 2006) had barely played any role in the 2009 general elections. However, in the 2014 elections, availability of mobile technology and smartphones and tablets took social media to the new generation of voters, otherwise mostly indifferent to electoral politics. The monotony of election campaigning did not appeal to the urbanized middle-class youth. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter went beyond the national borders and helped in globalizing the campaign for the first time in India's electoral history. As the Sangh Parivar had a strong presence among the Indian diaspora, the BJP had the obvious advantage on social media for its overseas campaign. Rahul Gandhi's negligible social media presence further became helpful to Modi. Additionally, Modi himself was extremely savvy about and personally interested in social media.

Narendra Modi was the first Indian political leader to make use of social media effectively to reach out to the youth. His popularity rose to new heights with 16 million followers on Twitter and Facebook (though it is not clear how many were from overseas, or how many of them were fake). His list of friends and the likes he got on Facebook were only next to Barack Obama. This is the reason why he was called the Facebook candidate. Arvind Gupta, who led the social media campaign of Narendra Modi and was the head of the BJP's information technology division, put it succinctly: 'We saw a trend, we read this trend, where the youth of the country were embracing social media as their first tool when they started using the internet, and we made sure our presence was there.' He also said, as quoted in Idrees Ali's (2014) write-up, that 'BJP's social media campaign was one of the most important factors in its victory as social media affected 30–40 per cent of the overall seats. In a sense, Facebook directly took part in Modi's election campaign when it launched a 'campaign to vote' in the 2014 elections, given its understanding of which politician of India was using social

media the most. A study of the US election studies shows that repeated mentioning of a name gives him/her a better chance of performing in the elections (Ali 2014).

Facebook and *The Times of India* joined hands to launch a campaign for Modi. As per information from Facebook, 'There are over 82 million Indian citizens now on Facebook. We're seeing people increasingly using the platform to discuss candidates, campaigns and critical issues facing the country', while *The Times of India* said, 'The youth in particular, we believe, can play a big role in cleansing our polity, ridding it of the cynicism that has taken such deep roots ... truly empowering the *aam admi* [common man]. It is as a result of this conviction that we have in the past launched campaigns like Lead India and I Lead India' (Digital Insights 2013).

With the advent of social media, the spheres of electoral influence expanded beyond the national territory of India and most of those who actively participated in the campaign either belonged to the corporate sector or to business communities, often based abroad. Unemployed educated youth and students were also seen to be active. The dreams for a bright future could be effectively shared by Modi and company on their social media platforms. However, Congress leadership clearly lacked the foresight to give good publicity to some of the credible pro-poor measures initiated by UPA I and UPA II. It is another matter that most of the social media consumers were seemingly not pro-poor. The BJP was well ahead of other political parties and dominated the social media discourse (Kanungo 2015). Social media forces, which never allowed anyone to critically question Modi on any issue, ran down Congress leader Rahul Gandhi through caricature. Thus, Modi monopolized social media in 2014 (Chilkoti 2014; Digiperform 2015).

There was a strategic collaboration between mainstream media and social media. Any print news items would find immediate place on Facebook and/or Twitter and reach out to distant places. Modi's 4D campaigns would appear on Facebook soon after they had taken place. News about his electoral events before and after their enactment would reach millions of people who did not have a chance to watch them otherwise. Kaushik (2016) thus rightly observed: 'Politicians realized that social media is not a couple of kids talking about fashion, but actually people talking about serious things.'

The 2014 General Elections and the Odisha Story

Many might wonder that when almost the entire nation came under the Modi wave, how come Odisha turned out to be a notable exception? The Biju Janata Dal (BJD), led by the Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, was able to win 20 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats in the 2014 elections—a record win since 1998. In the state assembly elections, the BJD reached another milestone by securing 117 out of 147 seats. The party's vote share in the Lok Sabha polls witnessed a steep rise to touch 44.1 per cent in 2014 as compared to 37.23 per cent in the 2009 general elections. In the assembly elections, the BJD's vote share shot up to 43.4 per cent in 2014 as against 38.8 per cent in 2009. The Modi wave, of course, helped in enhancing the BJP's vote share in the Lok Sabha elections from 16.89 per cent in 2009 to 21.5 per cent in 2014. However, the BJP could manage to win only one seat from Odisha. It is clear that the decline of the Congress, whose vote share in the Lok Sabha elections declined from 32.75 per cent in 2009 to 26 per cent in 2014, led to the rise of the BJP's vote share.⁵ Since the BJP made no visible impact in Odisha, the question worth asking was: why did the BJP and Modi fare badly in Odisha?

Odisha had been one of the most favoured destinations for investment capital in the post-liberalization period. The mining sector, which was the monopoly of the state, was opened up to private operators in the 1990s. However, Naveen Patnaik, who became the chief minister in March 2000, happened to be the big beneficiary of this decision. Having a good reserve of iron ore, coal, and bauxite, the state government signed more than 93 memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with big capital for installing mineral-based industries in the state, the largest being Pohang Steel Company (POSCO) of South Korea which signed an agreement for an integrated steel plant and iron ore mining with the state in 2005 and promised an investment of USD 5.2 billion in Odisha (Mohanty 2016; *Business Standard* 2014; *Business Wire India* 2005). These MoUs were undeclared promissory notes for future use during the time of elections. Corporates were happy with Patnaik since

⁵ See www.mapsofindia.com/parliamentaryconstituencies/orissa/general-election-results.html and <http://www.indiavotes.com/pc/info?state=6&eid=16>, last accessed on 16 January 2018 and 12 February 2018, respectively.

he undertook rapid industrialization based on a prior understanding between the two.

The media also became a beneficiary of the huge corporate investment in Odisha. As there was a promise of more than USD 30 billion corporate investment in the state, the media was assured of an uninterrupted flow of advertisements (*Business Standard* 2014). Hence, there was no reason for media to alienate Patnaik and favour Modi. In fact, Odisha had been 'development-friendly' long before the Gujarat model had been coined. The revenue-generation model of the media sector centring around state-sponsored advertisements, such as those from the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), was transformed with the availability of huge corporate funds on liberal terms. Large corporate advertising budgets became a major factor in attracting the national dailies to start Odisha editions, with *The New Indian Express* (1997) initiating the process, followed by *The Asian Age*, *The Pioneer*, *The Times of India*, and *The Telegraph*. The primary objective of these editions was to appropriate advertisement revenues from the corporates. Odia newspapers (*Samaj*, *Sambad*, *Dharitri*, and *Samay*) also started multiple regional editions with similar objectives. The major advertising revenue came from the leading extractive industries having business interests in Odisha: Tata (steel and power), Birla (aluminium and power), Ambani (power, telecom, and retail), Agrawal (steel, power, and alumina), Mittal (steel), Bhusan (steel and power), Jindal (steel and power), and Panda (manganese and ferro alloys).

The broadcast sector also had similar experiences. Baijayant Panda, the present vice chairman of the Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Limited (IMFA) and a BJD Member of Parliament, started a cable network in 1997 by the name *Odisha Television*; in 2007, they launched OTV, the most popular Odia television channel, which received the maximum revenue from the corporate sector. *Kamyab Televisions*, *Naxatra Televisions*, *Kanak Televisions* (The Sambad Newspaper Group), and Micro Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) group also launched television channels. A number of business enterprises used their surplus income to launch newspapers and television channels, primarily to ensure political and economic clout. These included microfinance organizations, real estate companies, mining groups, and education entrepreneurs. Mine owners and the mafia parked their illegal profit in media, including in television channels.

Thus, for the parliamentary elections and state assembly elections in Odisha, the media could not find any significant reasons to promote 'NaMo' or the 'Modi for PM' campaign. Organizationally as well as politically, the BJP did not enjoy any advantage in Odisha since Patnaik had called off the alliance with the BJP after the 2008 Kandhamal violence against minority Christians. Patnaik also enjoyed popular support as the Congress had been continuously losing its social base. Hence, there was no justification for the corporates and the media not to back Patnaik.

The RSS also did not target Odisha in 2014, focussing on bigger states of northern and western India, as the Sangh Parivar was weak in Odisha and the state did not promise much hope. Furthermore, the local leadership of the BJP was weak and fragmented, thereby not able to go for an aggressive campaign against the BJD. Even the BJP's national leaders did not criticize Patnaik during the course of the campaign; they only offered soft criticism of the state government's failure on the policy front. As the BJP was not sure of gaining electoral majority on its own, it kept open the option of a future alliance with Patnaik after the elections. Odias, in general, considered Patnaik to be 'clean', free from corruption, and secular. So, Odisha did not see the convergence of the corporate, media, and rightist forces in 2014. Rather the corporate support was clearly for Patnaik, who was capital-friendly and simultaneously popular.

As this chapter has demonstrated, at the national as well as regional level, issues involving the common man were subsumed under a calibrated corporate-media campaign harping on a strong leader and development, both of which raised hopes among millions. Election manifestos hardly mattered. Expressions of diversity in terms of political discourses were methodically sidelined. The economically powerful corporates chose a leader in the form of Modi and the media backed him to the hilt. While political leadership assured the corporates stability, security, and good business, the media committed itself to mediate between corporates and the political leadership. This model was national as well as regional, as evident from the case of Odisha.

The future of democracy will depend largely on how free the electoral processes remain. No amount of electoral reforms can ensure free

and fair elections in the future when the media has become an integral part of the corporates, dictating the content and policy of any major political party. In the 2014 elections, those who controlled media made it abundantly clear that genuine people-centric democratic leadership was not the best choice for the advancement of finance capital. Thus, unless the process of increasing corporatization of media and information was checked through a parallel, non-corporate confederation of alternative media, it would be difficult to save democracy from slipping into the hands of big capital, turning the people into merely helpless spectators to elections.

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ON THE GROUND

The Unfolding of the 2014 General Election Campaign

Patrick French

A win in a general election in a country as large as India can be a technical victory, depending not only on vote swings but also on complex alliances between one-time opponents and the ‘transferability’ of vote banks between castes, religions, and parties. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA)/Bharatiya Janata Party’s (BJP) success of 2014 was powerful enough not to be technical and came about from a concatenation of reasons: effective targeting by the BJP of ‘winnable’ seats; high turnout; the professionalism and ‘presidential’ nature of the BJP’s national campaign as against the undirected approach of the Indian National Congress (hereafter Congress); and a limitation in the success of appeals to caste identity over a willingness of voters to make decisions primarily on the grounds of economic self-interest and aspiration. The ‘Introduction’ in this volume proposes that:

An important way to analyse electoral democracy is to understand it as a phenomenon of warfare and welfare, where both become intimately intertwined in such a way that they can work—indeed they often do so—as near synonyms. In many forms—now direct, now indirect—this algebra of warfare and welfare, if this phrase is useful, is integral to electoral democracy, in India as also elsewhere.

My reading is that elections in India are run more often through incentive than through threat, which gives more importance to the 'welfare' aspect of the state, as defined in this characterization.

In March and April 2014, I travelled through south, west, and north India, starting in Bengaluru and ending in Banaras. My intention was to talk to a mix of politicians and voters and gain an impression of how they were thinking in advance of the general elections. Parts of this journey were done for a special report in *The Week* magazine (a publication of the Malayala Manorama group) and other parts were done independently. I have observed every Indian general election since 1998 and this experience, combined with the influence of my book, *India: A Portrait* (2011), enabled me to gain access to senior politicians across parties. Most of the conversations outlined in this chapter took place in English, while a few were in a mixture of English and other languages such as Telugu or Hindi, a result of interventions by colleagues who were accompanying me (Sriram Karri in Hyderabad and Abhishek Choudhary in Patna). My method was necessarily anecdotal and impressionistic—seeking to gauge a national feeling by looking at voters in a range of states—but it was also specific, using interviews with individuals to understand why a region or a constituency might be heading towards supporting a particular political party. I paid attention to smaller parties too, and how they were regarded at a micro level, since a local or state factor could change voting decisions in ways that, from a distance, might not be anticipated.

Adnan Farooqui and E. Sridharan (2016: 337) have argued plausibly that the Congress has been in long-run decline since 1989: 'Post-1996, Congress remained below 30 per cent in vote share, the overall slide being from almost 40 per cent to 19 per cent over 1989–2014.' They also deduced that India remains broadly in favour of a secular consensus, by which they mean that a clear majority thinks special provisions should be made for the fair treatment of minorities (for an anti-orthodox view of the trade-off between Indian secularism and majoritarianism, see 'Introduction'). Under pressure, then, the Congress faces either:

its disintegration and eventual demise by further splits and loss of social base, or its revival but as a broad, left-of-centre coalition of the disadvantaged, not an umbrella party, facing a broad, BJP-led, right-of-centre coalition. However, in the latter scenario, it would not be an umbrella

party but a centre-left party, and the social cleavages theory of party systems would have won out. (Farooqui and Sridharan 2016: 358)

As the Congress has become more diffuse, the BJP has become more tightly focussed. To a degree that was unusual, the BJP's campaign messaging in 2014 coalesced around the idea that a single, transformative leader might cut through the system and bring about change. Although in previous campaigns Atal Bihari Vajpayee was projected as a unitary, prime ministerial figure, he was not presented as a salve and was usually shown on posters alongside his senior colleagues. Narendra Modi became an Eckleburgian presence on city billboards (Figure 10.1). He squashed the BJP's collegial tradition and separated himself from the party. In Christophe Jaffrelot's words:

The Modi-centric character of the BJP's campaign found expression in one full-page newspaper ad showing Modi telling the Indian citizens: 'Your vote for the BJP candidate is a vote for me'. This personalisation



Figure 10.1 A Street in Banaras Featuring the Eckleburgian presence of the BJP's Prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, in April 2014

Source: Author.

of the act of voting enhanced an already existing tendency to presidentialize a parliamentary system where MPs have in recent years begun to matter less and less. (Jaffrelot 2015: 257)

This approach was abetted by the reluctance of Rahul Gandhi to unequivocally identify himself as the prime ministerial candidate of Congress and a long-term failure by the party to allow regional leaders of stature to rise.

The swing to the BJP in 2014 was stronger than the Congress 'waves' of 1984 and 1991 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, respectively. Voter turnout in 2014 was 66.4 per cent (Vaishnav 2015). Compared to the previous general election, an extra 136 million people went to the polling booths. Since 2009, the Election Commission of India has been promoting voter education and participation. Oliver Heath (2015: 125) noted, 'The size of the electoral roll grew from 717 million in 2009 to 834 million in 2014, equivalent to an average increase of 3% per year.' This exceeded population growth. Heath's study deduced from constituency-level data that the BJP did particularly well in places where historically its presence had been weaker. It was not noticeably effective at converting votes, attracting only about one-third of the former Congress voters who were deserting the party. The winning increase in vote share came, it appears, from mobilizing new groups of voters, an achievement that may be of long-term national importance. Moreover, 'large increase in turnout had a much bigger impact on the swing to the BJP in constituencies where it had done badly in 2009 than in constituencies where it had done well'. Heath (2015: 132–3) concludes that in India, where party loyalties tend to be more volatile than in other democracies, 'All other things being equal, then the conversion of existing voters is less likely to be stable than the mobilisation of new voters'.

Pradeep K. Chhibber and Susan L. Ostermann (2014: 138) deduced that the BJP won not because of Modi himself, but because he drew more 'vote mobilizers' towards the party than his opponents, and 'it is widely accepted that the BJP is an ideological party and ideological parties are less likely to favour power accumulation with one individual, especially when that individual is not the source of the party's ideology'. This claim does not seem wholly plausible, and my view diverges somewhat from Ahmad's view in the 'Introduction', which argues that the discourse around terrorism, particularly 'Islamic terrorism',

has a primary function in Indian politics. Although the BJP began as an ideological movement and remains concerned with religious and cultural dogma, in my observation, party workers and voluble activists in 2014 may have propagated Hindutva (see Chapter 2), but not in the way they had (and would do) in the state elections. The relentless focus was on jobs, 'change', and opportunity. An associate of Modi told me, for instance, in answer to an enquiry on the likely future form of nationalism in the event of a BJP victory: 'It is against Indian culture to expand or conquer. We do not crush our enemies. We are magnanimous. Even if I catch a snake, I will take it to the forest and let it go. I will not kill it.'¹ The BJP campaign was tightly controlled, and its more controversial ideology was underplayed. Since the 2014 general elections, Modi's accumulation of power has increased and attempts by the 'old guard' of the party to limit his centralization of decision making have been unsuccessful.

In this chapter, I rely on notes from my 2014 journey and an article I wrote for *The Week* magazine, rather than depending on hindsight. Although I detected a 'Modi wave' at the time and expected the NDA to win, I did not anticipate the scale of the victory or that the Congress would be reduced to 44 seats in the Lok Sabha, their worst-ever showing in a general election. The BJP had an efficient ground game, but it was not clear until after the poll how effective they had been at mobilizing new voters and converting a mood for change into action in the polling booth.

In this chapter, I use examples from different states to argue that although the BJP's execution of the campaign was consistently superior to that of its rivals, complex local factors invariably intruded into individual candidates' campaigns. For many voters, state-level issues dominated (as in Andhra Pradesh) and the interplay with national-level politics would frequently define a candidate's chances of electoral success (as in Gujarat). When deciding which states to visit in 2014, I weighted geographical diversity against urban/rural variety, and finally chose Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Bihar, and Uttar

¹ Bharat Lal, interview by the author in New Delhi, 12 March 2014. Subsequent quotations are taken from interviews and conversations with politicians, activists, and members of the public, conducted by the author during March–April 2014.

Pradesh (UP). With more time and resources, I would have also liked to include Punjab, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal. The accounts and interviews that follow demonstrate my argument that a multiplicity of factors were at play in determining the outcome of India's 2014 general elections, and that many of these factors were not immediately apparent and could be counter-intuitive.

Bengaluru: The Professionals

In Karnataka, I encountered the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which was seeking to extend its influence beyond Delhi and the north. This was not to be a success in electoral terms but it was notable how, in Bengaluru, anger against the establishment was channelled through the AAP. As Balaji, a software engineer-turned-activist, said: 'The country is suffering and going down. The problem is the centralization of power. We have two types of corruption: one is cutting edge and the other is behind closed doors.' For Balaji and his family, the AAP was offering something dramatically new.

Underneath a flyover road at Vijayanagar, Laxmi Arali, wearing a turquoise kurti and an AAP cap, was handing out leaflets. When she was not campaigning, she worked in software support. For her, too, corruption was the worst problem. If a middle-class person wanted to get admitted to a hospital or wanted a place at school for their kid, she said, they had to pay a bribe. This was the last chance to save India, in her opinion, and Arvind Kejriwal was the only hope for change. 'You have to pay money to get admission to school, money to get admitted to a hospital, money for electrical connections. It's a problem for the middle class, a serious problem. We can't do this any more.'

As Kejriwal's roadshow approached us, activists waved brooms, banged drums, and handed out leaflets. It seemed as if the party leader spent a bare moment beneath the flyover, being photographed and addressing a small crowd with energy and conviction, before moving on. It was only later, when I was travelling with him in his convoy on the road that I realized Bengaluru was not much interested in the man who had rattled Delhi and sent Sheila Dikshit into exile as governor of Kerala. Despite an amplified filmi voice blaring, 'Vote for the party of the COMMON man!', as we paraded through the city streets, people seemed to be unsure who Arvind Kejriwal was. Oddly, the

strongest recognition appeared to come from groups of school children. Although Bengaluru had reacted enthusiastically to the launch of his battle against corruption in 2012, this attempt to reach out to a mass audience in Karnataka was, in the words of a headline writer the following morning, 'a flAAP show'.

Commoners, though, were not Kejriwal's only targets. For several days, news that the AAP intended to hold a Rs 20,000-a-plate fundraising dinner at a fancy hotel had been causing agitation. The media were barred. An advocate even filed a complaint with the Election Commission that the dinner was a 'blind imitation' of American political traditions and was unconstitutional since it was 'dividing society as rich and poor'.

All the hassle was getting to the organizer, C.N. Radhakrishnan. Being a paediatric surgeon, he was not used to being in the political hot seat and having to discuss elections. Like many AAP workers and activists, he had come to the movement from outside and was only doing so because he was desperate for an end to the stasis of 'politics as usual' and to secret deals. 'We're not here to bring single malt and dance the night away,' he said in exasperation, while trying to placate a dozen or so police officers who had taken over the hotel lobby, aware that a leader from New Delhi was about to make an appearance. 'We've tried with Congress and with the BJP. Their election funding is to take money from corporates and have to pay it back.'

In the ballroom, well-dressed professionals waited for the arrival of the main attraction. They were told they could not make donations in cash and were obliged to take a receipt. 'One has been in the States enough to know about buying a plate for charity dinners', said a businessman. 'This is not about lobbying, it's about a very young organisation finding its feet. This is about civic activism and getting a better urban plan for Bangalore.' The fundraising dinner did not look too appetizing: a yellow Waldorf salad and a grey dessert that went by the name of Mocha Gateaux. It was reported later that the following evening, a more exclusive dinner had been held at a private residence, at which each well-heeled AAP-supporting guest was obliged to donate a minimum of Rs 10 lakh (1 million).

When Arvind Kejriwal finally appeared, he looked tired but calm, and spoke late into the night, answering questions from the audience and throwing out condemnations and claims of impropriety

against well-known politicians, seemingly at random. Among the party workers who had come with him from Delhi, he appeared to be the cynosure of an admiration that amounted almost to a cult. Kejriwal's tone of doom, his belief that he was the target of an establishment conspiracy, and his willingness to make unsubstantiated allegations was striking. He had a powerful, charismatic way of speaking. His achievement was—despite the solid power of established parties—to have enthused the detached middle classes and convinced them that it was still possible to make a practical difference to electoral politics in India.

In a different format, the city was home to another kind of new campaign. Fresh from giving an Aadhaar number to more than half of the nation's population as chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), software tycoon Nandan Nilekani was contesting from the Congress in Bangalore South. After an early morning round of Ambedkar Ground, where Nilekani was photographed hitting a tennis ball with a cricket bat, I asked him whether his experience of government had put him off politics.

'It was seeing it from the inside that made me want to join,' he said, as we sat together and ate idli for breakfast. 'As a technocrat, there was a limit to how much change I could effect. You can only do a job like finance minister if you've been elected. Your political legitimacy comes from winning an election. Once you win, what you say has meaning.'

Later, after a stint at a Ganapathi temple, the candidate began a rapid, raucous padayatra. The contrast between the regular Congress party workers and the 'Team Nandan' techies, some of them foreign-returned and keen to make India more livable for people such as themselves and their children, was profound. One youngish man who had made a fortune in data analytics told me: 'I'm interested in social entrepreneurship. We bring in data analytics and technology. As Nandan tells us, the campaign has to be both hi-tech and high-touch.' Barrelling along the road, the candidate looked exhausted, although the sun was not yet up in the sky. 'It's physically demanding,' he admitted. If he was not elected, would he stay in politics? 'I will. It's a great weight-loss programme.'

Despite the efforts of the Congress' candidate, the seat was retained by the incumbent H.N. Ananth Kumar of the BJP. Across the state of Karnataka, the Congress secured 40.8 per cent of the votes, against the BJP's 43 per cent, with the Janata Dal (Secular) taking 11 per cent (Election Commission of India 2014). The BJP's share of

the vote fell by a little over 1 per cent, but in terms of the number of seats, the party remained dominant. Local perceptions and distance from Delhi meant that it did not enjoy the bounce experienced by the BJP in many other states. For voters in Karnataka, corruption had been a dominant theme in the campaign, but there was no clear evidence that it determined the casting of votes. The AAP's success in Delhi was not easily replicable in other parts of India.

Andhra Pradesh: A State Divided

In what would soon become Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, national politics in 2014 existed only in the form of a question: would a particular leader at the centre help or hinder the division of the state and the allotment of contracts for the building of a new capital city? As in neighbouring Tamil Nadu (see Chapter 7), where old allies had evaporated, the Congress found itself perhaps unjustly eclipsed. Having been delivered the partition of Andhra Pradesh by the Congress-led government in New Delhi, state netas were rushing to escape its vortex, and new groupings were springing up, with Jagan Reddy's Yuva Jana Shramika Rythu (YSR) Congress Party and N. Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party (TDP), both gaining momentum.

The unusual thing, while Professor M. Kodandaram spoke in the prosperous city of Hyderabad to 'the face of Telangana', was that he showed none of the passion I had expected for blood and soil. What was the historical basis for the idea of separation, I asked this ideologue of the Telangana movement? He was vague: problems with water, misuse of state funds, and above all, a historic lack of chief ministers from their side. 'It's important that if communities assert themselves,' said Kodandaram, 'they are given the ability to govern themselves. We shut down the whole region, stopped everything working and had a successful campaign. We waited for Sonia Gandhi to come back from America, and then we did agitation. My training was in the Emergency.' Kodandaram saw the dispute over Telangana as part of a long historical struggle. 'If you go back to the 18th century, you will find that we have not had enough local people in the administration.' When I pressed him for the reasons for the demand for division, Kodandaram even said, astonishingly, that he could imagine reuniting with Andhra Pradesh after a few years, 'if we came together as equals'—a conundrum.

L. Rajagopal, an ex-Congress Member of Parliament (MP) and industrialist famous for pepper-spraying in the Parliament ('it was a small and legal pepper spray, like ladies carry in a handbag'), explained to me why local loyalties came first. 'It's easy to arouse passions, but we should create states on a scientific basis. That hasn't happened. I have, in some ways, a simple political philosophy. Throughout India, a person's loyalty is in this order: one, caste; two, religion; three, region; four, language; five, nation,' he said.

The political process was based on caste, the activist and thinker Kancha Ilaiah² agreed, or what he called 'Reddy hegemony and crony capitalism'. The BJP's support for small states was, he argued, a way of shaking the foundations of the Congress. 'The Telangana movement is led by feudals—it is not a progressive movement. Rural parts of the state are doing well. It's been the best period for tribals, Dalits, and backwards. More stable.' Ilaiah expanded on what is one of the twin concerns of this volume's introductory thesis, welfare (as positioned versus warfare):

The welfare packages of the Congress like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act [MGNREGA] have had a direct effect. It has freed labour from feudal bondage, and this has created a middle-class opposition to the Congress. In my own village of Papaiahpet in Warangal, before the 2004 election you would still find occasional Dalit families starving. Most people round about are scheduled tribes, and in the village there are Kurumas, Gowdas, Mudirajahs, and Madigars. So lots of backward families, but today in each family someone is educated, and more than half of the families would have a two-wheeler. The way people dress and what they expect has changed in ten years or so. I would say it's a combination of economic liberation and welfare schemes from the centre and the state government. It's ground level [*sic*].

While it may be true, as argued earlier in the 'Introduction' that a state with strong welfare initiatives reserves the right to punish its wards, Ilaiah's account also supported the idea that welfare does not necessarily entail political loyalty. According to him, the success of MGNREGA and the decision to bifurcate the state had rebounded on

² Since 2016, he has used the name Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, as part of his anti-Brahmin activism; his family comes from a community of shepherds.

the Congress. He thought the rural south and central India had done well over the last decade. Certainly, Telangana's dusty villages were visibly more prosperous than when I had last visited, in 2002, and the People's War Group was fighting the TDP. 'There's more wage security, less feudal bondage, and rice and oil are subsidized for poor families. An aspirational village revolution is taking place, with SCs [Scheduled Castes] and OBCs [Other Backward Classes] and some of the Muslims and STs [Scheduled Tribes] learning English,' Ilaiah concluded. The reasons for the improvement were complex: the infrastructure put in place by Naidu's administration to enable biometrically authenticated direct payments; individuals from rural areas going abroad and sending money home; and the social welfare schemes introduced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)—which in other states had often been badly or corruptly handled. The Aadhaar scheme seemed, from the conversations I had, to be universally popular among the marginalized.

Was the Congress capable of reaping any electoral benefit from dividing Andhra Pradesh and from its prudent economic policies? That seemed unlikely. When the votes in the state were counted, the new YSR Congress Party took away all of their seats, and the TDP (which won a similar vote share to the YSR Congress) gained the largest number of seats in the Lok Sabha. In Andhra Pradesh, favourable impressions of policies that had been a legacy of the Congress did not translate into electoral advantage for the party. The final result and the conclusive dominance of the TDP were, in large part, a consequence of the split in the Congress that had created the fledgling and dynamic YSR Congress Party.

An Interlude in Gujarat

As the BJP was handling its national campaign more slickly and strategically than the Congress, I had expected to find signs across the nation of the 'Modi *leher* (wave)' promised by the party's strident but generally anonymous social media promoters (see Chapter 1, for further discussion on the important role of social media in the election). However, where I found enthusiasm for the BJP, it was often for a promise of better governance and less graft, rather than a dedication to the idea of a particular future prime minister. When I asked the BJP's national spokesperson, Nirmala Sitaraman, what the party's top five priorities

would be if it formed the next government, her answers were notably all economic—constraining the fiscal deficit, introducing selective foreign direct investment, and so forth. It was only in Gujarat and in parts of Bihar and UP that the unconstrained Modi wave was in evidence. It came in Ahmedabad in a traditional form: as one lady said to me weepily, ‘He has made Indians proud again.’ But how did the Congress challenge this narrative of pride on Modi’s own turf?

It chose Lalji Desai, an articulate man in a short-sleeved kurta who had started life in a semi-nomadic Rabari pastoralist community and now headed an internationally connected non-governmental organization (NGO) in Ahmedabad. Though he was not a member of the Congress, and had flirted with the AAP, he was contacted out of the blue a few months before the election by ‘Team Rahul’, as he termed it. ‘I suppose they knew I was a community organizer and they had IB [Intelligence Bureau] reports on me. I felt shy at being inducted. When Rahul Gandhi came to meet the salt pan workers in Kutch, I had to anchor his dialogue with them. Now Team Rahul has made me a general secretary of the Congress party in Gujarat.’

It was the opposite of grass-roots politics: rather, an unaccountable management team from the capital anointed a member of the public as their chosen one. Why did Desai decide to take up their offer and join?

I think the Congress is the best tool to fight Hindu fundamentalism. I will start a bottom-up process to rebuild the party organisation, especially in rural areas where we are in a very weak position. The RSS is a patriarchal, feudal, Brahmanical organisation. In my childhood in my village, Hindus and Muslims played together and wore the same dress. But now because they’re feeling threatened, the signs of [religious] identity are stronger.

The tendency of the Congress high command to ignore its own people in a given state and parachute in its chosen candidates was unpopular with Shankersinh Vaghela too (Figure 10.2). He had served briefly as chief minister of Gujarat in the 1990s and had controlled the BJP until he was ousted by an upcoming Narendra Modi. Now he had transferred to the Congress and was pacing the marbled floor in his palatial house outside Gandhinagar. Vaghela’s rage against his own party and his former colleagues came to the surface quickly.

‘It’s all marketing’, he said. ‘The people are hypnotized by Modi. There is no law and order in the state, there is rape and cow-slaughter.’



Figure 10.2 Congress Leader Shankersinh Vaghela from Gujarat, Hemmed in by His Own party, Standing Outside His Residence Near Gandhinagar
Source: Author.

I stopped him. How was the Congress going to win seats here? 'I don't believe Delhi should choose people for Gujarat's seats,' he said with a sigh. 'I'm the leader here! But, OK, when in Rome, you have to do as the Romans do.' In open mutiny, but lacking options, Shankersinh Vaghela accepted the decisions of the high command.

On polling day, all 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat went to the BJP. The deciding factors in this result were: the legacy of Narendra Modi's conduct of politics during his time as chief minister; the

enduring dominance of the BJP; and the inability of the Congress party in New Delhi to generate a plausible, indigenous grass roots operation in the state.

Bihar and UP: Now You Cannot Slap in the Hindi Heartland

Expect the unexpected in the cow and sugar belt. Expect good, swift roads as you drive from Patna to Ghazipur, passing through red and green fields along the side of the wide, grey Ganga. Expect small industries and refrigeration units in the countryside. Expect castes that no longer vote in a bloc and people who refuse to be beaten down. 'Now you cannot slap,' a Bihari man said to me. 'Ten years ago in my village, you could slap people and they wouldn't say anything. A leader can no longer treat a caste group like a herd to be sent to vote.' Expect elections without the 'tak, tak' of rivals firing guns, as you would once have heard. Expect no booth capturing. Expect filth and dereliction in the holy city of Banaras, the roads pitted with potholes. Expect the assertion of hereditary politics in constituencies that for a generation were run by radical, grass roots leaders who arose out of adverse circumstances in the JP movement (led by Jayaprakash Narayan): Ram Vilas Paswan, Lalu Prasad, Sushil Modi, and Nitish Kumar. Expect the familiar in the Hindi heartland: netas who wish to pass on the mantle. 'The only thing all politicians here have in common,' said a cynical television journalist in Patna, 'is a love for choppers.'

Chirag Paswan, fresh from making his debut in the costly Bollywood flop *Miley Naa Miley Hum*, intended to become an MP. At 32, he felt ready. 'A politician's kid is more aware about politics than any other kid,' he said. 'But I was very vocal that I wanted to do some movies before politics.' He claimed that he had persuaded his 'secular' father, Ram Vilas Paswan, to do a 180-degree turn and support the BJP. Why? 'With Modi we will take the country to the next level.' What level? 'In development.'

Paswan Junior wore a crisp white shirt and blue jeans. Which designer were they from, if he didn't mind me asking? 'I don't know if I should say this, but they're True Religion.' Faith! True Religion jeans were selling at Rs 40,000 a pair in the finer shopping malls. On polling day, Chirag Paswan won his seat and became the MP for Jamui.

Lalu Yadav's daughter, Misa Bharti, with declared assets of Rs 5.5 crore (55 million), also hoped to enter the Parliament this time. She was thoughtful, and cautious, about saying anything except that she had seen the worst of times as well as the best. Instead, Lalu did the talking, sitting outdoors for his evening durbar on a towel-clad plastic chair, chewing paan, adjusting a burning mosquito coil, and gobbing into a spittoon.

A generation ago, 300–400 people would run in front of his rath at night. Now Lalu was at home on bail from jail, with an audience of perhaps 50 loyal followers. 'Everyone says Modi coming, coming, coming,' he boomed. 'What coming? I AM HERE! How will I show my face abroad if he is our prime minister? How? It will be the same as 1947. There's an international conspiracy to put in a hardliner, a hidden agenda by very, very cunning hi-fi people. Modi is a representative of the corporate and capitalist houses.'

Lalu was in eclipse, but his brilliance as a compelling, impromptu orator was undimmed. He was not, he said, the least bit bothered by dynastic politics. 'The issue is not Lalu Yadav's son or daughter, because every politician does this now. Doctors and engineers and income tax officials do the same.' As he was saying this, his son, Tejashwi, who a year later became deputy chief minister of Bihar, appeared. Did Tejashwi know Chirag Paswan, his near contemporary? 'I've met him a couple of times,' said Tejashwi, 'but we've never discussed politics.' This was a pattern I had noticed among the younger generation of dynasts: their interactions were social rather than political.

In Patna, a long-time associate of Narendra Modi who preferred to remain anonymous told me: 'Fifty IITians are at work in Bihar and another 500 across the country', running a technical, shadow campaign, separate from that of the BJP workers. He believed their powers of organization would win the day. Although there was much talk of the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) (which was depending on a Dalit–Brahmin–Muslim alliance), the Congress, the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), and other smaller parties, it was the BJP that was in the running.

Further west, in UP, political activists declared that communal harmony was intact (despite the spectre of the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots; see 'Introduction' and Chapter 5), even as they ran up against the superior organization of their rival. 'This is not a polarized place,' said a Congress

leader in Banaras. 'The waves of the Varuna and the Ganga are gentle and sweet, even if the city is still in a mess after having Murli Manohar Joshi as our MP.' A BJP-supporting businessman who was helping to target young professionals took a similar line: 'No one talks of Hindutva. People of our generation don't want to go back to those things.'

In Jalalipura, a Muslim part of the city, the sentiment was the same. In a narrow lane, watched by a goat wearing anklets, Azizul Haque, a powerloom owner, admitted that the failure of the opposition parties to agree on a joint candidate meant Narendra Modi would certainly take the seat. Did he feel like he was under threat? 'In this city, Hindus and Muslims are interdependent. Hindus sell us silk yarn, we weave it and sell it back to the Hindu traders. We would never vote for the BJP—although some Shias could—but when in government you have to unite people.'

Down by the ghat in Banaras, Sharda Pandey, recently widowed, carried a little basket containing a brass pot of rice and some jaggery and bel leaves. She is originally from Siwan in Bihar. 'I'll be here now until my death. My entire family has died here,' she said. Were things better now than ten years ago? 'A little. When I first came to this place, I used to mix salt and water and have that for a meal.' Who would she vote for? 'In earlier times, we voted for Indira Gandhi. Now traditionally we vote for the lotus. Everyone is making noise about Modiji, Modiji.'

In UP, when the votes were counted, the SP's vote share dropped by only a single percentage point, but electoral arithmetic meant they were reduced from 23 to five seats. The Congress and the BSP both suffered potentially fatal setbacks, and out of the 80 parliamentary seats in India's largest state, 71 were won by the BJP. In Bihar, the winning party's margin of victory was more tenuous, but collectively the NDA took 31 out of the 40 Lok Sabha seats (Election Commission of India 2014). Bihar and UP represented the strongest example of the success of the 'Modi wave' and the professional nature of the campaign by the BJP, but once again this achievement was predicated on specific local factors, particularly the SP's unforgiving loss of parliamentary seats because of the way that the vote had fractionalized in UP.

Delhi

In the national capital, I felt that 2014 was the most polarized general elections since the late 1990s. Those who had prospered under

a decade of UPA rule were frightened that an outsider might bring change to Lutyens' Delhi. The Congress was proving inept at trumpeting its achievements and the party's leaders lacked Narendra Modi's unerring talent for the cruel but effective jibes, such as calling Arvind Kejriwal 'AK 49' (*Indian Express* 2014) or saying of Rahul Gandhi: 'The shehzaada [prince] is giving sermons and lectures ... as if he has come from Mars' (Mishra 2014). Modi's own failure to clarify his economic policies, or to answer questions and be interviewed openly, passed under the radar—for he was making the political weather. The Congress campaign was opaque to the point of invisibility within the rapid, Modi-fied news cycle. Allegations regarding the UPA's failures and corruption during ten years in government were met with slow rebuttals. After the election, this process would continue when the new government claimed credit for schemes that had originated with the UPA, but this provoked little effective comeback from the Congress.

After my journey across different states during the 2014 general election campaign, one of my strongest impressions was that politicians from all parties had failed to respond to the fact that the mean average age of an Indian was 26. Much political dialogue and many cultural references harked back to earlier generations and remained mysterious to younger voters. The BJP was better than its opponents at harnessing a sense of a quickly changing India, but voters were now more willing than their parents to do as they chose, and not to fall into patterns.

This chapter argues that the outcome of the 2014 Indian general elections was a consequence of the targeting of 'winnable' seats by the BJP, the professional nature of the BJP's national campaign compared to that of the Congress', high turnout among new voters, a careful projection of Narendra Modi as a future prime minister, and a failure of appeals to caste-based identity in parts of north India at a time when voters seemed willing to make decisions primarily on the grounds of economic self-interest and aspiration. The consolidation of Hindu votes around a message of Hindutva appeared to be a less significant determinant than in previous and subsequent election campaigns. Multiple factors conditioned the outcome on polling day, and many of these were complex in their effect.

The rise of any political movement depends upon momentum. In the case of the BJP, since the 2014 general elections, this momentum has been discernible, aided by the inability of Congress and other parties to offer a plausible oppositional narrative that can catch the popular imagination. Under Narendra Modi's guidance, the BJP has been skilful at widening its reach and at extending the boundaries of what is permissible in Indian electoral politics. The decision to impose Yogi Adityanath as chief minister of UP in March 2017 without advance warning in the campaign, and the ease with which this was accepted by the party, indicates that the BJP is evolving rapidly and is willing to promote Hindutva in a way that was not attempted in 2014. The party president, Amit Shah, boasts that in terms of membership, the BJP is now the largest political party in the world (French 2016). It seems probable that in the absence of an unforced error by the government, a Modi-led administration may be likely to return to power in New Delhi at the general elections in 2019. Indian politics is entering a new era, the impact of which is not yet fully understood.

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II

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Democracy and Manifestos in the 2014 Indian Elections

Irfan Ahmad

Only a tiny segment of India's vast and diverse population either reads or seriously discusses manifestos of different political parties. Perhaps much tinier is the segment whose acts of voting might be determined by the contents of manifestos. Yet, manifestos do offer a window to understand elections in particular and democratic politics in general. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, manifesto itself became a topic of debate for the television media (*Times Now* 2014), not so much on account of its contents but more because of the delay by the main opposition party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to release it. The BJP was the last party to release its manifesto whereas it was the first to have declared its prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi. The BJP released its manifesto on 7 April when voting had already begun in some constituencies.

This chapter analyses the manifestos of three parties: the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the BJP, and the Indian National Congress (hereafter Congress), the party in power at the time of elections. The main contest was between the BJP and the Congress. The AAP was a new party, which had, for the first time, won to form a short-lived government in 2013 Delhi assembly elections. Its *differentia specifica* (mark of distinction) is its opposition to corruption. Since assuming power

in Delhi in 2013, its urban appeal widened beyond Delhi and it was considered a force to be reckoned with. Of the total 543 parliamentary seats, the AAP fielded its candidates in more than 350 constituencies (*Times of India* 2014b). My choice of the three parties for analysis is based on the premise that they, unlike many regional parties, had an all-India appeal and political base and were therefore also likely to be more influential. My main contention is that there are more similarities than differences in the manifestos of the three parties. The extent and nature of these similarities were such that the Congress accused the BJP of copying its manifesto and the BJP made a similar accusation (see the last section in this chapter). Put differently, I argue that there is a unity of politics in the midst of apparent diversity as manifest in the manifestos (which primarily outline policies) of these parties. Minor differences that existed amongst these manifestos made a marginal difference, thereby eliminating politics through installation of bare policies, which were hardly different from one party to another (discussed later in this chapter).

The Argument: Politics qua Policy

My argument is informed by the writings of the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who institutes a distinction between politics and policy. To Rancière (1992: 58), policy is built on consent and consensus concerned with distribution of shares which sanctify the existing hierarchy. Unlike the abstraction of John Rawls' proceduralism (Chambers 2011: 303–4) or the deliberation model of Jürgen Habermas (Gutmann and Thompson 2004)—where deliberation is often deliberately at the service of the status quo—politics, for Rancière, is about disagreement and dissensus. 'The essence of politics,' writes Rancière (2001; also see Rancière 1999), 'is the manifestation of dissensus' which imagines a 'possible world' other than the one which actors presently inhabit, whereas consensus is about prolonging the prevalent order of things so as to terminate—if necessary, by the violent arms of the 'law'—the very yearnings and flashes of a possible world. It is for this reason that Rancière detects an affinity between the thinking and deeds of policing and of the policymaking, to the extent that police and policy can be viewed as complimentary, even substitutes (Chambers 2011: 306). In short: Rancière theorizes 'politics not as a specific single world but as

a conflictive world, not a world of competing interests or values but *a world of competing worlds*' (Rancière 2011: 7; emphasis mine). When seen from this perspective, the differences, if any, amongst the manifestos of the AAP, the BJP, and the Congress appear in the realm of policy, not in politics. That these parties have different names and say *things differently*, as opposed to saying *different things*, does not mean that they are also different in their politics, as outlined above. Friedrich Engels' (d. 1895) observation that 'the names of political parties are never entirely right' is not without some merit (Schmitt 1986: 29).

A word about manifesto is in order here. A manifesto, in dictionary terms, is a public declaration, spoken or written (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2014). Popularly, it means a written document. A manifesto is thus a document of intention and plan, also giving clues to what a party thinks of overall politics. Its ultimate aim, however, is to persuade or manipulate voters in favour of a specific party. After getting elected to power, no party has ever delivered 100 per cent what it had promised in a manifesto. At times, a party elected to power may also go against what it had promised. Importantly, everything is not manifest in a manifesto, for many things remain subtly latent. The latent becomes manifest not in a manifesto but in practices of electoral mobilizations, and subsequently, where the unsaid is as salient as the style, time, place, and the audience—both visible and invisible—for which things are said.

Before I present my analysis, let me spell out the disciplinary and methodological assumptions that bear on this chapter. Issues of elections and manifestos have been the pet subjects of study by political scientists. Anthropologists' interest in them is relatively recent and still thin. This chapter on manifestos might well be one of the first, if not the first, writings by an anthropologist who is also trained in sociology and has taught and researched anthropology, politics, international relations, and religion for the past decade or so. Put differently, I tend to distrust the notion of a singular disciplinary fidelity; I instead favour what Immanuel Wallerstein (2003: 457) calls 'historical social sciences', albeit with a 'soft approach' (Burawoy 2013: 14).

The Similarities

Comparing the manifestos of the above-mentioned parties, one is struck by their similarities. The points of differences across them are at best

minor and pertain predominantly to policy, not politics. Furthermore, the differences appear to be more in modalities and degrees and much less in the substance of politics (cf. Chapter 10). Let me outline similarities first. Because the manifestos include a wide variety of issues, for the sake of brevity and clarity, I analyse them under three headings in this section of this chapter: (a) Economy, Development, Religion; (b) Social Groups; and (c) International Relations and Security. In the next section, I focus on the minor differences in the three manifestos to say that they, too, do not reflect what Rancière calls dissensus. I conclude with some observations on the prevalent views that elections offer freedom of choice to show their limits, structural as well as theoretical.

Economy, Development, Religion

The AAP, the BJP, and the Congress all promised new jobs. While the AAP and the BJP promised ‘millions of jobs’, the Congress promised ‘100 million’ (AAP 2014b: 10; BJP 2014: 29, 31; Congress 2014: 16).¹ On the broader economy, too, they were similar as they showed no alternative to a Francis Fukuyama-type of economy. Because the Congress spearheaded such an economy in the early 1990s and the BJP largely went with it, only the AAP was expected to offer an alternative. However, the AAP did not seem to have given sufficient thought to economy. It simply wished to ‘clean’ the economy that already existed. It was opposed to a tiny branch of capitalism—‘crony capitalism’. Its vision of economy was ‘neither Left nor Right’ but only ‘in the interest of India’ (AAP: 10). Such a position of the AAP resembles the ‘Third Way’ of Tony Blair, the former United Kingdom (UK) prime minister (BBC 1999). Sociologist Anthony Giddens, ‘Tony Blair’s favorite intellectual’,² wrote a book bearing that title, the aim of which was,

¹ From here onwards, I refer to the manifestos by the name of the party, followed by the page numbers. Thus, *Aam Aadmi Party National Manifesto 2014*. Ghaziabad: Aam Aadmi Party, hereinafter AAP; *Election Manifesto 2014: BJP*. New Delhi: Bharatiya Janata Party, hereinafter BJP; *Lok Sabha Elections 2014 Manifesto*: Indian National Congress. New Delhi: All India Congress Committee, hereinafter Congress.

² The quote is from an endorsement by the editor of *The Observer* published on the back cover of Giddens’s (1998) book.

among others, to make the UK 'a sparking point for creative interaction between' the unbridled capitalism of 'the US and' socialism of 'Continental Europe' (Giddens 1998: ix).

All three parties favoured entrepreneurs and businesses (AAP: 10; BJP: 29, 30; Congress: 10) with minimum government regulations. To the BJP, the existing regulations signified 'tax terrorism' (BJP: 10; the BJP unintentionally admitted that the state also enacted terror because tax is imposed by the state). The AAP simply added 'honest' before entrepreneurs and businesses (AAP: 11, 12). Against 'black money' they all stood. While the Congress promised to 'recover' it, the BJP vowed to 'bring back black money' and the AAP wanted its 'return' (Congress: 11; BJP: 5; AAP: 12). They all promised to fight corruption and price rise (AAP: 16; BJP: 4; Congress: 15). They all endorsed public-private partnership in economy (AAP: 11; BJP: 9; Congress: 15). Likewise, all three parties stood for health to all. Even the words deployed in the three manifestos were the same: 'quality healthcare' (AAP: 8; BJP: 18; Congress: 10). The promise of education to all was also common. Precise details of how health and education will be delivered were starkly absent, however.

Over 90 per cent of the workforce is engaged in the informal or unorganized sector, where the multitude of the poor struggle for their daily lives. No party structurally aimed to better their lot. The AAP, which claimed to be a party of the common man, showed its utter elitism when it promised to fight casualization of teachers, doctors, and so on (AAP: 15), but said very little about the unorganized sector where, in practice, there was not even an effective contract, which the poor—because of the lack of adequate social-educational capital and their overall location in the asymmetrical social structure—could hardly resort to for their own benefit. The AAP simply stated that it aimed 'to regularize their working condition and space' (AAP: 16). The AAP, the BJP, and the Congress promised to improve the working conditions of the poor multitude without questioning the very violent condition which routinely (re)produced the poor. Moreover, the poor and their concerns were not ends in themselves but a bare means for India's progress. While for the BJP food security was integral to 'national security' (BJP: 15), the AAP stated that it will not 'disadvantage' the poor so that they could contribute to 'India's prosperity' (that is, without the poor themselves becoming prosperous) (AAP: 12). Yet, each of them

invoked the Constitution, the preamble of which (cited by the AAP) calls India a 'socialist' republic. Is not the written word 'socialist' vacuous in the Constitution, or—to invoke Plato—an orphan which 'rolls about all over the place, falling into the hands of those who have no concern with it' (Plato 1956: 275)?³

Let me close this section on economy with a theoretical reflection on 'development', which the Congress, the BJP, and the AAP were all wedded to, the last one somewhat differently. While the slogan of the Congress manifesto, appearing on its every page, was 'Each Hand Power, Each Hand Development', the subtitle of the BJP's manifesto was 'Support of All; Development of All'. Clearly, 'development' is one of the rare concepts that enjoys legitimacy and acceptability across party lines. While only a few would probably contest that economic betterment and technological advances have become central to the idea of a good life under the capitalist modern nation-states, the near sacral status and the sheer power enjoyed by the concept of development in a post-colonial state such as India may make many sceptical of the prefix 'post' in 'post-colonial'. Historically, the term 'development' came into circulation precisely at a moment when the colonial empire was about to formally end. It became a key concept for the ex-colonial masters and new nationalist rulers to collaborate and benefit mutually (Rahnema 1997: ix; also see Escobar 1997). Thus, the beginning of development was not the end of colonialism but its transformed continuation in a new world order controlled by the West and enunciated in a different vocabulary. This was at once political-economic, intellectual, social, even spiritual. Based on interviews with colonial officers of the British Empire—who had worked in Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and elsewhere, and many of whom had joined the development industry after the formal decolonization—Uma Kothari (2006) rightly traces the historical link between development industry and the British Empire, arguing how the discourses (along with the functionaries) of colonial administration got transformed into 'development' (see Chapter 4).

³ If so, how do we account for theorization of the written word as a 'secondary form of action' by Jean Paul Sartre and as 'loaded pistols' by Brice Parain (Sartre 1993[1948]: 14–15)? Obviously, this is not the proper place to discuss the contrasting perspectives on the written word by Plato, Sartre, and many others.

This was no less true in the case of the 'Middle East', itself an imperial term (Ahmad 2011: 30–1). Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary (1945–51), held that 'the only way to preserve British influence [over the Middle East] would be through measures of economic development which would raise the standards of living of ordinary people' (Louis 1984: 17). Important in this quote is not the claim to improve the condition of ordinary people but, under its pretext, to perpetuate the British influence.

To the continued appeal of the concept of development was added the notion of 'good governance' by international organizations such as the World Bank. The 'good governance' doctrine came into massive circulation from the mid-1990s onwards (Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 1–2). Apparently unhappy with the 'good governance' mantra, the AAP proposed 'self-governance' (AAP: 3). However, far from being an alternative to 'good governance', 'self-governance' was, in fact, largely its substitute because, if translated into English, the book *Swaraj* by Arvind Kejriwal, key leader of the AAP, would be 'self-rule' and not 'self-governance'. My point is that the AAP, too adopted—if not actually copied—the dominant vulgate of governance, which cannot be historically and analytically delinked from that of 'development'. The discourse of 'good governance'—like the slogan of the LG Company, 'Life is Good'—makes us believe that what exists is already good and, therefore, people in quest for an alternative vision of good life are at best utopian, if not fools.

Linked to development is the notion of religion. In contemporary discussions, they are often depicted as not only two separate but oppositional entities. Several media groups and journalists sympathetic—wittingly or otherwise—to the BJP argued how it gave top priority in its manifesto to development over religion. Religion was relegated to the backstage, appearing only at the far end (half a page), just before conclusion (BJP: 41). At stake here is the attempt to show that the BJP was in favour of a secular goal like 'development', not religion. The media fashioned this separation between religion and development even as the BJP leaders themselves saw the two as deeply connected. Read the following conversation between journalist Barkha Dutt of *NDTV* and Murli Manohar Joshi, a top BJP leader who also chaired its manifesto committee. While discussing the BJP manifesto, Dutt asked Joshi: 'Has development trumped identity politics?' Joshi denied any

shift. Persisting with her predetermined narrative of development, she asked him again: 'Is there an ideological confusion, as ninety per cent of manifesto deals with development?', whereas the BJP leader, Amit Shah, made hate speech against Muslims. Let us recall Joshi's words, mentioned in Chapter 1: 'Barkha jī [a word for respect], you have every right to be confused. But you have no right to confuse the people and me' (NDTV 2014a).

Dutt discarded the coupling of development and Hindutva, which had been made plainly by Joshi, to recast development sans Hindutva as the key issue.⁴ My larger point is that development is necessarily linked to culture and religion. It is common sense in anthropology to say that development, or for that matter economics, is not merely economic. As tourism, travel, commodities, services, institutions, places, and ideas are religious, so are development and economy. In fact, pure economy is a misnomer; it is always political economy (Ahmad 2013b). As politics and religion are linked, so are religion and development (cf. Chapter 10).

Social Groups

The AAP, the BJP, and the Congress also bore similarities vis-à-vis their stances towards various social groups and communities. All claimed to champion the cause of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). In addition to supporting the existing reservations of these groups in education and government jobs, the AAP and the Congress also made other promises, especially to the STs (AAP: 18; Congress: 22–3). The Congress spoke of encouraging entrepreneurs amongst the SCs and the STs through mechanisms such as 'easy access to credit' (Congress: 23). On the other hand, the AAP stressed that STs should take 'charge of their own development' and that the natural and forest resources, including land, were not forcibly taken away from them (AAP: 18). All the three parties were committed to end the practices of untouchability and manual scavenging. The BJP did not mention reservation, implying it to be 'tokenism' and 'identity politics' and thus a violator of social harmony. It, therefore, aimed to combine 'social justice' and 'social harmony'. The BJP stated that

⁴ Other media, too, followed this line of presentation; see Ahmad (2014a).

it would ensure the prevention of atrocities against the SCs and STs (BJP: 16). However, the precise mechanisms to be followed to ensure their safety remained pretty vague. All the three parties promised to ensure safety to and non-discrimination against women. They all supported the proposal for 33 per cent reservation for women—‘nation-builder’ in the vocabulary of the BJP—in the Parliament and the state assemblies (AAP: 17; BJP: 5; Congress: 24).

Muslims were mentioned in the three manifestos, albeit differently. Under the heading, ‘Security and Non-discrimination for Muslims’, and opposed to ‘the communal politics of the BJP’ and the ‘vote-bank politics of the Congress’, the AAP promised to end police harassment and false cases of terrorism against young Muslims and prosecution of police officers involved in harassment. Recognizing that the existing reservation policies are religion-based, as Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians are excluded from the category of SC, the AAP stated that it ‘believes that the reservation should be religion-neutral’ (AAP: 20). However, it did not spell out whether it would take any concrete step to change the existing legislation; the AAP merely believed in it. Without using the term ‘Muslims’, the Congress referred to them under ‘Safeguarding Minorities’. Highlighting that the Congress introduced it in 2013, it promised to pass the Prevention of Communal and Targeted Violence Bill ‘as a matter of priority’ (Congress: 26; also p. 12). Contra the Congress’ promise of the provision of broadband connectivity ‘within 18 months’ (Congress: 11), there was no such time-bound promise for the passage of the Communal and Targeted Violence Bill. This lack of sincerity was also evident in its statement on the Sachar Committee’s recommendations when it said that ‘the Congress will work tirelessly to ensure that every single recommendation is reviewed and efforts are made for their implementation’. The particularity of how the Congress would execute the recommendation was lost in the mist of generality—‘efforts are made’ (Congress: 26). Like the Congress, the BJP referred to Muslims under ‘Minorities’ in less than half a page. It used the term ‘Muslims’ once to say that they would be given ‘equal opportunity’. Among the issues named were: modernization of madrasas; promotion of Urdu; empowerment of waqf boards; ‘curate[ing] their rich heritage and culture’ (what is meant by ‘curate’ is unclear to me); creation of a peaceful and secure environment; and establishment of a permanent interfaith consultative mechanism ‘to promote harmony and trust’.

The particularities of how these issues would be addressed in practice seemed to have been lost in the grandiose platitude of ‘equal opportunity’ (BJP: 17).

International Relations and Security

International relations and security appeared at the far end of the manifestos. Their placement at the end, however, did not mean that they were less significant. Nor did it imply that the categories of ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ were neatly separate as they often dovetailed into one another. On international relations and security, too, similarities were stark in the three manifestos. Though articulations varied, sentiments of what the BJP called the ‘resurgent India’ and her ‘rightful place in the comity of nations’ (BJP: 39) were common. Reeking of neo-realism (Ashley 1984; Shimko 2010), the BJP aimed to orient foreign policy ‘through pragmatism’ based on ‘enlightened national interests’ to achieve ‘one India, superior India’, a slogan that was the manifesto’s title and appeared at the bottom of its every page. ‘Instead of being led by big powers,’ the BJP stated, ‘we will engage proactively on our own’ (BJP: 40). To this end, the Congress promised to work for India’s permanent membership to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Congress: 47). Was it not demeaning for the world’s largest democracy to aspire to join the exclusive, undemocratic UNSC—Jacques Derrida (2005: 98) described the mechanism of its veto power as ‘monstrosity’ (also see Ahmad 2011)—comprising just the powerful states rather than demand its democratization for the whole world? How can the Congress’ claim to have an ‘inclusive vision’ (Congress: 4) be serious when it aspired to be exclusive? Does not such an inclusive vision *exclude all that is inclusive*?

The AAP shared the idea of a resurgent India and believed in ‘supplementing India’s meaningful engagements with the US’ (AAP: 25), with the conglomerates of states, for instance BRICS (acronym for the economic grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)⁵ and IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa),⁶ a trilateral forum of emerging economies. The AAP and the Congress mentioned China

⁵ For more on this, see BRICS (2014).

⁶ For more, see IBSA (2014).

in relation to border disputes, both stressing continued trade relations between the two. No non-powerful, 'non-emerging' country of Latin America or Africa was mentioned in the AAP manifesto. The absence of desire by political parties to engage with the marginalized, poor, and non-emerging countries (which have now begun to be viewed mainly as economies) was also reflected in sociologists' academic desire to engage only with the emerging economies such as the BRICS. Announcing the change of editorial team and the new 'direction for the journal', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (CIS), a well-known Indian journal, stressed the need to engage with BRICS (Srivastava and Mehta 2012: vii). One may ask: on what grounds are countries such as Bolivia, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Peru, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, or the Gulf States—in many of these countries a significant section of people of Indian origin have been living for decades, even centuries—academically 'uninteresting' for the new direction of the journal? Does the CIS's call for engagement with BRICS straightforwardly reflect as well as constitute the relationships between power and knowledge (sociological), where knowledge is wilfully unmusical about studying the poor and the marginalized countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific? The Congress' position on this issue was similar. The poor and 'underdeveloped' countries found no specific mention in the Congress manifesto. Disregarding their contemporary relevance, the Congress spoke of India's 'advocacy of freedom of African countries and steady support for Palestine' as no more than a part of India's 'heritage'. That is, these issues are a matter of history, not for *now* or *future* (emphasis mine; Congress: 41).

They all used the term 'cross-border terrorism' and vowed to combat it (AAP: 25; BJP: 38; Congress: 47). Whereas the BJP and the Congress named Pakistan (BJP: 37; Congress: 48), the AAP did not. Internal and external security—listed separately—however overlapped. The AAP and the BJP reiterated that 'Kashmir is an integral part' of India (AAP: 26; BJP: 8). Note that what is integral is Kashmir, not Kashmiris. The BJP and the Congress shared the hegemonic discourse on terrorism, the former committed to champion the 'uniform international opinion on issues like terrorism and global warming' (BJP: 40). A keen reader may notice that for the BJP, terrorism was a subject of science in the same way as global warming was and, therefore, the opinion had to be 'uniform', not multiple. Why should democracies, central to which is

plurality of views, have a 'uniform' opinion on terrorism? To fight terrorism, the BJP and the Congress stressed heightening of intelligence and coordination amongst various state agencies. To this, the AAP added addressing the 'root causes of citizens' disaffection' and making laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act less harsh (AAP: 25; also see 'Introduction').

What was common to all the three manifestos was that they reproduced the statist and mediatized definition—national and global—of terrorism without interrogating it. That the terrorism they all aimed to fight was construed in a specific—'Islamic' in this case—rather than a generic way remained firmly established. Hence, it was not questioned why acts of violence by the Maoists or by the activists of organizations such as Bajrang Dal and Abhinav Bharat were not called terrorism if terrorism was an act of violence or threat of violence by non-state actors against civilians as well as institutions of the state (Ali 2014). Likewise, the gruesome acts of violence by the state stood excluded from the ambit of terrorism (Jackson, Murphy, and Poynting 2009). While several voices from 'civil society' were reflected in those manifestos on many issues, those which questioned the state's and media's position on the existence and use of the term 'Islamic terrorism', or asked for credible evidence for its presence,⁷ had no place in any of the manifestos. Put differently, the three manifestos denied the history of state terror. It is well-known that various states—for instance, Indonesia, Israel, Algeria, Mali, Russia under the Czars, and the United States (US) (Keenan 2012; Roberts 2007; *Sydney Morning Herald* 2005)—have practiced terror and blamed it onto groups their own agencies created; in terrorism literature, it is known as 'false flag terrorism'.⁸ Whereas the subheading 'Media Policy' in the AAP's manifesto rightly spoke against the practice of 'paid news', there was no mention of how the explicitly biased media—across

⁷ Most Muslims hold that Indian Mujahideen, regarded by the media as one of the top terrorist organizations, does not exist and that it is a syncretic creation of the intelligence agencies and the media. Digvijaya Singh, a key Congress leader, and K. Rahman Khan, a union minister, articulated this viewpoint (see *Twocircles.net* [2010] and *Indian Express* [2013] respectively).

⁸ On this concept, see Lutz and Lutz (2011: 60–1). For a critique of statist discourses on terrorism, see Ahmad (2010, 2012a, 2012b) and Bailes and Aksan (2012).

differences of genres, language, and region—created and legitimized the discourse of ‘Islamic terrorism’ and contributed to the imprisonment of innocent Muslim youth on a large scale.⁹

The BJP and the Congress spoke of peace and war in the same breadth. While the Congress said that ‘we will continue the missile program to meet potential threats in region’ (Congress: 47), the BJP stated that ‘in our neighbourhood we will pursue friendly relations’ but ‘whenever required we will not hesitate from taking strong stands and steps’ (BJP: 40). Given that India is the ‘world’s largest importer of weapons’ (AAP: 24), the AAP, the BJP, and the Congress all called for ‘indigenous’ production of weapons and war technology (AAP: 24; BJP: 38; Congress: 46). Is there no tension between the longing for indigenization of weapons of mass violence and simultaneous invoking of non-violence, which the AAP also extended to animals (AAP: 22; see later in the chapter)? Why was there no discussion of indigenization of life-saving medicines due to which millions die, or agricultural seeds¹⁰ that contributed to thousands of suicides by farmers, especially in the southern and western states of India?

The Differences

The apparent key differences in the manifestos pertained to: (a) the construction of Ram Mandir over the site of the Babri Masjid, illegally demolished by the BJP and its allies; (b) abrogation of Article 370, which gives special provisions to Kashmir; (c) passage of the uniform civil code (aimed, *inter alia*, at replacing Muslim Personal Law); and (d) legislation to ‘protect and promote cow’. These issues figured in the BJP manifesto under the title ‘Cultural Heritage’ (in an attempt to separate them from the political).

That these issues did not figure in the AAP or the Congress manifestos in no way meant that these two parties necessarily opposed them. As was widely believed by many for long, and recently confirmed by

⁹ On the media biases on the issue of so-called terrorism, see Ahmad (2014c).

¹⁰ I thank Zakaria Siddiqui, an economist at the University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia for drawing my attention to the issue of agricultural seeds.

the investigative news website *Cobrapost*, the plan for Babri Masjid's demolition was known to the then opposition leader, L.K. Advani, as well as Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao (and other top leaders) who belonged to the Congress (*Cobrapost* 2014a).¹¹ I am not aware of a comprehensive and categorical statement by the AAP on this issue; however, if one goes by the remarks by one of its main leaders—Kumar Vishwas—on the Ram Mandir issue, the AAP looked to be in agreement with the BJP. In response to the question, 'Would (you) like to have Ram Mandir at the site or not?', Vishwas replied through Twitter: 'Every Indian wants Ram Mandir at its site except [the] BJP because then they will lose an issue of making people fool' (Krishnan 2013). As the response demonstrates, Vishwas was critical of the BJP for postponing the construction of the Ram Mandir to retain its Hindu support base, but this criticism was at best 'friendly'. That is, Vishwas wanted the BJP to build the temple immediately, rather than keep postponing, as it had been doing so far. The issue here is not if the Ram Mandir should be built or not, for no Indian—including Muslims—is against its construction. The issue at stake is that the question posed to Vishwas—and his subsequent response—eliminates the very existence of Babri Masjid and its illegal destruction, and that the planned temple is to be built exactly on the spot where the Babri Masjid existed. With systematic erasure of the Babri Masjid from popular memory and the visual public sphere and nearly no credible opposition to the BJP's agenda, either from the Congress or the AAP, does the construction of the Ram Mandir over the site of the demolished mosque look remote? The absence of any credible opposition to the BJP's plan of the Ram Mandir by the AAP and the Congress—indeed by any party—amounting to its tacit support, is also reflected in the description of India in the BJP manifesto as follows: 'India shall remain a natural home for persecuted Hindus and they shall be welcome to seek refuge here' (BJP: 40). In many speeches during the election rallies, Modi emphatically articulated this credo differentiating the Hindu and Muslim Bangladeshis coming to India as refugees and infiltrators respectively (Varadarajan 2014).

¹¹ The videos were first put on the *Cobrapost* website and were later available on *Cobrapost* (2014b), in many instalments under 'Operation Janmabhoomi'. For a summary of the investigation by the *Cobrapost*, see *Times of India* (2014a).

That the apparently secular terms—refugees and infiltrators—were indeed religious need not be stressed.

Though the AAP did not say so explicitly, its statement on ‘animal welfare’ might be interpreted to also justify ‘cow protection’ and oppose dietary choice of beef. Invoking India’s ‘richest traditions of respecting animals and living peacefully alongside them in a spirit of *ahimsa* (non-violence)’, in particular Emperor Ashoka’s (268–233 BC) rock edicts, the AAP stated that the industries which ‘use animals for food, clothing, or entertainment’ would be ‘tightly regulated and closely monitored’ (AAP: 22). Given the lack of specificity vis-à-vis actual policy in the manifesto, including the specificity of what kind of animals, it is unwise to link it straightforwardly to the banning of beef. However, two points are worth considering. First, the AAP invoked Ashoka selectively and inconsistently. In the Second Pillar Edict, Ashoka had also included birds and fish: ‘On men and animals, birds and fish I have conferred many boons, even to saving their lives.’ So why did the AAP exclude fish and birds? Second, the First Rock Edict saying ‘no animal is to be killed for sacrifice’ also included ‘no festivals are to be held for the king finds much evil in festivals’. The question then arises: why did the AAP not ask for a ban on festivals, including electioneering, most of which is beginning to resemble an advertising festival with music, songs, dialogues, slogans—in short, political fun? As Ashoka also stood for providing medicine for ‘men and beast’, why did the AAP not make a similar demand?¹² Might one be right in inferring that by not making such a demand for provision of medicine to men and beast in the capitalist democratic state that we live under, the AAP, in fact, offered an edited, presentable version of Ashoka that pleased the ruling capitalists and elites devoted to eliminate any state welfare programme on the puerile ground of ‘free’ market? Furthermore, since Jainism is also part of India’s ‘richest tradition’, why did the AAP not demand a policy and legislation against the killings of insects, including in agriculture, which, because it leads to murder of insects, stands forbidden in Jainism (Dalal 2006: 210–11; Dundas 2002)? Did the presence of ‘Animal Welfare’ in the AAP’s manifesto and simultaneous absence of demand for ‘Insect Welfare’ not mean that in a democracy where numbers reign supreme, the Jain traditions are of no consequence simply because followers of

¹² All quotes for Ashoka’s edicts from Embree (1999: 144–5).

Jainism number only 4,225,053 (0.41 per cent as per 2001 census; Dalal 2006: 210)? Finally, how do we reconcile Ashoka's respect for the life of animals and the denial of the same to humans, as Ashoka continued to uphold death penalty for human beings (Embree 1999: 152n57)?

It is true that the Congress occasionally and non-antagonistically reprimands the BJP on these issues; so does the AAP (2014a). However, it is one thing to publicly disapprove of the BJP and quite another to launch an honest ideological movement against it. Is it just a coincidence that the lives of over 50,000 Muslims—terrorized into living in camps in Muzaffarnagar owing to violence by the dominant local caste—and the wilful inaction by the state administration in 2013 therein were not election issues to figure in the manifestos of the AAP, the BJP, or the Congress? Why did/does the AAP define corruption predominantly in financial terms to exclude planned violence by the so-called civil society and the direct or indirect role of authorities in that violence? What politics does the AAP enact by first monopolizing the definition of corruption and then rendering it as the problem in/of politics?

Visual Symbolism

Let me close this section with a description of differences in the visual symbolism of the three manifestos. The cover page of the AAP's manifesto showed a crowd, comprising almost entirely of men, raising the party's electoral symbol—a broom—upwards (see Figure 11.1). No known face of the AAP leadership was visible. This might mean that the manifesto's cover aimed to represent the claim of the AAP to be a party of the common man. The cover had no slogan inscribed on it. The slogan—'Vote for an honest party; vote for the AAP'—appeared on the back cover. In contrast, the BJP's manifesto cover, with a saffron background, had smiling photos of its top four leaders on the upper left side and a photo of Modi flanked by three BJP leaders on each side (of the total six, two were women) at the bottom, in addition to its symbol—the lotus—placed in the centre. Below the lotus was its key slogan: 'One India, Superior India (*Ek Bharat, Sresht Bharat*)', which appeared at the bottom left of every page. The sub-slogan, 'Support of All; Development of All', appeared right below the key slogan. Unlike

the blank inside of the AAP's cover page, the BJP's had photos of two of its ideologues: Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (1901–1953) and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (1916–1968). The size of these two photos were larger than those of its top leaders on the front page, which were vertically arranged as follows: Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Rajnath Singh, and Murli Manohar Joshi. On the top right on each page of the BJP's manifesto was written 'BJP', over which was the lotus symbol. The back cover page had another slogan inscribed in bold: 'Time for Change, Time for Modi.'

In some ways similar to the BJP, the cover of the Congress manifesto had photos of Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh placed on the top right, with that of a smiling Rahul Gandhi in conversation with seven rural men and women at the bottom. The manifesto was titled 'Your Voice, Our Pledge', in capital letters. Its key slogan, 'Each Hand Power, Each Hand Development', was placed at the bottom right of every page with the symbol of an open palm. While the upper half of the back page of the manifesto showed young men and women, the bottom half had its symbol and slogan, below which men and women stood holding one another's hand. All the three manifestos gave the uniform resource locaters (URLs) of their Facebook and Twitter accounts. While the Congress also gave the URL of its YouTube and Instagram pages as well as short message service (SMS) number, the AAP provided its email account and phone number and the BJP gave the URL of its manifesto page. The mention of these varied technologies by the three parties



Figure 11.1 Manifestos of the AAP, the Congress, and the BJP (left to right)
Source: Screenshots of PDFs of respective manifesto covers by the author.

probably implies the significance they attached to the respective media in terms of reaching as well as assuming the audience/watchers.

Returning to the photographic symbols on the manifestos' cover page, the abject absence of photo of common people in the BJP manifesto and the stark presence of its leaders' photos may be read as the BJP's (and therefore, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's [RSS]) desire to turn the existing parliamentary form of democracy into a presidential one, which the nomination of Modi as prime ministerial candidate and the subsequent electoral campaigning illustrated beyond any reasonable doubt.¹³ In such a desire, people matter only to echo the plan which leaders already have drafted. It is relevant to remind the reader that during the 1970s, the Jana Sangh, BJP's predecessor, appeared unmusical about democracy and its leader—Atal Bihari Vajpayee—showed scepticism towards democracy. In his 1997 M.S. Golwalkar Memorial Lecture, Vajpayee described parliamentary democracy as being 'borrowed blindly from the British' (Jaffrelot 2000: 377n48). From the early twentieth century, various streams of Hindu nationalism began to support democracy, not because of its intrinsic worth and the simultaneous benefit to people of other faiths, but because, it was, to cite Christophe Jaffrelot (2000: 363), a 'convenient way to establish the domination of the majority community'. It is precisely for this reason that from the 1980s onwards, the BJP used (perhaps also coined), and still uses, the term 'pseudo-secularism', but never 'pseudo-democracy' (see Ahmad 2014b), which, logically, is possible exactly in the same way as pseudo-secularism.

The Limits of Democratic Freedom and Electoral Choice

The key argument of this chapter has been that an analysis of the manifestos of the three pan-Indian parties—the AAP, the BJP,

¹³ Parenthetically, let me note that currently some analysts regard the BJP as a strong advocate of the presidential form of democracy bordering on authoritarianism. However, prominent Congress leaders such as Vasant Sathe (1925–2011), too, stood for the presidential form of democracy. Shubhankar Dam (2016), a scholar of law, briefly alluded to this, as did an article in *The Economic Times* by Raghu Krishnan (2012). I owe this point to Pralay Kanungo and thank him for bringing this to my attention.

and the Congress—shows that there are more similarities than differences in their respective manifestos. These similarities, I have contended, stem from their notions of politics which construe politics qua policy. Given such a notion of politics, the similarities in the manifestos are neither surprising nor accidental but only logical. It is against this conceptual backdrop that one should analyse the mutual allegations by the BJP and the Congress that one copied the manifesto of the other (*NDTV* 2014). The similarities do not mean that there are no differences. In fact, I have discussed differences across the manifestos. Here, too, my point was that the differences were such that they did not make any monumental difference. The differences pertained to the realm of policy, not politics as Jacques Rancière conceives it. For Rancière, central to politics is dissensus, which is starkly absent from all the three manifestos analysed in this chapter. It is not a mere coincidence that in the otherwise elaborate ‘Table of Contents’ of all the three manifestos, the term ‘politics’ itself did not appear.

Elections seemingly offer freedom of choice. In its manifesto, the Congress described itself as ‘the only natural choice for the people’ (Congress: 5). From the analysis presented earlier, one is led to aver that the choice amongst the AAP, the BJP, and the Congress was indeed not a true choice in substance. On most issues, they almost converged. The vocabulary of choice, then, is neither about freedom nor about choice; it is ultimately about our inability to articulate unfreedom and constraints which masquerade as freedom and choice. The road of a choice or freedom which may disturb not merely policy but also politics often leads to either murder or exile. The ghastly massacre of over 40 Muslims in Assam at the hands of the Bodo militants—called ‘riots’ in the media which underplayed, if not suppressed, the barbarity of the massacre and the roles of the state agencies in its enactment to keep chanting Modi’s charisma¹⁴—took place precisely because they exercised their freedom and choice. To the militants, Muslims in Assam made a wrong choice by not voting for Chandan Brahma, the

¹⁴ To update Max Weber’s (1991: Chapter 9) notion of charisma—followers’ belief in a leader that the latter has an extraordinary quality as a gift from the grace of god—we should now say that the charisma of a leader such as Modi is equally a gift from the grace of television and Google.

candidate of the Bodoland People's Front. The massacre was carried out as 'punishment for Muslims' (Daniel 2014; Gatade 2014). In 1974, Salvador Allende, the president of Chile, was killed because though he was chosen by people, he chose to enact politics, not policy (Márquez 2014[1974]). In 2004, France and the US synthetically organized a coup against the elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Aristide was put on a 20-hour flight to the Central African Republic. Even the Haitian officials did not know about Aristide's destination (Ahmad 2013a).

There are also moderate ways through which the power elites cancel people's choice which might go against the predetermined policy to shake the contours of politics itself; they transform people's choice into its opposite, thereby obliging people to re-choose. How force might be packaged as unlimited choice and compulsion as unbounded favour was reflected in the response of the European elites to the Irish referendum. In June 2008, Ireland held a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty on the reform of the European Union. Over 53 per cent of the Irish voters rejected the Lisbon Treaty. This rejection went against the prior wishes of Europe's elites. Instead of accepting what the Irish people sovereignly decided, Valéry Giscard, a key author of the Lisbon Treaty, told a radio journalist:

Giscard: The Irish must be allowed to express themselves again.

Radio Journalist: Do not you find it deeply shocking to make people who have already expressed themselves take the vote over?

Giscard: We spend our time re-voting. If we did not, the President of the Republic would be elected for all eternity. (Cited in Ross 2011: 84)

It is clear what exactly Giscard meant by his comment, namely, the Irish people must keep on voting until they give the desired result he and other like-minded politicians in Brussels and other European metropolis cities wanted to hear and promote.

Elections lead to change in the government and policy. However, seldom do they lead to change in *raison d'état* (Raison D'état 2012), or politics which may allow any change except its own. Set apart by so many centuries and thousands of miles, Pataliputra's (Patna's) Chanakya and Florence's Machiavelli shared this point.

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ON STUDYING ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

A Conversation with T.K. Oommen

*R. Thirunavukkarasu**

R. Thirunavukkarasu (RT): Thank you for your time to have this conversation. Let me begin with a general theoretical question. Behind the description of the 2014 elections result—in terms of ‘spectacular victory for the BJP’s politics of development’ being ‘historic’ and so on—there seems to be a sense of ‘democratic triumphalism’ (see ‘Introduction’). As a sociologist, how do you view this democratic triumphalism?

T.K. Oommen (TKO): Triumphalism means excessive rejoicing over one’s success or achievements. As a political party with its rickety presence in the Lok Sabha for most of independent India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) can be triumphalist but it is certainly not democratic triumphalism. Similarly, 2014 was a politically spectacular victory for BJP, but if somebody attributes it to politics of development, it remains very contentious. The commentators of election results are usually journalists. The vocabulary they invoke is an indication of their ‘trained incapacity’, to recall the apt phrase of Thorstein Veblen (*d.* 1929), a Norwegian-American sociologist.

* This conversation took place at the University of Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

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Having said this, let me respond to the spirit of the question. When the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) came to power in 1996 with Vajpayee as the prime minister, the party and its supporters were less euphoric, partly because the then prime minister was perceived as moderate for a BJP leader. In contrast, Modi who fashioned himself as an unquestionable leader, captured power through two major devices. First, it was through a process of demonization of religious minorities, particularly Muslims, who are widely perceived as cultural outsiders in India, and sacralization of the Hindu majority, who are described not only as cultural insiders but also as the authentic owners of India, an idea which Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologues have nurtured since the 1930s. But the central-state authority in independent India could not be defined as Hindu before 2014. Thus viewed, the 2014 elections resulted in a paradigm shift in India. Second, as for the development plank, Modi sold what was euphemistically referred to as the 'Gujarat model'. Development now is widely perceived as scores based on Human Development Index (HDI) and, on several parameters of the HDI, the performance of the state of Gujarat did not afford a model. At any rate, a development model should encapsulate all citizens irrespective of their primordial identities. The slogan, '*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas*' (everybody's development along with all), was floated by Modi after he left Gujarat for Delhi. During his three terms as the chief minister of Gujarat, the most notable 'development' was polarization of Hindus and Muslims in the state. Further, as chief minister of Gujarat, he was constantly emphasizing Gujarati pride (*asmita*) in and out of season. But after becoming the prime minister, he is denying the Telugu, Bengali, and several other regional-linguistic prides.

That is why the 2014 electoral performance cannot be referred to as 'democratic' or 'developmental' by any discerning analyst.

RT: Many observers compare the 2014 Indian election result with the 2002 French presidential elections, when the far right initially secured more votes than the Socialist and other parties. The outraged public forced all parties to rally behind the centrist president to defeat the far right. In contrast, Narendra Modi, who, many maintain, facilitated the anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002 in Gujarat, is 'democratically' elected as the prime minister. During the 2014 campaign, he continued to speak the divisive religious language of us versus them. Of course, he was also projected as a leader of the backward castes, one who will work for the welfare of the common man, so to speak. Does not the simultaneous use of polarizing

enmity and promise of bettering people's lot mean that democracy works on the logic of warfare and welfare in the same breath?

TKO: It is problematic to compare India with Western countries. In the West, the 'people' are defined based on their linguistic identities; wherever linguistic diversity has persisted, as in Great Britain and Spain, the deprived linguistic communities articulate their frustration and insofar as they are territorially anchored, they get political representation. In South Asia, state formation is anchored to religious identity and religious communities are usually territorially dispersed. Hence, they are not likely to get political representation, which is an important basis of their deprivation. The RSS and the BJP follow an expansionist definition of 'Hindu', encapsulating the primal vision of the indigenous peoples of India (adivasis), the Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs (who are all defined as Hindus in the Hindu Code Bill). Further, the Hindu Dalits converted to Sikhism and Buddhism are given the benefits under the policy of reservation. In contrast, while the immigrant religious communities such as Jews, Parsis, and Bahai's are treated as guests in India, Muslims and Christians are castigated as dacoits. Thus, a policy of inclusion of Indic religious minorities and exclusion of non-Indic religious minorities is followed in independent India, not only by the BJP but also by those political parties who were in power earlier.

French nationalism was nurtured through a process of 'culturocide', that is, systematic elimination of non-French-speaking groups. In 1789, half the population in France spoke no French at all, and even by 1863 about 20 per cent of the population did not speak what was officially considered French. Alsatians, Basques, Bretons, Catalans, Corsicans, Flemings, and Occitanians were all coerced to abandon their mother tongues and adopt French. That is, linguistic homogenization was the kernel of French nationalism. In contrast, religious homogenization is the crux of BJP-RSS nationalism. Thus viewed, the rightward thrust in France and India has different contents, although cultural homogenization is common to both.

Ever since the linguistic reorganization of Indian states in the mid-1950s, the Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, and later the Telugu, Kannada, and other linguistic groups have articulated their deprivations. Therefore, to visualize an all-India pattern of electoral behaviour based on religious identities would be simplistic. The Kerala Muslims with their pre-colonial entry into India, the Bengali Muslims enveloped in Bengali

nationalism in the subcontinent, and the Urdu-speaking Muslims with their elective affinity to those who share the language, who may live in India and even in Pakistan, all complicate the possibility of mobilizations based on Hindu versus the rest. To put it succinctly, the intersectionality between religion and language in addition to religion and caste is crucial in the Indian context and needs to be taken into account in a nuanced analysis of electoral and political behaviour. Importantly, the centre–periphery relations can influence electoral alliances and behaviour as exemplified by the coalitions between the BJP and regional parties both in Jammu and Kashmir (the Muslim-majority state) and in some of the Christian-majority states in the North-East to secure financial favour from the centre. An analysis which ignores the stick and carrot approach of the Modi government is not only simplistic but misleading. All this means that the democratic ethos is yet to evolve in India.

The final component of your question about the logic of warfare and welfare is an important one. Historically, the relationship between the state and citizens has been resolved in three distinct ways—in terms of hegemony, uniformity, and pluralism. The hegemonic type recognizes only one primordial identity (religious, linguistic, racial) as legitimate; the ‘national’ identity is synonymous with the mainstream identity and the smaller, weaker groups are prodded to assimilate. The uniformity pattern assumes that older identities will gradually disappear, thanks to modernization/globalization. The pluralist pattern acknowledges the existence of several nationalities within the polity and recognizes the distinction between citizenship and nationality, as in the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The Indian situation does not fit into any of these; single citizenship coexists with multiculturalism. The welfare orientation, wherein the state was a protector of needs and aspiration of citizens, existed under planned economy. But the Indian state turned into a predator when internal emergency was declared in the mid-1970s, when the state waged war against those citizens who challenged its authority. But it had to revert to its welfare orientation, thanks to election results. However, after the 2014 elections—when the BJP secured a clear majority—the state initiated predatory measures against religious minorities, particularly against Muslims and Christians. Thus, the Indian state is at once a protector in terms of welfare measures and a predator indulging in warfare against a segment of its citizens because of their religious and even linguistic identities.

RT: India is often depicted as one of the largest democracies in the world. So far, it has conducted 15 general elections to the Lok Sabha (Lower House of India's Parliament). Only recently have sociologists started paying attention, albeit little, to 'Election Studies'. All along—from the 1950s, to the 1970s—sociologists in India were preoccupied with research on family, marriage, kinship, caste, and village studies. What prevented Indian sociologists from focussing on the study of elections and if/when sociologists want to study them, what methodology you would suggest for them to adopt?

TKO: All over the world, elections were not the primary focus of sociologists and social anthropologists. In fact, political scientists did study electoral behaviour continuously—before election, during election, and post election—and their singular question has been 'Who votes for whom, and why?' The question is partly descriptive and partly explanatory. Thus, elections have been a very important area of investigation for political scientists. This is true in the case of India too.

Psephologists would always try to predict the likely results of elections and invariably they would go wrong. That does not make them irrelevant, however. Sociologists were, as you indicate, traditionally interested in certain themes. Why were they involved in those kinds of research themes? One straight explanation is this: Indian sociology has been very much conditioned, in fact overshadowed, by British anthropological traditions. That is because of our colonial connection. Social anthropology has been defined in the West as the study of the 'other'. And for the colonizers, India was certainly an 'other'. The British scholars of India were interested in issues such as religion, caste, village, family, marriage, and kinship. Further, there were no elections during the colonial period. Understandably, in the scheme of studying Indian sociology and social anthropology, electoral analysis did not figure. Over time, as you have said, things have changed a bit indeed.

If sociologists were to study electoral behaviour, they should link it with elements of social structure, such as class, gender, age, race, religion, language, and above all, caste in the Indian context; simply focussing on who votes for whom and why is of very limited relevance in sociology. Unless one relates these social structural features with electoral behaviour, it cannot be called sociological. There is also, if I may say so, a social movement dimension because electoral behaviour

is collective behaviour. In collective behaviour, people are mobilized into action. At one point of time, voter turnout in India used to be very low; it is steadily increasing. Of course, even in the highly 'advanced' liberal democracies, the voter turnout was/is not very high—maybe between 40–60 per cent—for a variety of reasons.

Indian elections are like social festivals, which means that each of the parties or coalitions would try to mobilize people against their opposing parties and vice versa, not necessarily based on ideology alone. So, during election time, if you observe the communication pattern, there is lot of demonization of the opposing party and sacralization of one's own; political rivals/leaders become demons and their own leaders become charismatic heroes. These issues have not been studied systematically even by sociologists (It seems the world is catching up with India. Witness the recent presidential election campaign in the United States [US].)

RT: Could you elaborate the reasons that had perhaps prevented sociologists and social anthropologists from studying elections more systematically?

TKO: Sociology and social anthropology have not made much advance regarding election studies because of the nature of their research terrain. In elections, individual as an individual is making choices. And the election result is the conjoint result of their independent actions. Sociologists refer to this as the synergetic model. When an individual acts as an individual, s/he does not necessarily consult others and vice versa. So, hundreds of thousands of individuals are making their decisions as individual voters. One may not actually know who has voted for whom, but in the end, one would get a pattern. But the synergetic model of analysis is not very popular in India.

The other related matter is that when we talk about election and democracy, the unit involved at the macro level is the so-called nation state. In many Western democracies, there is a co-terminality between political and cultural boundaries. Thus, there is one recognized religion and even though minority religions may exist there, they are usually insignificant in the context of elections and parties are not bothered about them. Second is the issue of language: almost all nation-states have one official/national language. Think of India, we have Telugu as well as Punjabi electoral politics. Similarly, in the case of the United

Kingdom (UK), one can have English politics as well as Scottish politics. A predominantly Christian country needs to confront denominational groups within the Christian community. In India, which is multi-religious and multilingual, the complexity of electoral politics increases exponentially.

RT: Compared to many former colonial countries, democracy in India remains strong and vibrant. That is, elections are quite regular and India has never allowed military rule or one-party dictatorship. Without a grand consensus, democratic polity would not have survived so long in India. However, this incredible feature of modern India as a democracy remains untouched to a large extent by sociologists/social anthropologists. Democracy is effectively understood as elections and hence, it became an essential trope of political scientists. Could you please elaborate why sociologists perhaps unwittingly fail to study democracy?

TKO: We must recognize the conceptual distinction between military rule—wherein there is no scope for democracy, one-party rule which proscribes multiparty democracy, and democratic polity which permits functioning of several political parties to which India belongs. But acceptance of a principle does not automatically lead to its translation into practice. One-party dominance prevailed in India for about four decades, largely because the Indian National Congress (INC) emerged out of the womb of the anti-colonial movement, which is usually referred to as the national movement. Since the INC promised to put into practice the vision of the national movement, people of India gave them four decades to perform. The coalition era started only in 1989 and it continued for a quarter of a century. But the coalitions, too, did not perform up to the expected level. This resulted in the reversion to one-party dominance in 2014. Thus viewed, electoral democracy in India is a robust phenomenon and a rational response of the electorate. But electoral democracy should not be mistaken for liberal democracy in which values such as equality and dignity of fellow citizens are internalized by all. This has not yet happened in India.

We also need to keep in mind the disjunction between democratic polity and hierarchical society in India. The former is anchored in equality and the latter in inequality. The unstated assumption that the introduction and the gradual internalization of democratic values will transform the hierarchical values embedded in India's social institutions

into egalitarian values has not come true. And, this is because of the bi-dimensional nature of the Indian status system which functions simultaneously in two contexts: the ritualistic and the secular. Change in the secular realm need not affect the ritual context; transformations in polity need not necessarily transform society.

As is well known, sociologists and social anthropologists focussed on traditional social institutions such as the joint family, the caste system, and Hinduism. Their concern was whether the joint family was changing into nuclear family, not if patriarchy was withering away or whether violence against women was diminishing. They emphasized the harmony in inter-caste relations thanks to the elaborate division of labour and the Hindu Jajmani system. Very little attention was paid to the exploitation and structural violence embedded in the caste system. They were keen to highlight the tolerance and accommodating nature of Hinduism, as compared with Islam and Christianity. In other words, the focus was to highlight the unique features of Indian society and study of democracy—an 'alien importation'—was not a priority on their agenda. That is, the analysis of elections could not have attracted sociologists and social anthropologists of India and hence its neglect.

Let me add a word of caution here about the inadequate, indeed weak tradition in studying democracy in social science in general and in sociology in particular. Democracy as a value and as a political arrangement emerged largely in the twentieth century. In 1900, there were only 25 'democratic' countries accounting for 12 per cent of world's population. But what existed then was restricted democracy, in that only property-owning men had the right to vote. By 1950, there were 22 electoral democracies which permitted universal adult franchise, accounting for 31 per cent of the world's population and 21 countries with restricted democracy accounting for 12 per cent of the world's population. By 2000, out of the 192 existing countries, 120—accounting for 58 per cent of the world's population—had electoral democracies. Of these, liberal democratic countries which respected basic human rights and rule of law were 85, accounting for just 38 per cent of the world population. This is to underline the fact that a non-existing phenomenon could not have been studied. Election studies came into vogue as countries became electoral democracies, but the study of democracy as a socio-political phenomenon could have become popular only with the spread of liberal democracies. And, as recent as 2000,

less than 40 per cent of the world population was exposed to liberal democratic practices. To be sure, in the decades to come, democracy would gain its deserved attention as a theme of sociological study.

RT: If/when attempts are made to study democracy, what are the methods to be adopted to characterize the study as quintessentially sociological?

TKO: Sociology has two connotations. The narrower view is that it is a residual discipline which studies those aspects left out by other disciplines: economy, polity, and culture. But if viewed broadly, sociology is the general science of society, everything human is encapsulated in its scope. Democracy is increasingly recognized as an important aspect of human life in the contemporary world. As for the methods of studying democracy sociologically, it should be eclectic because both quantitative and qualitative data ought to be collected by a truly sociological analysis.

A sociological analysis of election entails studying the individuals who cast votes—as well as the factors and forces which prompt him/her to vote—because voter apathy is a widely recognized phenomenon, even in liberal democracies. Therefore, a general understanding of the proportion of eligible voters who cast votes and the sociocultural background of the candidates as well as the sociocultural characteristics of the constituencies need to be understood. For this, social surveys need to be undertaken. But the content of vertical communication flow from leaders, as well as horizontal communication flow among the voters and their subgroups—women, men, age groups, party members, religious and caste groups, the poor, the well-off, and the like—ought to be captured through informal interactions. Informant interviews, group discussions, observations of election meetings, both big and small, ought to be pressed into service to collect qualitative data. To put it pithily, both quantitative and qualitative data need to be collected for sociological analyses of election, as noted above.

However, analyses of elections do not exhaust the study of democracy, although it is a crucial aspect. To study democracy, one has to understand not only the pre-election processes involved, such as selection/identification of candidates, and the factors which influence this, but also how elected candidates participate in the decision-making processes. More importantly, the factors involved in getting the decisions implemented

need to be observed and studied. To put it succinctly, the 'everydayness' of democracy needs to be studied intensely and constantly. But which method/s would be invoked to understand specific democratic processes depend upon the differing contexts. To study the democratic process, the decision-making process in the legislatures and the process of implementation of the laws need to be studied and they require different 'methods'. I believe that for a sociological analysis one should resort to 'methodological eclecticism', opting for differing combinations with varying emphasis depending upon the context studied.

RT: How complex is the Indian electoral system and how does it affect our electoral behaviour in your opinion?

TKO: In the case of India, we have several religions. Of course, the social demographic situation is that the dominant religious group—namely Hindus—constitutes 82 per cent of India's population. The remaining 18 per cent makes nearly 200 million people, a size much bigger than the biggest countries in Europe. Remember, unified Germany's population is only around 80 million. Therefore, even as India's religious minorities constitute only 18 per cent of the total population, the three major religious groups among the religious minorities of India—namely Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs—together have a population much bigger than that of most countries in the world, and hence they play a major role. Their political choices do make a difference. Consider the case of Punjab: the Sikhs are more than 85 per cent there. Similarly, there are three Christian-majority states in north-east India and even in Kerala and Goa, Christians are in sizeable numbers; and they matter in the electoral politics of these states. Of course, the Muslims are widely dispersed. While they are in majority in Jammu and Kashmir and in Lakshadweep, their presence is substantial in several other provincial states. Thus, we are not dealing with one religious group. Moreover, democratic elections are territorially anchored; that is to say, there are constituencies and there are contestants who are asking for votes in that constituency. Therefore, territorial anchorage has something to do with electoral behaviour. In case we have a system where Sikhs will vote only for Sikhs wherever they live, the situation obviously becomes quite different, in fact, simpler. The Indian context is not like that. There is a lack of co-terminality between the territorial unit—the constituency—and the sociocultural units in terms of religion and caste.

This disjuncture between territorial units and sociocultural units makes Indian electoral behaviour much more complex. Therefore, the analytical tools with which one studies a monocultural society cannot be of major help in studying India's complex sociocultural situations. I feel those who study electoral behaviour have paid little attention to this disjuncture, save the factor of caste.

One must keep in mind two factors while analysing electoral behaviour in India. The first one I would designate as 'plurality', the second one as 'pluralism'. However, most authors do not distinguish the two; plurality is a social fact which implies the co-existence of different social segments without social interaction whereas pluralism is the accommodative attitude. A word of caution is called for here: do not conflate 'plurality' with 'pluralism'. Plurality refers to the co-existence of groups without interaction in social and cultural contexts, but pluralism implies harmonious co-existence of different socio-cultural groups in the polity. When I refer to 'plurality', I employ the conceptual framework provided by J.S. Furniwall, who studied the colonial societies which were divided into two—insiders and outsiders. In the case of India, some religious groups are defined as 'cultural outsiders'. As we all know, in the writings of RSS ideologues, Muslims and Christians are not part of the body politic. But at the same time, they are citizens. Therefore, as citizens they are political insiders—they have the right to vote; but as members of the society (*samaj*), they are cultural outsiders. This disjuncture plays a vital role in electoral behaviour. That is the reason why one often comes across the phrase 'Muslim pattern of voting'. But all Muslims are not loyal to one party or to one leader. There are as much political differentiations among Muslims as in the case of Hindus and Christians. But since Muslims are present in substantial numbers in many geographical pockets in the country, there is talk of 'vote bank politics' and 'communal politics'. Similar behaviour of Hindu voters is not referred to as vote bank politics but 'national' politics. One will not come across such a differentiation in Germany, where electoral behaviour is conditioned by political ideology.

In fact, from the time India went for linguistic reorganization in the mid-1950s, communal politics has become quite interesting, if I may say so. Each of India's provincial states is roughly equivalent to the nation-states of Europe in terms of size and sociocultural complexity. Therefore, in India, there are several 'nations' without states, that is,

sovereign states. The electoral behaviour of, say, Tamil Nadu can never be the same as that of Punjab. In Punjab, the dominant factor is division among Sikhs, a religious category. In the case of Tamil Nadu, the division is based on Dravidian ideology confined to the linguistic category called 'Tamils'. That is to say, the Tamils are divided into a few categories in terms of political parties—the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the Congress party, and others. Thus, Tamils vote for several Tamil parties of their choice, just like in Germany where the Germans vote for different German parties. This is quite similar to the Maharashtrians who vote for different Maharashtra parties, some of which are local (for example, Shiv Sena) whereas others have an all-India support base.

So, what is called Indian electoral behaviour is not organic behaviour which can be observed at a macro level; Indian electoral behaviour is a summation of what is happening at the provincial state level—that is, of different linguistic groups. Well, there may be some similarity between the electoral behaviour in West Bengal and Tripura as both are Bengali-dominated states. In the Hindi belt, there are five Hindi-speaking states and there could be some similarity in terms of electoral behaviour in these states. But if one steps into Odisha, the scenario is different.

RT: With India having such a complex social as well as political structure, as a sociologist of eminence, would you suggest a methodology or a framework to study the electoral behaviour in India?

TKO: In my understanding, election studies in India should pitch at three levels. Thanks to the 94th Amendment in the Indian Constitution, now we have a huge local self-government system—the Panchayati Raj. Elections that are taking place at the panchayat level, the micro level, have a different meaning. There the main issue is how to deploy the available resources, in whose benefit, and who will constitute the list of beneficiaries at the village/panchayat level; this is quite different at the state assembly level. Thus, we have to distinguish electoral behaviour at the grass roots level, namely, the village/panchayat level, from the state/assembly level. Differences between these two electoral contexts are also at times quite different. For example, in the case of Tamil Nadu, the electoral behaviour is persisting with regard to Tamil nationalism. But in the case of Gujarat, it is entirely different; and this

may be designated as pro-Hindu anti-Muslim orientation. Therefore, the second layer of election study must focus on the state-level or the provincial-level specificities.

What we designate as all-India electoral behaviour is an aggregation of all these meso-specificities. If someone thinks in terms of 'trends' which are common for the whole of India, we are indulging in a 'wild goose chase'. But there are two points which I must note here as exceptions. The INC, which was leading the anti-colonial movement—at that time, was just a movement—transformed itself into a political party later. It has had that heritage as a movement that fought against the colonial forces; it has also had a charismatic and 'secular' leader in Jawaharlal Nehru. Moreover, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, had christened him as the jewel of the country and certified that India would be safe in the hands of Nehru. Therefore, there is continuity from the anti-colonial movement to national political processes. With Nehru at the helm of affairs, we have had the possibility of an all-India Congress and yet, the Congress party in Kerala is different from the Congress party in West Bengal. Yes, it is the Congress party in form, but not quite the same in substance. I don't think anybody has seriously addressed this dimension in the electoral context. Later, things changed: Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura went on to support left parties, although the latter two changed their orientation recently. Way back in 1954, for the first time in India, a socialist government—Praja Socialist Party (PSP)—came to power in Kerala, whereas in Tamil Nadu the Dravidian parties have continued to dominate since the late 1960s.

What I am suggesting is that what we call 'national' is actually an all-India scenario. What ought to be designated as national politics must be politics of Punjab, Bengal, and so on. So, an all-India electoral analysis is simply a summing up of the provincial state-level electoral behaviour. I, however, do understand that India has experienced for some time what Rajni Kothari described as the 'Congress System', but that system has gradually eroded. My view is that we should not consider Indian election similar to elections in Germany, Portugal, or Japan; the comparable unit for India would be the European Union (EU). However, EU is not a sovereign state. Several of them have come together to form an association, that is, the EU. Each of its units has retained its sovereignty. In India, it is the other way around. These issues fundamentally affect electoral behaviour.

It is also important to note that the religious minorities of Indian origin—Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—have already been absorbed into the Hindu Code Bill; in fact, they are taken into account while defining the ‘we’ in India. The tribal populations, who have not converted to any of the non-Indic religions—say, Islam or Christianity—are also counted as Hindus. Now, people are talking about ‘*ghar wapsi*’;¹ in fact, the first major ghar wapsi was done by the state way back in 1951 itself, through the instrumentality of Indian census. Doesn’t it affect electoral behaviour?

Moreover, if you add Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists, one would get roughly 85 per cent of India’s population who are projected as cultural insiders; but there is a huge wedge among them, based on caste groups. In fact, we have three caste blocks: the traditional upper castes—no one knows their exact percentage; the Mandal Commission in its 1979 report to the Government of India estimated that the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are roughly around 52 per cent; and finally, the 2011 census estimated the Scheduled Castes (SCs) at 15–16 per cent of the population. If one puts together both OBCs and SCs, they form around 68 per cent of our population. It is often observed by many in India that the so-called upper castes may be about 10 per cent, occupying majority of important positions from bureaucracy to politics. In the Madras assembly in the 1950s, not even two non-Brahmin members were there. Many people may not know why the anti-Brahmin movement first crystallized in Tamil Nadu. Power was, in fact, monopolized by the tiny Brahmin group. One must remember that numbers matter in democratic politics.

What I am trying to suggest is that the Indian society is polarized between insiders and outsiders—the non-Indic religious minorities—and on the other hand, it is also polarized between the ‘inferior’ Dalits and Adivasis and the dominant castes. This obviously would affect the electoral behaviour. Whether one likes it or not, caste does matter in Indian political behaviour, which is totally absent in Europe. In the US, the racial factor matters in political behaviour. Even if religious identities crop up during elections in Europe, it is the denominational

¹ Ghar wapsi literally means coming home but the intended meaning is a call to religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians to return to the fold of Hinduism because every Indian is perceived as a Hindu and left his/her home when converted to any of the non-Indic religion.

identities among Christians that play a role. You could never imagine a polarization between Hindus and Christians or Muslims and Buddhists in British elections. Conflict of interest between Catholic and Protestant Christians may crop up in Britain. But the other religious groups are not counted, not because of any inferior status but because they are considered as mere migrants. Recollect what I have said in the beginning about the insider–outsider dichotomy. Of course, conflict between nationals and immigrants (ethnies) does occur in British electoral behaviour. In India, the ‘outsiders’ are not people who immigrated to India; the outsiders in India are the nationals who have been living here for several centuries but are perceived as outsiders because they embraced one of the non-Indic religions. In addition to this, the hierarchical arrangement in society in terms of caste also affects electoral behaviour substantially.

Thus, the European experience is utterly different from the Indian scenario; those who are interested in electoral study in India must understand this simple but profound truth. Anthropologist M.N. Srinivas talked about ‘vote banks’; that may be a ridiculous concept in the West, but in India, it is a function of the social structure. However, Indian ingenuity is such that we have mechanisms through which the salience of identities has been nullified. For example, if in Andhra Pradesh all candidates in a constituency are Reddys, caste loses its importance, though other factors become important in moulding the electoral behaviour in that constituency. Similarly, in Kerala, if in a particular constituency where Christians are in sizeable majority the two major political coalitions put up Christian candidates, then this effectively minimizes the role of religion; and other factors begin to play a vital role.

What I am trying to suggest is that these social structural complexities and the specificities seen in terms of sectoral mobilizations make the study of election in India a very challenging task. This is something, I am afraid, our political scientists or even psephologists have largely ignored. Therefore, this dimension must be the domain of sociologists or social anthropologists in the context of electoral studies. Here, I want to add that this does not mean that there is no importance of political parties or political ideologies. In India, elections are not only festivals, as I alluded earlier; they are also like playing chess. Every voter will observe and decide who will be the most appropriate candidate

in his/her constituency: appropriate in terms of social demography of that particular constituency. All political parties try to dissect the local situation first before they zero in on their candidates. That is why some of the party workers who are working very faithfully and efficiently for the party may not get the ticket to contest; somebody else will pocket the ticket. The candidate who is a vote-catching one will obviously be the preferred choice. These social structural factors may not be very germane in the study of electoral behaviour in European countries. I am not suggesting even for a moment that political parties and their ideologies are unimportant in India, but here it is more complicated. Additionally, in India, we must recognize the role of money in elections. A candidate may be very corrupt but if he has enough money to sway the electoral trend in his favour, that will influence the electoral process.

In short, the study of electoral behaviour should focus on three levels—the micro level (the village/panchayat level); the meso—provincial state level; and finally, the macro level. These levels would have to be taken into account for an appropriate and comprehensive study of electoral behaviour. Neither political scientists nor sociologists have yet attempted to do this.

RT: From the 1st Lok Sabha election onwards, India has been witnessing a change in the election campaign strategies by many political parties. As a sociologist, how would you look at the changing nature of our election campaigns? How do you think sociologists should look at it?

TKO: Here, too, I go by the template of three layers. At the village/panchayat level, virtually everybody knows the candidates, whatever political party they belong to. Here, campaigning as such does not have much value. Growing up in a Kerala village, I recall that several interesting stories would be circulated just on the eve of the elections about candidates, intended both for demonization and sacralization. In my village, there was a man referred to as Nehru; he did not have anything to do with Nehru but he was perceived as the local Nehru. There are people nicknamed as local Gandhi (I mean Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi). These are what I call 'local charismatics'. If one party has put up a 'local charismatic' leader and the other party does not have such a candidate, the campaign would unleash a process of vilification, often attributing several imagined stories about him/

her relating to financial corruption and moral turpitude. The content of charisma at the local level would be good character, incorruptible nature, impartiality, and so on. On the other hand, the electability of a candidate depends on how 'good things' about him/her were manufactured and spread across. In India, the village context is like that of a primary group, whereas at the national level, that is, in the Lok Sabha constituencies, it is an aggregation of several such local contexts and it does not really matter to have a man/woman of 'good character'. What matters are the benefits that the candidate can bring to the constituency. Sometimes people say, 'I have voted for Vajpayee', meaning the BJP; or 'I have voted for the Congress party', meaning Nehru and later Indira Gandhi. Such charismatic influence could be visible all over the country. But at the provincial state level, the situation is different, in that there are different ways of evaluating candidates. The candidate-voter relationship is not as intimate or close as in the case of village/panchayat level, or as distant and awe-inspiring as in the case of Lok Sabha constituencies.

In the case of state legislative assembly elections in India, things are different. That is why, in India, we have utterly different types of provincial state politics. There was a time when many thought that the anti-Congress sentiment was picking up momentum across the country through the socialist brigade in several pockets of India, as illustrated by the influence of Jayaprakash Narayan or Lohia. Similarly, the hegemony of Communist Party of India (Marxist) persisted in certain pockets for quite some time. Odisha offers another interesting example. The current Odisha chief minister is in a formidable position largely because of his father. And his father, the late Biju Patnaik, was a popular leader because of the incapability of the Congress to hold sway in the state. That is, the charismatic factor at the all-India level, emanating from an all-India leader, may not have an equal influence across regions. There were provincial charismatic leaders, such as the longest-serving chief minister in India, Jyoti Basu, whose charisma would not count much beyond West Bengal. In Tamil Nadu, there are competing charismatic personalities.

Therefore, sociologists' approach to election studies should be a 'differentiated one'. The reason is that the parameters of provincial politics are not applicable to India as a whole. That is why many scholars are quite bewildered when election results are declared. Their predictions

could be correct in some states but not in other states, because the local factors are more important than the all-India factors.

If one analyses the last 16 general elections, one can notice that political scientists have often made rash statements regarding rapid changes in India. Actually, nothing of that kind took place. I remember that I was asked to write a paper on the fourth general election held in 1967. I began looking at the available sources and observed that India was undergoing a 'transitional anomie'. In a typical nation-state wherein democracy prevails, voting based on certain ideologies is the norm. Thus, in most of the Western countries, there are two or three well-formed political parties. People vote for one of them. In India, because of the complexity of the social structure which I alluded to, there is multiplicity of parties and most of them cannot claim an all-India spread. Suppose a party is dominated by the Reddy community, it means it is a regional party influential only in Andhra Pradesh/Telangana; the Reddy-dominated party cannot exist in Kerala. If a party is dominated by Jats, it would be an influential player only in areas where Jats have significant presence. Therefore, the factors/groups involved are quite different in different regions, and they do not have the same meaning at all levels—the macro, meso, and micro levels. Thus, the importance of the factors changes at different levels, and accordingly the electoral behaviour also changes. Therefore, it is this similarity and difference from top to bottom—from macro to micro via the meso level—which will give us a comprehensive understanding of the electoral behaviour in India. This is a unique feature of India. Consider the example of our neighbour Bangladesh—almost all citizens there are Bengali as well as Muslim. There, the possibility of ideological polarization is quite high and strong. In India, given its cultural heterogeneity and social hierarchy, ideological polarization was a far cry. Election study is likely to be much more complex in India in the days ahead because of the emerging ideological polarization, coupled with social heterogeneity and hierarchy.

Of course, for the first time, the BJP managed to have an absolute majority in the Lok Sabha. Even the idea of proportional representation based on social categories in India would create complications. For example, in the case of the Telugu-speaking region, the proverbial conflict between the Malas and Madigas, the two numerically significant SCs, would persist even after proportional representation to SCs

is provided. Therefore, problems will not be resolved by implementing proportional representation to broad social categories. What we have already done is reserve some constituencies for Dalits. In a local situation, for example, if Malas are in overwhelming numbers and Madigas are a minority, it goes without saying that the Madiga candidates could never win an election in that constituency, in spite of it being reserved for the SCs. It is equally true of religious communities. India is a four-in-one society. I mean ours is a society at once stratified, plural, heterogeneous, and hierarchical. In this context, electoral studies become an extremely complex phenomenon. That is perhaps the main reason why sociologists and social anthropologists didn't get into the business of election study.

RT: As you have elaborated the power of primordial loyalties and their manifestations in electoral politics, do you think electoral politics in this country has some potential in preventing majoritarianism from gaining momentum?

TKO: My answer is both 'Yes' and 'No'. If you have a political leader who can fool people by projecting himself/herself as indispensable, who can get things done, then there will not be any hope. People vote not for his party, but they vote for him/her. But with principled politics, majoritarianism would not gain momentum.

Let us deal with some issues which are electorally more pertinent. The demand for a separate Vidarbha state in Maharashtra has been there for quite some time. People from Vidarbha are Marathi speakers and the majority of them are also Hindus. But the demand for a separate Vidarbha state is based on underdevelopment. A similar situation was there in Andhra Pradesh too. In the name of development, a strong demand for separate Telangana was put forward; the Telangana people have always claimed that they have been exploited and downplayed by the *Andhrawalas*. Finally, the people of Telangana have succeeded in getting a separate state; they too are Telugu-speaking Hindus. Why is it that the Vidarbha state did not materialize? Nobody seems to be asking this question.

The second stage of state reorganization may be one stage where we can create relatively homogeneous states where the developmental disparity will not be marked. In many states in India, this problem persists. Several pockets in many states do claim that they have been deprived of

the benefits of development. Therefore, they do ask for separate states. The coastal people in Odisha have been demanding a separate state for a long time. Unless politics is conducted in a non-discriminatory vein, unless governance is carried out impartially, unless economic disparity is considerably reduced, there will be further division of states. I am not talking about secessionist movements; I am only referring to the demand for new states within the Indian union.

Wherever the tribal population is in substantial numbers, we may have to create new states—Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh being examples. This is fundamentally a social-structural issue to resolve conflicts between tribal and non-tribal people. But when one looks at data, one realizes that even in predominantly tribal states, many of the powerful political positions are held by non-tribal people who are intruders into the tribal territories. The rule was that the non-tribal people would not be allowed to come and settle down or to buy land in tribal regions as these were protected areas. But the Indian state has allowed—even if unwittingly—non-tribal people to settle down in traditionally tribal habitats, rendering the latter ‘internal colonies’.

The idea of nation-state is embedded here. The co-terminality between political territory and cultural homogeneity is taken to be a necessity for democratic polity to flourish. The moment complexity based on religious, caste, linguistic, racial, and other identities emerges, the feeling of discrimination surfaces. The situation can be handled through egalitarianism. Please remember, egalitarianism is not only at the individual/personal level or at the inter-group level, but also at the regional level. In most provincial states of India, there are several regions and the developmental disparity among these regions needs to be reduced, only then a true democratic polity would emerge. In a democratic polity, primordial identities and loyalties will not automatically disappear, but will be less salient in terms of ‘vote bank’ politics. Also, the new phenomenon of ‘women power’ surfacing in today’s politics is gaining salience. In the recently held assembly election in Bihar, one of the reasons often cited for the victory of the current incumbent is his strong stand to prohibit liquor in the state. People emphasize that the promise of prohibition brought greater support to Nitish Kumar from women voters. But there is no prohibition in Western countries. Of course, there is a clear policy of the state towards the consumption of liquor. In Scandinavian countries, for example, wine and beer are reasonably

priced whereas hard liquor is expensive; also because hard liquor spoils not only the health of its consumers but also leads to violent behaviour.

Therefore, in the electoral context, one has to tackle problems from different angles; one is creating constituencies which have a homogeneous social structure. Even after that, generally half of the population would be women; therefore, one must initiate credible policies to reduce patriarchy and the consequent behaviour of men. Because one cannot conceive of a unisex society, one must ensure a healthy relationship between men, women, and transgender people.

Let me share an interesting story. Some years ago, I was in Finland. Some of my friends suggested going for a cruise—a short trip on a ship. The moment one enters the ship one can consume any drink one wants, including hard liquor. But back at shore, the permission is to have only wine or beer. Please note how the state very cleverly mediates the relationship between men and women, given the fact that alcoholism among men is an important cause for family instability. Compare it with the scenario in Kerala about liquor. There are several lobbies which are at loggerheads. Some people are interested only in making money, even if family life is in jeopardy. Therefore, the state has to solve the problem and the state cannot remain indifferent when sizeable number of its citizens suffer from liquor-related health issues. Ultimately, in a democracy, political power has to regulate money power. Therefore, electoral behaviour is very crucial. Of course, at a given moment, the issue which is salient is the one around which electoral behaviour or voting will focus. As soon as that is tackled, another issue comes up. In Kerala, landlessness has been effectively done away with, thanks to the Marxist regime that ruled the state for quite some time. Now the issue is to provide everybody with a pukka house; it is not a bungalow but at least a decent accommodation. If that is achieved, the state will have to move forward with another issue. Therefore, newer and newer issues will surface as governance gets better. Recall the ongoing campaign in the current US presidential election. There the issues are quite different. What I suggest is that issues and consequent electoral behaviour will change as times move forward, depending upon the social transformation that takes place in particular polities. Electoral politics and behaviour are, therefore, perennials in social research; they are too important to be left for political science.

RT: The present BJP government at the centre won absolute majority in the 2014 elections. After three long decades, one party managed to form the government on its own. Political pundits had earlier said that the Indian polity had entered an irreversible era of 'coalition politics'. Do you think that the BJP would be able to repeat its performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and form the government on its own? Or do you believe that the BJP's success in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections was just an aberration and India's tryst with coalition politics would continue to sustain itself?

TKO: The answer is: 'It depends'. Let me elaborate.

As already noted, the first four decades of independent India had one-party dominance. The quarter century which followed witnessed coalition politics and at present, there seems to be a tendency to return to one-party dominance. Whether or not we continue with this trend depends on what the opposition parties are likely to do. Given the complexity of India's social structure, there are numerous political parties based on regions, religions, languages, castes, tribes, and similar factors prompt formation of political parties in addition to ideological and class factors. But most of them subscribe to a multi-cultural India. However, the BJP subscribes to a unicultural India as formulated by the RSS, the motto being: 'One nation, one culture, one people.' Indian social reality is utterly antithetical to this; there is not a single social or cultural factor shared by all Indians except citizenship. This is to say that there is an Indian polity but not an Indian society. And if a political party or a combination of political parties is aiming to establish a unicultural India, it is an attempt to create an alternate idea of India. Therefore, all opposition parties, irrespective of their ideological differences, can and should fight a combined electoral battle and if they do, they can defeat the BJP. That is why I answered: 'It depends'; that is, it depends on what the political opposition does.

In the 2014 general elections, the BJP/NDA plank was the ideology of Hindutva. The RSS/BJP definition of Hindu includes all religious communities of Indic origin, as noted earlier. Therefore, the possibility of improving the electoral performance based on the expansive notion of Hinduism cannot be ruled out. Therefore, the expansionist notion of Hinduism, which denies religious identity

to Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and adivasis, ought to be contested if the opposition wants to defeat BJP/NDA.

The other crucial factor implicated in the idea of one nation, one culture, and one people is the hegemony of one language, namely, Hindi. Since 2014, this orientation has been loudly articulated in some circles. It may be noted that Hindi is constructed as a language absorbing some 40 mother tongues into it, a few of which have 10 million or more speakers. And some of these mother tongues are more proximate to other languages (for example, Maithili to Bengali) but annexed by Hindi. In spite of all this, that is, denying identity to several mother tongues and arbitrary inclusion of some others, the Hindi speakers make only 38 per cent of the total population of India. And Hindi enthusiasts refer to it as the 'national language', although Schedule VIII of the Constitution lists 22 languages and none of them is designated as the national language. The anti-Hindi attitude has been gradually dying down since the 1960s, but recent attempts to impose Hindi in non-Hindi regions have given a new lease of life to the negative attitude towards Hindi. The coming general elections should project the present proclivity to impose Hindi on the majority of Indians as a serious threat to derail the idea of a multicultural India in spite of repeating ad infinitum the notion of cooperative federalism! What Voltaire said in 1765 sounds so familiar: 'Those who can make you believe in absurdities, can make you commit atrocities.'

If the political opposition comes together and presents the BJP/RSS notion of a monocultural India as patently antithetical to the authentic fact of multicultural India, they would not only win the next general election but would also make a long-standing contribution for the survival of multicultural India. If they do not recognize this simple truth that the notion of 'hierarchy of enemies' is a ubiquitous phenomenon, which would vary contextually, one must conclude that they have lost their political acumen to evolve a contextually relevant electoral strategy. To conclude, the result of the 2019 elections would depend more on the opposition parties' ability to evolve a contextually relevant electoral strategy than on the tall claims being made by the BJP/NDA.

AFTERWORD

Pralay Kanungo

The idea of this volume had been the outcome of long conversations between an anthropologist and a political scientist, gradually taking shape through continuous exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences. Despite different disciplinary backgrounds and training, perceptions and approach, we shared some common ground: we both worked on religion and politics, connected theory and practice, adopted interdisciplinary approach, privileged political anthropology, tracked everyday practices, and followed ethnographic method. Our shared social, political, and intellectual concerns drove us to collaborate to produce this volume on the 2014 election, which aspired to be distinct in some sense from other election volumes, in terms of political understanding and insight, social-anthropological thrust, and critical scholarship. Further, it interrogates certain core issues relating to the Indian elections with a long view in the larger context of democratic ideas and practices, which had not been adequately addressed earlier.

While working on this volume, we did not agree on many things: for example, though both of us followed a *longue durée* approach in our respective research on religion and politics, our understanding and emphasis differed while studying Indian elections. Whereas the anthropologist's tilt towards the long-term processes was more pronounced than the political scientist's, the latter showed more interest to dabble with immediacy. Similarly, whereas both of us shared the

warfare-welfare model as a crucial determinant to understand and explain Indian elections, specifically the 2014 election, the emphasis differed here again. While the anthropologist privileged the former, the political scientist did the latter, along with factoring in other key aspects. Hence, to retain each other's distinct take and intellectual autonomy, we assigned the task of writing the 'Introduction' and the 'Afterword' to the anthropologist and the political scientist, respectively.

The 'Afterword', which reads the dialectics of warfare and welfare differently, is divided into four sections. The first section critically reflects on the 'Introduction' in the light of its critique of other pioneering studies on Indian elections. Then it moves forward to the next section to argue, in contrast to the thrust of the 'Introduction', that the fulcrum of the 2014 elections was welfare rather than warfare, though warfare played a subdued role at stray sites and had a marginal impact. The third section shows why and how warfare returned from slumber in the post-2014 elections, shrouding Modi's welfare governance, and soon became more imperious during the state elections. The final section visualizes how the algebra of warfare-welfare will play out in the 2019 election.

Reflections on the 'Introduction'

First and foremost, the 'Introduction' to this volume is a dissenting note on the existing explanations on Indian election studies in the larger context of ideas and praxis of democracy. While boldly challenging and contesting the 'received wisdom' of Indian election studies, and adopting a *longue durée* approach, it offers a more comprehensive, complex, robust, and alternate thesis on Indian democracy in general and on the 2014 elections in particular. Unlike the conventional reading of democracy on predicted lines, the 'Introduction' deconstructs electoral democracy systematically to arrive at its kernel—the intertwinement of warfare and welfare. In doing so, it crafts a different and succinct hypothesis, not formulated, at least not too distinctly, in most of the existing accounts. As the 'Introduction' examines and contests the assumptions of the existing scholarship to craft this thesis, obviously this thesis, too, is not above contestation. Though the 'Introduction' has all the reasons to interrogate and critique all 'received wisdom', it would be unfair to understate the contributions of these important

studies. After all, no single factor determines the outcome of Indian elections (see Chapter 10). Most of the academic, journalistic, and scholarly works have tried to read and interpret this complex phenomenon in multiple ways, maybe with some limitations, but have made their distinct scholarly contributions.

Political scientists, psephologists, sociologists, and anthropologists—starting from Rajni Kothari to Paul Wallace, from Myron Weiner to Ashutosh Varshney, from M.N. Srinivas to Mukulika Banerjee, from James Manor to Yogendra Yadav, from Christophe Jaffrelot to Louis Tillin—have tried to decipher the complex code of Indian democratic elections through the prism of their respective disciplinary and methodological lenses, with the support of rich quantitative and qualitative data and factoring in prevalent and changing social, economic, political, and cultural developments into their analysis. It is true that no monocausal or even multicausal explanation or multilayered method would be complete in itself to tell the full story of democratic politics in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multicultural, and multilingual nation such as India. Yet, the ‘Introduction’ of this volume finds them wanting because, *inter alia*, in many works, the immediacy of the event either skips or does not sufficiently engage with the *longue durée*. This portrayal may not be entirely correct, however. The ‘Introduction’ does not dismiss the short view *per se*; what it objects to is that this view hides much more than it reveals and the lack of a long view leads to unconvincing conclusions. Even if this criticism is conceded, immediacy on occasions may decisively determine the outcome of an election in an open and transparent manner, raising new political possibilities. For instance, the unexpected defeat of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the bypoll for two parliamentary seats in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2018 has primarily been the outcome of Mayawati’s offer of support to the Samajwadi Party (SP) candidates despite both parties having been bitter political rivals for about a quarter century. The immediate issue that brought these two rivals together was their political survival against the BJP onslaught. This defeat has suddenly changed the existing political narrative by questioning the invincibility of the ruling party and creating new political possibilities for the opposition in 2019.

Second, the ‘Introduction’ outlines a distinct thesis that this volume offers—the algebra of ‘warfare-welfare’—which is the title of the volume as well. As this thesis suggests, warfare and welfare are intimately

intertwined in electoral democracy and even become near synonyms; India in 2014 is no exception. Hence, contrary to the standard explanation, it treats the phenomenon of warfare-welfare not as disjointed or either/or. Thus, the plank of development for all (*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikaas*) cannot be disentangled from warfare or vice versa, as the ideology of Hindutva is not only pronouncedly anti-minority but it also has a long history of violent campaigns against the minorities. The BJP's 2014 victory, as the 'Introduction' suggests, is an outcome of this complicity. This thesis gets support from the evidence and arguments offered by other contributors in this volume: Modi's anti-Muslim narrative of terror (Chapter 2 by Manisha Sethi), anti-Muslim violence in Muzaffarnagar (Chapter 5 by Hilal Ahmed), communal development in Gujarat (Chapter 4 by Zoya Hasan), Hindu-Muslim polarization in Banaras (Chapter 6 by Bikramaditya Kumar Choudhary), and anti-Muslim rumour (Chapter 1 by Irfan Ahmad) lend support to the warfare thesis.

No doubt, the 'Introduction' constructs a robust and convincing warfare-welfare model adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, critically engaging with many cutting-edge studies on politics, democracy, and elections. Yet, willy-nilly, it becomes a victim of the same logic which it sets out to refute other studies as partial and unconvincing explanations, by reducing a complex, multidimensional phenomenon neatly into two rubrics: warfare and welfare, or rather one phenomenon—warfare-welfare. Even while dissecting the warfare-welfare model, the 'Introduction', treating them as coterminous, seems to stretch the arguments on warfare a little too far, thereby leaving limited space for arguments on welfare. Has the Gujarat model of development presented a warfare story? True, this model may be exclusionary to some extent, its hallowed claims may be rightly contested (see Chapter 4), yet it has surely made an impact on a large electorate irrespective of region, caste, class, and communities; the aspirational class has pinned its hopes on the promise of development (see Chapter 10). However, the 'Introduction' defends its position by arguing that the reason for this unevenness is primarily because the reigning explanations have already given enough attention to welfare to render warfare into near theoretical oblivion. If this is so, then the algebra of warfare-welfare thesis becomes equally lopsided as well.

True, votes and violence have remained integral to India's electoral democracy for long. For decades, some socially dominant castes,

especially in north India, have not tolerated the idea of social and political equality and citizens' rights for Dalits, and they have used violence in some places to deny them their constitutional right to vote. For instance, atrocities by Jats against Dalits in western UP was a routine affair during the elections until the late 1970s. Though the upper-caste domination received a serious setback with the deepening of democracy, unleashing of a 'silent revolution', Dalit awakening, and so on, the caste violence has taken various forms and still threatens to return whenever the subaltern resistance gets weakened. With regard to minorities, it is true that over the decades Hindutva has constructed its democratic discourse, focussing more on Hindu identity and culture, and mobilized Hindus against Muslims by projecting them as the 'other' for the purpose of electoral success.

Riots have certainly polarized communities and influenced voting behaviour. Yet, anti-Muslim hysteria alone does not constitute Hindutva's democratic discourse, determining its electoral victory or defeat. The Ram Janmabhoomi issue, which was ignited by the Congress by opening the doors of the disputed Babri Masjid for the Hindus, became a mass movement due to Hindutva's aggressive anti-Muslim mobilization, resulting in the surge of BJP's popularity and electoral gains. However, the BJP has never received overwhelming support from Hindus on a pan-Indian spectrum, or even in the Hindi heartland, to have an absolute majority in the Parliament. The BJP came to political power long after the movement subsided; hence, the logic of electoral victory on the basis of a majoritarian discourse on warfare looks less convincing, more so when BJP's vote share in the 2014 election is barely 31 per cent.

Elections in India have always been perceived to be a 'battle' in popular academic and journalistic discourse. The 'Introduction', dissecting the nature of Hindutva politics, elevates its status to warfare. In some ways, it may be justified when one analyses the making of this warfare in a long historical and social trajectory. As the 'Introduction' suggests, the warfare is not geared against Muslims alone, it is very much against many other minorities, like the Adivasis of Niyamgiri where Vendanta, a powerful corporate, is determined to displace the Dongria Kondhs from their habitat (see Chapter 9). It needs to be noted that the Dongria Kondhs repelled the mighty corporate by using democratic methods. Thus, the warfare explanation needs a nuanced analysis.

It is, of course, true that in contemporary times, nationalist discourses across the world conveniently attempt to create an antagonistic other on the basis of religion and do succeed. But there are many hurdles in the construction of a monolithic Hindu identity in India. There can also be warfare of one section of Hindus against another, as Hindus do not constitute a homogeneous entity, being divided into caste, tribe, class, gender, race, region, and language. Curiously, some Hindu sects do not want to be clubbed with Hindus and demand a separate religious status; the recent controversial recognition of the Lingayats as a separate religion by the Congress government in Karnataka for electoral gains is a case in point. Even if Hindutva manages to create Hindu homogeneity by raising the fear of the 'other', it will not necessarily reflect in the voting decision. An all-India election is rarely fought through a direct or frontal attack by one community against another, though there are moments when this cannot be ruled out completely. The election battle may also involve a series of intra-community battles. For instance, it is very hard to erase the antagonistic contradictions between Hindu upper and lower castes.

The third major intervention of the 'Introduction' is its emphasis on a *longue durée* approach. This approach certainly enables us to provide a more authentic explanation by taking a long view while analysing electoral processes. Yet, immediacy still matters to a great extent. Sometimes, the emergence of new events, issues, leadership, rhetoric, symbols, slogans, rituals, and/or ceremonies on the eve of elections may overshadow the long historical sociological build-up, considerably affecting the outcome of the election. The election may look like a carnival with new hopes, aspirations, assertions, and promises of welfare, which may be illusory and temporary, as 'carnivalesque' does not necessarily end but may hide contention or shelve it temporarily. Suddenly, the discredited 'patron-client' relationship may metamorphose into lofty rhetoric of economic and social justice and development, assuring livelihood with dignity, thereby giving more hype and credibility to immediacy. Indira Gandhi's '*Garibi Hatao*' (remove poverty) rhetoric became a huge vote catcher; similarly, '*Indira Hatao, Democracy Bachao*' (remove Indira Gandhi and save democracy) became a potent slogan of the JP movement (anti-Emergency/anti-Indira Movement led by Jay Prakash Narayan) which dislodged Indira Gandhi in 1977. Hence, both *longue durée*

and immediacy have to be factored in to grasp a democratic exercise as complex as election.

Explaining the 2014 Victory: The Lens of Welfare

Set against this backdrop, the victory of the BJP in the 2014 elections calls for some reflections. The BJP's absolute majority in the Parliament was not only a remarkable achievement but it also signalled a decisive turnaround in Indian democracy. As this volume shows, rather than simply being the handiwork of the Modi magic, this unique feat was the outcome of a complex interplay of agencies and processes carrying contradictory and yet complementary elements—disillusionment and aspirations, exclusion and inclusion, hopes and fears, media hype and silent groundwork. No doubt, Modi magic played a crucial role, but all tools and paraphernalia for the magic show were at his disposal before the performance began.

By 2014, the ruling regime had been thoroughly discredited and was exhausted and demoralized, losing all its will to rule; it had already surrendered much before the race even began. In fact, the Congress as a political party had started eroding long ago, ever since the days of Indira Gandhi. However, continuity in political power acted as a glue to save it from dissolution. Ever since the fall of Rajiv Gandhi's government in 1989, the Congress had been surviving on the coalition oxygen, which was bought at a very heavy price. Not only were the diktats of the partners arbitrary, some of them often acted as mercenaries and indulged in scams, thereby discrediting the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government every other day. The Congress got a negative projection in the media as a wilful ally of corrupt coalition partners right since the regime of P.V. Narasimha Rao to that of Manmohan Singh, though the latter had high personal integrity (scams like 2G, which discredited the Singh government, have now got the clean chit from some courts). The Congress, which had acquired such a negative image, showed little concern to replenish itself with new ideas, leadership, energy, cadre, and programmes to come out of this routine blackmail and image crisis.

In fact, the Congress had been systematically losing its moral ground for quite some time. Indira Gandhi's authoritarian rule during the Emergency was an assault on democracy. Rajiv Gandhi's silence

led to the 1984 riots against the Sikhs. In 1992, Narasimha Rao's covert concurrence resulted in the Babri Masjid demolition. Thus, both Rajiv and Rao dealt a serious blow to one of the foundational principles of the Indian Constitution—secularism. Minorities felt insecure and got alienated from the Congress. The moral compass of the party was later passed on to Sonia Gandhi, who restored some credibility. While running the government, though Manmohan Singh retained personal integrity, most of the party leaders became power wielders and power brokers, involved in all sorts of unethical deals and compromises.

The Congress leaders showed no interest in the revival and rejuvenation of the party. Rahul Gandhi's attempt to inject new blood and spirit among the young cadre failed to impregnate the iron wall of resistance of the old guard, who nourished a structure built on patronage, corruption, sycophancy, and opportunism. This kind of party structure and leadership, despite adoption of some progressive and pro-poor policies by the UPA regime, looked socially and politically non-committal and morally hollow. Thus, the Congress, quite rapidly, started losing its old social base and coalitional character, which had once consisted of a wide range of social classes—from the upper and middle classes, to the lower and marginalized.

Despite a coherent and credible top leadership, the inaccessible high command culture in the party (a legacy of Indira Gandhi) systematically alienated genuine party workers and leaders. Periodic desertion by party leaders at the regional level had created a vacuum in every key state and the acute factionalism in every layer of the party had weakened the Congress beyond redemption. Thus, the Congress lost its regional bearings and got completely fossilized at the grass roots. Continuous electoral losses which the party suffered in most key states had demoralized the cadre and left no hope for the party's future.

Narendra Modi entered at this critical juncture, when the nation was disillusioned with the Congress and the Congress itself had lost its legitimacy and credibility. Not just that, a media-led Congress demolition squad, consisting of diverse actors—Anna Hazare, Arvind Kejriwal (see Chapters 1 and 9), Ramdev (see Chapter 3), and many others—had shaken the foundation of the Congress so hard that it was waiting to crumble at any moment. Modi simply gave a nudge

and the Congress could not muster even 10 per cent of the seats in the Parliament.

This does not take away the credit of Modi and his charisma. For a regional leader who had never been a member of Parliament, and who was constantly interrogated after the 2002 Gujarat riots by the national media and ostracized and ridiculed inside and outside the nation, it was a phenomenal achievement to overcome such serious roadblocks to emerge as a popular national leader symbolizing hopes and aspirations so swiftly. However, behind this phenomenon, there was a complex code that various chapters (see Chapters 2, 6, and 10) have attempted to decode.

In India, episodic and catastrophic events and occurrences—from communal carnage to caste atrocities, from linguistic clashes to regional brawls, from state oppression to mega scams—gave birth to new political parties and new political leaders. Though not all could survive the litmus test of politics, a few smart leaders did. Modi, no doubt, was a model product of Hindutva ideology and politics, who became a Hindutva icon after the catastrophic 2002 Gujarat riots. However, soon he reinvented himself, first as the icon of Gujarati identity (*asmita*) to repeat his win in Gujarat in 2007, and later as an icon of development by craftily marketing the ‘Gujarat model’ to win the 2014 national elections, successfully shedding his sectarian past by adopting a fine make-over strategy. While many analysts found the Gujarat model flawed and exposed its hollowness, Modi had successfully sold the dream model by that time. In politics, perceptions matter much more than statistics. Compared to large states such as UP and Bihar, Gujarat undoubtedly appeared to be developed in growth parameters, infrastructure, and investment. Though it seriously lagged behind in some crucial social indicators (see Chapter 4), certainly many states, including Bihar and UP, were still far behind Gujarat. Besides, powerful oratory, innovative style of direct communication with people, prolific use of social media, aggressive campaign on ground and in media, all helped in the making of a charismatic Modi (see Chapter 9).

The Modi magic was also greatly complemented by the Sangh machine which worked tirelessly on the ground, right from strategization to mobilization and micro-management to overall coordination. The Sangh machine, an ever-active agency of Hindutva politics, besides mobilizing Hindus on anti-Muslim ideology, had been continuously

working at the grass roots since decades for various marginalized communities, particularly adivasis and Dalits, and incidentally, had successfully co-opted a section of minorities into the Hindutva fold and created fissure in the community (see Chapter 8). The perfect convergence and coordination between the pracharak (full time organizer)-led Sangh machine and the Amit Shah-led BJP party machine clicked very well. Caste equations, particularly in north and west India, were thoroughly analysed and necessary social and political alignments were made by the Sangh strategists who knew the ground situation very well; the Sangh had started 'social engineering' since the time of Balasaheb Deoras and finally, it paid rich dividends in 2014.

Modi also played his political card with smartness. While his catchy message to the nation was 'India First', he did not forget to invoke his backward caste identity in states such as UP and Bihar, where it mattered. While Modi, by and large, stuck to the welfare discourse by talking of 'development for all' in his national campaign, he also raised the issues of 'Islamic terror', Pakistan, and Kashmir (see Chapter 2). At selective places such as Muzaffarnagar in UP, Muslims became the target of Hindutva violence with the objective to fuel the othering and Hindu-Muslim polarization, like any warfare for electoral gain. All these, however, were 'exceptional' and limited experiments rather than the overall strategy, which promised 'development for all' and '*acchhe din*' (good days).

Modi's promise of change (*parivartan*) and good days (*acche din*) was suitably crafted with an anti-corruption rhetoric. He fiercely attacked the corrupt Congress regime and made it a crucial plank of his discourse on development; his single status and the promise to build a corruption-free India with assurances such as '*Na Khaunga Na Khane Dunga*' (will neither engage in corruption myself, nor will allow others to) became an instant attraction for the common man. People trusted Modi as a selfless, credible leader, with charisma and concern, who would change their destiny; thus, the elections were more decisively fought on a welfare discourse rather than on warfare. The party strategists understood that warfare strategy had a limited appeal and application as people, in general, were looking for better lives rather than a communal recipe. Moreover, the BJP and Modi were not sure of the success of such strategy as people were indifferent to their Ram Mandir plank.

After the Victory: Warfare Shrouds Welfare

As argued, Modi came to power putting high premium on welfare, and if warfare was used, it was restricted to a few local contexts and had limited utility for the 2014 elections. Then, logically, warfare should have no role in governance at all; after all, Modi gave a call for ‘development for all’ signalling the end of all discrimination and exclusion and ushering in a prosperous India for everyone. Yet, soon after his ascension to power, strangely, a warfare narrative appeared in multiple forms, shrouding the welfare agenda.

Before discussing warfare, it needs to be stressed that Modi introduced a plethora of structural changes, welfare schemes, and programmes, big and small, conventional and innovative, refurbished and fresh—from NITI Ayog to Swacch Bharat to Jan Dhan to Digital India to Make in India, just to name a few—marking his distinct personal signature on each of them. While some initiatives reflected his boldness to go for next-generation economic and administrative reforms through digitization and elimination of bureaucratic hurdles, others addressed the needs of the poor, marginalized, women, and rural India. On the economic front, he adopted bold and risky steps like demonetization and the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Though these measures were criticized as myopic decisions for creating chaos in the economy by bringing down the gross domestic product (GDP), yet, politically, they proved productive; the poor, curiously, despite being the sufferer, approved Modi’s ‘anti-rich’ initiatives.

Incidentally, Modinomics demonstrated contradictions. As the darling of the corporates on the 2014 election eve (see Chapter 9), he was expected to make a huge turnaround for the corporates. Modi delivered in many ways. He privatized new sectors, liberalized investment, cleared many pending projects, reduced bureaucratic hurdles, and brought up India’s global ranking in ‘ease of doing business’ from 146 to 100. The Modi era brought an all-time high in the stock market. Yet, for Indian businesses, this was not enough; administrative controls still haunted.

With a huge political constituency of poor, Modi could not afford to allow a free neoliberal journey and had to balance with pro-poor measures. Thus, he refurbished the existing pro-poor policies such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

(MGNREGA), and announced welfare schemes such as Housing for All, Electricity for All, Clean Cooking for All, Health for All, and Insurance for All. Some schemes worked, while some others remained non-starters. However, Modi's sheer enthusiasm, energy, campaign, and political smartness made his leadership appear distinct and decisive. The common man understood that any change would not yield results overnight, and hence was prepared to wait and watch, thus giving Modi the benefit of his faith. This faith got further entrenched when politically savvy Modi convincingly reminded the people that their plight was the outcome of non-performance of the Congress regime during the last six decades. However, as we approach 2019, and the promise of 'acchhe din' still remains unfulfilled, the youth, the farmers, the workers, and the marginalized are becoming restive and have started voicing their resentment.

Amidst a mixed welfare narrative, which was marked by a gap between popular expectations and delivery by the Modi government, a warfare narrative had gathered momentum. Modi started his innings as a perfect messenger of peace by inviting all heads of states of India's South Asian neighbours, including Pakistan, to his swearing-in ceremony. This out-of-the-box initiative was greatly applauded as a great message of peace, not just to the nation but also to the neighbours. Modi, by this action, elevated himself from a politician to a statesman. Unfortunately, this initiative lost its momentum quickly and the Indo-Pak relations deteriorated so much that India resorted to 'surgical strike' against Pakistan. No doubt, Pakistan—escalating terrorist activities in Kashmir—compelled Modi to retract his peace move. However, Modi's external diplomacy lost its sheen, being a victim of the warfare logic.

Again, the BJP, shedding ideological differences, made a fine pragmatic and bold move to make an alliance with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) for restoration of peace in Kashmir and to bring back the Kashmiri youth into the national mainstream. However, mistrust, intransigence, and state high-handedness further alienated the Kashmiri youth, thereby demolishing all confidence-building measures initiated by the Vajpayee government. Pakistan and Kashmir, border clashes, and terrorist violence had always fuelled the warfare narrative against Muslims in India, in which they had no role and unfortunately no control. The hardening of Modi/Indian government's relations with

Pakistan and Kashmir gave an opportunity to Hindu nationalist hardliners to invoke their long-standing demand to revoke Article 370 and give more powers to the army and security forces to crush all dissent by brute force.

While Kashmir took a turn towards a communal, national issue, overzealous Hindutva fanatics—emboldened by the invincibility of their government—came to believe that the entire nation should submit to the idea of Hindu nationalism. First, they sporadically targeted Muslims by launching aggressive campaigns like '*ghar wapsi*' (reconversion) and '*gau raksha*' (cow protection). At some places, Muslims were forced to chant 'Vande Mataram' and '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*'; a few innocent Muslims such as Mohammad Akhlaq and Junaid became victims of mob lynching on the pretext of nationalism or the beef issue. Vigilantism and violence unleashed a state of fear and insecurity among minorities. Such violence was not restricted to the minorities alone; even Dalits were brutally assaulted for being alleged killers of cows. The number of such cases may be a handful, yet it created an atmosphere of terror and intimidation against the minorities. While Modi reprimanded the perpetrators of violence occasionally, the warning, by and large, remained ineffective and the violence continued at periodic intervals in different forms.

Alongside these acts of anti-Muslim violence, the discourse of nationalism took an aggressive turn in the media and public sphere. Even yoga guru Baba Ramdev, a strong ally of Modi (see Chapter 3), who quickly became a billionaire monk with his sprawling Rs 10,000 crore (100 billion) Patanjali business empire, joined the chorus. Responding to All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen's (AIMIM) Asadduddin Owasi's statement that he would not raise the slogan 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' even if a knife was put to his throat, Ramdev said he would have 'beheaded' people for refusing to chant the Bharat Mata slogan. Any voice of dissent, which did not conform to this version of nationalism, was castigated as anti-national. Some students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi were charged with sedition for raising anti-India slogans, which they denied; even if there is an element of truth, the issue could have been handled in a more mature way rather than projecting students as anti-national. However, Hindutva wanted to escalate this ideological warfare against the left, which has dominated reputed academic institutions and universities such as JNU

since Independence. The Hindu right always nurtured a grievance for being alienated and excluded from these prime intellectual hubs and now the time was ripe for them to reclaim these institutions and saffronize them systematically. Thus, an ideological warfare was unleashed on campuses. Hindutva forces elevated nationalism to the status of a religion. Any citizen who dared oppose their version of nationalism was branded as anti-national and deserved to be punished. Simultaneously, keeping in tune with its long-standing position, Hindutva claimed that secularism was an anathema to India and should be expunged from the Indian Constitution. Surprisingly, even a union minister, Anantha Hegde, aired this view publicly.

Why did warfare, which was subdued and a marginal influence in the 2014 elections, stage a comeback to public discourse and governance after Modi came to power? There were many explanations but only two factors will be addressed here. First, one should never miss the point that the very foundation of Hindutva was laid on an anti-Muslim rationale. In the past, anti-Muslim mobilization brought Hindutva close to power, but it was never enough to catapult it to the seat of power in Delhi. Hence, Hindutva was compelled to compromise on occasion on its ideology and programme. Further, though the anti-Muslim plank might be a major ingredient to bring people into its fold, it was still impossible to win an all-India election on this sole criterion as it would be a fraction of what the diverse electorate from different regions demanded. Even if Hindutva had won on this single issue, it could hardly have sustained. To overcome this limitation, Hindutva had been working round the clock to create, expand, and retain an all-India Hindu constituency, which lived off anti-Muslim fodder. So, when Modi came to power with absolute majority, Hindutva crossed a huge barrier and felt emboldened and wished its Hindu constituency to feel proud and empowered because of its decisive victory and demonstrate their prowess over Muslims.

Hindutva leadership would have ideally liked Modi to send out some clear signals to the cadre that this government would implement Hindutva ideology, but it did not push it as it was aware of the governance constraints. Modi certainly indicated that his government would shun Muslim 'appeasement'. However, that was not enough for the hardcore Hindutva cadre, for whom anti-Muslim rhetoric and propaganda had been part and parcel of their lives. Once in power, it was

natural for them to expect some quick state action against Muslims; as the Modi government appeared to be reluctant, they became impatient and went forward with the anti-Muslim mission on their own. Modi was in a moral dilemma: while governance demanded strong legal action against the violent Hindutva activists, he was reluctant to be tough as he himself had once championed the same anti-Muslim rhetoric and action. Moreover, the Hindutva leaders and cadre had played a crucial role in his victory and would be a key part again in his future electoral victory. This dilemma left scope for an aggressive Hindutva to sporadically play out its anti-Muslim activities with impunity and dented Modi's governance as well.

The second factor behind the return of warfare was Hindutva's political ambition to win the state elections and to become fully pan-Indian in terms of its political outreach and control. Thus, for the BJP, the election did not end in 2014, but a new race to capture states began. Modi, again, had to lead from the front to win elections for the party. The Modi-Shah combine, buoyed by political power and a decimated opposition, pledged to make a 'Congress-*mukt* Bharat' (Congress-free India), thereby launching a campaign war with a killer instinct. All lines of political decency were crossed, not just against political opponents but also against minority communities. Union Minister Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti started it with a derogatory anti-Muslim remark in Delhi elections, and the trend continued with some habitual anti-Muslim offenders every now and then, such as Union Minister Giriraj Singh and BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj. The states where political stakes were very high, and the opposition was formidable, Hindutva came back in strident forms in the election campaign.

In the 2017 UP state assembly elections, even the prime minister's speech had overt communal references when he raised the issue of *shamshan* (Hindu cremation ground) and *qabristan* (Muslim graveyard) on the pretext of attacking the failure of governance by the SP government. It was certainly undesirable, but the prime minister had to win elections to stay politically relevant. Many BJP leaders invoked the anti-Muslim rhetoric to ensure victory in UP. Yogi Adityanath, who later became the chief minister, continuously used anti-Muslim rhetoric in his speeches. Then came a do-or-die electoral battle in Gujarat, where the Congress, which had already been written off, came back with a vengeance to challenge Modi. Cornered by the opposition,

particularly by the challenge from three young leaders—Hardik Patel, Alpesh Thakur, and Jignesh Mewani—Modi dumped the Gujarat model and returned to his old rhetoric on Pakistan, terrorism, and ‘Gujarati asmita’. Dependence on warfare brought him a narrow victory. The unprecedented victory of the BJP in Tripura was the outcome of an ideological warfare against the communists who had controlled the state for a quarter of a century. After the victory in the north-eastern states, the BJP certainly looked invincible by bagging 19 out of 29 states in its kitty, moving rapidly to reach its target of Congress-mukt Bharat. In this endeavour, it had used twin strategies of warfare and welfare, depending on the context; wherever it faced a stiff battle, it had privileged warfare over welfare.

The Future: Pre-reading 2019

In this scenario, the question arises, how would warfare-welfare dialectics play out in 2019? Despite BJP’s winning spree in state elections and control of 19 state governments, 2019 may not be a cakewalk for Modi. The marginal victory of the BJP in the 2017 Gujarat assembly elections and the loss of two UP parliamentary seats in the bypoll in 2018, which had earlier elected the UP chief minister and deputy chief minister, sent out some important political inferences.

First, Modi’s welfare economics has not brought *achhe din* for the common man so far—youth remain jobless, farmers face acute distress, small businesses struggle for survival, and big businesses feel stifled. Thus, all those who voted for him are getting disillusioned, and if nothing concrete happens soon, they may change their minds in future. Second, as Modi’s welfare agenda has not delivered on ground to meet the aspirations of various classes and social groups, a confident Modi seems to have buckled under pressure and criticism. Third, when Modi feels vulnerable without enough achievements to his credit, in an act of desperation he may likely dump welfare and fall back upon the warfare rhetoric to retain his electorate. If the second line of strategy is adopted, then a team with Hindutva firebrands such as Yogi Adityanath will provide ammunition against Muslims by escalating the Ram Mandir issue; a test balloon has already been floated with the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)-sponsored ‘Ram Rajya Rath Yatra’ to gauge popular support. Fourth, the success of a

renewed social coalition by the Congress in Gujarat and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)–SP alliance in UP has raised possibilities for the emergence of a strategic opposition alliance against the BJP, seriously threatening to checkmate Modi in the Hindi heartland. Fifth, these state election results, despite the outstanding electoral record, have somehow dented the perception of Modi–Shah invincibility and encouraged BJP’s alienated alliance partners not only to be assertive, but even threaten to divorce; the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has already pulled out of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Losing alliance partners in states where the BJP needs crutches could prove detrimental for the party in 2019.

All these inferences may not necessarily pan out and could be countered by Modi. Despite such signals, Modi still remains numero uno in terms of popularity, and no other leader from the opposition can match his charismatic personality at this point. Indeed, Modi would adopt all political tactics to stop any leader to emerge as the challenger. The Gujarat election was tough, yet Modi passed the litmus test in Gujarat. In fact, Gujarat was passing through social turmoil since Modi left for Delhi, and no state BJP leader was able to handle the crisis as the Modi–Shah domination greatly obstructed an autonomous leadership to emerge. Modi’s demonetization and GST adversely affected a large section of the business community, both small and big, who had been traditional BJP supporters. The Congress took advantage of this crisis and built a credible coalition of disgruntled caste groups to offer a strong challenge; it would not be possible for the Congress to replicate this recipe on a pan-Indian level. Moreover, the Congress itself has been struggling hard to retain its identity in many states.

The success of the BSP–SP experiment in the UP bypoll might not be replicable in UP in 2019, as there remain several social and political contradictions between the two erstwhile rivals that need to be resolved. The BJP, strategically, will work on these contradictions and attempt to drive a further wedge between them. Also, these are mere bypolls where Modi has not campaigned. In a national election, the issues are likely to be different with Modi in the saddle. Further, the very idea of a united opposition against the BJP would be an uphill task (see Chapter 12). Reaching a consensus on seat sharing would be a formidable obstacle. Then who would be the leader of these

disparate political forces, who hardly trust each other and are haunted by mutual mistrust, political enmity, and social contradictions? There has already been a serious move to have a third front and this would be in the BJP's advantage as a triangular or multi-corner fight would make the BJP's win easy.

The BJP will also try to fortify alliance to counter the opposition challenge. It can always mend its relationship with the alliance partners, and even rope in new partners, as Modi still has an edge over the rest and the BJP has all the resources, being the ruling party. In southern states such as Tamil Nadu, where in 2014 the BJP failed to make much impact (see Chapter 7), there are new opportunities in the context of vulnerability of post-Jayalalithaa All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) and BJP's possible tie-up with popular cine star-turned-politician Rajnikanth. In Andhra Pradesh, the BJP has already moved to compensate TDP's loss with a possible alliance with Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress. The BJP's political strategists have shown their skill in government formation in many states where the party lacked majority—from Goa to Meghalaya. Hence, government formation at the centre will be smooth even if the BJP just emerges as the single-largest party, without having an absolute majority.

Thus, while 2019 would be interestingly poised amidst these narratives and counter-narratives, what would be the algebra of warfare-welfare? Modi still occupies the top spot on the popularity chart despite the shortcomings of his welfare economics. True, Modi has allowed Hindutva campaigners to unleash their anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence on occasions, and he himself has invoked warfare rhetoric to establish hegemony in the states and achieve a Congress-mukt Bharat. Yet, as a shrewd and pragmatic politician, he is likely to reconfigure his welfare model to deliver on ground rather than sharpening the logic of warfare, with the same understanding as in 2014 that warfare has a limited appeal and would not be necessarily paying every time, everywhere. Moreover, intensification of warfare will weaken his credibility as a leader, divide the nation, and bring all anti-BJP forces onto one platform. Modi has also understood that aggressive Hindutva had dented his reputation in India and abroad. Moreover, the BJP's win in the North-East, a minority-dominated region, has sent a message that elections can still be won on the promise of welfare.

Modi's promises might be fading, but his charisma has not yet faded. To his advantage, people still have hopes from him and still believe that no one in the opposition can provide a better alternative. So, it is high time that Modi delivered in order to retain New Delhi in 2019!

Whatever the face and shape of the future, the dialectic of warfare-welfare that the 'Introduction' proposes as a thesis, and the volume dwells on is an important one to think about.

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