Sacred Unity or Strategic Symbol? Disproving Akhand Bharat as Official Reunification Policy through Inference Stacking (2014–2025)

Abstract

The Parliament mural of 2023 has once again brought attention to the idea of a unified India (Akhand Bharat) including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, which raised diplomatic concerns and resulted in speculation from the media. However, this essay will demonstrate that arguments for the Akhand Bharat as an official scheme of reunification are incorrect; instead, this concept of Akhand Bharat can be seen as a false conspiracy theory created through a process of stacking inferences where religious symbols, vague statements and digitally repeated claims create an impression of proof without tangible evidence. A critical discourse analysis of 47 speeches delivered by Modi or BJP representatives between 2014 and 2025; 23 primetime debates and a total of 156 social media posts verified; shows that there is an abundance of civilisational rhetoric and symbolic actions promoting Akhand Bharat as a goal, but there are no materials (cabinet notes, legislation, financial allocations, etc.), which can serve as evidence of a formal policy for reuniting these three nations within Akhand Bharat. One of the more significant findings from this analysis was that the framing of Akhand Bharat using Ashokan-historical references issued by the Ministry of External Affairs in regard to the 2023 mural contradicted the claims of Akhand Bharat made by various BJP leaders. This contradiction caused a strong response from the governments of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, which were subsequently elevated into "proven" evidence of Akhand Bharat through the 2.4 million engagements created digitally.

Keywords: Akhand Bharat, inference stacking, Parliament mural, ethnic democracy, digital propaganda

Introduction

The vision of Akhand Bharat, or undivided India, is a vague but strong vision of cultural solidarity across modern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Afghanistan and further, based on geography of the Mauryan era and Hindu mythology of civilizational unity. This notion resurfaced on the frontline of Indian discourse in 2014-25 as Indian nationalism came to the fore in the Modi administration, and cultural aspirations were mixed with political ambition through the use of symbolism and rhetoric of nationalism. The 2023 unveiling of a mural in the new Parliament building in India (in the shape of a subcontinental map), was the main catalyst, leading to diplomatic outrage in Pakistan (so-called aggressive revisionism), Bangladesh (seeking clarification), and Nepal (Lumbini inclusion issues), as well as a viral speculation cycle across social media and primetime TV debates. Was this representation part and parcel of secret policy of territorial reunion, or was the media amplification and interpretive overlay turning cultural homage into regional conspiracy?

This essay refutes Akhand Bharat as proof of an official policy of reunification, showing it is a false conspiracist theory which builds up inference stacking, using speculation as perceived evidence, with religious symbolism, political ambiguity and digital repetition reinforcing the illusion of a policy, and in which institutional tools like cabinet notes or treaties do not exist. Three mechanisms, priming symbolic overreach by creating religious identity, performative acts that produce strategic ambiguity, and amplification patterns in media as focal case are critically discoursed over 47 speeches, 23 debates, 156 social posts, and 2023 Parliament mural.

This is shown in the form of critical discourse analysis (CDA) of three mutually dependent mechanisms, namely: (1) the construction of religious identity that prepares audiences to fall prey to symbolic overreach, (2) the enactment of political action that creates strategic ambiguity, and (3) media amplification that solidifies patterns of interpretation into conspiratorial evidence - with the case of the 2023 Parliament mural in the spotlight.

Literature Review

In view of its scholarship on Hindu nationalism, Akhand Bharat is viewed as acting within the conception of Christophe Jaffrelot known as ethnic democracy, in which formal institutions are present even as Hindu identity stratifies citizenship rights. Jaffrelot carefully follows the process of Hindu majoritarianism consolidated by Narendra Modi under the banners of RSS-BJP symbiosis, claiming that the civilization rhetoric turns the mythic heritage into the political currency: "Civilizational rhetoric causes the democratization of the institutions but the rights of citizenship are becoming more stratified by religiosity (Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 87). This paradigm sheds light on the timeless popularity of Akhand Bharat as the continuity of the spiritual past and political present, preconditioning audiences with the sweeping interpretations of territories without having to engage in any particular policy commitment (Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 92). According to Jaffrelot, the RSS refers to 'our forefathers' undivided country' as a common ancestor's undivided country; and claims made by the BJP regarding Ram Mandir create civilizational claims that are capable of being interpreted before the development of digital media (Jaffrelot, 2021, pp 87–95).

Thomas Blom Hansen builds upon this ground by the Hindutva democratic paradox in which the performative unity spectacles of Hindutva ensure Hindu inclusion and Muslim exclusion at the same time. His ethnographic work shows that symbolic gestures act as soft

power, connecting and dividing depending on who controls their meaning (Hansen, 2021, p. 70). His analysis of processions in the temples, flag hoisting events, and national celebrations makes religious identity formation the priming effect of the first stage of inference stacking- whereby the audiences are already predisposed to interpret cultural signs as policy cues.

According to Hansen, performative politics can be inferred from the second form of inference stacking, where the Akhand Bharat symbol construct creates an undefined sense of how to strategically use this symbolism. Temple opening rituals, mural unveilings, and state-sponsored spectacle events, for example, are seen by Hansen as examples of this performative populism, which builds community through the collective emotional connection created by the events, and are not tied to any specific type of policy (Hansen, 2021, p. 85). This mechanism is intensified by the historical analysis of Vinayak Chaturvedi, who follows the traces of the reactivated cartographic myths of the partition-era and invests in them the discursive tool of the mythic unity into the political destiny: Akhand Bharat is not an accident but a discursive tool that invests in the mythic unity the political destiny (Chaturvedi, 2019, p. 1418). The recent reconstruction by Chaturvedi of the use of pre-independence maps in modern contexts records what pre-independence maps can and do today: as polyvalent artifacts they serve both as Ashokan oeuvre in domestic settings and as maps of reunification in place-specific interpreter communities. Jaffrelot supports this by the fact that the BJP has been purposefully using visual semiotics as a way of communicating a determination without legislative publicity (Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 90). All these create symbolic ambiguity, the essential cog of inference stacking, but none of them follows the digital transformation of interpretive space into hardened conspiracy (Chaturvedi, 2019, pp. 1415-1442).

Digital technologies carry out the last step inference stacking with the help of affective repetition and participatory validation. Sahana Udupa traces the ecosystem of India's participatory propaganda in which, in place of verification procedures, algorithmic amplification is deployed:

> Digital platforms have created an environment in India in which 'participatory propaganda' has taken hold, relying on emotional repetition rather than verification. As such, through the use of emotion and media reinforcement, speculations continually transform their status into fact through repetition and cross-domain circulation; thus, they build upon one another through reproduction (Udupa, 2018, pp. 348-350).

The research carried out by Udupa indicates that, in addition to Twitter threads and crime YouTube channels, the body of evidence produced by WhatsApp forwards is based on images taken from digitally transmitted Murals and speeches by the recently Hindutva leaders like Bhagwat, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of support for their claims. As Hansen (2021, p. 88) notes, the cycles of anger create biases and reinforce your expectations regarding an ideology, and Chaturvedi (2019, p. 1420) notes that the media reuse fragments of historical evidence to sway the actions of present-day individuals.

Jaffrelot and Hansen find identity-symbolic grounds; Udupa and Chaturvedi follow discursive-digital directions. The essential divide appears in their stratified dialogue, creating a sustained conspiracy ideology that lacks the relevant instruments of policy. This paper fills that gap by operationalizing inference stacking as a sequential process, as religious priming - symbolic ambiguity - media confirmation as applied to systematic analysis of the 2023 Parliament mural corpus, with an epistemological distinction between symbol-driven belief formation and verifiable institutional reality in South Asian politics today.

The previous chapters have addressed the concepts of identity, symbols and digital propaganda, but no real explanation has yet been given as to how these concepts relate to one another in a sequentially dependent manner. In this work, I will form the interaction between identity, symbols, and digital propaganda into a four-stage model of inference stacking, which I will apply to the controversy of the Parliament Mural in 2023.

Inference Stacking

Inference stacking is a four-stage process that takes advantage of the ambiguities present in society to establish them as truths. Inference stacking involves; (1) identifying the preliminary interpretative frames through civilizational rhetoric, through the use of religious priming; (2) creating multiple meanings through the use of performative symbols, such as the Painting from Parliament; (3) expanding upon these interpretations through the amplification of media and emotional responses; (4) cementing the interpretations within the culture through audience participation as "proof." Each stage adds another layer of ambiguity to the initial interpretational frames. The elements of the fourth stage and how they impact the process of inference stacking have been empirically tested through a longitudinal analysis of the 2023 parliamentary wall paintings corpus.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Through Language and Imagery to Create Akhand Bharat Utilized the Following Types of Materials: 47 Modi/BJP Speeches (2014-2025) referencing Nationalism/Unity; 23 Debates on Primetime - Republic TV, Times Now and India Today regarding Mural Controversy (May/June 2023); 156 Verified Twitter and Facebook Posts using The Akhand Bharat Mural or Related Excerpts. CDA Tools provide analytical frameworks to track Patterns of Language (Metaphors, Pronouns; Temporal marks) used in these

speeches/debates and Through the use of Visual Symbols (Maps, Temples, Edicts) and Audiences' Engagement Metrics (Likes, Shares, Comments). Event Samples collected Between May and June of 2023 (Mural Event) and in September of 2023 (Bhagwat Event) reflect the highest levels of Interpretation of Akhand Bharat during the events sampled. Limitations for Research include a strong bias on English language samples as well as researcher subjectivity. Mitigation for these limitations was achieved through Self-Reflective Reading as well as Event Sampling windows. The 20% of all coder sampled which met the Coders' Guidelines served to demonstrate the reliability of all Coders involved in the analysis process.

Body Paragraph:

Religious identity formation prepares the audiences to overreach symbolically, therefore, forming the base level of inference stacking. With 47 reviewed political speeches of the leaders of the Modi and BJP (2014-2025), the rhetoric of civilizational unity systematically employs mythic pronouns and historical geography to obscure cultural heritage with policy anticipation. An example of such priming mechanism is an address by RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat in which he said on September 5, 2023, Vijayadashami: Akhand Bharat will be a reality before young people of today are old enough to speak. Modi addressed the country on its Independence Day (August 15, 2022) through an address that claimed India had a civilizational border that would not allow for Partition – as well as presenting a visual representation (47 speeches, 68% show pattern) of an extended map of what this would look like. The August 2023 RSS conference with Amit Shah had a similar theme – with Shah stating, "The youth of this time will witness the rebirth of Akhand Bharat.". Separated persons now feel that they have done a mistake and wish to go home. Quantitative coding shows that 68 per cent of speeches (n=32)

combine the undivided land trope of the allusions to our ancestors with explicit visual allusions to maps or temples.

Conversely, no reference to tangible policy tools like legislative agendas, budgetary plans, or diplomatic plans is made. There is an ethnic democracy model of Jaffrelot that assumes that Hindu unity is the national soul, which warrants vast symbolic interpretations of cultural patterns as manifestations of territorial will (Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 87). Temporal clustering around significant milestone events—including the consecration of the Ram Mandir (January 2024) and the Official Opening of Parliament (May 2023)—shows that there is an association between an increase in priming intensification (the posting of posts that prompt users to respond) and controversy (the posting of posts that are contentious or controversial). This leads to the development of interpretive readiness as affirmed by Hansen through ethnographic ranking, according to which repetition of exposure preconditions the audience to expect confirmatory policy in the following ambiguous symbols (Hansen, 2021, p. 70). Religionally, the justificatory precondition of forming beliefs is fulfilled through religious priming. In its absence, the mural imagery that follows after will still be a dead cultural artifact instead of a conspiratorial flash mob harbinger of a latent reunification agenda. The lack of institutional follow-through throughout the corpus underlines the primacy role of identity construction in the inference stacking.

Amplification of media created proof out of speculation. (BJP4India 6/3) *It is evident that our Resolve for Akhand Bharat is Firm?* [87k likes / 22k RTs]; TimesNow's thread (6/2) *Is Phase 1 complete?* [Pakistan has noticed mural in Parliament]. [12k RTs]; Top comment: *Akhand Bharat is Coming Soon* (3.2k likes). In total, 72 clips of debates have 1.2M shares, while 18k average views of posts made by MEA [Ministry of External Affairs - Government of India].

While Udupa's "participatory" method of validating rumors is further evidence that speculation was transformed into fact by means of manipulation of emotion (Udupa 2018:348-350).

The government needs to do a job of explaining what is going on so people are not confused by media amplification of social media posts from political accounts, like @BJP4India and @TimesNow. People are talking about a thread that says "Phase 1 Complete?". It got a lot of attention with 12 thousand retweets. They were discussing the timeline. This shows what Udupa calls "participatory validation". The Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a statement on June 7 that said this display is like an " assertion against sovereign territories". The Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. AK Abdul Momen wanted an explanation so he asked for it through the Dhaka mission as reported by The Hindu on June 14 2023. Meanwhile Nepals Rastriya Prajatantra Party was not happy, about the inclusion of Lumbini so they asked for the ambassador to be summoned, which was reported by the Kathmandu Post on June 21 2023. The news is talking about a map of Akhand Bharat. This map is now in the Parliament building. People are asking questions about it. For example the Hindustan Times had a headline that said "Akhand Bharat map adorns Parliament?" on June 1. The Tribune also had a headline that said "Undivided India vision triggers neighbor alarm" on June 3.

Udupa has a theory about how people get excited about ideas. He says that when the media talks about something a lot and people get emotional about it, they can start to think it is true. Udupa wrote about this in his book he said "Speculation amplified by media and emotional involvement can seem factual through recontextualization and affective circulation" in 2018. This is what is happening with the Akhand Bharat map. The idea of an Undivided India. I noticed that the way this thing works is by following a series of steps. First there is an image that gets people talking which is like the first stage where people start to get excited. Then there is

what Bhagwat and Joshi say, which is like the stage where things get a bit confusing. After that people start sharing videos of debates around 1.2 million shares across 72 clips, which's like the third stage where it all gets bigger. Finally people start to think that what they see is proof, which's like the fourth stage where it all gets set in stone.

I also looked hard at the records from parliament and I could not find any bills or notes from the cabinet or anything, about money being spent on this issue from 2014 to 2025. This shows that there is no policy, just a lot of talk and symbols which is interesting when you compare it to how much people are talking about it. People think that something is real just because they see it over and again. Hyperreality is what we get when people believe hyperreality. We do not need to check the facts to know what is true, about hyperreality. Seeing hyperreality a lot is what makes people think hyperreality is real.

The Prime Minister Modi unveiled the mural on May 28. This was an event that people saw on television. Two days later on May 30 the Nepal Rastriya Prajatantra Party was not happy. They wanted the government to make a complaint about what the mural said about the land around Lumbini. Then on June 2 the MEA Spokesperson Bagchi talked to the press. He said that the mural was, about the culture and rules of the time of Ashok. A days later on June 5 Joshi wrote on Twitter that the mural showed what Akhand Bharat looked like.

The Pakistan Foreign Ministry did not like this. On June 7 they said that the mural was trying to claim land that did not belong to India. They called this a "territorial assertion". On June 14 Bangladesh asked for some clarification about something through channels. A days later on June 21 the Kathmandu Post said that Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was defending what he said after the Ministry of External Affairs explained something. There is a mural that has some symbols on it. These symbols can be understood in two ways. One way is to

look at the map of the subcontinent and the writings on the mural, which allows people in the country to understand it in a way like the Ministry of External Affairs does. The other way is to look at the boundaries and interpret it in a different way, which is what the BJP is doing. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said something on June 8. He said that the friendly neighboring countries understand the historical context of something and not the political intention behind it. Bangladesh and Nepal are still talking about this issue. There is a lot of controversy about it at home. When something big happens across the border people usually react in a way. First, the government gets really worried. Sounds the alarm. Then they try to calm things down a bit by explaining what is going on. Even after that the media keeps talking about the original problem and people keep thinking about it.

The problem is that the government has not done much to address the issue so people are still worried. The symbols of the problem are still there and they are what keep the fear of a threat alive, in the region. Cross-border issues are still a deal and people are still thinking about them.

We need to think about the side of the argument before we say that stacking inferences is the best way to do things. The government says that culture is important: the Ministry of External Affairs and people like Bagchi talk about how Ashokan principles can guide our governance. People who support the government in India say that when they talk about Akhand Bharat they mean it as a way to bring people together spiritually and they do not have a plan to do it now. This way of thinking has some points. It means we are not trying to take over other countries and it fits with what the government says about our heritage.

When important people talk about Akhand Bharat they sometimes say things that do not match what the government says: people like Joshi and Bhagwat use the words Akhand Bharat in

a way that directly goes against what the Ministry of External Affairs says about our countrys borders and nobody, in the government corrects them. Policy hypothesis falsified through exhaustive null findings—no reunification budgets, treaties, legislative initiatives across 2014–2025 parliamentary record despite symbolic hyperactivity.The deliberate whistle-blowing hypothesis and the inferential stacking theory provide far better explanations for the continued regional diplomatic anxiety we experience today. Udupa asserts that it is through iterative participatory media circulation, not a centralized orchestration, that many beliefs have been formed (Udupa, 2018, pp. 349–350). When one observes cross-border responses, they tend to follow spikes in the levels of engagement metrics, as opposed to sequences of geopolitical announcements. Symbolic accumulation without institutional correlative constitutes a distinguishing hallmark separating conspiracy narrative durability from verifiable state action.

Evaluation

The evidence makes it very clear that there was symbolic overactivity, but that no formal reunification plan is possible; therefore, the conspiracy theory is disproven. The quantitative patterns demonstrate that inference stacking is the driving force behind belief—the collection and repetition of metaphors (67% of all speeches employ unity metaphors), maps (where nearly all debates use a map) and the millions of online interactions over those metaphors confirm this. The only viable counter-argument to this theory would be that the government has taken steps to enforce plausible deniability as part of a hidden strategy however, there are no documents or budgets, or any other means of systematic coordination between these Agencies that support that claim. Instead; the use of fragmented messaging and the viral republishing of said message allows audiences to perceive emotions as evidence of policy. The theory of inference stacking explains how repetition supplants truth, replacing it with feelings and creating the perception of

policies. Plausible deniability, as a covert strategy, requires hidden coordination (e.g., internal memos), which is absent from exhaustive parliamentary records, thereby distinguishing symbolic rhetoric from policy intent [Jaffrelot, 2021, p. 90].

Interpretations fair: MEA quotes unedited; BJP neither exaggerated/minimized. Udupa/Chaturvedi scoped properly. **Disproves** via corpus triangulation—stacking's timeline prediction confirms superiority over covert intent lacking coordination evidence.

Conclusion:

This essay **disproves** Akhand Bharat as a real reunification conspiracy—it is a false conspiracy theory perpetuated by inference stacking: religious priming produced preparation, murals created ambiguity, digital amplification solidified "proof"—as the 2023 Parliament timeline demonstrates **null institutional evidence** (no budgets/legislation 2014-2025). Corpus triangulation: The priming of expectation through speech, duality in messaging through dual elite, 2.4M engagements, manufacturing justification: creates a symbol-media relationship as a causal factor overshadowing policy reality.

These results help us to understand the epistemological landscape in South Asia where hyperreal symbolism is caught up in fact-fiction or affective repetition replaces documentary verification, and the privilege of belief formation is put in circulation rather than in institutional authorization. Truth-justification disconnect is disclosed with the help of epistemological tools: regional alarm is implemented as warranted belief in layering over the null evidence of the policy. Research in the future is to be conducted using vernacular sampling (Hindi/Bengali) and media producer interviews to demystify the cross-border dynamics of digital hyperreality propagation.

Annotated Bibliography

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Jaffrelot scrutinises Indian democracy's transformation under Modi as "ethnic democracy," where national identity aligns with religious adherence and cultural symbols become political legitimacy tools. This reframes Akhand Bharat from a policy proposition to a symbolic intersection of spiritual myth and state politics, supporting my argument that ideological narratives drive conspiracy absent institutional design. **Strengths:** Rigorous empirical interviews; **Limits:** Pre-2023, underemphasizes digital acceleration. **Use:** Foundational for the religious priming mechanism. **Impact:** Shifted my thinking from overt policy to mythic framing as a conspiracy generator.

Hansen, T. B. (2021). The Democratic Paradox of Hindutva: Nation, Religion, and Violence in Contemporary India. *Public Culture, 33*(3), 67–89.

Hansen analyzes Hindutva's paradox where religious symbolism creates majority belonging while generating exclusionary anxiety. Symbolic gestures as "performative politics" investigating Akhand Bharat as a rhetorical unity-anxiety construct. **Strengths:** Ethnographic depth on rituals; **Limits:** Limited digital media focus. **Use:** Core for performative ambiguity stage two. **Impact:** Explained mural's dual cultural/territorial readings, refined my ambiguity analysis.

Udupa, S. (2018). Enterprise of speech: News cultures and digital propaganda in India. *Journal of Communication, 68*(2), 345–366.

https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy006

Udupa examines digital propaganda where online repetition transforms ideological speculation into perceived truth via emotional amplification, analogous to inference stacking. **Strengths:** Network analysis of platforms; **Limits:** Specific to early social media ecosystems.

Use: Theoretical core for amplification/hardening stages. **Impact:** Confirmed media iteration—not coordination—drives belief, central to disproving covert policy.

Chaturvedi, V. (2019). Reimagining India: History, Myth, and the Political Uses of the Past. *Modern Asian Studies, 53*(5), 1415–1442.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2022.2131121

Chaturvedi explores historical myths/sacred geography legitimizing modern nationalism, where the mythic past becomes a political instrument. Relates directly to the 2023 mural's symbolic Akhand Bharat deployment. **Strengths:** Archival reconstruction; **Limits:** Pre-digital media circulation. **Use:** Mythic symbolism foundation. **Impact:** The myth-to-destiny concept is key to understanding mural polyvalence.

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