

WHAT IS NEW ABOUT 'NEW HINDUTVA'?

Thomas Blom Hansen and Srirupa Roy

This collection of essays examines the phenomenon of contemporary Hindu nationalism or 'New Hindutva' in India, the ideology that orients the popularly elected national government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party) that has been in power since 2014. There is a rich body of academic work on Hindu nationalism, but its main focus is on the insurgent mass mobilizations that roiled the country in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to this era of *mandir* (temple) politics, new Hindutva is a governmental formation with considerable institutional heft that converges with wider global currents and enjoys an unprecedented level of mainstream acceptance.

Contemporary Hindu nationalist politics is also significantly different from earlier versions in both form and substance. For instance, economic and foreign policy projects and aspirations are as important to Hindu nationalists today as are their efforts to shape and transform cultural and religious identity along Hindu majoritarian lines. Expanding beyond the regional arena of north Indian Hindi heartland politics, regions in the south, east, and northeast of the country have emerged as central theatres of Hindutva political action. The politics of caste has assumed a new and intense significance for Hindu nationalist mobilization and electioneering. Finally, cellular and individualized forms of vigilante action have emerged alongside older cadre-based, centralized, and mass organizational forms to advance the violent politics of Hindutva in the twenty-first century.

To understand these new political forms and their implications for democratic futures, a fresh set of reflections is in order. The essays in this volume address contemporary Hindutva as an example of a *democratic authoritarianism* or an *authoritarian populism*, that is, a politics that simultaneously advances and violates

ideas and practices of popular and constitutional democracy. The democratic context of Hindutva as an electorally acclaimed and now apparently mainstream political project is our key concern. What are the causes and consequences of the rise of Hindutva, and of avowedly non-democratic Hindu nationalist organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, National Volunteer Organization), in an intensely competitive electoral democracy?

Understanding Hindu Nationalism

The 1990s saw a surge of scholarly interest in the rise of Hindu nationalism. Reflecting the socio-political and academic *zeitgeist*, these interventions shared several common features. First, the bulk of late twentieth-century scholarship has approached Hindu nationalism in politically instrumentalist terms, as a deliberate and politically organized project of social engineering and collective identity formation. Countering essentialist arguments that assertions of Hindu group identity in Indian public life were eruptions of timeless religious passions, multiple authors defined *fin-de-siècle* Hindu nationalism as a project of collective mobilization and ideological engineering that reflected thoroughly modern political aspirations and calculated power plays by historically situated political actors (Basu 2015; Brass 1997, 2003; Hansen 1999; Jaffrelot 1996).

These evaluations were influenced both by current events, with Hindu nationalist ascendancy linked to the successful strategic manoeuvres of political parties like the BJP and its leaders, and by the dominant theoretical paradigms of the time. For instance, the shift towards constructivist approaches and the rejection of an ‘ancient atavisms’ mode of analysis for Indian politics was aligned with post-colonial theory and its intellectual critiques of orientalism (Ludden 1996; Van der Veer 1994; Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993). Efforts to establish the modernity and political rationalities of Hindu nationalism bore the imprint of contemporaneous modernity critiques that urged for a reconsideration of modernity’s normative and spatial–temporal contours. Moving sharply away from ideas of a salutary European modernity, the violence and exclusion of Hindu nationalism was seen to reflect modernity’s thriving presence in the postcolony (Madan 1987; Nandy 1988).

Next and as the term itself indicates, the scholarship of the 1990s drew attention to the specifically nationalist dimensions of efforts to create an ‘imagined community’ of the Hindu nation. The primary focus was on the culturalist and identitarian stakes of the Hindutva project (Anderson 1983; Chatterjee 1993; Pandey 1999). ‘Supply-side’ and ‘demand-side’ perspectives respectively examined the ideological and organizational strategies of Hindu nationalist actors and institutions, and the

beliefs and choices of ordinary citizens who subscribed to the Hindutva cause (Andersen and Damle 1987; Basu et al. 1993; Kakar 1996; see also Berenschot 2012). For both, Hindu nationalism was about ideological persuasion. Its primary aim was to cultivate sentiments of collective identification and cultural belonging; to affirm a Hindu self against a feared and hated Muslim other (Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Kumar 2016).

The enabling link between Hindu nationalism and the problem of communalism – a term that described the deep collective identifications with politically constructed formations of Hindu and Muslim religious community – was another prominent theme. In these accounts, the Hindutva project was a post-colonial variant of the colonial 'construction of communalism' (Pandey 1990; Tambiah 1996). Finally, the scholarly debates of the 1990s also invested Hindu nationalism with a decidedly insurgent charge. It was defined as an oppositional and often violent mobilization of the imagined Hindu nation against the institutional order of the state establishment and the Muslim other that the secular Indian state was accused of favouring and 'appeasing'. In this phase of scholarship, the Hindu nation and the Indian state were presented as fiercely antagonistic formations. Mirroring and reinforcing an enduring opposition between communalism and secularism that had structured Indian political thought and practice for many decades, the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s was seen to imperil the survival of secularism.

In the early decades of the twenty-first century, a differently oriented set of scholarly reflections has gained ground. Reflecting the political successes of Hindutva as it transformed from an insurgent mobilization to a governing formation that has captured state power at both sub-national (regional state) and national levels, scholars have expanded their attention beyond the Hindu nation to the vision for a Hindu state. In recent years, the substantial work on the cultural and ideological activities of various Sangh Parivar organizations (Kanungo, Reddy, and Zavos 2012; Katju 2017; Menon 2011; Narayan 2008, 2021; Thachil 2014) have been supplemented by scholarly engagements with the policy and governance dimensions of Hindutva statecraft, electoral strategies of the BJP, the Sangh's political party, and the distinctive leadership style of the longest serving BJP Prime Minister, Narendra Modi (Basu 2015; Ganguly 2015; Sitapati 2020). Several recent publications have been authored by Hindu nationalist sympathizers, who have enhanced the political affairs and current events turn of contemporary writing on Hindu nationalism with their insider accounts of manoeuvres and political machinations within Hindutva organizations (Ganguly and Dwivedi 2019; Jha 2019; Mahurkar 2017; Sinha 2020).

The present volume continues this engagement with questions of statecraft and governance that we raise at a time when Hindu nationalism has been

institutionalized and normalized as the ideology of the ruling national political party for two successive electoral cycles. A recent volume, *Majoritarian State*, has traversed similar ground, tracking Hindutva's 'moment of arrival' and its modulation from a nation-making to a governmental/statecraft project (Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot 2019). Many contributions to that work remain focused on the Hindu nationalist movement, and they map the distinctive manoeuvres and practices of Hindu nationalist organizations themselves. This volume, by contrast, focuses on the broader historical and social-political contexts and fields where Hindutva is embedded. We track the interplay of Hindutva forces and many other competing forces, institutions, and actors. We examine how the gradual embedding of the ideology of Hindutva across multiple societal and political domains has upended earlier assumptions about the stark opposition between a 'normal' Indian secular democracy and the Hindutva exception.

Populists in Power

The problem at hand is not unique to India. In recent years, authoritarian and populist governments have formed within constitutional (and in many cases, liberal) democracies in many different parts of the world (Kyle and Gultchin 2018; Mounck 2018; Müller 2016; Snyder 2017). As with the Indian BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, leaders like Donald Trump, Recep Erdoğan, Viktor Orbán, Rodrigo Duterte, and other strongmen around the world have not directly annulled democracy in order to come to power. Rather, they have used democracy's normal and normative resources, relying, for instance, on the continued functioning of key democratic procedures such as elections, and on laws and institutions authorized by their respective constitutions (Scheppele 2018).

Once populists are in power, these practices of democratic and constitutional deployment continue. From Brazil to the Philippines, Turkey to the United States, authoritarian populist governments, many under individual strongmen leaders, hollow out and transform democratic regimes from within, effecting a molecular transmutation or modulation of the existing system rather than a sudden and frontal assault. Simply put, populists in power gradually morph rather than abruptly kill constitutional democracy. The use of terms like 'backsliding' to describe the transformational effects of authoritarian populist regimes on existing constitutional democracies conveys the elasticity of the processes involved. The entangled formations that result defy any rigid separation of authoritarian and democratic forms and moments (Bermeo 2016; Crewe and Sanders 2020; Mair 2013; Waldner and Lust 2018).

Instead of a binary switch or a tectonic shift, we have a sliding back and forth and a blurring of antinomian registers; democracy and authoritarian populism, liberalism and illiberalism exist in uneasy simultaneity rather than in a linear chronology of succession. The rhetoric of democracy and affective-moral appeals to the power of the people do not disappear but, in fact, are heightened and intensified in the age of authoritarian populism. We appear to confront a paradox: the time of liberal democracy's greatest threat is equally the time of democracy's greatest value as a discursive apparatus and rhetorical currency of political legitimation (Canovan 1999; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Explaining the causes and consequences of this apparent paradox of authoritarian populism's 'long march through institutions' (Ahmad 2020) is an important purpose of this book.

The chapters are organized around four keywords that describe the four distinctive attributes of new Hindutva: *rule, articulation, inclusion, and violence.*

Rule

Departing from movement Hindutva's affective projects of social and individual identity formation, governmental Hindutva is centrally concerned with the dry business of institutions. Since forming the government in 2014, the BJP and the Sangh Parivar (the Hindu nationalist family of organizations) have engaged in practices of institutional capture, creation, and bypass at national and state levels. All of these involve the use of existing and constitutionally sanctioned instruments of rule; the intensification of tendencies inherent in normal democratic government; and the circulation of established idioms of public legitimation and justification (neoliberal efficiency, anti-corruption, and anti-elitist democratization are among the legitimation vocabularies that governmental Hindutva draws upon). In other words, governmental Hindutva does not reject as much as it repurposes and innovates upon constitutional democracy from within.

For instance, the practice of institutional capture that has attracted considerable media attention since 2014 is essentially about the BJP using its parliamentary majority – won through largely free and fair elections – to exercise the constitutionally sanctioned authority of executive appointment. Like all its predecessors, the new BJP government after 2014 filled a large number of important state offices with its own people – individuals who conformed to some preferred set of criteria (more on this later). These included cabinet ministries, gubernatorial offices, cultural, research, and educational institutions, and technocratic, regulatory, investigative, and watchdog state agencies, such as the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the

Election Commission, the Central Information Commission, the Auditor-General, the Central Vigilance Commission, the Central Bureau of Investigation, and the public broadcaster Prasar Bharati. Significantly, several of these, such as the Election Commission, the Central Information Commission, and the Comptroller and Auditor General are check-and-balance institutions invested with powers of oversight and veto over the exercise of governmental power. Controlling these ‘institutions of accountability’ facilitated a process of ‘executive aggrandizement’ or the unconstrained exercise of power by the national executive (Bermeo 2016).

The judiciary and the bureaucracy were also targeted for personnel changes by the new BJP regime. One of the first legislative attempts of the BJP government in August 2014 concerned the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC). Although it was ultimately unsuccessful, the measure aimed to replace the existing collegium system of judicial appointments where judges themselves determined the composition of the Supreme Court and high courts with a system in which the national executive would play a decisive role. In terms of bureaucratic appointments, the new BJP government paid special attention to the staffing of the prime minister’s office, and, like all other governments before it, brought in new officers of its choosing to serve as principal secretaries and close aides to the prime minister.

While these were intra-bureaucracy transfers that conformed to existing civil service rules and conventions of seniority, in subsequent years the BJP also appointed several outsiders to senior bureaucratic positions. In 2018, the central government announced a new scheme of ‘lateral entry’ into the civil services that brought nine new joint secretaries from outside the tightly specialized ranks of elite civil service to key ministries. In July 2020, the government proposed to hire another 400 directors and deputy directors to head state agencies under this scheme. Although lateral entry was a significant departure from the existing insular system of elite bureaucracy, the main public justifications that were offered for the innovation remained on familiar terrain. Lateral entry was justified in terms of private-sector meritocracy and efficiency, using arguments that had been endorsed by non-BJP governments in the past with similar vigour.

In sum, if Hindutva ideologues have been able to capture the levers of power in significant political, cultural, and educational institutions in India, they have done so through established means. If the present scenario of RSS ideologues in high office and saffron-clad monks as chief ministers of major states seems unprecedented, the road to this unfamiliar destination is not entirely new; it is paved, in fact, by the discretionary powers of executive appointment that the existing system of constitutional democracy readily makes available. Because of its large electoral majority and the lack of an effective parliamentary opposition, the BJP government

has been able to use these powers in an unconstrained way, and has made many more appointments, and done this far more swiftly, than its predecessors. For instance, while it is common practice for the ruling national party to appoint some state governors based on their party affiliations, the BJP has taken this to the logical extreme and appointed party people to gubernatorial positions in all but three Indian states as of 2018.

What is new as well is the overt ideological calculus that determines the appointment of individuals to governmental positions. Considerations of party politics and patronage have influenced appointments made by previous governments as well. But the present Hindutva regime relies almost exclusively on ideological and loyalty criteria. Positions are filled on the basis of a shared Hindutva worldview and personal loyalty to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This has often meant that professional qualifications are overlooked. Several Hindutva ideologues and loyalists who have been appointed to key positions in educational and cultural institutions in recent years have been patently unqualified for the job. One example is the appointment of a television serial actor (Gajendra Chauhan) to head the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), known for training several generations of world-renowned filmmakers, that sparked angry protests by the FTII student body in 2015.

In another significant difference that underscores the distinctive ideological nature of appointments to state institutions under the current Hindutva regime, the appointment process is overseen by a singular extra-governmental organization, the RSS, the force behind the Sangh Parivar (Nag 2017; Sampal 2020). The role of the RSS as a penumbral authority in the contemporary regime, a shadowy and unaccountable presence that insists on its non-political identity even as it facilitates an organized ideological *gleichschaltung* or a coordinated homogenization across multiple state institutions, is one of the distinguishing features of governmental Hindutva. This has several implications for the practice of democratic politics in India. For instance, the exercise of tacit forms of extra-governmental influence has heightened the political importance of intermediaries that link state, society, party, and the RSS. The creation of new mediating institutions and networks bridging state and social spaces is an important component of the new regime. Right-wing think tanks and individuals like Ram Madhav, a senior RSS leader who is also a key figure in the national organization of the BJP, are powerful players in national politics today. They adroitly mediate between the diverse power centres of the Sangh Parivar, party, state, and capital that conjointly constitute and shape political order in contemporary India.

The penumbral influence of the RSS also means that Hindutva agendas are diffused widely through different kinds of governmental spaces. Changes are enacted through a broad array of legal and policy measures that range from renaming

cities, changing the colour of Uttar Pradesh's (UP's) public buses to saffron, and increasing budgetary allocations for Sanskrit education, to the designation of 25 December as 'good governance day' in 2016, a measure that effectively annulled the commemoration of Christmas as a national holiday by requiring all employees and students of central educational institutions to show up to work and school. Mirroring the diffused and flexible logics of Sangh social mobilizations, the advance of governmental Hindutva has taken a tentacular form as well. Hindutva has inserted itself within multiple legal and policy domains to carry forward its ideological project by any means necessary.¹

Along with these practices of institutional capture and creation, concerted efforts of institutional bypass are also quite central to the project of Hindutva rule. As we have already seen, placing pliant and ideologically committed individuals at the helm of several key monitory or check-and-balance institutions cleared the way for the unfettered exercise of executive power in the service of Hindu *rashtra* after 2014. The BJP government has also systematically whittled down parliamentary opposition and eroded parliamentary practices and procedures that were designed to foster democratic deliberation and encourage the representation of diverse opinions. Examples of parliamentary bypass include relying on ordinances rather than legislative enactments that require parliamentary discussion; using money bills to get around the scrutiny of the Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament) where the BJP is in a minority position (money bills do not require Rajya Sabha assent); rejecting the long-standing parliamentary convention of referring bills to parliamentary standing committees where opposition parties can make a legislative contribution; and discontinuing well-known deliberative and dialogic parliamentary practices such as division votes and parliamentary question hour.

Efforts of institutional bypass have extended beyond the state to the domain of civil society. The BJP regime has targeted many of the autonomous monitory institutions that aim to check the excesses of state power. Since its electoral victory in 2014, the BJP government has pursued efforts to curb and control media and civil society criticism with great vigour. It has used a variety of direct and indirect measures from income tax raids on media owners and the freezing of bank accounts of human rights organizations, to the criminalization and imprisonment of activists under non-bailable 'black laws' of anti-terrorism and colonial-era sedition laws.²

To a large extent, these practices of institutional bypass are enabled by the constitutive 'gaps and ambiguities' of democracy itself. Indian democracy, like many other formal democracies around the world, invests considerable discretionary power in the national executive.³ This in turn has engendered an emphasis on convention and customs. Elected governments conventionally rely on unwritten

codes of 'institutional forbearance' and conform to the normative rather than literal contours of their power. They do not do what they are formally capable of doing (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). The stability and reproduction of the democratic system has rested on the creation and management of this gap between effective and potential authority: democracy functions as a system of reserve or unexpended power, we might say.

Governmental Hindutva, however, rejects these norms and conventions and makes full use of its discretionary authority to transform and dismantle democratic institutions, acting 'as per rule' all the while, making literal and maximum use of its constitutionally authorized powers. This may be the ultimate irony of the authoritarianism-within-democracy formation of rule, and what makes the task of critique and resistance complex and fraught: 'that it depends, ultimately, not upon [the] bogeymen of democracy – not on demagoguery, populism, or the masses – but upon the constitutional mainstays we learned about in high-school civics' (Robin 2020).

The section on 'Rule' opens with Ashwin Subramaniam's timeline of governmental Hindutva, a detailed annotated reckoning with the policies, laws, crises and critical events that have taken place since the BJP took office in the summer of 2014. The next two chapters track how Hindutva has been normalized as a resource of rule. Through a discussion of the new modalities of state-sponsored violence since 2014, Amrita Basu draws attention to the 'webs of complicity between state, political parties, and civil society' that routinize violence as a governmental tactic. The networked relations and mainstreaming efforts of Hindutva are also the central foci of Srirupa Roy's chapter on the rise of right-wing think tanks over the past decade. Belying Hindutva's angry anti-establishment rhetoric, she shows that 'right-wing think tanks are centrally invested in the creation of a governing elite, and they work with and expand rather than demolish existing formations and networks of elite power in order to achieve this aim'. Shifting attention from the exceptional violence of the Hindutva project to the discourses of 'civilizational power' and the organization of international conclaves by right-wing think tanks that are attended by a wide array of national and global elites, the chapter draws attention to 'the wider enabling conditions of normal democratic rule that also sustain the Hindutva project'. Chapter 5, an interview with journalist Neha Dixit and filmmaker Nakul Sawhney, gives us a close-up portrait of the everyday practices of governmental Hindutva in UP where a militant Hindu ideologue, Ajay Bisht/Yogi Adityanath, is in power. Dixit and Sawhney show us how the model of 'Yogi Raj' has normalized anti-minority violence by portraying minority areas as intrinsically criminal and anti-national, in need of extraordinary measures such as violent raids, mass-arrests, and the lengthy incarceration of suspects.

Articulation

Like other religious majoritarianisms and authoritarian populisms across the world that have taken root in electoral democracies, Hindu nationalism is entangled with older social and political formations. Much of the support for Hindu nationalism used to come from a number of regions in India, and from certain upper caste and middle-class social environments, where Hindu nationalist values and anti-minority sentiments over decades have sedimented into a shared, majoritarian common sense. This process of sedimentation of Hindutva as a shared sentiment, however vague, did not always translate into electoral victories for the BJP. However, this sedimentation of key elements of Hindutva in diverse domains has had a number of other less perceptible effects. As the project of Hindutva has grown and deepened, its rather 'thin' core tenets (such as 'India is a Hindu homeland and Muslims are invaders') have allowed it to diversify, morph, and co-articulate with a large number of regional histories and specific circumstances.

In the 1980s, the sociologist Stuart Hall developed the notion of 'articulation' to capture a process whereby distinct cultural forms and ideological constructs become mobile and floating signifiers that are associated with a range of different social, economic, and cultural circumstances and forces (Hall 1993). Racial fear and racial pride, gendered frames, and nationalist fantasies depend on such mobile and floating signifiers and enduring tropes, Hall argued, capable of being expressed and given meaning and emotional charge in a wide variety of circumstances. In the Indian context, the very notion of Hindutva is indeed articulated as a forceful response to at least three mobile, floating and adaptable elements of long standing: (a) Fear of Muslims as a demographic threat, a source of non-vegetarian pollution, and a threat of violence. (b) Fear of 'western culture' and the breakdown of conventional sexual and gender norms. (c) Upper caste fears of the rise of the numerous lower caste communities in public life and education, jeopardizing the 'natural' dominance of upper caste Hindu men in all aspects of Indian society. Thinking with the process of articulation illuminates the distinctive organizational form of new Hindutva. Replacing the familiar model of a pre-planned master-minded project of Hindu nationalism that is controlled and orchestrated by a central node, Hindutva now partakes in many forms of assemblage politics. New Hindutva advances through a contingent, decentralized, and flexible series of actions and events that are shaped by localized contexts and imperatives and yet (re-)produce a Hindu majoritarian social order.

Instead of viewing Hindutva as an exception, a complete break with a secular-democratic past, an emphasis on articulation thus affords a consideration of unexpected and perverse continuities, affinities, and resonances between

contemporary Hindu nationalist politics and older forms of democratic politics in India. Two chapters in this section on 'Articulation' focus explicitly on how Hindutva becomes co-articulated with deeply entrenched spatial, social, and economic boundaries and segmentations. Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay investigates the gradual spatial and social segregation of Hindu and Muslim communities in Calcutta in the twentieth century. Always a Hindu-majority city in a Muslim-majority province, the tensions between the two communities were indelibly changed by the systematic and widespread killings, displacements, and loss of livelihood during the riots in August 1946. This resulted in deep and enduring segregation along community lines, a process that was reinforced with the massive influx of Hindus following Partition in 1947. Tracing the history of barely reported riots in subsequent years, Bandyopadhyay argues that Calcutta turned into a 'majoritarian city' at this point: '... a state of affairs where violence toward the minority is routinized as a self-reproducing system – a society where lynching envelops riot as the dominant form of physical violence'.

Thomas Hansen traces two interrelated processes of physical segregation of communities and deepening segmentation of economies and livelihoods in the old Deccan city of Aurangabad. Once an important administrative node in the Hyderabad State, Aurangabad experienced a rapid economic growth and a demographic transformation that turned it into a Hindu-majority city from the 1980s. The militant Hindu right organization Shiv Sena made Aurangabad a major base, turning it into one of the most 'riot-prone' cities in the country, marked by deep and antagonistic segregation of communities. Aurangabad's history of violence and communal antagonism has also structured its booming industrial growth and expanding labour markets since the 1980s. Virtually all major industries are owned by Hindu business families, and almost all attractive jobs in the city are held by Hindus in a deeply unequal labour market segmented along lines of religion and caste. This has further deepened the marginalization of Muslims in social, economic, and spatial terms, locally castigated for their 'backward' and conservative attitude, unable to forget the past glory of the Nizam's regime. This social and spatial isolation of Muslims has also consolidated the idea of Hindus as modern, entrepreneurial, and forward-looking, making it possible for Hindutva to emerge as a dominant common sense among many Hindus in the city.

Inclusion

Hindu nationalism has long been understood as an exclusionary political and social project. It creates and cultivates a normative distinction between good Hindu selves and a range of hated/feared others, from religious and caste minorities to

political ideologies such as communism. With the consolidation of the BJP and RSS's hold on political and institutional power, a new logic of inclusion has gained prominence among Hindu nationalists. Efforts to incorporate and include a variety of previously excluded social groups such as Dalits and even Muslims are now part of the outreach policy of Hindu nationalist organizations. Fuelled by a new sense of political and cultural confidence, the defensive tenor of Hindutva that blamed India's weakness on foreign aggressors has now given way to a more full-throated embrace of an expansive idea of Akhand Bharat, a greater India and a greater Hindu civilization. As in other domains, these efforts demonstrate a new ideological and strategic inventiveness and expansive flexibility.

After its founding in 1964, the Sangh organization Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)'s first missionary efforts were in India's northeast as a response to India's humiliating defeat at the hands of China in 1962. The rationale for VHP was explicitly to strengthen India's borders and to strengthen the presence of Hinduism in a region with a strong Christian presence rocked by several armed insurgencies against the Indian state. Today, this earlier defensive attitude has given way to an assertive embrace of indigeneity, the land (*bhumi*), and 'Mother Earth' as common ground between India's Hindu majority and the tribal and indigenous communities in the northeast. As Arkotong Longkumer shows in his chapter, RSS organizers in Arunachal Pradesh and elsewhere in the region counter Christian influence in the region by promoting the idea that ancestor worship and the mother goddess are the origins not just of indigenous and 'pagan' belief systems, but the original foundation of Hinduism as well.

Suryakant Waghmore explores an RSS-sponsored educational organization, Tapas, that promotes education of children from poor and lower caste backgrounds. He argues that the defence of the caste system among older upper caste leaders of RSS notwithstanding, organizations like Tapas works systematically to create 'caste-free spaces' where the caste hierarchies of everyday Hinduism are replaced by a deference to national heroes and the senior leadership of the RSS. Waghmore suggests that while an older secular ethos tried to encourage toleration between ethnic and caste communities, RSS and affiliates seek to replace a caste-ridden 'everyday Hinduism' with Hindutva as a new, 'thin' and patriotic 'civil religion' that projects itself as a caste-blind 'nationalist Hinduism', hospitable to all Hindus regardless of caste and birth.

While Muslims continue to play a pivotal role in Hindu nationalism as the all-important external and internal enemy, the new confidence of the Hindu nationalist movement has more recently given rise to a strong distinction between 'bad' and anti-national Muslims, and 'good' and patriotic Muslims. Lalit Vachani explores how the RSS-sponsored organization Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) is trying to

provide a platform for 'patriotic' Muslims who recognize and embrace the notion of India as a Hindu nation and homeland. Although MRM has a negligible grassroots footprint among ordinary Muslims, the organization's many public events and carefully staged performances of pro-Hindutva Muslims, and Muslim clerics without 'hatred in their hearts', serve nonetheless as an illustration and projection of a possible Muslim future in a Hindu India: as an enthusiastically patriotic minority, eager to please and affirm their role as loyal allies of what Longkumer in his new book calls 'The Greater India Experiment' (Longkumer 2020). These RSS performances of 'preferred Muslimness' have the media, the RSS rank and file, and the wider Hindu publics as their intended audience, Vachani argues. Despite the language of outreach, Muslim citizens, it turns out, are not the intended target audience of the MRM project.

These chapters highlight how Hindutva's success as a populist political formation sustained by electoral democracy has expanded and changed the project of Hindutva. Political power has neither diluted nor 'mellowed' Hindutva as many analysts had projected when Modi rose to power in 2014. Rather, it has enabled its ideological project to expand, adapt, and articulate as an overarching civilizational project. Hindutva does not 'tolerate' social, cultural, and religious minorities as the official secularism of old. It seeks to encompass them, absorb them, and define them as first and foremost Indian, as *bharatiya*.

Violence

Violence and the ubiquitous 'threat' from the Muslim enemy have always been key elements of the larger Hindutva project. The RSS was initially formed as a 'self-defence' organization, and the rhetoric and practices of the RSS and affiliates are to this day suffused with violent imagery and tropes. However, violence has never been praised or owned by the RSS in the way Shiv Sena has used direct attacks as its signature. Even largescale atrocities against minorities such as the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat were framed as a 'natural reaction' (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012), or as a morally justified form of spontaneous 'Hindu anger' beyond the control of any organized force. This pattern continued after BJP's electoral victory in 2014, albeit in a slightly different form. A generalized 'Hindu anger' was now enacted as decentralized and seemingly spontaneous acts of vigilante violence against Muslims suspected of transporting and selling beef, or as lynching of individual Muslims for no apparent reason. These violent acts were perpetrated by people who had no formal links to the BJP or the government, leaving RSS activists of many stripes free to endorse these actions as symptoms of a seething and ever-present desire among Hindus to punish those who insult the nation's honour.

This raises the question of how such supposedly ubiquitous Hindu anger has been gradually naturalized and taken for granted. Let us briefly turn to the long-standing debate on the nature of communal riots in independent India in order to understand this process of naturalization of anger and the desire for violent retribution. Virtually every major riot in India since the 1960s has been a concerted attack on Muslims by organized members of the majority community. As Megha Kumar has shown, the massive riot in Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 1969 was an organized attack on Muslim neighbourhoods. The style, the sexual violence, and the rabid anti-Muslim rhetoric of 1969 were largely repeated in subsequent riots in 1985 and again, most infamously, in the pogrom of 2002 (Berenschot 2012; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Kumar 2016). The literature on communal violence is rich and diverse: political scientists have studied the relationship between the staging of communal riots, electoral performance, and consolidation of political power (Basu 2015; Brass 1997, 2003; Wilkinson 2004). Others have explored the larger context of conditions and cleavages that make riots more likely to occur (Chibber 1999; Varshney 2002). Anthropologists and others have taken particular interest in the experiential dimensions of riots, among both victims and perpetrators (Das 1990; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Hansen 2001; Kakar 1996; Roy 1994; Tambiah 1996). The common thread running through these debates is the focus on the riot itself as an articulation of political interest, social competition, institutional bias, social dynamics within movements and crowds, as well as the complex of fear, enjoyment, and exhilaration that seem to drive rioters. The objective of many of these studies has been to explain why and when riots occur, to explore the circumstances and actors that propel them, and to understand their effects on electoral outcomes.

Incidents of communal riots always have an intense presence in public discourse where they are seen as 'law and order failures' that are routinely used to criticize the performance of local governments, or to transfer law enforcement officials. In public debates and among activists, officials, journalists, and scholars, communal riots have emerged as the most central indicator of the level of tension between Hindus and Muslims in particular, and indeed an indicator of the general level of tension between different religious and ethnic communities. The problem, however, is that the staging of a riot or pogrom does not necessarily tell us much about what drives ethno-religious cleavages in a city or area, and whether such tensions may have significant political and electoral consequences. As has been demonstrated by much of the scholarship, riots are complex occurrences, in part planned and directed, but also shaped by multiple contingencies and local events beyond the control of political activists and operatives who are active on the ground. Starting and participating in a riot are always high-risk political enterprises that can work to the advantage of those staging attacks but can also backfire.

More importantly, riots may have local causes, but they are much more than an expression of tension and enmity in one city, or single locality. The long-term and trans-local ideological effects of riots are also much more consequential than is often evident from the literature cited above. As has been shown for Gujarat, the long-term consolidation of the BJP and the ideology of Hindutva in the state went hand in hand with the spatial segregation of Hindu and Muslims. Decades of physical threats and attacks on Muslims led hundreds of thousands to seek physical safety in Muslim-majority areas, while Hindus in these areas have tended to relocate to Hindu-majority areas (Field et. al. 2008; Jaffrelot and Gayer 2011). This process was not limited to areas that had experienced riots but was much more generalized because the ideological effects of riots – deepened suspicions and fears of the other community – are multiple, deep, and trans-local. Rumours and stories, including stock items such as the threats of 'Muslim mobs', or Muslims roaming the city with the intent of seducing or abducting Hindu women, tend to reinforce and rekindle the long-standing and remarkably stable repertoires of prejudices, stereotypes, and rumours that have persisted over many decades.

Such trans-local ideological effects of riots have in recent decades been multiplied by the proliferation of social media platforms that at an unprecedented speed circulate rumours, doctored videos, and gruesome footage of violent acts. The intensity of this circulation of images and generally 'fake news' about attacks or perceived threats in various parts of the country has by now greatly accelerated the process whereby riots and violent incidents anywhere can become 'nationalized', to use Stanley Tambiah's term (Tambiah 1996), and spark protests thousands of miles away. The deepening segregation of communities and trans-localization of Hindu-Muslim enmities, wherever they occur, have also paved the way for the emergence after 2014 of the figure of the 'abstract Muslim', a ubiquitous enemy figure who can be attacked, lynched, and tortured anywhere by any patriotic Hindu. The victims of these crimes seem random – truck drivers accused of transporting beef, a young man with a skull cap on a train, a day labourer – but the motivations and imputed audiences for these attacks are uniform: to become a celebrated patriotic hero, a *deshbhakt* (devotee of the nation), however short lived, on countless social media platforms that are popular among Hindu nationalist activists and millions of others.

With the formation of BJP's government in UP headed by Yogi Adityanath in 2017, a new configuration of violence began to emerge. Under what has become known as 'Yogi Raj', the BJP in UP, and Adityanath's trusted men and militants from the Gorakhnath Math, embarked on a more ambitious attempt at a takeover of the state apparatus, police, and security forces in UP. The state had become notorious in recent decades for its extensive campaign of unaccountable 'encounter killings' of suspected criminals, a very large number of which happened

to be Muslim (Venugopal 2020). As Neha Dixit and Nakul Sawhney describe in their interview in this volume, this capture of the state by Adityanath and allies soon resulted in systematic harassment and illegal arrests of opponents of the government. Following the massive protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) at the end of 2019, the UP police unleashed a reign of terror on Muslim neighbourhoods across the state, arresting, torturing, and detaining Muslim men on the flimsiest of pretexts. The UP police and courts are no longer enforcing the law but systematically violating the law by acting as extensions of the chief minister's will and whim, exacting vengeance on the Muslim community and opponents of Hindutva.

A similar attempt at capture of the police power of the state by RSS and affiliates can be seen in Maharashtra where attacks by Hindutva activists on Dalit celebrations at Bhima Koregaon in 2018 sparked massive Dalit protests across the state. The Dalit protests were met with overwhelming force by the police, and a few months later a range of Left and Dalit activists and intellectuals were detained and falsely charged with being 'urban naxals', supposedly secretive and 'anti-national' organizers of these protests and other activities undermining the Indian state (Phadke 2019). Following the 2019–20 protests against the CAA, Hindutva activists instigated deadly attacks on Muslim neighbourhoods in northeast Delhi, clearly framed as a vengeance against the many Muslims who had come out in the streets protesting the CAA. Following what seems to be the new script of Hindutva state power in India, the Delhi police took no action against elected BJP officials who had openly incited the violence and instead charged various Muslim community leaders with instigating the violence that Irfan Ahmad (this volume) and most observers describe as pre-meditated attacks on Muslim areas.

The earlier Hindutva narrative of violence being the inevitable and spontaneous effect of a naturalized Hindu anger is, in other words, gradually being supplanted by a more assertive narrative of justified vengeance and punishment of the enemies of the nation, disobedient minorities and others, as Ahmad observes. In the hands of new Hindutva, state violence is no longer just 'law-preserving' but instrumental and constituent as a new form of 'law-making' (Benjamin 1996). The new Hindutva order is, however, law-making without new laws: it mostly revolves around dismantling and altering existing legal and political norms and frameworks. It disregards existing legal protections of individuals and communities, activates repressive security laws (mostly enacted by the Congress regime), and promotes majoritarian solutions to vexed issues (such as the status of the Babri Masjid site).

Another example is the repealing of Article 370 of the Constitution that since 1950 has guaranteed a special status for Kashmir. In her piece in this volume, Mona Bhan argues that the justification of this move is framed in openly 'settler

colonial' terms as an overdue incorporation of Kashmir into the sovereign Hindu nation. Since 2014, the BJP government has generally pushed for a more flexible application of the domicile laws, in order to enable traders, bureaucrats, and others who have migrated to 'restricted areas' (such as Kashmir and Ladakh, or tribal areas protected by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution) to obtain permanent domicile status. In 2016, protests broke out across Jharkhand against a change in the domicile laws that would allow non-native residents who had lived in the state for more than thirty years to obtain a domicile certificate (*The Hindu* 2016). In 2020, the Government of India introduced new domicile laws in Jammu and Kashmir. The new laws allow non-native residents to obtain domicile after fifteen years, or less if possessing advanced educational qualifications or if related to officials of the union government (Khan 2020). This has generated fears that the BJP seeks to enable a gradual policy of 'Hindu colonization' by letting non-Kashmiris purchase land and occupy dominant positions in the newly incorporated union territory's government and economy.

Throughout the country, this new regime of constituent violence is most visible in the open attacks on Muslims, the celebration and justification of attacks, lynching, and pogroms as a manifestation of a new, aggressive, and unapologetic Hindu. In his piece in this volume, Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi (2012) argues that the aftermath of the pogrom in Gujarat in 2002 was paradigmatic of this new regime of 'perverse permission':

Hindus were to emerge from the pogrom free to choose violence, free of the superego's torturous grip. Modi transformed the ambivalence many Gujaratis felt for this figure into a form of Hindu righteousness and indignation.

This new and constituent violence against Muslims has gone further and deeper in Gujarat than any other state in India. Here, Muslims are more isolated and marginalized than ever before, pushed together in dense slums and urban enclaves, dispossessed of many properties and robbed of any legitimate public presence in cities and villages across the state. Hindu victory is total but some of Ghassem-Fachandi's interlocutors feel that something has been broken and lost. Ghassem-Fachandi narrates the extraordinary story of Kalubhai, an ordinary Hindu man, who is frantically building a shrine to a local Muslim *pir* who in a dream had demanded that a shrine be built. His family and neighbours seem to accept that the spirit of the long dead *pir* must be placated: 'It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Kalubhai speaks against all odds with the voice of a collective superego, a voice demanding the recognition of a trans-generational guilt vis-à-vis Muslims.'

The most poignant aspect of the story of Kalubhai may be that for him, and other of Ghassem-Fachandi's interlocutors, Muslims are no longer much of a physical and

social presence in Gujarat today. They have mainly been relegated to a past from where they may come back to haunt their former neighbours. That may encapsulate something essential about the future of the Hindu India that RSS and its affiliates are envisioning. This view of Muslims as a form of anachronistic presence that needs to be overcome is also reflected in recent changes to the 1968 Enemy Property Act. The 1968 act enabled the Government of India to put properties of families who had left for Pakistan under the authority of the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property. In 2017, the act was expanded so that all Muslim families whose more distant relatives may have left for Pakistan now potentially face confiscation of their properties, at the discretion of the Office of the Custodian. This legislation converted alienable land of 'enemies of the state' into national property, held by the Custodian in perpetuity. With the amendment in 2017, any property owned by a relative of someone who had left for Pakistan could be declared enemy property and thus the property of the nation. As a result, the number of properties held by the Custodian of Enemy Properties has risen from a little over 2,000 in 2010 to more than 15,000 in 2017, a number that is still rising (Doval 2017). Further, it allowed the Custodian to sell off properties, supposedly to non-Muslims deemed to be proper members of India's sovereign people (Umar 2019).

Modulations and Moving Targets

A brief note on the necessarily selective character of the volume is in order. We do not aim to provide a synthetic and comprehensive survey of every detail and development of Hindu nationalist rule over the past decade. Constraints of time and space mean that we have excluded several significant aspects of the new Hindutva project, for example, the 'mediatization' of new Hindutva and the heavy reliance on media and communication technologies by the BJP and the broader Sangh organizations in recent years; the role of the Hindutva diaspora and its distinctive brand of 'long-distance nationalism' in securing the electoral success and global legitimization of the BJP regime; the economic policies of the Hindu right and the often convergent interests of Indian and global capital and Hindutva organizations; and the strategies of 'southern Hindutva' that reap electoral dividends in states such as Karnataka that have historically been at far remove, both culturally and spatially, from the northern Hindi 'cow belt' milieu in which Hindutva has traditionally thrived.

Missing too are the ongoing modulations and moving targets of Hindu nationalism. From the early months of 2020, the political and social upheavals of the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to batter India and they are extracting an unimaginably high death toll as this volume goes to press. Just as the flames of

riots and pogroms haunted an earlier generation of scholarship on movemental Hindutva, the burning fires of mass cremations shadow our attempts to grapple with its governmental moment. Across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated and sharpened existing social fractures and strengthened the authoritarian muscle of state power, and India is no exception. Through its practical and narrative management of the pandemic, the BJP regime has advanced many of its political and ideological commitments to a majoritarian, Hindu-first vision of India, whether by blaming Muslim religious gatherings as 'super spreader' events (the myth of 'Tablighi Corona' that was propagated in 2020) or through myriad small acts of everyday discrimination, such as the placement of Hindu and Muslim COVID patients in separate hospital wards (Ghosh and Dabhi 2020; Slipowitz 2020).

But this present crisis also illuminates a number of unexpected details about Hindutva and state power that merit further and sustained reflection. First, the present crisis has made it abundantly clear that the primary objective of Hindutva governance is to exercise ideological and narrative control in a way that constantly portrays the BJP and its leadership in the most favourable light and stamps out any dissent. The fudging of all numbers (of infections, tests, deaths, and so on), the inadequate and bungled mobilization of resources to fight the pandemic, and Modi's premature declaration of 'victory' over the virus at the World Economic Forum in January 2021 are all elements of this strategy of narrative control.⁴ Similar strategies of image manipulation were mobilized around the calculation and presentation of India's gross domestic product (GDP) and other economic indicators in 2015–16 as a part of the BJP's attempt at presenting India as an attractive destination for international capital and investment. Second, BJP's insistence on conducting electoral rallies and holding state elections in April 2021, as well as supporting massive religious festivals such as the Kumbh Mela, indicates that the imperatives of constantly renewing an emotional bond with the electorate and the so-called 'ordinary Hindus' far outweigh any governmental rationality around public health, livelihoods, or protection of vulnerable segments of the population.

At the time of writing in May 2021, India is living through the second month of the worst outbreak of the pandemic that has been seen anywhere in the world. Thousands of bodies are abandoned at riverbanks and dumped in rivers, hospitals are ill-equipped to deal with the enormous surge in critically ill patients, and the vaccine rollout is slow and woefully inadequate. It is evident that the most basic functions of the state – to offer a minimum of protection to citizens and residents from calamities and violence – have failed. The BJP's national leadership has been reluctant to act decisively, instead leaving the management of the pandemic to state governments, evidently hoping that this may shield Modi and the central

government from being blamed for the ongoing loss of life and livelihood. But the BJP's lacklustre performance in a number of state elections in April 2021 suggests that COVID-19 may ultimately force a political and electoral reckoning that strategies of narrative redirection cannot counter. More than any other political force, new Hindutva has fashioned Indian politics into an emotional drama running on fear, anger, and resentment. This makes the BJP government vulnerable the day the emotional wave turns against them.

Notes

1. While many of the measures taken by the BJP seem to have a mainly ideological and cosmetic character without transforming the functions of the state, some parts of the anti-Muslim agenda of the RSS have resulted in more lasting legal changes. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is one of the clearest examples. Unlike the previous amendments to the 1955 Citizenship Act that had gradually established blood and descent as the basis of citizenship, the CAA used religious community as a basis for eligibility for citizenship, a provision that specifically excluded Muslims. The Act grants the option of citizenship to non-Muslim refugees/migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan ostensibly on the compassionate ground of their presumed persecution as religious minorities in their native countries. Clearly, the law reflects the long-standing objective of defining India as a homeland for Hindus and other religious communities considered 'native to India'. Defining any non-Muslim from the wider region as belonging to the 'Hindu homeland' also reflects the RSS' long-standing vision of the entire subcontinent as Akhand Bharat, that is, 'greater India'.
2. Interestingly, none of this has required new legislation. BJP has simply availed itself of the extensive legal frameworks, police powers, and emergency provisions that were put in place by successive Congress governments since the 1960s, including Mrs Gandhi's Emergency rule from 1975 to 1977 (see Hansen 2021; Jaffrelot and Anil 2020; Prakash 2019).
3. The gap between parliamentary politics and the bureaucracy is unusually wide in India. It is rooted in the colonial apprehension of any elected native representative or legislative organ, and the attempts by the late colonial civil service to concentrate power at the 'white' top of the bureaucracy. Decades of Nehruvian reformist and modernizing zeal turned the bureaucracy into the main instrument of reforming and disciplining backward and recalcitrant citizens, a process that only added to this gap and further entrenchment of discretionary authority within the bureaucracy. In the hands of a regime invested in a particular ideological project of Hindutva, discretionary authority has turned out to be very useful in protecting rogue elements and vigilantes associated with the BJP, for example (see the section on 'Violence' later).
4. Modi's speech at the World Economic Forum, Davos, can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7p5kDtH-mc> (accessed on 15 May 2021).

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