

The Right and the Left: Contemporary India and the crises in Indian Democracy

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Abstract

The last sixty odd years or so have been arguably a period in which Indian democracy despite severe limitations has established itself in the mainstream of political activity. It has been able to successfully involve a great number of the population in the governance process and despite tremendous political opposition from vested interest groups brought into focus the marginal and caste oppressed people through the electoral process. The positive reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC and ST), though strongly contested by the entrenched upper and middle castes as well as those who have been traditionally privileged, have played a significant role in providing mobility to those historically oppressed and disprivileged. The gains have been uneven on this front but the rise of Dalit political leaders as well as professionals and entrepreneurs from these sections of India's population indicates some modest gains that cannot be overlooked.

Keywords- Right and the Left, Indian Democracy

Introduction

Similarly, the various Left parties in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura through land reforms, the empowerment of village population through energised local self-government (as in Panchayati Raj) and several schemes aimed at the rural poor and the labouring classes had brought in mobility to those sections of the society that were traditionally poor and marginal. Structural interventions by using the governmental machineries as well as through mass mobilisation of the poor and the marginal helped the Left and democratic forces in the Indian polity to stay useful and relevant in the determination of national policies as well. The United Progressive Alliance, which came to power in 2004 at the Centre with Dr Manmohan Singh as the Prime Minister, helming a large coalition, had the support of the parliamentary Lefti . The defeat of the Indian National Congress (INC) led UPA in 2014 put an effective end to the era of Centre-Left political formations ruling India and ushered in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition. This coalition was

underpinned by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and led by Mr. Narendra Modi. The same coalition was returned to power in 2019 general elections and Narendra Modi continues to lead the formation. But the change from the UPA coalition government to the NDA was not simply a change of political parties or alliances. I will argue that it marks a qualitatively significant departure in Indian politics and has ushered in an era of Right Wing Populism (RWP) that has many significant similarities with Right wing politics globally. To understand the contemporary Indian polity and the crises that India is currently passing through, it is critical to have a more globally nuanced yet locally grounded view of events. Indian politics since then has been in a state of flux and Hindu nationalism has emerged as a dominant political force. More importantly it is much more confident of its 'Hindutva' agenda, than say the government headed by Atal Bihari Bajpai (1999-2004). The Modi led NDA has also been more belligerent and brazen in its approach to the autonomous institutions of the state and has effected critical changes to the functioning of the courts and such bodies that can check and balance the executive power in a parliamentary style democracy. The result of this belligerent no holds barred right wing politics in India also meant that the Centre-Left political space has increasingly diminished and the largest centrist party, the INC has suffered tremendous electoral setbacks.ⁱⁱ The gulf in 2 electoral terms between the Right and the Centre-Left parties has never been so wide in the history of Indian parliamentary politics. The impact of the electoral setback for the Centre-Left political formations cannot be simply understood in terms of seats in the Lok Sabha. The ambitions of the BJP go beyond the ballot box and the consolidation of its power in the parliamentary systemⁱⁱⁱ. The BJP's political agenda is to promote 'Hindutva' as the one and only ideology that would be seen nationally as well as internationally as emblematic of India. It seeks to usher in a so called 'Hindu Renaissance' that would transform the social dynamics of Indian society as in the present and bring back the 'glorious days' of ancient Hindu religious ethos – an imagined historical era whose storyline has been set by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ever since its inception. The story of the crises of democracy in India or the radical transformations that are on the anvil as well as its impact cannot be explained or understood without reference to the increasing clout of the RSS. To understand the present political space and its actors it's essential that we understand the significance of Hindutva, a doctrine that claims that all those who identify themselves as Hindus, are in fact part of it and that those who are its proponents have a right to define what Hinduism means. This transference of the space of religion onto the space of a political project is very crucial to Indian

politics and democracy. The thrust of Hindutva as opposed to the Hinduism is one of homogenising the political and social spaces by defining every identity in the country under its rubric and thereby subverting and transmogrifying the principles of republicanism, democracy and secularism through a subterfuge of 'religion' and upending the idea of citizenship, which denies any discrimination to Indians before the law. It also has the potential to introduce a hierarchy of citizens based on adherence and integration to the principles of Hindutva, a hierarchy that is reminiscent of the classification that Nazi Germany adopted while dealing with those it considered not 'Aryan' enough. At the head of this campaign of integration, classification and hierarchisation of India's diverse population is the RSS as an institution and its reading and assertion of Indian history as a struggle between a homogenous 'Hindu' population fighting a protracted battle against an equally homogenised 'Muslim' population. More importantly, the homogenous Muslims are usually tyrannical 'foreign' oppressors who are constantly at war against the 'patriotic' Hindus – a simple binary of good versus evil that has grabbed the imagination of those who are not too well versed in the intricacies of identity politics and its history. This hand-me-down, easy to understand and memoriseiv narrative passed on as history of India's past must also be read with the purported 'achievements' of ancient India where Hindus had already mastered the intricacies of plastic surgery and had acquired the necessary knowledge to fly aircraftsv . Thus, the narrative is dependent on emotional appeal – here is an ancient civilisation, credited with path breaking inventions that others could never have dreamt of at that time and yet sullied by tyrannical and evil foreign forces for centuries. With the patriots in power, the time it would seem is ripe for righting the wrongs. This is the populism that bolsters and energises the right wing in Indian politics and this ideology of the RSS provides the present with the historical preconditions that contemporary Hindutva cannot do without. 3 The RSS and Hindutva – A Romance with European Fascism Modern Hindutvavi begins its journey through two important personalities – V D Savarkar and K B Hedgewar. It was Savarkar who brought in the definition of who a Hindu is in 1923, when he wrote that 'a person who regards the land of Bharatvarsha from Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland, as well as his Holy land – that is the cradle land of his religion'vii . It was however Hedgewar, who in 1925, on the auspicious occasion of Vijaya Dashami in Nagpur, Maharashtra established the RSS. The date is significant for in Hindu belief it was on this day that Lord Ram, king, seer, God and the very epitome of the Hindu male, defeated the evil Ravana. The name RSS was however given in 1927 on Ram Navami, the day that Ram is believed to have been born. Both the

days – Vijaya Dashami and Ram Navami were chosen to emphasise and convey symbolically the pathway that the (then) nascent organisation would adopt in the future. D. R. Goyal, an ex-member of the RSS writes about the origins of the organisation and places the aftermath of 1921 and the Khilafat movement as the historical backdrop and the immediate reason for Dr. Hegdewar to launch the RSS. Hegdewar comes through in this narrative as a person who is bold and practical in coming up with solutions that are not confined to ‘thinkers’ only. “While wishful thinkers pretended not to see the writing across the national political firmament, the realist in Dr. Hegdewar refused to dream up wishy-washy dreams. The truth was out. Only Hindus would free Hindustan and they alone could save Hindu culture. Only Hindu strength could save the country (emphasis added). There was no escape from the logic of facts. Hindu youth had to be organised on the basis of personal character and absolute love of the motherland. There was no other way. The agony of the great soul expressed itself in the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. With five friends he started day-to-day programme of the RSS. This great day was the auspicious Vijaya Dashami day of 1925”. (Basu et al, 1993, p15) This politics of exclusion of ‘others’ as a scheme of things or practice in creating a nation-state finds greater clarity in the writings of the M S Golwalkar, a successor to Hegdewar in the RSS. Golwalkar in 1938 writes in his book ‘We or Our Nationhood Defined’ that the Hindus must learn from the Germans on how to preserve the pride of a nation^{viii}. Scholars like (Basu et al 1993) have argued convincingly that this publication of Golwalkar explicitly models cultural nationalism of Adolf Hitler. It is pertinent to quote at length the passages that help to explain the dalliance of Hindutva unambiguously with the Fascist ideology. Golwalkar writes that “German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.”^{ix} (emphasis added) The lessons for India as stated by Golwalkar for India or Hindustan as he puts it is crystal clear. The non-Hindu people “must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and revere Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but the glorification of the Hindu nation.” And then more emphatically, “they must cease to be foreigners 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” (Basu et al, 1993, p27).

The exclusivist discourse that is being propagated here indicates the linear and one-dimensional nation state that the RSS is in favour of. 4 Hindustan or India has a singular culture, one language and therefore becomes one nation. Others deserve no rights and must be wholly subordinated to the Hindus. Golwalkar has however no words of condemnation for the actual foreigners who were ruling India at that time. In his 'We or Our Nationhood Defined' he is critical of the anti-British movements and feelings that permeated much of the Indian political space at that time. He goes on to say that "...being anti-British was equated with patriotism and nationalism. This reactionary view (emphasis added) has had disastrous effects upon the entire course of the independence struggle, its leaders and the common people" (Basu et al, 1993, p 29). We shall see subsequently the political implication of what sociology calls 'othering'^x and the resonance this has with the world-wide resurgence of the Right wing, all with overt or covert sympathies with Fascism and Nazism^{xi}. Bandyopadhyay (2021, p29-30) following Mark Trish argues that the characteristics of Fascism may be listed as varied and diverse but has certain essential attributes that draw their inspirations from the political experiences of 1920s Europe. First among them is the call to revert to or bring back the nation's long-lost glory. Second, a militarist hierarchical organisation similar to the Gestapo or SS. Third, the singling out of one leader who is provided unlimited adulation and who is made out to be head and shoulders above all the other leaders, including those from his own party. Fourth, a call to make the nation self-reliant and thus not 'dependent' on other nation states or actors. Fifth, the slogan of full employment and lastly the creation of an aggressive foreign policy that mirrors the domestic political environment of a militant reclaim of the past. Trish argued that when all the six attributes are present in an ideology or movement, it may be called Fascism. However, the first three points are crucial and more important^{xii}. Achin Vanaik (1997, p 237-238) talks about the importance of coming to a certain agreed minimum in defining fascism. He feels that 'fascism is a strong form of authoritarian nationalism. Fascism is always an authoritarian nationalism but the reverse does not hold'. While the true nature of a movement lies in its aspirations and not in its practices his contribution adds value to the discourse on the subject. He states that (p239) – (i) Charismatic leadership would seem central to all fascisms. The leader embodies the inspirational ideal. Indeed, it is precisely the relationship of the leader to the masses that embodies the superior, because more 'direct' and plebiscitary, democracy of fascism. (ii) There is exaltation of youth and youthfulness (relative to leaders of the traditional Right parties) of fascist leaders. A real generational gap prevails. (iii) Violence is glorified and there is the

militarization of political behaviour and relationships. (iv) Political meetings are carefully choreographed to arouse mass emotions through evocative symbols. (v) Masculinity is stressed. Vanaik's inputs are valuable and we shall have occasion to remark on these aspects while talking about the global RWP and the political crises of our times. It is equally important to note that Vanaik argues that the critiques of fascism are varied and emanate from diverse political / ideological backdrops. But "the fulcrum of a Marxist approach rests on the economic functions of fascism and on the fragile nature of the relationship of class forces that make the 'fascist option' available and its success possible or probable" (Vanaik, p241). Vanaik argues that after the end of the Second World War and with the transition to bourgeois democracy of Portugal and Spain in the late seventies, it is this zone (mainly OECD countries) that seems to be secured against fascist or fascist like organisations. He goes on to state that "the zone where capitalist authoritarian nationalisms have flourished has been the third world" since a strict Marxist understanding of fascism as an ideology sees it as a "feature not just of capitalism in crisis but of capitalism in crisis in its imperialist stage and prevails among imperialist countries only" (Vanaik, p245). While India is by no means an imperialist country but has political formations that draw inspiration from fascist and other brutal authoritarian regimes and political formations a case for third world fascism as Vanaik terms it has to be made out. He feels that for 'a Marxist wishing to justify the possibility of third world fascisms one possible theoretical route to take would be to see it as a political outcome which emerges in certain cases and for certain reasons but is a potential embedded in the general dynamics of the capitalist modernisation process" (Vanaik, p246). Thus, in the case of India we may see the likelihood of fascism as a moment of transition in the development of capitalism in the context of its limitations and possibilities of the emerging national bourgeoisie and its integration to the world order, globalisation being the latest structural feature that makes such integration achievable. I would argue that all societies irrespective of their spatial location harbours fascism and authoritarianism 'in potentia' and that one of the fall outs of globalisation has been the trigger for the rise of right-wing populism that fundamentally draws its political inspiration from the Fascism of the inter-war years of the twentieth century. I argue in the next section about the global trends in RWP and the consequent political tussle with Left and Centrist democratic formations, which in turn provides the inspiration for 'third world' fascistic tendencies and exclusivist politics that threaten to tear asunder the diversity mosaic^{xiii} of countries like India. RWP(s), the new Global Order and the Entrenched Trinity Right Wing Populism (RWP) is

determining the global political order and India is no exception. As part of the integration of politics and society following the advent of globalisation, the aspiration of the Sangh Parivar to turn India into a Hindu Rashtraxiv and a majoritarian democracy has found global fellow travellers. Indeed, it can safely be said that the 21st century has provided fresh impetus and traction to the political ambitions of all authoritarian regimes, figures and parties across the world. It has fuelled a growing political traction among those who found parliamentary, liberal and socialistic democracy constraining and limiting. The rise of Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, the Freedom and Justice Party in Poland, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Jean-Marie Le Pen in France as well as the overt turn to authoritarianism of the Republican Party under Donald J Trump in the USAxv are indicative of the ascendance of RWP both in Europe and the USA. The ideological roots and underlying logic of these varied examples of RWP does not necessarily carry a coherent political vision but can be seen as forming a loose conglomeration of political attitudes that in some way or the other draws upon a trinity of socio-political attributes. I would argue that the trinity that has evolved from the real political experiences of a now globally entrenched RWP regime rests on features that transcend spatial considerations. In a world of heightened political communication facilitated by the new technologies of instant transmission and reception of ideas, images and content, it would be wellnigh impossible to limit the RWPs to cartographic certainties. Rosenberg (2019) xvi following scholars like Mudde argue that the “intellectual roots and underlying logic of RWP are best understood as an outgrowth of the fascist ideologies of the early 20th century” and the rejection of the tenets of liberal democracy. The three elements that underpin the diverse 6 RWPs revolve around (i) populism, (ii) nativism and (iii) authoritarianism. In its propagation of populism, the RW takes over the idea of ‘we the people’ – an ill-defined and inchoate formation that purports to represent the entirety of ordinary citizens. The people here are understood with reference to who they are not rather than who they are, thus setting up a binary whose demarcations are more often than not porous and fuzzy. The ‘other’ of the people are the ‘elites’ – ‘social, political, economic and intellectual’ who are positioned as living off the fruits of the hardworking labouring and toiling massesxvii . It is quite another matter that the economic benefits of the RWP governance usually accrue to a handful of powerful economic entities and that real elitism rests easy in the knowledge that the government is in the hands of the RWPxviii . Rosenberg defines ‘nativism’ as standing in for ‘ethno-nationalism’. The nation-state is the unit of the people here and they are distinguished in a manner that talks about common core beliefs, common rituals, and

common physical appearance among other attributesxix . Thus, who we are combines the sociological with the supposed anthropological discourses and delineates the apparently clear divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. A very important fall out of ‘nativism’ is the creation of a discourse of xenophobia. Xenophobia in turn undermines the democratic understanding of an inclusive polity and civic nationalism by creating or attempting to create a nation state that is homogenous and bound together by a set of core values and beliefs. What is also remarkable is that the tensions created by xenophobia are to be constantly referred to – a kind of ‘keeping the pot boiling’ as it was, so that the emotional dividends become valid political currency. The last of the trinity is authoritarianism with its roots in ideological fascism and its often-unabashed appreciation of what Germany and Italy had done to form and run governments in early twentieth century Europe. Critical to the RWPs love for authoritarianism is its conception of power and leadership. It envisages a leader who is the embodiment of political power and the will of the people. The leader is feted for his / her ability to be stern and authoritarian and for brooking no interference from other leaders and ideologies. The leader in other words is supreme and beyond the purview of ordinary scrutiny and checks that usually accompanies any mass politics, especially those that claim democracy as its core value. Consequently, a top-down approach in politics is preferred centred on the persona of the leader and centralisation of power follows. The constraints of office are seen as obstruction to the achievement of the goals that are pre-ordained and irritants to the leader, who can only fulfil the mandate of the people by charting a path that removes the niceties of the structure of democracy and its conventions. As a result of this understanding of power and it’s ‘mandate’ the autonomous institutions of the state like the justice system, the universities, the statutory bodies that oversee rights, the banks and the financial system are all sought to be subverted to the political power of the RWP. In creating a political base for itself where the authoritarian characteristic would be appreciated and lauded, the discourse of populism puts the ‘people’ as being on the side of a perceived moral majority fighting an immoral elite. The leader and his party appropriate the space of resistance and claim to be the sole defender of the ‘people’ and more importantly the only authentic political figure to do so. What is critical in this formula of RWP is that discourse claims to have identified the ‘enemy’ of the people – the malevolent ‘other’. This ‘other’ can be anyone who does not fit into the RWPs understanding of the authentic people. Thus, we see RWPs targeting refugees, immigrants, sexual minorities, left-liberal intellectuals, religious minorities, linguistic minorities and a host of 7 different groups and

solidarities that for the RWP threatens or may threaten in the future the ideal of its own. In the Indian context the primary social and political ‘other’ is the Muslim as much as the Jew was for the Nazis in Germany. From a sociological perspective what the RWP does is that it creates a sense of paranoia among the population by constantly creating and re-creating a host of dangers that seemingly threatens the peace, stability and order. The structuring logic of this discourse involves simple ready to comprehend categorisations and this communication is aimed initially at the more vulnerable, less educated and naive sections of the majority population. The political communication is to ensure that the demographic minorities remain enmeshed in an atmosphere of violence. Banaji (2018, p2) draws our attention to the “vicious physical atrocities within families and against members of the despised communities” (emphasis added) that have the covert if not at times overt support of the state. The outcome of perpetual fearxx in sociological or psychological terms is varied and would require separate focus and dedicated research to evaluate its consequences on the individual in terms of dignity, ability, mobility and aspirations. However, one can argue that in concrete terms this assault of what is called ‘civic violence’ by scholars like Rajagopalxxi creates or seeks to create a docile minority that would not claim rights (or would have great difficulty in doing so) that are constitutionally provided for but would be burdened with obligations. One of the obligations that the minority would be forced to bear in perpetuity is the burden of ‘proof’ – proof of loyalty, patriotism and nationalism – a matter that would never be a requirement for the demographic and ideological majorityxxii . What is also quite clear from this is the inability of the ideologues of the RWP to see the nation state as a diverse unit or to appreciate multi-culturalism as a valid and authentic way of life. Pluralism becomes an anathema to public conduct and space and uniformity becomes the only authentic feature of life eventually. This attitude needless to say would produce tremendous social problems if pursued to its logical end in a vast and diverse country like India. What is also of note and worrisome is the fusion of power that RWP proposes. The demarcated boundaries of the private and the public, of the religious and secular and of the several heuristic divisions that sustain and maintain public space in a democracy is sought to be dismantled. The public sphere or space is crucial to modern life for it allows individuals and groups to discuss matters of public import and transforms private into public by highlighting the collective. The manner of such coming together is through debates and discussions, through talks that transcend the market to become a theatre for discursive transactionsxxiii. Thus, the creation of perpetual fear and the ‘civic violence’ undercuts the very

basis of democratic politics and sequesters the left and democratic political groups severely and adversely. But that does not complete the story of the triumph of the Right in India nor the losses that the Left and democratic forces have had in the last few decades. For that we have to turn to the new technologies of communication and the new media where the battle is being fought in earnest. The cyber space, the social media platforms and the battle of perception is as real as the political battles that are fought over the traditional and material demands of our times in the twenty-first century. Those whose ideals of public life and politics lie in an alleged ancient past have been the first to jump on to the bandwagon of new technologies. It would be a mistake to assume that the 'reactionary' political forces have an antipathy to modern technologies of communication (Banaji 2018, p6). 8 The Right and the IT cell: Fusing the Archaic and the Avant-garde Perhaps it would be not wrong to argue that the Left, Centrist and other democratic forces have lost out to the RSS-BJP combine in the use of political communication. Its sustained campaign across the several social media platforms as well as its control over corporate media in India has effectively created the necessary perceptions among the populace that have helped the party and its affiliates. It may also be stated with some degree of profit that the Left's efforts to emphasise the traditional political elements in its campaign against the RWP propelled politics has failed to garner support. In this respect the virtual and the ideational have trumped the material and the class-based approach through a clever presentation of the RW propaganda as 'real' politics. In the battle of perceptions, the BJP could establish the tenets of the political trinity that I have argued above and place the political confrontation as one where the common people are challenging the elite and their agenda. I will highlight a few of the political points of the BJP that have gained wide currency within the political milieu of the Right as well as in the broader political ecosystem in the present. These political base points of the RSS-BJP combine have been in circulation for long but have now gained prominence and fillip due to the manner of their transmission. In other words, while the sentiments of the RWs have not changed, they have gained a wider audience and more importantly this audience has been drawn into transmitting these messages in various forms. The people themselves have become participants in the chain of communication, persuading others to see a certain political perspective as the most authentic point of view and working as 'volunteers' of the Information Cell (IT Cell) of the RSS-BJP combine. In their paper "The right-wing populism of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (and why comparativists should care) McDonnell and Cabrera write about their experiences with elected representatives, party officials and spokespeople of the BJP

in 2016 at Delhi. Their research indicates that the RWP concerns with ‘people’, ‘elite’ and ‘others’ featured unambiguously with the people being described or projected as essentially Hindu, patriotic and “fundamentally united” (2018, p5). As one respondent, Saket Bahuguna of the BJP’s student organisation ABVP stated, “to be Hindu is to belong to the Indian identity, to Hindu values” while Atif Rasheed of the BJP’s minority cell chief felt that whoever is living in India, in Hindustan, is Hindu”. McDonnell and Cabrera argue that their interviews and research indicate the dominant perception that those who do not subscribe to the dominant view of a homogenous ‘Hindu people’ are outside the pale for consideration as people with an authentic claim to being Indian. If such people are not sufficiently loyal it is “they who are excluding themselves by privileging alternative identities” (ibid, p6) that are supposedly not agreeable to their identification as Indian. Similarly, the ban on consumption of beef is a reflection of what the ‘real’ people want and therefore that demand should be respected irrespective of the sentiments of the minorities or their rights. In keeping with the political line of the BJP that the people have been betrayed by the elites, interviewees of McDonnell and Cabrera state that the Congress as a party is centred around the Gandhi family (Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka) whose loyalties are suspect and who best represent the unpatriotic elite with little connect with ‘real India’. Taking on the Left whose political line can hardly be called elite, the functionaries of the BJP have an interesting take – the Communist parties like the Congress want the Muslims and Dalits to remain “poor, marginalised and scared of the BJP” while at the same time being deeply unpatriotic and anti-national as is evidenced from their support to the students protests^{xxiv} (2018, p7).⁹ The important and critical ‘other’ for the BJP has always been the Muslims. The research by McDonnell and Cabrera reinforces this well deep-rooted prejudice that they have historically held. The Muslim population was described as having suspect loyalties and more importantly of posing a threat by increasing their demographic presence at a rate that endangered the Hindus^{xxv}. To compound the problem from the Right-wing point of view the Muslim other was also guarded politically by the elites who allow terrorism to flourish. Accordingly, the other is homogenised and put up as a real threat to the nation and to its ‘core’ people – the Hindus. From their ability to overcome their demographic status of a minority, to being a constant suspect in terms of their commitment to the nation, to being terrorists – the melange of key elements and the wide range of snarl^{xxvi} descriptions have been politically communicated making the other an evil force, dangerous and malevolent. In addition, and more critically ever since the demolition of Babri Masjid the communication strategy has undergone a

strategic change. Banaji in her paper *Vigilante Publics: Orientalism, Modernity and Hindutva Fascism in India* quotes Christiane Brosius' work to show how the communication and propaganda strategy changed from a face-to-face discussion on the 'true path' toward a Hindu nation to a more "quasi fictional documentary propaganda" (2018, p6). Brosius points out that in these media a claim about "fusing a pastoral, romantic, mythical, Arcadian past in which the whole of South Asia including Pakistan and Bangladesh form part of India, alongside a scientific, rational and technological present, replete with successful businessmen and venture capitalists taking over silicon valley; an appeal to modern populist and democratic impulses (among the Hindu public) and the celebration of the God-King Ram visualised in manner that celebrates an authoritarian and antidemocratic form of governance" (ibid, p7) is made. This fusing of the romanticised narratives of the past with the contemporary advances in capitalism, communication and hyper-national images and messages effectively wove together a narrative of a new nation in the making. This nation, so went the messages, is no longer waiting to develop. It has arrived on the world stage and is literally rubbing shoulders with the international leaders of capital and technology. Development is no longer a steady and ponderous long haul of indicators like Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), or Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) or the stories of jobs and employment. Development is more glamorous and technology oriented, of young people working in the IT (Information and Technology) sector 24x7, 365 days, imitating American and British accents to be part of the capitalist corporate dream, if not actually migrating to the West and working in these fields as prized workers. The smart phone becomes a great leveller of stark inequalities making it difficult to broach traditional Left and democratic solutions to a world so obviously enamoured and taken in by this blitzkrieg of RWP propaganda. Indeed, many of the economic plans and programmes of the BJP led government made it a point to declare that the economy would move out of the 'dole regime' and that a more entrepreneurial regime following the so-called 'Gujarat model' would be put in place. This would fast track development via the free market and privatisation and usher in high growth and jobs. In fact, the claim was made that about 100 million new jobs would be there for the young of India^{xxvii}. This claim found ready takers among the aspirational middle classes and the young who were by now subjected to million images of the 'good life' that capitalism provides in the havens of Europe and North America. Evidently, what the BJP did as all good RWP parties do, was to take the focus of the people away from the 'humdrum and mundane' economic discussions¹⁰ and fix the gaze at a more carnivalesque spectacle of politics as

symbolised through the persona of Narendra Modi. Banaji points out that “by 2013, much of this spectacular pomp and circumstance was accorded to the rallies at which Narendra Modi spoke – he displayed himself eagerly in traditional Hindu costumes, wearing golden turbans, shawls, head cloths, pointing his fingers, carrying swords, inspecting guns, kissing children, embracing billionaires, touching the feet of old women and Hindu Gods” (ibid, p7). A mosaic of masculine power, capitalist dreams and age-old values were seamlessly woven together to deliver a political message of the arrival of India on the world stage – a place that is rightfully hers in the comity of great nations and one that was denied to her by the incompetence of India’s past leaders^{xxxviii} as well as the orchestrated conspiracies of those powers that had dared to keep India under subjugation. These messages and images were ad nauseam repeated across the social media – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, comics and through the corporate media, initially vernacular and then progressively across the national English media platforms as well.

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