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Introduction. Academia, Scholarship and the Challenge of Hindutvaism: Making Sense of India's Authoritarian Turn

Aminah Mohammad-Arif and Jules Naudet

- 1 Academia, science, and freedom of speech are under assault in India. This is not a metaphor: scholars and students are being attacked in many ways, including physically. As a journal specialized on South Asia, we consider that our core mission—producing scientific knowledge about societies—is also being threatened. This situation prompted the SAMAJ editorial board to bring together academics to reflect on this current state of affairs.
- 2 Our main objective is to show that the social sciences propose useful analytical tools to understand India's political evolution under Narendra Modi's regime. In order to raise awareness and help non-specialist readers understand what is currently happening in India, we have chosen to make an exception to our usual format and open the journal up to more than just the traditional academic article and also include essays, interviews or portraits of significant figures.
- 3 For this precise reason, the first section of this introduction starts by clarifying a term that is central to all the papers gathered here: Hindutva. The second section briefly reviews the chronology of events from the passing of the CAA in December 2019 to the Delhi pogroms of 2020. It also highlights how the BJP has been actively trying to crush all forms of dissent since 2014. The third section examines how Modi's second government, elected in 2019, has been characterized by an acceleration in the BJP's attempt to enforce the idea of a non-secular India. As a matter of fact, the year 2019 represents an undeniable "Hindutva turn." The fourth section questions the nature of the new regime, through a discussion of the notion of fascism, which is increasingly used by commentators to qualify Hindutva. The final section presents the contributions

in this special issue, highlighting how each one sheds valuable light on the dynamics at work in India.

What is Hindutva?

- 4 Hindutva is a multifaceted term that simultaneously refers to an ideology, a political movement, and an objective, that of laying the foundations of this ideology within the Indian political system and in the minds of Indian citizens.
- 5 Hindutva ideology was crafted by V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar who promoted a kind of Hindu ethnic and religious supremacism, based on the idea of a Hindu nation (Hindu *rashtra*), a Hindu race (Hindu *jati*) and a Hindu civilization (Hindu *sanskriti*). In order to refer to this ideology, we have chosen to use the neologism “Hindutvaism” (which we shall return to below). In his book, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Golwalkar’s statement leaves no doubt about the core tenets of this ideology:

The non-Hindu people in Hindustan must adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture [... and] may [only] stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges -- not even citizens’ rights. (Golwalkar 1939:55–6).

This ideology crystallized into an organization called the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), which actually drives the political and social movement of Hindutva. Founded in 1925, the RSS has since then become a tentacular movement with ramifications throughout Indian society. It began with the creation of *shakhas* (branches) designed to crisscross the entire country to extend the movement’s ideological influence as widely as possible. After independence, other organizations were founded to broaden Hindutva’s sphere of influence in all areas of Indian society. Known as the Sangh Parivar (“the family of associations”), they have now infiltrated all spheres of society, and have enabled Hindu nationalism to gain increasingly hegemonic power in India. Among this galaxy of organizations stands a political offshoot, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—formerly Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), whose ideological line is directly inspired by the RSS. The fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and 62 per cent of his government’s ministers in 2020 belong both to the RSS and the BJP is undeniable proof of the intimate connections between the two organizations (HT Editorial Board 2020).

- 6 The objective of this movement is indeed to institutionalize Hindutvaism by grounding it in political and administrative spheres, as well as in social and cultural ones. We refer to these efforts to implement Hindutva hegemony as “Hindutvaization,” another neologism (see below). In order to reach their objective, the various organizations of the Sangh Parivar have structured their mobilizations around several key symbols: the construction of a temple dedicated to the God Ram on the site of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, the abolition of the Article 370 of the Constitution that grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir, the ban of cow slaughter, the criminalization of conversions from Hinduism to another religion, etc. These key areas of conflict aim to polarize the country and cement the Hindu community around a nationwide hatred of religious minorities, Muslims in particular. This strategy has involved, among other tactics, the

organization of communal riots and anti-Muslim pogroms, such as in Gujarat, in 2002, where violence claimed an estimated 800 to 2,000 lives.

Dissent, violence and Hindutva

- 7 The December 15 date for the publication of this special issue is not a coincidence. It was deliberately chosen to commemorate the emblematic Shaheen Bagh protests that began exactly one year ago, on December 15, 2019. A major case of violence against universities also occurred that day: students of Jamia Millia University, quietly reading in a library, were beaten by police officers without any warning. The latter also assaulted other students on the same campus, who had gathered to protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act, ratified by Parliament a few days before. This law, which changes the conditions of access to citizenship (see below and see contributions by Kennedy¹ and Mathur² in this volume), subsequently triggered a huge protest movement throughout the country. The violence at Jamia Millia continued over the following days, spreading to other universities such as Aligarh Muslim University and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)—where the latter had already been the target of state violence since Hindu nationalists had won elections at the central level. Since then, symbolic, verbal, and physical attacks have continued against people from various backgrounds who were protesting against the new law. But academics have remained among the prime targets. One of the latest victims is a contributor to this special issue, Jayati Ghosh, an economics professor at JNU (Mahaprashasta 2020). Along with other colleagues, she is falsely accused of helping to foment the Delhi riots of February 2020 that erupted during the protests against the citizenship law.
- 8 Attacks on universities are evidence of the magnitude of the threats to academic production. They take the form of assaults using the media or legal measures, such as those targeted at another contributor to this issue, Nivedita Menon, a political scientist at JNU (John 2016). Social science researchers and professors are now being labeled as enemies from within. Faculty members and other teachers censor themselves in their own classrooms for fear of being denounced by students who have been won over to the Hindutva cause. Apart from obstructing social science inquiry, there are efforts to instrumentalize other fields of research in order to advance an ideological agenda. Biologists, for instance, have been called upon to set up investigation protocols aimed at demonstrating the healing powers of cow dung and urine (even against diseases like cancer) (Chandrashekhara 2020) or the virtues of the water of the Ganges.
- 9 Symbolic violence extends beyond India's borders, as shown by the examples of American researchers who have been mistreated in recent years by Hindutva militias, like the Indologist, Wendy Doniger, the philologist, Sheldon Pollock, and the historian, Audrey Truschke, who has contributed a piece to this volume. Since the publication of her work calling into question the commonly held image of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, as intolerant towards non-Muslims, Audrey Truschke has been very regularly subjected to violent abuse on social media (Moses 2018). For Wendy Doniger and her publisher (Penguin Books), things have gone further: both were subject to legal proceedings after the publication of her book, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, because her interpretation of the texts of Hinduism³ was not to the liking of Hindutva followers (Singh 2014). As for Sheldon Pollock, an (unsuccessful) campaign was launched to remove him from the direction of a book series on classical India (the Murty Classical

Library of India), the contention being that because he is not of Indian origin, he lacks the required knowledge to occupy a position of responsibility in that institution. The real reason behind such a move was that he had added his voice to the public denunciation by intellectuals of the attacks against JNU academics and students (ET Bureau 2016).

- 10 While these attacks on academia are of major concern, they are only part of a more general context of violence enacted by Hindutva militias against several other groups of individuals, among whom, in addition to public intellectuals and NGOs, journalists and religious minorities figure prominently.
- 11 The media is indeed confronted with multifaceted censorship, not unlike that experienced in 1975-1977, although no such State of Emergency is in effect today. This censorship and/or self-censorship, out of political allegiance or driven by fear of being chastised, losing one's job, or even being the victim of physical attacks, mainly takes place in television and mainstream newspapers, which as a result are very measured in their criticism of the government, when they do not blatantly support it. Another reason for this (self-)censorship is that most press groups are owned by large financial consortia that support the government's liberal economic policy. Beyond symbolic violence, verbal violence can stem directly from the State, as shown by the nickname "presstitutes" assigned to independent journalists by Vijay Kumar Singh, former Chief of Army Staff and twice Minister in the successive governments of Narendra Modi. Since then, the nickname has been taken up by Hindutva supporters (Agrawal 2015). Independent journalism in India is operating in an increasingly hostile climate, marked, moreover, in recent years by an upsurge in violence, even resulting in murder, against journalists (The Wire 2019).
- 12 Violence against religious minorities targets Muslims more particularly. They have been victims of a growing stigmatization and marginalization since independence (see Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; and see Mahmudabad in this volume⁴). In recent years, however, not only has this process escalated to the extent of being institutionalized, but its degree and nature have changed with forced conversions, lynching, and pogroms being among the new forms of violence introduced by Hindutva supporters.

Modi 2 and the acceleration of Hindutvaization

- 13 The most recent escalation and change in violence began during Narendra Modi's first term (2014-2019). The first steps were taken to propel India towards what Christophe Jaffrelot calls an "ethnic democracy," i.e., a democracy in which Hindus and members of other religions originating in India, like Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs, would have more rights, as "sons of the soil," than members of "non-Indian born" religions, like Christians and especially Muslims (Jaffrelot 2019).
- 14 This process has accelerated considerably since Modi's re-election in 2019. As early as July of that year, the newly appointed government took a whole series of measures, some of which were briefly mentioned above. First, the government revoked Article 370 of the Constitution that granted relative autonomy to the state of Kashmir. This revocation was followed by the imprisonment of most of the local political leaders, including elected officials, a very long blackout of telephone and electronic communication systems, almost complete media censorship and the repression of protests. Second, a list of 1.9 million inhabitants of the state of Assam was made public,

including a large number of Muslims, who, having been unable to prove their Indian nationality, are at risk of being excluded from the NRC (National Register of Citizens, to which we shall return) and of becoming “non-citizens.” Third was the judgment of the Indian Supreme Court, authorizing the construction in Ayodhya⁵ of a temple on the ruins of the Babri Masjid (see Etter⁶ and Lefèvre⁷ in this volume).⁸ Last but not least, there was the ratification of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). It amends a 1955 law to legalize the status of Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Jain, and Buddhist refugees who fled “for religious reasons” from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Bangladesh before 2014. Only Muslims are excluded, even if they are members of persecuted minority groups in Pakistan such as Ahmadis⁹ and Hazaras. The new law also does not apply to minorities in non-Muslim countries of South Asia, such as Sri Lanka, where Hindus and Muslims face persecution from the Buddhist majority. Undeniably discriminatory, the law violates the secularist principles of the Indian Constitution by expressly excluding a group from citizenship on the ground of religion. This is an unprecedented move in the history of the Indian Republic.

- 15 While the “banalization” of ethnic nationalism during Modi’s first term was met with relative apathy, the acceleration of the process since his re-election sparked a reaction of a magnitude that no one had expected. The CAA in particular, that, some observers compare to the Nuremberg laws of 1935 (Friedrich 2019, Mahmudabad 2019; see also Mahmudabad in this volume¹⁰), led to mobilization on an unprecedented scale, which, as said before, very quickly spread throughout the country.
- 16 On December 12, the day after the law was passed, students from at least 50 colleges and universities took to the streets in protest. The demonstrations snowballed into a massive pan-Indian movement. In addition to their massive scale, they struck outside observers by the large presence of women (Muslim women in particular, who have not had a tradition of mass mobilization in India since independence). Very quickly, a particular neighborhood in New Delhi, Shaheen Bagh, stood out as one of the main emblematic sites of these mobilizations. The demonstrations were largely peaceful, with hundreds of thousands of people rallying to oppose the law which they believed violated the Constitution.
- 17 In response to the resistance, the government chose repression, and left the field open to individuals and/or groups determined to take on anti-CAA protesters. India’s capital itself bore the brunt, plunging the city into a spate of violence between Hindus and Muslims scarcely seen since the partition of India and Pakistan. At the regional level, some states vied with each other in imagination to fight against the opponents of the CAA. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, pictures and names of anti-CAA demonstrators were posted on walls, stigmatizing political opponents in an unprecedented way (*The Wire Staff* 2020). The message left no room for doubt: expressing political dissent was no longer considered a democratic right, that of freedom. In recent months, political dissent has exposed people to violent reprisals, as shown by the imprisonment of intellectuals and civil rights activists such as Sudha Bharadwaj,¹¹ Anand Teltumbde,¹² and Gautam Navlakha.¹³
- 18 It is in this heavily charged political context that the COVID-19 pandemic erupted. After an initial show of unity, the world crisis triggered by the spread of the virus quickly gave rise in India to new forms of Hindutvaization initiated by the State. While recommending social distancing, the Prime Minister called on Indians to bang on pots and plates (in imitation of the Spanish and Italians), and, according to a more

specifically Hindu tradition, to ring bells and blow into *shankhs* (i.e., Vishnu's conch). Members of the Sangh Parivar recommended the consumption of cow urine as a preventive measure against Covid-19 (until the urine killed someone). The pandemic also witnessed an escalation of increasingly virulent and ostentatious Islamophobia, using as a pretext a gathering of the Tablighi Jama'at in Delhi, which subsequently became one of the first clusters in the spread of the virus.

- 19 It is therefore clear that the pandemic has in no way slowed down the process of Hindutvaization of the country. In fact, the health crisis, which occurred at a time when the government was harshly criticized for its mismanagement of the communal violence in Delhi, was undoubtedly a real boon for Hindutva forces. The lockdown made any mobilization in public impossible. It is difficult to know whether the end of the Covid-19-related crisis, at a date that is, moreover, indeterminate, will see new protests against the regime.

Is Hindutvaism a form of fascism?

- 20 In fact, the pandemic could be used by the government to consolidate its authoritarian and anti-democratic turn. So much so that one wonders whether the notion of "ethnic democracy" has not become obsolete to account for India's political evolution. This question is all the more compelling because the rule of law is increasingly being violated. The Supreme Court decision on Ayodhya, the impunity of individuals committing communal crimes (such as the pogroms in Gujarat and Delhi or the lynching of Muslims accused of consuming or transporting beef), as well as the appointment to the Rajya Sabha¹⁴ of the former President of the Supreme Court, Ranjan Gogoi, known for his verdicts in favor of Modi governments I and II are all facts that suggest the loss of the independence and autonomy of the judiciary (Bhuwania 2020).
- 21 If "ethnic democracy" is no longer an adequate descriptor, then what is the most appropriate term to name India's evolution away from secularism and increasingly from democratic values and practices? Every election since May 2019 has shown that Modi remains popular with the Indian electorate, yet elections are a necessary—but not sufficient—condition of democracy. India has been recently described as verging towards "electoral autocracy" (V-Dem Institute 2020), or towards "competitive authoritarianism" (Mukherji 2020). We are indeed seeing in India the development of unprecedented forms (since the State of Emergency) of authoritarianism, which is combined with muscular nationalism, right-wing populism, religious fanaticism, social illiberalism, crony capitalism, not to mention the symbolically and physically violent othering of religious minorities (mainly Muslims). In view of this picture, would "fascism" be the appropriate term to describe India's political evolution? The term indeed seems to be gaining currency and is more and more frequently mobilized by commentators of Indian political life (Guha 2020 and K. Thapar 2020).
- 22 Yet, this is a heavily loaded term that must be used with caution and that requires us to draw upon a precise and rigorous definition. With the rise of authoritarian regimes all across the world, an increasing number of scholars have recently tried to develop definitions of fascism that are not reducible to the sole cases of Italian fascism or German Nazism.¹⁵ Among them, Ugo Palheta (a French sociologist and political activist) has framed a generic definition of fascism that helps to highlight striking similarities between Hindutva and fascism. Rather than passing a judgment on whether or not a

regime is fascist, he is more interested in identifying the fascist potential of a given ideology or mass movement. He thus defines fascism in the following terms:

A mass movement that claims to work for the regeneration of an 'imaginary community' that is considered organic [...], through ethno-racial purification and the annihilation of all forms of social conflict and protest (political, trade union, religious, journalistic or artistic), in other words, through the removal of everything that seems to jeopardize its imaginary unity (in particular the visible presence of ethno-racial minorities and the activism of political opposition) (Palheta 2018:31).¹⁶

At first sight, Ugo Palheta's definition seems to be ticking all the boxes of the characteristics of Hindutva as described above. But whether or not to consider Hindutvaism as a form of fascism is hotly debated among Indian academics. For some, like the historian Jairus Banaji and the political scientist Radhika Desai, there is little room for doubt: the Sangh Parivar, both in its ideology and methods, is fascist. As compared to the Extreme-Right in Europe, "the Sangh Parivar is in some ways a purer version of the political culture of a more traditional fascism," writes Banaji (2013). Drawing on a number of indicators, like the influence of fascism on Hindu nationalism from the outset (Casolari 2000), the social basis of Hindutva (middle and lower-middle strata), the personality cult around Modi and the othering of Muslims, Desai also infers that the Sangh Parivar is fascist. She goes on to argue that the Modi government is fascist as well:

If the Sangh Parivar is a fascist organization, if the BJP majority government has assumed office with capitalist backing more fulsome than any other previous Indian government, if a cult of personality and 'decisionism' surround Modi as no previous Indian leader, if RSS cadres have campaigned for Modi on a scale and with a zeal that they never showed any other BJP leader, it follows that a fascist government is in power in New Delhi (Desai 2016:72).

However, others, like the historian Romila Thapar, are more hesitant to establish an equivalence between Hindutva and fascism. She primarily sees Hindutva as a backlash of the colonial discourse based on the idea of separate Hindu and Muslim identities. In the wake of the creation of a democratic nation-state, the struggle to establish a society of citizens with equal rights in a highly hierarchical society led to the replacement of democracy by a form of "internal colonialism" understood here as a (potentially violent) promotion of majoritarianism to the detriment of minority groups (R. Thapar and Kwiatkowsky 2020).

- 23 The question gets further complicated from an emic point of view. Of course, analogies should not only be proposed in conformity with the actors' self-definitions, but these self-definitions do nonetheless deserve attention. Therefore, it can be worth pointing out the ambivalence of the relationship of Hindutva supporters to fascism. On the one hand, there is little doubt that the Hindutva founders' conception of the nation heavily borrowed from European fascism (Casolari 2000). On the other hand, like other groups around the world that share similar political conceptions, contemporary Hindutva supporters will not use the term "fascism" to label their project: they are usually aware of the negative connotations attached to the term.
- 24 Both from an etic and emic perspective, the association between Hindutva and fascism is thus contested. Beyond India, for specialists of fascism, the very notion of "fascism"

is ambiguous and fuzzy, as well as unstable (Bertagna and Loriga 2020), not least because it is precisely simultaneously a concept, a historical phenomenon, and a label. In some ways, there is only consensus on the fact that it has taken on a generic meaning to describe, or denounce and rail against, various forms of authoritarianism. Hence, since in a way, the *label* “fascism” is more precise than the *concept* insofar as it immediately refers to a political stigma, one may wonder whether the main heuristic value of the term might not be to help the external or even internal observers understand the dangers lurking behind India’s current evolution.

- 25 One could argue that, like Trumpism and Putinism, “Modi-ism” could be an alternative and convincing analytical category. However, despite his persistent popularity among Indians and the personality cult surrounding him, Modi’s politics are not reducible to his sole person. He does embody a particular style of governance, of “populist” inspiration, but he is far from being the single bearer of a particular ideology or movement: his politics are embedded in the larger project of Hindutva, and he would probably not be able to remain in power for very long without the active support of the RSS and of the Sangh Parivar.
- 26 In view of the magnitude of the phenomenon, one may ultimately wonder whether the native term “Hindutva” and the derived neologisms “Hindutvaism” and “Hindutvaization” (defined at the beginning of this introduction) would not be sufficient categories of analysis that would provide comprehensive and precise insights into India’s current evolution. Without pretending to definitively close the debate, this is the choice we have made for this introduction (even if several contributors to this issue do use the term “fascism” to refer to the Hindutva movement or to the Modi regime). Hindutva is indeed a term that encompasses an organicist ideological and political project and that has a powerful meaning of its own, which may make it possible to dispense with categories and labels that are not only exogenous but often too generic, ambiguous, heterogeneous, and unstable. Similarly, unlike “fascization,” “Hindutvaization” can be mobilized to describe an ongoing process (similar to Islamization): it refers to a more tangible reality that might enable us to account for the evolution of both the country and the society, not only through its ideological, but also its social and identity-related dimensions. We even take a step further by adding an “ism” to Hindutva—thus “Hindutvaism”—to account for a process of ideologization brought to its paroxysm (as with, for instance, “Salafism” and “Jihadism”).
- 27 In any case, the political changes have been so deep and massive, and occurred at such a fast pace that observers struggle to stabilize appropriate terms to describe India’s current political situation, and this special issue does not claim to offer any definitive answers to these debates. Although social scientists continue to debate the appropriate terms to describe India’s current political situation, they nonetheless have a rich toolkit at their disposal to help make sense of its dynamics. It is precisely the desire to share some of these tools with a wider audience that prompted us to solicit the contributions published here. We indeed believe that the very rich scholarship on Indian society and politics can help to take a step back and look at the unwinding concatenation of events by mobilizing adequate concepts, appropriate frames and relevant perspectives.

Academic perspectives on Hindutvaism and resistance

- 28 True, research has a temporality of its own and it is still too soon to draw any conclusions on where India is heading. Yet, the social sciences do have a lot to offer, and the vast array of research accumulated on the dynamics of contemporary India provides a solid foundation when attempting to analyze what is going on. This is why the whole SAMAJ team mobilized its resources and energy to gather together, in less than a year, the perspectives of different scholars speaking from different disciplines and mobilizing different methodological and theoretical traditions. As mentioned before, their contributions are presented in a variety of formats ranging from interviews to essays and traditional research articles. We have divided these contributions into five sections.
- 29 **The first section** (“Winter 2019-2020: Awakening to India’s New Face”) discusses the policies and events that triggered the December 2019 and January 2020 mobilizations.
- 30 It starts with an essay by **Nayanika Mathur** on the CAA bill in which she discusses the bureaucratic implications of the bill. She describes the project as a “paper monster” that seems to have led to an inflation of procedures, rules, and orders. More specifically, its implementation led to “the creation of a bureaucratic category of a doubtful citizen,” and it vested a huge discretionary power within the hands of the local administrations that could easily withdraw names from the draft of the Local Register of Indian citizens. Her conclusion is clear: “the alternative to not being entered into these registers is not just a social or a political death, but also quite possibly *a literal one*.”
- 31 The second contribution is an essay by **Ali Khan Mahmudabad**, who explores another source of the outrage that sparked the massive mobilizations in Shaheen Bagh and throughout the country: the drift from the marginalization of Indian Muslims to their exclusion from the access to all kinds of political, economic, social, and symbolic resources. During the five years of the Modi government, the BJP systematically barred democratic channels to Muslims, seizing any opportunity to humiliate and exclude them. This is why “the anti-CAA protests represented both a moment of desperation as well as of hope because there was a realization that the BJP wanted to transform citizenship from a right into a privilege.”
- 32 The third and last contribution to the first section consists in an interview with **Niraja Gopal Jayal** conducted by **Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rewal**. Jayal underlines how the assaults on academic freedom are unprecedented: data clearly shows a steep decline from 2014 to 2020 in freedom of speech.¹⁷ Publishers are compelled to withdraw books; lectures, seminars, films, and plays are cancelled; scholars working on areas affected by insurgency are targeted by the police. Scholars expressing dissent are harassed; faculty members are now often recruited on the basis of their ideological preferences; RSS members are appointed to top positions in Central universities. In the worst cases, rationalist scholars are assassinated by Hindutva supporters. From October 2019, JNU students started protesting against the privatization of higher education and their protests ultimately merged with the anti-CAA protests, with students from Jamia Millia and JNU doing much of the organizational groundwork of the protests.

33 **The second section** (“The Ideological Tenets of Hindutvaism”) offers insights on the ideological matrix of Hindutva by identifying its core tenets. It consists in a single but very dense and thorough article by **Dwaipayan Banerjee** and **Jacob Copeman** in which they explore the ways in which the idea of a Hindu nation is molded by specific representations of blood. They analyze a highly rich corpus of textual and ethnographic materials as diverse as ideological texts, donation camps, the offering of activists’ own blood to political figures, an exhibition of blood paintings of political figures, and bloodshed during episodes of communal violence. Blood, they argue, helps Sangh Parivar’s ideologists, leaders, and activists to pursue three main political goals: to define the nation’s boundaries, to authorize and legitimize acts of violence and to re-write Indian history.¹⁸ Banerjee and Copeman’s in-depth analysis of Hindutva’s conceptions of blood leads them to frame the CAA as a punitive legal manifestation of a long-standing claim according to which, as they very aptly summarize it:

Ancient inhabitants of India shared a common blood-tie, only recently betrayed and broken by the recent conversion of some to Islam. Because of this shared consanguinity, Muslims could return to the fold, if only they were to give up their allegiance to Mecca. The implications of this Hindutva’s knotting together of geography and blood (based on an implicit assumption that Muslim blood had now been recently contaminated by conversion) reveals itself in the logic of the CAA. Because of their blood-betrayal, they cannot legitimately claim citizenship by default. And by association, nor should their supporters: anti-CAA protestors were all ‘anti-national’ because they question Hindutva’s hematological geography.

The third section (“Enforcing Hindutvaism”) looks at the practical ways in which power is exercised by those who claim to implement the Hindutva agenda: propaganda, repression, manipulation, misappropriation of cultural and religious symbols, and so on.

34 In her contribution, **Nivedita Menon** untangles the complex threads of the controversy surrounding the suicide of the actor Sushant Singh Rajput. The exploitation of this tragic event by Hindutva leaders testifies to their will to take control over the country’s largest cultural industry and to “purge spaces seen as either controlled by ‘left liberals’ or as syncretic and unamenable to Hindu-Muslim polarization.” Leaders of the BJP and the RSS have mobilized all their resources to try and achieve this goal. This episode has also unveiled deep fault-lines within the Hindutva galaxy, and more specifically the rival claims over Hindutva that oppose the BJP and the Shiv Sena.¹⁹ The Maratha-Kunbi-Koli support base of the Shiv Sena does not identify with the RSS-driven North Brahminical values of the BJP and is opposed to vegetarianism and to “*gau rakshak*” politics. Menon’s article thus contributes to deconstructing the myth of Hindutva as a monolithic project. Rather, the Shiv Sena’s and the BJP’s conceptions of Hindutva are so different that it led them to start a merciless political war. But whoever wins this battle over Bollywood, the conclusion will remain that “Hindutva is the new North of the political compass.”

35 **Jayati Ghosh**’s essay asks if there is such a thing as Hindutva economics. Modi is openly neoliberal and pro-big capital, but his support of market fundamentalism is contradicted by his politics of hatred that severely disrupts economic growth. However, the fact that the Hindutva agenda adversely affects economic activity is not necessarily in contradiction with the core tenets of neoliberalism, Ghosh argues. As she shows, the way Modi actively fuels beliefs that the economy is doing very well, actually serves the

neoliberal agenda by silencing the anger of the poor and by facilitating wealth accumulation by those who own capital. In this regard, the active and aggressive efforts of the government to manipulate and destroy the statistical system are decisive. The Modi government prefers to alter the perception of its policies rather than to actually develop and implement economic policies that would benefit the people.

- 36 **Véronique Bouillier's** portrait of Adityanath Yogi, Uttar Pradesh current Chief Minister, delves into the theological sources of his power. Adityanath Yogi's rise as a major political figure is closely tied to his affiliation with the Nath Yogi sect and, more precisely, with the monastery of Gorakhpur. Since Digvijaynath became its *mahant* (chief of the monastery) in 1935, the monastery has been characterized by an increasingly worldly promotion of a global Hinduism, which transcends sectarian boundaries and shows strong affinities with RSS ideology. Adityanath Yogi is the heir of a dynasty of *mahants* who have deeply altered the way the Naths articulate the political and religious realms. In order to carry out their agenda, these *mahants* of Gorakhpur extended their influence by taking part in the Yogi Mahasabha or by running for elections, as if the conquest of secular power was a necessary pre-requisite for the triumph of their religious conceptions. Heir of a dynasty of Thakurs who took control over one of the most prestigious congregations of yogis, Adityanath Yogi is undoubtedly the one who, among the last three *mahants* of Gorakhpur, pushed this ambition of political domination the furthest by becoming Chief Minister and imposing himself as one of the most influential national figures of radical Hinduism. He could even be, according to some, in a position to dethrone Narendra Modi.
- 37 **The fourth section** ("Hindutva and Historical Revisionism") further explores the complex relation between Hindutva and history, history being one of the major battlefields in the Hindutva fight over cultural hegemony.
- 38 **Audrey Truschke's** essay inaugurates this section by arguing that Hindutva is an ideology that relies upon "a series of wrong assertions, to varying degrees of unbelievability, about the past." One of the core tenets of their vision of India's past is "an imagined Hindu golden age of scientific progress interrupted by Muslim invaders who sought to crush Hindu culture and peoples." Not only does this contribute to further stigmatizing the Muslim minority, it also helps to ground the claims for a forthcoming Hindu Rashtra in a mythical golden age of Indian culture. Since the BJP took power in 2014, this narrative has become official and permeates all the media of cultural dissemination: school textbooks, academic circles, social media, etc. This construction of a fanciful past by historical revisionists is one of the major fronts in the RSS fight over cultural hegemony. Audrey Truschke meticulously deconstructs their tactics, which involve undermining academic institutions such as JNU or coordinating attacks on scholars to discourage any potential dissident voice in the academic sphere. In the face of such an assault on academic autonomy, she calls for a bolder and more coordinated response from the academic community: scholars should not bow to political pressure and take refuge in their ivory tower. Rather, following Chitralkha Zutshi's call, she argues that academics should work at "bridging the gap between academic and popular history."
- 39 **Corinne Lefèvre's** article explores how this revisionist approach to history is embedded in the heritage policies of the BJP. She first draws upon an in-depth analysis of two national programs implemented by the BJP (the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and the Adopt a Heritage Scheme) to show how Hindutva ideology is central to the way the

BJP approaches the preservation of India's historical past. She then goes on to argue that the BJP policy does not stick to ranking historical buildings considered worthy of preservation by the State but indulges in the ruthless creation of new heritage artifacts. She describes how "a mania for ever taller statues celebrating Hindu historical and mythical figures has been fast spreading across India" and how this participates in a "Disneyization" of Hindu nationalist fervor. Finally, the darkest side of the BJP heritage policies plays out in the form of a memoricide, resulting in the destruction of Indo-Muslim built architecture as well as of the symbolic presence of the Mughal past, the most obvious instances being the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya or the renaming of roads in New Delhi.

- 40 **Anne-Julie Etter** explores the BJP politics of archeology. She starts by reminding us that archeology is a tool that all nationalist movements tend to resort to in order to "sustain their essentialist vision of the nation and its so-called homogenous cultural, religious, linguistic or ethnical features." In this regard the Hindutva nationalist project is no exception, and the BJP has invested massive efforts in taking control over archeology. Archeology indeed enables them to materialize their narratives and give credence to their mythical reconstruction of the past. Anne-Julie Etter first shows that since its creation in 1861 the Archeological Survey of India has been directly controlled by the central State, which has enabled the BJP, once in power, to use it to push its Hindutva agenda. She then analyzes how the Babri Masjid case has revealed the political and scientific fracture lines within the world of Indian Archeology as well as the full extent to which the State has the capacity to control scientific debates. Finally, she gives us a few keys to decipher the complex debates surrounding the identity of the first inhabitants of India and around the lines of continuity or discontinuity between the Indus Valley civilization, the Aryan and Dravidian peoples, and the Vedic and Harappan civilizations. These three lines of inquiry help to give a clear overview of the political stakes involved in Indian archeology today.
- 41 The **final section** ("A Season of Dissent": Opposition and Resistance") of this special issue looks at the different ways in which the CAA met with opposition and resistance.
- 42 The emblematic aspect of this resistance has been the multiplication of spaces of contestation modeled upon the example of Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi. **Riccardo Jaede** retraces the ways in which such mobilizations developed in Kolkata. As part of his PhD research, he followed a non-partisan alliance of Muslim and non-parliamentary left organizations mobilized against the NRC and that started in mid-2018. This allowed him to observe how a moral community formed and unexpectedly—as the CAA suddenly became a national issue—coalesced to constitute the core group at the origin of the sit-in (*dharna*) that took place in Park Circus, a Muslim-majority area in the heart of Kolkata. He then carries on with an analysis of the gender dynamics of the mobilization as well as of the more general logistics of the Maidan mobilization. Pointing to antagonisms between the organizers, he further describes a turning point, when this grassroots movement came to be taken over by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) party. In spite of the TMC taking command over the Maidan, the initial unity of the movement was nonetheless preserved, forcing the TMC to adjust its political stance. According to Riccardo Jaede, "this unity was produced through the integration of different actors with diverging strategies, goals, and modes of participating who nonetheless used the same symbolism and partook in a shared normative imaginary."

- 43 It is precisely such resistance against CAA by state-level governments that is at the core of **Loraine Kennedy**'s article. She analyzes how, following the passing of the CAA in 2019, a dozen states and Union Territories as well as hundreds of village councils announced their refusal to comply with the law. Given the role of state governments in implementing national laws on the ground, this was a major setback for the central government. Loraine Kennedy argues that because such "institutional" dissent is expressed through democratically elected bodies; it confers legitimacy on the process and opens up space that can potentially be leveraged as a moderating counter-force." It also stresses the capacity of the federal institutions to act as "a power sharing mechanism." After offering a very clear synthesis of the major differences between the CAA, the NRC and the NPR and a clear presentation of the legal and bureaucratic implications of each of these laws, she describes the various forms of resistance that were expressed by subnational governments. Her article offers a precious map of the chronology and the key arguments mobilized. This allows her to conclude by reflecting on the trend towards a deepening of federalism in India as, since Independence, "the different states have become increasingly salient as discrete political spaces." But with the reinforcement of the BJP majority and the government's constant efforts to centralize power, this balance between states and the center is currently being modified. This is why the resistance to CAA by state governments must be read as an effort they make to preserve their autonomy in a context where they are the target of the BJP's insatiable thirst for more power and desire to re-establish India's early days of one-party dominance.
- 44 This special issue closes on a poetic note with a ghazal by **Karthika Naïr** that is followed by a discussion between the poetess and **Laetitia Zecchini**. In her ghazal, Karthika Naïr evokes this winter of 2019/2020 during which masses expressed their opposition to the Hindutva project and their attachment to secularism and to the values that presided over the creation of India's Republic. She stitches together words, slogans, and places to portray this "season of dissent." In the conversation with Laetitia Zecchini that follows, she reflects upon the political power of ghazals in particular and writing in general. She shares her feeling "that India is unfortunately right now living proof for anybody who wants to see the chronicle of an ascension of totalitarianism... It's an incremental approach. First, almost always, they come for the books, the art, the movies, the seemingly frivolous things." But when all other cultural forms have been taken away, as her ghazal suggests, "Poetry, once more, stands tall."

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NOTES

1. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6896>
2. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6917>
3. Among other things, her book included satirical stories about Hindu Gods, criticisms of the caste system and of the treatment of women.
4. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6701>

5. Ayodhya is believed to be the birthplace of Ram.
 6. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6926>
 7. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6728>
 8. The Babri Masjid, believed to have been erected on Ram's birthplace by Mughal Emperor Babur, was destroyed by Hindu fanatics in 1992.
 9. Despite the fact that they have been declared non-Muslim in Pakistan.
 10. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6701>
 11. Sudha Bharadwaj is a trade-unionist, activist, and lawyer. She has fought hundreds of cases for contract workers in the factories of Chhattisgarh.
 12. Anand Teltumbde is a scholar and writer, fighting for Dalits' rights. See Lardinois (2019).
 13. Gautam Navlakha is a journalist and human rights activist. He is also an editorial consultant of *Economic and Political Weekly*.
 14. The Rajya Sabha is the upper house of the Parliament of India.
 15. Such a trend notably follows the path opened by the "New Consensus" school developed by Roger Griffin who contends that "like conservatism, anarchism, liberalism, or ecologism, fascism is definable as an ideology with a specific 'positive,' utopian vision of the ideal state of society, a vision which can assume a number of distinctive forms determined by local circumstances while retaining a core matrix of axioms" (Griffin 1998:4).
 16. Our translation.
 17. See also Sundar and Fazili (2020) on academic freedom in India.
 18. See Copeman and Banerjee (2019) for a more detailed account on "the political life of blood."
 19. The Shiv Sena is a Hindutva-inspired Marathi political party founded in 1966 by Bal Thackeray.
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Keywords: Hindutva, Hindutvaism, RSS, BJP, Narendra Modi, Authoritarianism, Fascism, Islamophobia, Academic Freedom, Resistance, Dissent

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