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Rise of the Political Right in India: Hindutva-Development Mix, Modi Myth, And Dualities

Dr Nitasha Kaul[1]

Abstract

We are witnessing a global phenomenona of the rise of right-wing leaders who combine nationalist rhetoric with a claim to challenge the pernicious effects of neoliberalism. But, upon achieving power, they do not oppose the business elite, instead, while paying lip service to the victims of economic processes, they direct the blame for those structural problems upon the minorities and 'Others' within the rightwing nationalist imagination. In the Indian context, this is typified by the rise of Narendra Modi. Modi-led BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and its coming to power in 2014 has similarities with Trump, and is also different from the earlier incarnations of the BJP. In the first part of this paper, I explain the innovative nature of the specific Modi-mix of Hindutva and Development, and outline the toxic impact his right-wing populist givernment has had on a broad spectrum of Indian society and polity. However, in spite of the visible increase in real and symbolic violence across the country, Modi continues to remain popular and wield great influence. The second part of the paper answers this apparent puzzle by providing an account of the work of the 'Modi myth' that projects him as an ascetic, paternal and decisive ruler. This political myth is constantly reinforced through medium, speech, and performance. Further, given the many disparate constituencies with differing concerns that Modi-led BJP addresses itself to, the policy inconsistencies are reconciled by a strategic and systematic use of 'forked tongue' speech that presents the different interests as being uniform. A populist right-wing politics is constructed out of keeping these dualities in motion by speaking to the different constituencies with a forked tongue. I conclude by giving three examples of management of such dual domains: corporate/grassroots, national/international, India/Bharat.

Keywords

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> I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces.
>
> (La Boétie 1997 [ca. 1576]: 53)

Introduction

As the post-Second World War liberal democratic capitalist consensus breaks down, we find ourselves in a world of worsening economic inequality and growing political disenfranchisement, where there is increasing precarity and multiplying conflicts over issues of identities. On the one hand, there is an unjustified yet continual belief in neoliberal solutions — characterised by a focus on profit, potential for corruption, belief in the economy as a neutral entity separated from society and split from values, the idea that prejudices can get evolved out of systems, and lack of concern about inequality per se – which act to constantly lower the value of human life by inhumane ideologies and a lack of ethics (Kaul 2007, 2011). On the other hand, there is a marked resurgence of right-wing nationalism which recognises the victims of such a system but personalises the targets for structural problems and heaps blame on 'the Other' (various kinds of minorities) while letting the system run on. Moreover, the dynamics of these two ideologies are often studied separately from each other, if not by actually considering the two in opposition to each other (the unbounded market versus the defined nation-state). In fact, it is possible to argue that the political and the economic in neoliberalism and right-wing nationalism are inextricably intertwined. This is evident if we take seriously the unfolding global phenomenon of a particular kind of leadership in ascendancy. Whether we look at the Indian Prime Minister Modi who came to power in 2014 or the US president Trump who came to power in 2016, there are conspicuous similarities in the way in which their appeal to the electorate has relied upon a dual power base – those who wish to challenge the visibility and voice of marginalised minorities, and those who wish to challenge the economic elite.

In this paper, I argue that this combination is no coincidence. The success of contemporary right-wing nationalism has relied upon a systematic projection of the mythology of a new kind of leader who acts in an emotive realm of politics, promises to take people back to 'the golden past as future', and professes an intention to deliver power back to the people, while at the same time taking swift action, not on the 'high cost' domains of holding the economic elites to account, but merely on 'low cost' domains such as facilitating, enabling or maintaining silence in the face of the persecution of minorities. In addition, the policy failures or inconsistencies of such leaders are not seen as problematic by their support base because of the way in which they systematically speak with a 'forked tongue', that is, using systematically different vocabularies for different constituencies of supporters. It is important to analyse the dynamics of such movements because of the way in which they generate their strategic populist appeal by gaining from welding the different concerns of the electorate. By projecting a charismatic leadership and speaking successfully with a forked tongue, they are able to come to power even without an overwhelming electoral mandate in their favour. Once in power, these 'strongmen leaders' are able to act in divisive and authoritarian ways, seeking to fabricate an idea of the nation that intrinsically involves a scapegoating and disenfranchising of minorities and those seen as 'Other' without in practice delivering any economic power back to the people.

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These dynamics are further magnified in postcolonial societies that are undergoing a radical transformation of values and are simultaneously marked by high levels of physical and epistemic violence. In the Indian context, there has been a triumphalist positioning of a cultural and economic right wing discourse on India as a nation (symbolised by Modi-led BJP, Bharatiya Janata Party) which is Hindu supremacist and masculinist — Muslims and other minorities are located as the Other of this body politic quite explicitly by the RSS or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a nation-wde right wing paramilitary posing as an NGO which seeks to aggressively 'defend' the 'Hindu nation' — and this trades on the idea of the country as a 'rising power' (the need for India as a market by the West is significant in this regard) willing to stand up to unfriendly neighbouring countries of Pakistan and China.

In what follows, I provide an analysis of the success of contemporary right-wing Hindutva[2] nationalism in India as exemplified by the Modi-led BJP government. In the first section, I will outline the historic background to the current electoral prominence of the right-wing, in order to illustrate how the twin planks of 'Hindutva' and 'Development' came to be the key components of a dramatic narrative of power that combines nationalism and neoliberalism. I then identify the wide-spectrum of real and symbolic violence of various kinds during the tenure of the Modi-led BJP. In the second section, I introduce the idea of a political myth and elucidate the categories within which the Modi myth functions. I argue that the success of contemporary form of right-wing Hindutva nationalism relies upon the systematic forked tongue speech to create and mobilise dualities in three specific domains — corporate versus grassroots, national versus international, and India versus Bharat.

Road to the Modi Hindutva-Development Mix

Hindutva forces had been present in India since prior to independence (in 1947) as the core RSS (founded in 1925) and they gradually expanded to create the various organisations that comprise the Sangh Parivar (the family of Hindu right-wing organisations).[3] However, their electoral appeal initially was not as broad as it was to become following on from the 1990s. The BJP (formed in 1980, its forerunner party being the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, founded in 1951) won only 2 seats in the 1984 general elections. However, by early 1990s, the grand old party of power, the Indian National Congress — which had a claim to anticolonial resistance and a historic galaxy of renowned leaders – was fading from prominence in the face of high-profile corruption scandals, accusations of 'minority appeasement', the rise of identity politics, assassinations of its leaders, and the end of a commitment to a socialist planned economy. A fiscal crisis in 1991 led to the perforce IMF-mandated 'opening up' or liberalisation of Indian economy, which was carried out by the Congress leadership (a key architect being the then Finance Minister, and later Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh) and opposed by the BJP. At the time, the BJP was widely perceived as a political party of middle-class commercial traders that had a sectarian/communal agenda of furthering the interests of the upper caste Hindu population. A trio of veteran BJP leaders – Atal Behari Vajpayee, Murli Manohar Joshi, and Lal Krishna Advani – were significant figures; of these, Vajpayee would later become the Prime Minister in a coalition government that

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[2] Hindutva refers to politicised use of Hindu religion to transform the Indian polity into a Hindu nation (for a discussion of these terms, see Anand 2011: 2-6, see also Basu et al. 1993; Jaffrelot 1996; Hansen 1999)

[3] These include the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, Rashtra Sevika Samiti, Durga Vahini, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and so on. For details, see Jaffrelot (2005).

lasted until 2004, but all of them would be sidelined with the rise of Modi a decade later. In the early 1990s, the spectacle of the 'Rath Yatras' (nationwide Hindu politico-religious rallies led by the BJP leaders, especially Advani) culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh (the most populous state in the country) on 6 December 1992. This was a pivotal moment in the national memory and the communal fabric of the country (see Panikkar 1993; Nandy et al. 1995; also Van Der Veer 1987). Amid chaos, violence and official callousness/abetment, a group of organised 'Kar Sevaks' (Hindu religious militia) demolished centuries old archaeological monument (a mosque from the time of the Mughal Emperor Babur) in order to build a Hindu temple there since it was claimed that this was the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. There was bloodshed in the communal clashes in different parts of India and lives were lost, however, this event had both created and roused a Hindu body politic that came to see itself along the lines of an 'awakened Hindu nation'.

In the years and decades that followed, the significance of claiming a majoritarian cultural and political Hindu identity became ever more important, despite the country being officially secular. The BJP at this time was seen as a communal party with a support base amongst Hindus and a few years later, after two inconclusive elections, it came to power as part of the NDA coalition of parties (National Democratic Alliance, led by Vajpayee). It also carried out the nuclear tests in 1998 as a way of making India a powerful player on the global stage. Alongside this rhetoric of realpolitik, the communal agenda continued apace. In 2002, the western Indian state of Gujarat under the Chief Ministership of Modi witnessed horrific anti-Muslim riots (preceded by the death of Hindu activist Kar Sevwaks in a train fire in Godhra) in which hundreds of Muslims were killed. This pogrom was carried out by organised Hindu right-wing vigilante groups who raped and murdered Muslims (see Varadarajan 2002; Brass 2004; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). While these riots tarnished the global image of Modi (so that he was denied a visa to the US and snubbed by many Western countries for several years, see Burke 2012; Indiatimes News Network 2005), within his own constituency of hardline Hindu right-wing, it established his reputation as a strong champion of Hindus. In the next two national elections of 2004 and 2009, the BJP lost and the UPA I and UPA II coalition governments (United Progressive Alliance, led by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh who was to be the Prime Minister for the following decade) stayed in power, enacting various economically populist schemes of subsidies, rural employment guarantees, and so on.

If the BJP was perceived as a communal Hindu right-wing nationalist party at the start of the new millennium, just over a decade later in 2014, it came to be projected as the party of the rehabilitated national saviour to-be Modi who was the new face of Hindu nationalism. Modi's career trajectory in Gujarat had shown him to be 'fearless' when dealing with minorities and also keenly technocratic and pro-big business. His later tenure as Chief Minister of the state was widely projected as having led to a 'Vibrant Gujarat' (see Bobbio 2012; Jaffrelot 2013). As the 'father figures' of the earlier incarnation of the BJP (like Advani and Vajpayee) were sidelined, the entire RSS wholeheartedly put its support behind Modi — he was the Hindutva Man. But at the same time, his big business backers from the home state of Gujarat (the likes of globally significant industrialists Ambani and Adani) put their weight into his election campaign (the most expensive ever in the history of the country, see Outlook Web Desk 2015) suffusing every media with his development message — he was the termed the 'Vikas Purush' or Development Man. The Modi victory in 2014 was about *being* Hindutva and *doing* Development.

The backstory to the rise of Modi and contemporary right-wing nationalism in India is important because it illustrates how his coming to power required an interlinking and

welding together of the concerns of the nationalist and neoliberal constituencies of voters. By the early 1990s, the contemporaneous arrival of both liberalisation ('free markets') and right wing nationalism (Hindutva or Hindu supremacism) is hard to miss, but commentators have often posited them as two separate forces with their own economic and social trajectories respectively. The arrival of neoliberalism in India is studied in the sphere of economy, and the rise of Hindutva is analysed in the cultural sphere. One is economic policy, the other is identity politics. The latter is often seen as something of a reaction to the former. This is unsurprising since neoliberalism and nationalism are rarely analysed for the ways in which they are intertwined, and more often pitted against each other as opposing tendencies (on this, see Kaul 2016). Neoliberalism is seen to be characterised by the way in which it deterritorialises capital, disrupts traditional communitarian affiliations of identity and weakens the underlying foundations of the nation-state by shifting power towards the globally mobile transnational corporate entities and away from the governments that are faced with ever greater constraints in terms of what they can regulate, how and to what extent. Nationalism, on the other hand is seen in terms of how the nation either creates an associated sense of identity and belonging, or how the collective imagining of a nation as an entity manufactures a sense of belonging and affiliation.

In the Indian context too, there have been explanations of how neoliberal reforms eroding the power of the state required a resort to nationalism of the religious kind in order to define a strong cultural identity in the midst of much drastic transformation of the landscape. However, such a narrative sees the economic and cultural domains as parallel and endogenous. The economic policies of neoliberal reforms were no less nationalist or cultural in the way in which they conceptualised a 'New India' that would be free of the shackles of the past and ready for the post Cold War world. Similarly, the rath yatras, Babri Masjid demolition and anti-minority violence (real and symbolic) that pushed Hindutva into public consciousness was no less an economic calculation intended to create a political momentum and favour the caste Hindus who stood to lose from a fragmented population with increasingly assertive claims for the disadvantaged in society. Both nationalism and neoliberalism are on a spectrum and in a relationship with each other, and they are defined as separate by making the effects of one appear cultural, and of the other, economic. It is the wider architecture of these social-economic relationships that was sought to be manipulated by the BJP as it went from being a Hindutva communal party trying to accommodate itself to the mainstream in coalition governments (in late 1990s) and failing at elections (in 2004 and 2009) to its next incarnation as the Modi-led BJP (by 2014) which was unashamedly communal pro-Hindutva and also pro-big business, winning voters over to the idea of a 'Rising India' that was open for business, heading towards 'Development' for all, reclaiming its place on the world stage as a world leader ('Vishwa Guru'), and reflected an awakened Hindu nation that could export its traditional Hindu values.

A mandate for Modi as leader in the right-wing BJP's victory in the Indian general elections of 2014 was made possible by the efforts of Sangh Parivar and corporations, two constituencies that were heavily invested in creating the symbolic and material consensus that would sweep Modi to power in what was called a 'Modi Wave'. These general elections in 2014 were a watershed moment in Indian politics. It was also a remarkable victory for Modi (who became the Prime Minister) - the Chief Minister of Gujarat during the 2002 riots - since the electoral campaign had been overwhelmingly centered on projecting his personality as a leader (see Bobbio 2013; Jaffrelot 2015). During the elections of 2014, 'NaMo' was the ubiquitous catchphrase; an abbreviation of the first two alphabets in the name Narendra Modi, it was recited like a magic formula that would cure the nation of all

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its ills. Modi campaigned furiously, addressing hundreds of rallies in person across the country with a fleet of three aircraft at his disposal (courtesy his corporate backers) that brought him back home to Gujarat each night (see Mishra and Kaushik 2014). In addition, he also ~~adressed~~addressed hundreds of rallies virtually in different places simultaneously through the use of holographic projections of himself (see Nelson 2014). In remote rural areas, the use of such technology, hitherto unknown to the people, added to the awe and mystique of a miraculous leader. Modi repeatedly promised 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas' ('Development for all') and held out the vision of 'acchedin' ('good days') ahead. Not only did his campaign make an unprecedented use of technology targeted at specific demographics,[4] but like President Trump, twitter has generally been his favourite means of communication. He was projected as a techno-savvy Hindutva strongman leader who would bring 'Development', but at the same time, and in spite of his rhetoric about being a leader for everyone, the communally incendiary anti-Muslim views of his key allies (such as the BJP President Amit Shah, also from Gujarat) are indubitable (see Peer 2014). Modi himself is a proud lifelong member of the RSS which has the idea of a pure Hindu nation at its core. He consistently refused to wear a Muslim skullcap during his campaigning, and upon Modi's election victory, a young Muslim man was killed in the the city of Pune by right wing Hindu extremists because he was wearing a skull cap and thus identified as visibly Muslim; Modi never condemned the killing.[5]

In the three years since then India has seen a slew of changes that have their roots in the Modi-led BJP effort to reshape society and economy in line with the right-wing politics of the Sangh Parivar (family of Hindu right-wing organisations that form the backbone of Hindu supremacism in the country) and the business interests of the corporate backers of the Modi-BJP campaign. Their efforts to fundamentally change the nature of Indian society and economy began immediately upon assuming power, continue apace, and have resulted in a targeting of constitutionally guaranteed principles such as secularism, freedom of expression, democracy, minority rights. The sheer number and nature of the multifaceted attacks make it impossible to recount them here, but the terms 'intolerance debate' or 'anti-nationalism' or 'sedition' in India today encompass writings on what has come to be seen as 'Modi-fied' India (see Kaul 2015; Bhattacharjee 2017; Hundal 2017).

The Modi tenure has been disastrous for minorities, environmentalists, labour rights activists, liberal media, progressive universities, socially and economically vulnerable groups such as dalits (oppressed castes) and farmers, to name a few. There have been continued killings and beatings over the contentious issue of 'beef ban'; murders of rationalists and atheists; an emboldening of Hindu extremist groups that act to violently enforce their principles or openly indulge in hate speech against minorities fearing no repercussions; significant removal of environmental safeguards for business projects; policy making by ordinances; out of turn appointment of senior defence figures; changes to

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[4] The role of technology was crucial and raised questions such as 'did/could google fix the 2014 Indian elections?', a concern that came up again in the run-up to the US presidential elections in 2016. See Rogers (2015).

[5] This case is commonly referred to as the 'Pune Techie murder case' whereby, days after Modi coming to power in 2014, a Muslim man named Mohsin Shaikh was beaten to death in Pune by Hindu extremists of the HRS (Hindu Rashtra Sena). Several accused were charged and imprisoned, however many were granted bail. In a judgement in January 2017, the Bombay High Court granted bail to some more of the accused because they did not commit the murder out of personal enmiity but acted because they were "provoked in the name of religion" at a Hindu extremist rally and incited to go on a rampage. In May 2017, the well known public prosecutor in the case abruptly withdrew without giving any reasons. See Arvind (2017), The Wire Staff (2017).

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textbooks to revise historiography in line with a Hindutva view of history; changing of the heads of national institutions and state governorships to replace them with establishment-friendly figures; a vindictive ~~targetting~~targeting of universities that have been at the forefront of resistance to the government; efforts to make education systems 'saffronised' along the wishes of the RSS; social campaigns with regressive anti-minority messages; political use of vegetarianism; little action on a large number of farmer suicides due to economic hardship; delay or non-prosecution of criminal cases involving Hindu right-wing terrorists acting against minorities; in/direct exoneration of various figures previously successfully prosecuted for their criminal involvement in violent anti-minority riots; heightened moral policing of women; curbs on free speech online; fears of increased surveillance through the use of biometric 'aadhar' identity cards; promulgation of an anti-scientific regressive outlook on sexuality and morality coupled with the spread of fake facts in the name of indigenous knowledge; violently enforced rituals of 'patriotism'; concerted abusive attacks on critical academics, media persons and filmmakers; agenda of vendetta against opposition politicians; censorship of NGOs (non governmental organisations); severe economic turmoil over a hastily enforced demonetisation policy that made 86% of the country's paper currency worthless overnight; and charges of anti-nationalism against dissenters and critics.

There has thus been a definite increase in political and economic violence and overt intimidation at all levels of society accompanied by plummeting levels of media freedom, a consolidation and centralisation of power, and an openly hostile attitude to secularism and democratic principles (see Kaul 2015, Manor 2015). This turning up of the "volume of violence"[6] has been drowned out by the official propaganda of a 'new' kind of development that is ostensibly going to be delivered by the 'reformist' Modi as the head of the most business friendly[7] government India has ever seen. The appeal of this new India is a domestic one, reaching out to the middle classes who are seduced by the rhetoric that India will now finally arrive on the global scene as an economic superpower ("India Rising"), but it is also international, both for the Indian origin diaspora who can now be proud to be Indians overseas, and also for the broader international community[8] who has largely bought into the idea of "Brand India" as the 'world's fastest growing free-market democracy' (see Kaur 2012, 2015).

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[6] I borrow the formulation of "turning up of the "volume of violence" owing to social conditions" from Dobash et al (2000: 40) who use it in their analysis of violence against women.

[7] The actual 'business-friendliness' of the Modi regime has been open to question from its very inception. Even the so-called 'Gujarat miracle' hides an ugly reality of crony capitalism, see Bahree (2014), Balan and Damor (2014). Further, following on from the demonetisation in 2016, there were global headlines such as 'What India Has Done To Its Money Is Sickening And Immoral' (Forbes 2016), 'Modi's attempt to crush the black economy is hurting the poor' (The Economist 2016), 'Modi's Money Madness' (Crabtree 2017). However, in spite of the now-documented negative economic fallout (BBC 2017) and the actual loss of human life (officially uncondoled deaths of over a 100 people) from hardships due to the poor policy (Kumar 2017), Modi's agenda has its supporters who see it in a high-risk, high-reward frame and don't find the human cost too onerous (see Worstall 2016; Reuters 2017).

[8] The contrastive idea of China plays an interesting role in this regard. It is a complexio oppsitorum in that Modi's rise in India is seen both as a way of India finally getting an authoritarian leader who will be able to deliver India as a rising superpower, just like China, without being bogged down by the messiness of democratic functioning. Yet, the violent fallout of Modi's policies in the economic and social domains is also overlooked because India is a democracy unlike China which is authoritarian.

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While some have been tempted to see the situation in India in terms of a development and communalism trade-off (Jaffrelot in Vij 2014), where one buys into the idea of Modi-led BJP as essentially interested in delivering inclusive development towards a rising India ~~but~~and is having to tolerate the rising violence in order to pacify the communal right wing support base of the RSS and Sangh Parivar, I argue that doing so overlooks the ways in which the political and the economic are inextricably intertwined in the strategy of governmentality of the Modi-led BJP. Rising intolerance and communalism on the one hand, and so-called development on the other are not two parallel domains, but both are equally crucial to the nature of Modi-fied India.

In spite of the aforementioned increase in violence, and despite occasional setbacks in state elections (in Delhi and Bihar), Modi's right-wing populist juggernaut rolls on. In March 2017, the BJP won a massive victory in the state elections in India's most populous bellwether state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). Following this, in a brazenly communal move, Yogi Adityanath, a Hindu supremacist extremist fringe leader was appointed as the Chief Minister (CM) of the state with Modi's approval.[9] The episode of the UP elections in 2017 was eventful both because BJP's success was far from assured in the aftermath of Modi's demonetisation policy that resulted in significant economic hardship and a number of deaths, and also because of the appointment of Yogi Adityanath as CM. In both cases, the outcomes suggest Modi's enormous hold over the public imagination. Modi was presented as the face of the BJP in the UP election campaigning and his approval of Adityanath represents the great extent to which he can enforce the Hindutva agenda while claiming to be a 'Development man' for all. When the demonetisation diasaster was unfolding, Modi was quick to label those who questioned his policy as supporting 'black-marketeers' and acting against the interests of the nation. Eventually, when he did address the repercussions in public directly, he presented them as part of an emotive national morality tale, where the people must suffer so that the nation can be ennobled.[10]

Modi-led BJP has sought to be all things to all people, integral humanist for the poor, capitalist for the business, populist for the media, free marketeer and business minded internationalist for the west, economic nationalist under cover for some of his supporters, cultural nationalist using the economy, economic fundamentalist using culture. As with Trump, the realms of real experience matter less than the emotive imaginaries presented to the people. For some, it is development, for others, Hindutva, for yet others, a Rising India, or a growth miracle. The messianism of religion and the market are combined in

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[9] Yogi Adityanath being appointed as the CM is an unequivocal signal of the anti-minority and extremist hardline right-wing Hindutva agenda of the Modi-led BJP. See NYT (2017), Safi (2017), Suri (2017), Venkataramakrishnan (2017). For the implications in terms of policy challenges and populism, see PTI (2017) and Sharma (2017).

[10] Some excerpts of Modi's morality tale framework using the metaphysical language of good and evil (NDTV 2016a, emphases mine):

> Since Diwali, our nation has been witness to a historic *rite of purification* [referring to demonetisation]…In God's creation, humans are endowed with fundamental goodness. With time, the distortions of badness creep in…It seemed at times, that the evils and corruptions of society, knowingly or un-knowingly, intentionally or un-intentionally, had become a part of our daily lives….However, when crores of Indians unite to fight a war against internal evils, it is unparalleled. Indians have, with firm resolve and infinite patience, faced difficulties with a smile, re-defining the *concept of sacrifice*…The people, through persistence, sweat and toil, have demonstrated to the world, an unparalleled example of citizen sacrifice, for the brighter future of a nation. Usually, when people's movements have arisen, the people and the government have been at loggerheads. It is historic, that both the people and the government are on the same side in this *battle against evil*.

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politically opportune ways, and those who challenge him or his policies are presented as anti-national traitors, western stooges or leftist lunatics. When there are blatantly condemnable and factually incontrovertible incidents of lynchings or violence or hardship, Modi (like Trump) refuses to condemn them, employing a strategic silence.[11] It is instructive to note that Modi's overseas Hindu diaspora supporters also actively campaigned for Trump's election ('Hindus for Trump') and Modi again maintained a silence when some of them were attacked or killed by Trump supporters in the US in 2017, showing that, like his commitment to development for all, his Hindu supremacism is not immune to political opportunism either.

Even so, a shapeshifting political strategy comes with its own costs. Surely, at some point, the electorate might take a serious note, if not of the marginalisation of the minorities and critics, then at least of the policy inconsistencies, divergence from stated commitments, lack of will or ability to deliver on key promises. Why has this not happened in the case of Modi? On the contrary, his persona as the saviour of the country continues to hold ground. There are many hagiographies of him (Marino 2014), and a retired Army Major General speaking at a technology institute (IIT Madras) function in 2016 said that "India got independence only in 2014 after Narendra Modi came to power" (Sikhwal 2016, see also FE Online 2016).

Here is a man whose record as CM in Gujarat in western India was one of overseeing and/or abetting a pogrom against the minorities, whose much-touted Gujarat growth miracle was dismissed by leading economists as an invention without basis in numbers, who has not delivered on development, who has maintained a strategic silence in the face of reprehensible violence, whose narcissism was on conspicuous display when he wore a multi million dollar suit embroidered with his own name in gold for a national republic day function, whose foreign policy so far has been focused on spending a disproportionately large amount of time flying around the world with no concrete results. Large numbers of his supporters still feel proud to be called 'Bhakts' (devotees), armies of them are online daily defending him and viciously attacking and abusing those who question him, making Indian trolls infamous worldwide. His face is not only on hoardings but also on the masks that his supporters like to wear. He is their muscular strongman Hindutva-cum-Development leader hailed for his "56-inch chest", the man who will make India proud again.

The emergence and entrenchment of rightwing populist politics in India has thus been largely unaffected by its failures to deliver in many cases. This contradiction can be explained through an understanding of political myth, and specifically the Modi Myth that allows much to remain unseen, invisibilised, or condoned.

Modi Myth and Dualities

The Modi-led BJP government has pursued a political strategy that owes its success in large part to myth-making about Modi, and the deliberate use of systematically inconsistent 'forked tongue' speech addressed to different constituencies of voters.

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[11] Modi's silence has been a consistent issue throughout his tenure (see NYT 2015 for an early example), there are any number of write-ups over the years questioning his silence on everything contentious involving Hindutva interests. His silence is selective; he condemned the Orlando shootings but not violence against Muslims and Dalits by cow vigilantes in India, he condemned Kansas shootings, but not the killing of Indians in the US by Trump supporters.

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Let us consider the concept of a political myth. Flood (2001) provides a comprehensive account of political myth as part of ideology, as form of an ideological discourse. He sees it as different from but related to sacred myth, in that it has an everyday presence and authority and relies upon propaganda and delusion, but it isn't just emotion or mere brainwashing. It is a form of storytelling about politics that has a persuasive appeal to its adherents. Bottici (2011: 39-40, 49) further develops a philosophy of political myth by drawing attention to the ways in which a political myth is performative, and does not describe, but creates a reality. According to her, 'work on a political myth' can create a salient shared identity for a group; it is not just consciously learnt but also unconsciously apprehended from cumulative exposure, condensating into images or 'icons'; and it functions processually in diverse settings — such as speeches, visual and other arts, rituals, social practices — magnified in current media-saturated societies. She writes of how the same political myth can be a source of oppression and liberation, depending on the context, further (ibid.: 35):

> what we can call the "particularistic" nature of political myth, to the fact that the same myth can have very different meanings according to the particular circumstances in which it operates. Political myth, as myth in general, expresses itself through variants: properly speaking, we never see a political myth at work, but always variants of it. Furthermore, what is a political myth for a certain group of people may well not be so for another, and, even for the same group, the same narrative can work as a political myth in certain circumstances but not in others.

So, in this sense, we can see Modi-led BJP's process of political myth-making at work with Hindutva and Development as the central tropes of a narrative that may not be correct, consistent or scientific, but it is a dramatic narrative that allows for an ~~accummulation~~accumulation and reproduction of significance through work on multiple sites. Modi-led BJP provides a narrative of development and hindutva which is constantly reinforced through every possible medium, speech, performance. There is a general level at which this works through the use of symbolism, role of the media and creation and tapping into imaginaries linking emergent rising India as superpower, but the iconic power of this political myth is centred around the figure of Modi himself. As previously argued, there is a significant difference between the BJP as it was in the late 1990s and when it lost power in 2004 (in spite of the 'India Shining' campaign) and the BJP that won in 2014 largely based on the figure of Modi. While the 2004 defeat reflected the blatant falsity of 'India Shining' (the electorate could see that India was far from shining), the 2014 victory reflected a promise of what 'NaMo' would bring, based on his 'Vibrant Gujarat' past. The shift also reflected a change from a politics that referred to description and reality to a performance politics around the cult of an individual leader as saviour.

The carefully cultivated, well branded mythology of Modi projects him as a saviour of the country who promises ideological cleansing of India to its purer origins unsullied by minority appeasement, while at the same time, being a leader from humble origins who has no hesitation in taking up the broom for a cleanliness campaign to launch a 'Clean India' (Swachh Bharat) initiative. His humble background, including his belonging to a backward caste, is used as an alibi to represent his party as non-elitist even though in reality BJP is backed overwhelmingly by dominant castes and middle and upper classes. He is the 'vikas-purush' (development man) who will replicate the 'Gujarat Model' throughout the country. As per the Horatio Alger myth, Modi symbolises not just a personal rise, but is used to argue that his party, the BJP, is one that 'allows' such a rise to happen, unlike the Congress, which is widely perceived as a party of dynasty politics. Lost in this narrative is the familial-dynastic role of Sangh Parivar, the significant role of the crony capitalists banking on Modi-led BJP, and the crucial role of Gujarat riots in proclaiming his

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unswerving commitment to Hindutva, followed by an aggressive campaign to disown any responsibility at the time, and later, after coming to power, the many court judgements reversals that have effectively let some of the highest profile culprits off the hook (for example, the granting of permanent bail to Maya Kodnani, a minister in Gujarat under Modi who was convicted as 'kingpin' of a massacre during Gujarat riots, and the bailing of many of her associates, aides and other convicts, see HT 2014; Bhan 2015; Misra 2015). As Bobbio (2012) notes, the subnational Gujarati chauvinism and cultural exclusion were perfected by Modi as elements of political-cultural propaganda. The political phenomenon of Modi is embodied by him being "the representative of a so-called typically Gujarati culture combining religious bigotry, intolerance, and a marked aspiration towards an ideal of modernization pinned on Western symbols of consumerism" (Bobbio 2013: 124).[12] His success was in representing this specific Gujarati culture as a model for the rest of India in terms of Hindu entrepreneurship.

I argue that there are three sub-categories — ascetic, paternal, and decisive ruler — in which the Modi myth has been a political myth in the sense of an ideology as well as a narrative that ties in with various dominant imaginaries of deserved rulership/leadership in Indian (South Asian) history.

Modi has projected himself as an ascetic - as a man with great self-control and without family ties or attachments. He has sought to make high-profile displays of his religious and ascetic nature such as when he refused to eat during his first visit as PM to the United States. Predictably, this was a much-remarked upon feat, adding to his religious credentials among his supporters and showcasing his devotion and stamina. See, for example (Nair 2014):

> Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will observe a strict religious fast during his maiden trip to the United States, aides said on Monday, in a test both of the 64-year-old leader's stamina and of protocol in the Obama White House. Throughout a gruelling schedule that features the United Nations General Assembly, a rally of Indian Americans at New York's Madison Square Garden and talks with Obama in Washington, the devout Hindu will abstain from food. In keeping with the habits of a lifetime, Modi will restrict himself to a "liquid diet" throughout the Navratri festival, when India's majority Hindus worship mother goddess Durga in all her manifestations. "He will only consume lemonade with some honey and a cup of tea every day," a senior official in Modi's office in New Delhi told Reuters".

The much delayed declaration of his married status and his abandonment of his wife (see Mehta 2014 for her account) very early on in his life is presented as his passion for the service of the nation which could not brook any obstacles of family life. This is also narrated as part of the reason why he cannot possibly be corrupt or be prone to corruption, with the explanation that he has no family to accrue riches for and is thus above the lure of money.

Drawing upon ethnographic and historical studies, Copeman and Ikegame (2012: 316, 320) in their study of 'guru-logics' referring to the link between sexuality and Indian nationalism, explain:

> While western masculinity was based on physical strength, its eastern counterpart was viewed as an embodiment of spiritual strength deriving from self-control over

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[12] For a detailed analysis of the various phases of Gujarati subnationalism and dissent, see Bobbio 2012.

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bodily desires and especially total restraint from sex…Echoing the militant ascetics of the eighteenth-century [Pinch 2012]…the ideal model of the ascetic nationalist develops pure loyalty towards the nation and the vital force derived from complete self-control becomes a strong force for countering colonial domination…Traditionally women have been completely excluded from the gurukula system in which student-disciples reside with the guru and study at his feet, enabling master-gurus and student-disciples to develop intimate relationships and lineages of philosophical thought. Women represent 'domesticity' (marriage, kinship, practicality), defined in opposition to the kinless creation of the guru lineage, within which they thus cannot hope to participate…gurus' 'kinlessness' can cause them to be viewed as trustworthy political actors.

Modi has also projected himself as paternal - as a father figure. During his campaigning for the 2014 elections, he even went to the extent of saying that the opposition candidate Rahul Gandhi's sister and a public figure, Priyanka Gandhi, was "like his daughter" (a statement that was reportedly later edited out of the national TV channel Doordarshan interview, see DNA 2014) and the BJP spokesperson said: "Somebody, a father's age referring to a girl as a daughter is reflective of Indian culture. He said it in that spirit". Priyanka Gandhi's response was: "I am Rajiv Gandhi's daughter" (see PTI 2014).

In 2015 again, Modi on his radio programme (*Mann Ki Baat*, literally Heart-Talk) launched a "nationwide social media campaign for fathers and daughters to take selfies together, and post them on Twitter with the hashtag #SelfieWithDaughter" (Sharma 2015) as a campaign for the girl child. These attempts to project himself as a paternal figure point to the political significance of the 'father figure' mythology. Bollywood actors like Saif Ali Khan have gushed about Modi as a warm paternal figure, and a Gujarati actress even went on to say that "Narendra Modi is a father figure for all girls in India". While the Selfie with Daughter campaign (originally the idea of a Haryana village leader) has been mentioned by Modi in places like the Wembley spectacle in London in November 2015, Ehsan Jafri's daughter posted a photo of herself with her father who was ~~was~~ killed by a Hindu mob (FirstPost 2015):

> PM Modi may have come a long way from the days when he was Gujarat chief minister, but some people seem to remember his tenure well, especially the 2002 Gujarat riots that claimed several lives. One of the lives lost in the Gulberg Society massacre was that of Congress MP Ehsan Jafri. He was brutally murdered by a violent Hindu mob and his house was burnt down on 28 February, 2002. While his wife Zakia Jafri is still fighting for justice, his daughter Nishrin Jafri Hussain on Sunday night shared a photo with her father with the 'SelfieWithDaughter'. In her post, she said, 'SelfieWithDaughter: This one will haunt him for ever'. This post proved to be a chilling reminder of how the riots have scarred hundreds of lives. And as the PM seems to have moved on, those who suffered during the riots still remember.

As Borneman (2004: 4) argues: "among the most notable aspects of totalitarian regimes is their reliance on both pre-modern and modern forms of sovereignty, death-cults and bio-politics, as well as a demand for subjective identification with the father" (cited in Pandya 2016: 81). The ascetic and paternal elements of 'idealised' Hindutva imaginary also interlink and find their counterpart in the projection of its opposite onto 'the Muslims' who are legitimised as targets of violence by virtue of being seen as meat-eating, sexually aggressive and overpopulating 'Other' (see Ghassem-Fachandi 2009: 77 for the rationalisation of lack of vulnerability of Muslims by reference to diet, worship and sexuality, see also Anand 2005).

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Finally, the Modi mythology of the decisive ruler is what allows him to be represented as 'efficient'. In various government reports and assessments, there is a repeated emphasis on how BJP-led Modi is a government that does things 'quickly'. Bureaucracy, planning, legislation, inspections, regulatory safeguards are all seen as barriers to the smooth, quick and ostensibly 'efficient' mode of governance that is championed by Modi. Jaffrelot (2015: 157) writes about the Modi-centric BJP campaign of 2014 and how preceding the elections, a large number of people from various backgrounds decided to switch allegiance to Modi for various reasons, including that Modi had shown in Gujarat that he was "very fast" in taking decisions. In just about a month after taking power, Modi dismantled all empowered groups of ministers (EGoMs) and groups of ministers (GoMs) that were groups of Ministers who were tasked by the PM to decide on key policy matters and resolve differences. As a result of the change, ministries would decide directly and if they faced any difficulties, the cabinet secretariat and PM's office would step in (see Chatterji 2014). Of course, this faster governance mode requires less delegation of authority and more centralisation of power (for details, see Manor 2015), but it also means much less deliberation and definite adverse effects,[13] though yet again the personality cult is deployed to insist that there is debate because the PM works extra-hard to consider well, but also quickly.[14]

Over a year later, Modi again promised to American CEOs to make decisions faster, and reduce the role of government in business, saying "The world is not going to wait for us. I know that", and prompting News Corp.'s Murdoch to tweet: "Great hour with Indian PM Modi. Best leader with best policies since independence, but massive task to achieve in most complex nation" (Jha and Singh 2015). In a complex nation, the very structures of democratic deliberation have come to be seen as the hurdle and fast-thinking is seen as the governance answer.[15] The connotations of decisiveness in this context are not merely

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[13] Like the environment and impact on tribal welfare, for example (Singh 2014):
> Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar said on Thursday that there is not a single file pending in his ministry. The Expert Appraisal Committee, a body which examines environmental projects and its impact, cleared 217 projects in three months while former environment ministry under Jairam Ramesh had cleared 212 files in seven months…Instead of afforesting twice the area being cut for a project, the ministry permitted the Indian Border Roads Organisation to afforest only as much area as being deforested…The Modi-government is also considering changes in Forest Right Act, which would take away tribal's veto power to stop government from felling trees for infrastructural projects.

In subsequent years, there has indeed been a dilution of the Forest Right Act (see Karat 2016):
> The National Board for Wildlife, with the Prime Minister as Chairperson, was reconstituted, slashing the number of independent experts from 15 members to three, packing it with subservient officials. In the first three months of assuming office, the Modi government cleared 33 out of 41 proposals diverting over 7,000 hectares of forest land. Of this the major share was for Gujarat companies. In two years the clearances for projects have included "diversion" — or more appropriately land grab — to the extent of 1.34 lakh [1.34 hundred thousand] hectares of forest land. In many areas this will lead to massive displacement of tribal communities.

[14] In 2017, responding to the Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen's critique of demonetisation, Modi said "Hard work is more powerful than Harvard" (NDTV 2017), demonstrating yet again a reliance on performance and catchphrases than substantive rebuttals to policy critiques.

[15] Studies have sought to analyse the way in which fast thinking dominates in political exchange in contemporary democracies, linking a marketisation of politics to the devaluation of politics. In their study of UK focus groups, Stoker, Hay and Barr (2016: 18) state: "Modern marketing techniques favoured by political elites lead invariably down the path of reinforcing the fast thinking mode".

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related to swiftness, but also to the definitiveness. The understanding is that a 'strong' leader is someone who can enact a plan, come what may. The consequences, even when they extend to unnecessary hardship endured by millions, are ~~sought to be~~ justified by appeal to this virtue. The demonetisation policy declared by Modi in November 2016, was presented as a 'surgical strike on black money'. Coming not long after the summer of intense killing and maiming by the indiscriminate use of pellet guns by Indian security forces on the Kashmiris (who are seen as 'traitorous Muslims') staging an anti-India uprising for freedom, and the 'surgical strike on Pakistan' that successfully deflected the world's attention from the atrocities in Kashmir, the metaphor of the 'surgical strike' used this time for the economy, served to convey the move of a decisive leader. The most commonly used Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes were deemed worthless overnight and though it boosted the fortunes of corporates in the electronic money trade, a majority of those in the informal sector were badly affected, queues stretched for miles outside cash dispensing ATMs, numerous people died trying to access their own money, several sectors of the economy slowed down; even so, the move was seen as 'bold' and 'decisive', something only a leader like Modi could have undertaken. Sure enough, a few months afterwards, the voters in UP gave BJP and its decisive Hindutva agenda (in a state with around 38 million Muslims, the BJP fielded not a single Muslim candidate, creating and consolidating their Hindu base, see Saldanha 2017) victory again. As mentioned earlier, this victory led to Yogi Adityanath's appointment as CM, and consumers of meat and romance are already being targeted in the state by violent Hindu militias (BS 2017, Gowen 2017), while Modi maintains his strategic silence.

The Modi myth of an ascetic, paternal and decisive leader serves to legitimise his authoritarianism and promote him as an icon who is both a champion of Hindus and of business. His Hindutva leadership is astute in the way it combines and builds upon popular idioms of mass speech with what is sought to be promoted. As a political strategy, this brings together popular idioms with new proposals in innovative ways. It has been an important part of the Modi campaign success in 2014 and onwards. Take for example the slogan "Ab ki baar, Modi Sarkar" (this time, Modi government); this rhyming (in Hindi) catchphrase gained enormous currency during the campaign so that even attempts to ridicule it were forced to repeat the phrase as they modified it and thus added to its circulation.[16]

Through suitable political advertising, the interest alignments can, at times, work seamlessly; but there is no dearth of obvious contradictions between following policies favouring big business while claiming to be a 'Development Man' working for all. So, while the Modi Myth has insulated the right-wing movement in India from the fallout of failed promises for many marginalised sections of society, its perpetuation cannot be understood without taking into account the management of conflicting interests through the use of what can best be referred to as 'forked tongue' speech. Modi-led BJP's positioning of itself as a government spanning the interests of Hindutva and business and development generates a fair share of ambiguities and contradictions in terms of their competing and often contradictory foci — for instance, those voted for Modi solely or primarily for 'development' expect access to infrastructure and a better quality of life, those who see him as a muscular 'Hindutva' leader expect him to promote the traditional conservative religious values along the lines of 'make India a Hindu nation', the 'business' interests expect him to be a deregulating free-market reformer. While some Hindutva figures have

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[16] So much so that Trump used it in his campaign as well, saying "Ab ki baar, Trump sarkar" (PTI 2016a).

reinvented themselves and come into prominence as indigenous industrialists (such as yoga guru Baba Ramdev with his Patanjali industries that aspires to drive out multinationals, thus profitably combining anti-western herbal signified products with consumerism and conservatism, for example, see Sandhu 2016), by far, the rank and file of his hardline Hindutva supporters who act to enforce 'beef ban' and force closure of meat shops or organise into 'anti-Romeo' squads, are in direct opposition to those who benefit from India being one of the world's largest exporter of beef, or those diaspora Hindu supporters who like to think of themselves as 'model minority' Indians overseas as opposed to the Islamophobic idea of 'conservative' Muslims in the West. Modi's nativist backers who would like him to make India proud and get the Kohinoor diamond back from the British crown are in stark contrast to his international/Western trade and business allies who want modernisation of commerce and ever greater access across all sectors in the Indian market.

The management of these contradictions in the Modi-led BJP government policies requires strategies that enable the tensions between the various distinct interests to remain profitable and productive. In order to cope with the disparate interests, Modi-led BJP adopts a deliberate stance of systematic inconsistency, such as what the term 'speaking with a forked tongue' implies. Additionally, the fact that the Sangh Parivar family of rightwing organisations cover a wide spectrum of society makes it possible for the final responsibility for any incendiary action to be perpetually deferred or ignored.[17] Altogether, the BJP, RSS and the entire Sangh Parivar are a dynamic, synergistic multi-headed hydra bent upon a far-right conservative revolution. However, the iconic face of all this is Modi, the man of mythical leadershp qualities, who can be everything to everyone, within India and overseas, through his use of silence, denial of responsibility and forked tongue speech.

In the following section, I give some examples of forked tongue speech in order to manage dual domains of corporate/grassroots, national/international, and India/Bharat. Here it can be said that this government has sought to use the colonial strategy of 'divide and rule' as well as 'define and rule' (Mamdani 2012). What might at first strike as dichotomous domains - for instance, favouring big business or favouring the poor, are combined by a strategy of using different idioms that present their interests as uniform. In doing so, the propagation of a neoliberal subjectivity and high-technology capital intensive solutions favoured by corporates becomes essential, so that people see good governance as least role of the government in providing services; instead, the government lauds people who provide for themselves what the government should provide as public goods.

Take the example of the Modi speech where he coined a word "Rurban" by combining Rural and Urban. As he launched his "Rurban Mission" in Dongargad in Chattisgarh, he said: "Previous governments had the habit of doing everything by sitting in Delhi. They would invite 200 to 400 people to the Vigyan Bhavan in Delhi and light some candles [at the launch of programmes]. Some media friends also used to help them. But I have brought the government out of Delhi and among the people" (Dahat 2016). On this occasion, Modi praised a 104-year-old woman from the State for selling her goats to build a toilet in her home and called her a "symbol of new development". This new

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[17] The BJP is, in effect, the political wing of the RSS (see Sharma 2016), but this latter, a nationwide rightwing paramilitary, claims an social service NGO status (it has been banned at various periods in India's history). PM Modi himself is a lifelong member of the RSS (an organisation which has also produced terrorists, see Daniyal 2017), government ministers have given presentations of their policies to the RSS, see NDTV 2015).

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developmnent would combine the soul of the village with the facilities of the city; "Aaatma hogi gaon ki, aur suvidha hogi shahar ki" (see Ghose 2016). He further explained that Rurban symbolised "the culmination of rural and urban. Development should be in such a way that its soul should be in the villages and the cities should be its body. The mission will reduce pressure on the cities and provide a new avenue to the village people" (Dahat op cit).

By reference to the "soul of development" and "development with a soul", he sought to moralise development as a duty, but then also delegate the responsibility for that duty onto the people themselves. The fact that a 104 year old woman had to sell her goats in order to build a toilet while the government was focusing on creating smart technological hubs was not seen as a failure of government, but as a success of the new governance system which focused on development with a soul. Moreover, he said that he appreciated the courageous decision of the local body in one village (Ambagad village in Rajnandgaon) to impose penalty for open defecation, adding that "he, being the Prime Minister, was reluctant of levying any new taxes" (NDTV 2016b). In spite of his Swacch Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission) aim of eliminating open defecation by 2019, commentators noted that the 2015 budget cut the allocation to the programme to Rs 3,500 crore[18] from Rs 4,260 crore and much less than the originally promised Rs 134,000 crore over five years, stating: "With this amount of money, the government will hardly be able to build a toilet for every household lacking one in the next five years as was originally promised" (Vyas 2015). In 2016, this allocation was increased significantly, with the Union Finance Minister linking the Modi-led BJP policy to lay a claim on the legacy of Gandhi; "this (cleanliness) subject was very close to the heart of the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi" (PTI 2016b, see also Overdorf 2017).[19]

Another duality to be manipulated in this manner has been the nation/al versus international domains. When Modi has been in India, he has maintained a studious silence on the numerous instances of communal bigotry and brutal lynchings and killings by Hindutva groups. When he has been on his much publicised overseas visits, he has spoken of tolerance and secularism. Jaffrelot and Therwath (2007) argue that the overseas Indian diaspora has long been an instrumental force in the rise of Hindutva and in turn has been re-Hinduised by the Indian state.[20] Bhatt and Mukta (2000: 438) provide a comprehensive account of the ways in which diaspora Hindutva movement has concerned itself with minorities and majorities in the West and in India, writing that "It [diaspora Hindutva movement] is as concerned with its minority ethnic and religious rights in the

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[18] One crore is equivalent to ten million.

[19] Toilets have become central to political rights in other frightening ways too. As the noted lawyer Indira Jaising writes (Jaising 2015):

> The judgment of the Supreme Court in the Raj Bala case deals a near fatal blow to the health of the Indian democracy. In essence, the court has held that those who have no formal education, those who have no "functioning toilet" and those who are in rural indebtedness cannot contest an election for the position of sarpanch.The judgment effectively disenfranchises – and it recognises this – 68% of Scheduled Caste women, 41% of Scheduled Caste men and over 50% of all women in Haryana from contesting a panchayat election. Several other BJP-ruled states including Rajasthan have similar restrictions.

[20] Overseas Hindus as ambassadors of Hinduism is an old project of Hindutva. The view is that the civilisational greatness of Hindutva is 'naturally' inclined to flow beyond national borders. Jaffrelot and Therwath (2007: 280) quote RSS leader Golwalkar: "…the one supreme conviction that we are a great people charged with World Mission, should be ever vibrant in our breasts…"

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West as it is with the 'majority rights of Hindus' in India". They rightly point out that "the unequal power geometry of globalization that is concentrated in the West can create significant advantages for diaspora Hindutva movements in their relationships with India" (ibid.). And indeed, one could say that the global backdrop of heightened Islamophobia since the attacks on World Trade Centre in 2001; the racism and prejudice in many debates around multiculturalism in the Western countries; and the aggressive mode of state backed-up neoliberal capitalism of socialised risk for the corporations and rollback of welfare for the public have all given a fillip to the 'Rising Powers' discourse and a postcolonial resurgence whereby the failed combination of liberal democracies and post-crash economies in the West have made business compromises on the applicability of universal human rights discourses in relation to countries like China and India, or perhaps, have come to exchange the consistently hypocritical instrumentalisation of human rights discourses in return for the continued ability to deploy terrorism discourses on the same terms.

In any case, this global backdrop has certainly been propitious for Hindutva and for Modi-led BJP. The mythology of the 'Gujarat miracle'[21] trumped the reality of the Gujarat riots. On his foreign visits, Modi has also taken credit for the pride that Indians now feel in the world at large, as opposed to the shame they felt earlier.[22] Likewise, Modi has been filmed laughing about demonetisation when abroad in Japan, but getting tearful about the same when in Goa in India (Huffpost 2016). He has refused to wear the symbolic Muslim skullcap when in India, but visited mosques abroad in UAE (Express News Service 2015).

For all the nationalist Hindutva fervour of the new India as a global player, Modi government in April 2016, flummoxed everyone by saying that the Kohinoor diamond was "neither forcibly taken not stolen" but a gift to Britain, and reversing the nationalist line that it ought to be brought back as an act of a rising post-colonial nation. However, as soon as

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[21] Jaffrelot (2013: 84) unravels some of this:

> Gujarat ranks only tenth out of 21 states in terms of Human Development Index…Indeed, Gujarat is a case of social polarization with new rich in the cities and most of the groups which are at the receiving end concentrated in the villages. The number of families below the poverty line has jumped from 23.39 lakhs in 2000 to 30.49 lakhs in July 2012…Unsurprisingly, 9 of the 11 lakh houses without electricity according to the Gujarat 2011 census are in rural areas…Dalits [oppressed castes] and Adivasis [oppressed tribals] (respectively 11.3 and 16.5 per cent of the state population) are even more specifically affected. For instance, the percentage of tribal underweight children (0 to 5 years old) is much higher in Gujarat than the tribal average at the national level (64.5 per cent compared to 54.5 per cent). The under five mortality rate of tribal children is also much higher. Similarly, the percentage of Dalit participation in the NREGA programme is three times less in Gujarat (7.83 percent) than in India at large (22.67 per cent)…In fact, development has meant socio-economic polarization, because Gujarat is a typical case of growth without development for all.

[22] See DNA (2015):

> Addressing the Indian diaspora in Seoul, Modi said, "There was a time when people used to feel that what sin they committed in their past life which resulted in taking birth in India, is this what you call a country and a government, is this how the people are, let's leave it and go somewhere else, and people did leave. Now I can say it with firm belief that intelligent people from all walks of life, renowned scientists too, even if they are earning big abroad but now they are eager and happy to come back and settle India for even lesser incomes," he said. In Shanghai, Modi had said, "Indians were feeling pessimistic about their own country till recently but my government has tried its best during its first year in office to change that.

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it faced a barrage of criticism for this, it reversed its stance yet again and stated that it "reiterates its resolve to make all possible efforts to bring back the Kohinoor diamond in an amicable manner" (Express News Service 2016). Scholars have previously highlighted in the ways in which Modi's tenure in Gujarat was marked by a strategy of never taking responsibility for anything that went wrong, and projecting any blame meant for him as being a collective slur and disrespect to all Gujaratis (Bobbio 2013). As Manor (2015: 746) puts it in his study of multiple antagonisms that mark the precarious enterprise of Modi government: "The key point here is Modi's tendency first to avoid risky situations, and second to duck responsibility when things go wrong". In much the same way, when the stance on the Kohinoor was reversed, there was extra emphasis on blaming India's first PM Nehru for his view on the matter, while trying to project Modi as being the saviour yet again.

Finally, there is the juxtaposition of Bharat versus India. The Hindutva version of India is 'Bharat' (literally, the Hindi word for India), which stands not just for a country that is India, but also connotes an idyll of pure Hindutva morality where there is no Westernisation or its associated ills. For instance, the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has said "Rapes do not happen in Bharat, they happen in India" (NDTV 2013). At various times, Bharat is rural India, historical pure India, or an imaginary of India that Hindus (and Indians, who are in this view, Hindus above all their other identities) must work to create. However, with the neoliberal nationalist discourse, this bifurcation has also come to signify the idea of a richer metropolitan urban India versus the poorer rural India. And there are debates that refer to this latter way of connoting urban rich/rural poor divide, but this imaginary of nation is generally used so as to include the moral dimension and degree of westernisation/indigenous purity. The meanings shift in relation to the framing, a columnist writes (Mid-Day, 29 December 2013): "And so, depending on the context, India becomes liberal to feudal homophobic patriarchal Bharat, or India becomes Western stooges to traditional, rooted and grounded Bharat. Depending on the context, government policies seem to favour either India or Bharat. Depending on the context, India has to learn from Bharat or Bharat has to learn from India". The argument here seeks to emphasise that the entities 'Bharat' and India are constructed for particular political purposes.

Modi-led BJP functions through speech and performance that brings together diverse or contradictory imaginaries and reconciles them in a way that makes it suitable for different audiences among the electorate. Increasingly, it is recognised that politics is a performance as much as anything else. Rai (2015: 1194) notes how analysing politics through a performative lens "allows us to make judgements about the authenticity, legitimacy and liminality of both political claim-making and claim-makers. It does so by holding together in one frame — rather than separately — the body, stage, speech and performative labour that goes into institutional and individual performance through which claims are made". This is not to give an impression of performance as something unsubstantial or shallow, in opposition to a deeper actual political realm. It is rather to draw attention to the ways in which the Hindutva ideology of brings together disparate and opposed ideas and presents them in a self-serving manner by using the politics of perfomance. The politics of spectacle has been pursued by Modi, especially in relation to the ways in which he has created a politics through the televisual gaze. It is a politics of the camera almost, as is embarrassingly evident on occasions when he has pushed and pulled other politicians and celebrities into or out of the frame in order to keep himself centrestage (see Bose 2015).

Conclusion

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<u>In patterns similar to emergence of rightwing populist 'strong' leaders in different democratic countries, India is witnessing a shift toward majoritarian nationalism that has similarities with historic fascism.</u> In this paper, I have argued that understanding the rise and entrenchment of the right wing Modi-led BJP in contemporary India requires an unravelling of the Modi-mix of 'Hindutva' and 'Development'; this mix continues to be salient for numerous Indians and others who are held in thrall to the Modi myth. I have provided an account of how this myth functions and the ways in which it can often be insulated against the fallout of failed promises by the strategic dualities that are created and maintained to manage the conflicting interests of a diverse population. Undoubtedly, rising violence of all kinds and the proliferation of censorship in India is likely to continue, and it will likewise be cosmetically denounced by those who encourage and perpetrate it; the question is how long before the dramatic and toxic transformation of this ostensible 'free market democracy' gets greater global attention?

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