

**GENDERED  
ASSUMPTIONS  
AND  
WOMEN'S LIVED  
EXPERIENCES:**

*Interrogating “Violent Extremism”  
and political violence from  
the standpoint of women*

**RADICALIZATION PAPER / INDIA**



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All those involved in the writing of this report are unable to identify themselves due to the danger to their safety in the current political context in India.

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# PREHISTORY OF PRESENT-DAY HINDUTVA

An essay on the history of right-wing Hindu fundamentalism or Hindutva and the more recent resolute creation of a default Hindu nation-state can possibly begin at many different historical moments. Here Hindutva is used to refer to the political ideology of various groups within the Hindu right that seek to forefront Hinduism and “Hindus” as the entities to be protected at all costs against imagined threats from the “other.”<sup>1</sup> While the meaning of the term is historically contingent, it is used in all its malleability in its broad sense in this paper.

The history of Hindutva then could begin in 1925 with the founding of the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh in Nagpur. This organization, which remains at the core of this brand of politics in both ideology and practice, is an important factor in this history. It could begin at independence-partition. In this moment there are many examples of the setting up of the foundations of the Indian nation-state as tied to “Hindu” identity even while Dr. Ambedkar put in place a constitution that decentred religion and established secularism as an integral part of the constitutional morality of the new nation. It can begin with the horrors of partition where, in some parts of the country, the sparks of communalism could fly and spread with speed and vengeance. It could begin with the moment when the RSS member Nathuram Godse murdered Mahatma Gandhi. The different elements that make up the history of Hindu fundamentalism in India – caste, neoliberalism, undemocratic governance etc. – can be traced back to literally any given point in the history of this region that is now “India.” Indira Gandhi’s 21-month emergency rule could be marked as a watershed moment for the consolidation of modes of hegemonic governmental power that can disregard democracy in its entirety.

For the sake of this analysis, working backwards from the various socio-political and economic strands that are highlighted as part of this history, we begin with the protests against the 1979 Mandal Commission reports’ measures in 1990.<sup>2</sup> This commission increased “reservation,” the Indian term for affirmative action, for “Other Backward Castes” (OBC) a census-based term for non-brahmin, non-Dalit castes, in education and employment, including in government jobs. This dealt a blow to the never-before challenged sole entitlement over education and employment by the upper castes – the Brahmins. The Prime Minister, in 1990, V.P. Singh was committed to executing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. Interestingly, the commission also coincided with the opening up of the market at a scale not seen before in independent India.

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1. <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/on-the-difference-between-hinduism-and-hindutva/>

2. This first section is largely based on interviews with Uma Chakravarti and Rajshri Dasgupta who both lived through these times and were functioning in the public realm as a teacher/public intellectual/activist and journalist respectively.

Speculation arose at that time that the commission itself was a distraction from the opening up of the market – a move that would be moving away from the traditional economic policies of the country thus far, which was socialist in a way specific to the post-independence context in India.<sup>3</sup> This attempt to execute the Mandal Commission was met with massive protests. Many upper caste men burnt themselves alive. In cities such as Delhi and Bombay, upper caste students, mainly young men, organized extensively and held protests regularly. The arguments of merit vs. reservations, the danger of reservations for the upper castes etc., are alive and well in India and manifest as the prevalent casteist culture in education and employment.<sup>4</sup>

As these protests raged in different parts of the country, in 1989, L.K. Advani, a leader of the right-wing Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party, began to mobilize the masses to journey to Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, a town in Uttar Pradesh. Here, a mosque built in at least the 16th C, if not earlier, was to be demolished and a Ram temple was to be built as Ram was believed to have been born at that exact spot where the mosque stood. Advani began a Rath Yatra (Chariot Journey) calling upon “Kar Sewaks.” The term literally means those who provide religious services voluntarily. It has now come to connote Hindu fundamentalist volunteers in India. These Kar Sewaks were to journey with him to Ayodhya to destroy the mosque. The Yatra ended on October 30th of that year. A connection between V.P. Singh's decision to execute the Mandal Commission recommendations and Advani's Rath Yatra became central to the right-wing discourse that claimed that V.P. Singh was dividing “Indians” in the name of caste while Advani was “uniting” “Indians” (read Hindus) with the call to build the Ram temple. The Rath Yatra put the BJP on the political map in electoral terms nationally and also consolidated the BJP's resolutely Hindu fundamentalist identity which was only to be honed further in the years to come. Advani too was mobilizing non-brahmin, non-Dalit communities whose socio-economic rights the Mandal recommendations sought to affirm. Thus, the caste dynamics of these parallel occurrences were much more complex. But to Advani, the non-brahmin, non-Dalits were Hindu/Indian as the two are interchangeable for him and his party. That religious/national identity was spoken of as a uniting force in the midst of the “caste tensions” caused by V.P. Singh.

A good example of the Hindutva modus operandi at this time was the Bhagalpur Riots of late 1989. The Hindutva brigade entered the village and asked the people what the main issue was. The Other Backward Caste (OBC) community there of “Hindus” brought up land issues – an unsurprising element in most parts of the country. The owners of small parcels of land in this area were of the Islamic faith. The two communities have been living in connection with one another for a long time. The Hindutva brigade spun the issue into one between Hindus and Muslims. The entire village was complicit and actively participated in murdering the Muslim landlords. They buried the bodies in the very fields that they had violently taken over, after they has already filled up the wells with bodies. Later they grew cauliflowers on those fields.

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3. Bhikhu Parekh, *Nehru and the National Philosophy of India*, *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, No. 1/2 (1991): 35–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4397189>.

4. <https://epw.in/engage/article/rohith-vemula-foregrounding-caste-oppression>

The People's Union for Democratic Rights fact-finding commission found that the members of the Hindutva Brigade in the area and more disturbingly, the villagers themselves proudly declared their gruesome actions.<sup>5</sup> The two main things to take away from this are the ways in which Hindutva modes of operating work closely and intricately with local dynamics of caste, land ownership etc., which are then painted in religious colours, and the method of making the entire community complicit in the violence thus ensuring a context of complete impunity. We see strands of this same mode of functioning as late as the Gujarat Carnage in 2002.

During this period, riots such as that which occurred in Bhagalpur and many others were not covered extensively in the national media. Another major set of riots with a similar modus operandi called the Khurja Riots of 1991-92 also did not receive nearly enough attention in the national media.<sup>6</sup> In general, in terms of elite discourses which in turn inform media visibility, those living through that time may not have recognised the right-wing discourse of the connections between V.P. Singh's "dividing nation through caste" and Advani's "uniting nation through religion."<sup>7</sup> Thus, these riots may not have been seen as being part of a larger picture which is now visible in hindsight. The lack of visibility of these violent incidents contributed to a lack of awareness around the emergence and strengthening of Hindutva ideology. This may be one among the many reasons why many who were active political adults in 1992 watched in shock and horror as the Babri Masjid was reduced to rubble in a matter of hours. At that time, they believed that the courts in UP that had put a stay order on attempts to demolish the mosque would prevail. Or that politicians such as Lalu Prasad Yadav from Bihar who opposed the rath yatra would hold some power to stop it. But nothing stopped it and the mosque came down. In hindsight, we know that there was no going back from Hindu-India from December 6th 1992.

The 1990s is marked by liberalization of the economy inaugurated by V.P. Singh and taken forward by all governments that followed, irrespective of party affiliations. Liberalization meant that privatization became the norm. There was a large amount of loss of jobs. It was a resolute abandoning of the working classes.<sup>8</sup> In Bombay for instance, age-old state-run industrial plants were being privatized and workers were left jobless and distraught, making for tensions. These tensions became ripe ground for planting seeds of discord in the name of religion. Meanwhile, there were even discourses circulating among the upper classes that there isn't a need to protest this much about the Mandal changes as the private sector was emerging and ready for the taking of any number of people and the upper castes can find their place in it. We know now that they have indeed found their place. But this did not quell the anti-Mandal, anti-reservation expressions then and it hasn't now.

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5. Interview with Uma Chakravarti and People' Union for Democratic Rights 1989 report on the riots at: <http://new.hrsjm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Bhagalpur-Bihar-Riot-1989-report-by-PUDR.pdf>

6. [https://www.academia.edu/21782673/2\\_May\\_1992\\_Khurja\\_riots\\_1990\\_91\\_Understanding\\_the\\_conjecture\\_by\\_Uma\\_Chakravarti\\_Prem\\_Chowdhury\\_Pradipta\\_Dutta\\_Zoya\\_Hasan\\_Kumkum\\_Sangari\\_and\\_Tanika\\_Sarkar\\_Economic\\_and\\_Political\\_Weekly\\_pp\\_951\\_965](https://www.academia.edu/21782673/2_May_1992_Khurja_riots_1990_91_Understanding_the_conjecture_by_Uma_Chakravarti_Prem_Chowdhury_Pradipta_Dutta_Zoya_Hasan_Kumkum_Sangari_and_Tanika_Sarkar_Economic_and_Political_Weekly_pp_951_965)

7. Interview with Uma Chakravarti and Rajashri Dasgupta

8. Ibid

A useful way to understand the impact of liberalization in the spread and solidification of Hindutva is through a gender perspective. Through the description above, in every instance, caste/religion/nation was read onto and imposed upon women's bodies.

Whether it is as symbols of honour or targets of dishonouring. With the liberalization of economy, there was an increased emphasis on bringing women "into the economy." This meant bringing them into the capitalist production structures as workers to yield profits for companies. Needless to say, women's unpaid care work within and beyond the home was unacknowledged then as it is now. Also, women workers, like men, were brought to the streets with the loss of jobs due to privatization.

Women's role in this emergent neoliberalism is clearly seen in the explosion of their presence in the media as consumers, sellers, and symbols of the newly emerging market. This explosion was an important by-product of the sudden increase in the sheer number of media outlets, be they television channels or magazines. Uma Chakravarti's analysis of "State, Market and Freedom of Expression: Women and Electronic Media"<sup>9</sup> analyses advertisements, TV serials and the news to show how the neoliberal changes propagated a façade of "choice" while actually building a singular image of the "Indian family" and thus by extension a singular society and nation.

Women are at the centre of the portrayals that are responsible for this contradictory project that propagated "choice" while furthering singularity. Perhaps the most important point Chakravarti makes in this article written in the year 2000 is the replacing of state or any regulatory body with "the market" as the censoring body. The "market" comes to decide which portrayals will stay and which will no longer be part of the media. Interestingly the "market" forefronts portrayals that can show a "shining" India where a caste- and religion-bound Indian family can choose from a million different tv channels which advertise a large number of products that they are to either buy or aspire to buy. And thus, the neoliberal universe in India begins to be consolidated.

It is in this context that the Gujarat carnage occurred in 2002. Not surprisingly, Gujarat with its Chief Minister at that time, Narendra Modi, had already emerged as a shining example of the victory of neoliberalism. Narendra Modi was granted the chief minister post as a prize for managing the Rath Yatra by Advani so deftly. This well-documented and analyzed carnage of the Muslim community points to crucial ways of operating that the BJP has perfected since then. The complicity of an entire community in brutal violence witnessed in Bhagalpur in 1989 was seen in a much more sophisticated form in Gujarat.

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9. Uma Chakravarti, State, market and freedom of expression: Women and electronic media, Economic and Political Weekly (2000): WS12-WS17.

Even before the beginnings of the violence, the entirety of local administration, judiciary, and police were populated by BJP-VHP-RSS men. The state machinery was used clearly and extensively to identify and murder those who were Muslim. The ways by which this entire machinery worked smoothly to make the carnage possible have since been erased by the acquittal of those responsible for these crimes. These acquittals are substantial victories of the BJP and of Narendra Modi. Interestingly, just as the destruction of the Babri Masjid caused shock, so did the carnage in Gujarat.

By this point, there had been at least ten years of the existence of a robust Hindutva presence in the country. Nevertheless, the blatant complicity of the state in the violence and the planned nature of it, along with the sheer brutality, left many, including myself, in shock.

While the BJP's "India Shining" campaign that sought to forefront neoliberalism in the 2004 elections did not lead to an electoral victory, their consolidation of power continued. The 2000s was a period of the infiltration of predatory neoliberal capital, accompanied by armed forces, to every part of the country. The brutality unleashed upon the forests of Chhattisgarh through Operation Green Hunt<sup>10</sup> and the use of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in the north-eastern states of India are but a few examples of the use of the military to ensure free passage to neoliberal capital in these regions. The use of these laws that give extraordinary powers to the army, police, and other arms of the state is an expansion into the rest of India that which is practised and perfected in areas such as Kashmir and the north-eastern states. These practices were never adequately addressed or resolved in independent India.

The occupation of these regions by the Indian state and army became the model for similar occupations in places like Chhattisgarh. By the late 2000s, the combined might of military and capital was visible for all to see. While the BJP pursued specific militarized neoliberal projects in states where they held power such as Chhattisgarh and Karnataka, the general turn towards armed backing of neoliberal growth was supported by all governments across parties all over the country. By the time Narendra Modi came to power as Prime Minister for the first time in 2014, this process had solid roots in the country and set to grow with ease over time. The abrogation of Article 370 which has denied Kashmir its special status since 2019 onwards is, fundamentally, an effort to increase the spread of "Indian neoliberal capital" as the primary vehicle of the Hindu India agenda into Kashmir. The growth, consolidation, and normativization of Hindutva as a mainstream ideology that is now more widely accepted by many sections of society across India has to be placed in the context of the history outlined above.

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10. See Chapter 6, Operation "Green Hunt" in India: Social Practices of the Genocidal Counterinsurgency Strategy "hearts and minds" by Adolfo Naya Fernández, Foreign Languages Press, 2020.



# POST 2014

Given the historical context outlined above, what follows is a multipronged description and analysis of the ways in which Hindutva has been established as the norm in India since the Modi government has been in power. Even though many elements are a continuation of this history, the remainder of the essay will be dedicated to prying apart, in detail, specific elements within the establishment of the Hindutva agenda.

This agenda is one that seeks to establish a 'Hindu India' with a neoliberal economy by any means necessary. What began in concrete ways as an ideological formation articulated by Advani and his rath yatra, is now being constructed into a structure of state and society that seeks to rewrite the foundational values of India such as democracy, diversity, coexistence, equality, fraternity, and so on. The means used by the current regime in India is a way of furthering extremist ideas through violent means by the state. The extremism and the violence in this process are complex and nuanced. These complexities are outlined below. The entire process is made exponentially dangerous given that it is propagated by the state, the institution that wields utmost power in any society.

## CASTE AND HINDUTVA

### ***Use of existing Caste dynamics to further Hindutva***

As is clear from the pre-2014 period, the dynamics of caste played a crucial role in the shaping of Hindutva at local and national levels. At the national level, the coinciding of the Mandal agitations and Advani's Rath Yatra made for parallel discourses on caste that fed into the spread of Hindutva at that time. Mandal as divisive and Rath Yatra as "uniting" of India was perhaps the first instance of the collapsing of the concepts of "Hindu" and "Indian" in recent history in India. The Rath Yatra "united" "Hindus" who were either of dominant castes or of oppressed castes who felt a sense of belonging by succumbing to dominant ideology. To paint this truth as a "uniting of Indians" planted a seed that has since grown and stands before us today as a toxic tree.

In the current context, caste dynamics play a vital part in the sustenance of Hindutva in places such as Uttar Pradesh where it is already well-established. More worryingly however, is how localized caste dynamics are weaponized by Hindutva in contexts where the framework of "Hindu" does not hold much sway in isolation from caste. What follows are a few examples of that.

The states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh are potent examples of this. The former is one of the few states in the country with a 60% upper caste population. Given this, there is an absence of a rhetoric around subaltern mobilization for fundamental rights or political representation that is seen in many other states in India. Here the BJP work with the dominant presence of upper castes and their political programme is blatantly casteist and unfiltered.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile in Uttar Pradesh, while there is a discourse circulating that the BJP is genuinely popular through the inclusion of oppressed castes, Harish Wankhede shows that they mobilize all non-Dalit votes against the Dalit political party.<sup>12</sup> Given these examples and a general perception that the BJP was an “upper caste party” Jafferlot has argued that “following the failures in 2004 and 2009 elections, it realised that it had to shed its image as an upper caste and elite party to combat the rise of OBC and Dalit politics and found in Narendra Modi the face to do so.”<sup>13</sup>

In accordance with this realization, the BJP has devised multiple tactics in different parts of the country. In Tripura, a state where a separate state has been a demand based on tribal identity, the BJP set up an uneasy affiliation with the tribal political party while also balancing the interests of Bengali Hindus of dominant castes. To the Bengali Hindus they promised a path to citizenship for non-Muslim Bangladeshis through the new discriminatory citizenship act. Simultaneously, they have lured the tribal vote through a promise of inclusion in the National Register of Citizens and through coopting various leaders. In Tamil Nadu, the BJP is mobilizing the Pallars, a Dalit caste, as well as Goundars and Vanniyars who are Backward castes. Tamil Nadu has a long history of Dravidian politics standing up to Indian hegemony, be it against the imposition of Hindi as the ‘national’ language or any other “national symbol.” The BJP had barely any sway in Tamil Nadu except among the minority Brahmins for decades. Recently though they are gaining ground in Tamil Nadu both electorally and in public presence.<sup>14</sup> The Tamil Nadu BJP has boldly threatened to create a separate state only with its caste constituencies in the north and south of the state.<sup>15</sup> While Tamil Nadu still remains a space that defies the Modi influence to a large extent, the expert use of caste dynamics by the BJP is yielding results slowly but surely.<sup>16</sup>

It is possible to do a state-wise analysis of how the BJP is using local caste dynamics to gain ground in different places. They are doing this even as they remain, as Jean Dreze says, “...a lifeboat for the upper castes, in so far as it stands for the restoration of the Brahminical social order that places them at the top. Seen in this light, the recent growth of Hindu nationalism is a major setback for the movement to annihilate caste and bring about a more equal society in India.”<sup>17</sup> One of the most potent types of evidence for this is an analysis of BJP leadership.

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11. <https://www.newsclick.in/Uttarakhand-Upper-Castes-Support-BJP-Preserve-Domination-CPI-Leader-Samar-Bhandari>

12. <https://thewire.in/caste/is-bjp-really-a-party-of-the-subaltern>

13. <https://hindutvawatch.org/caste-quandary-the-social-profile-of-hindu-nationalism-and-its-unease-over-reservations/>

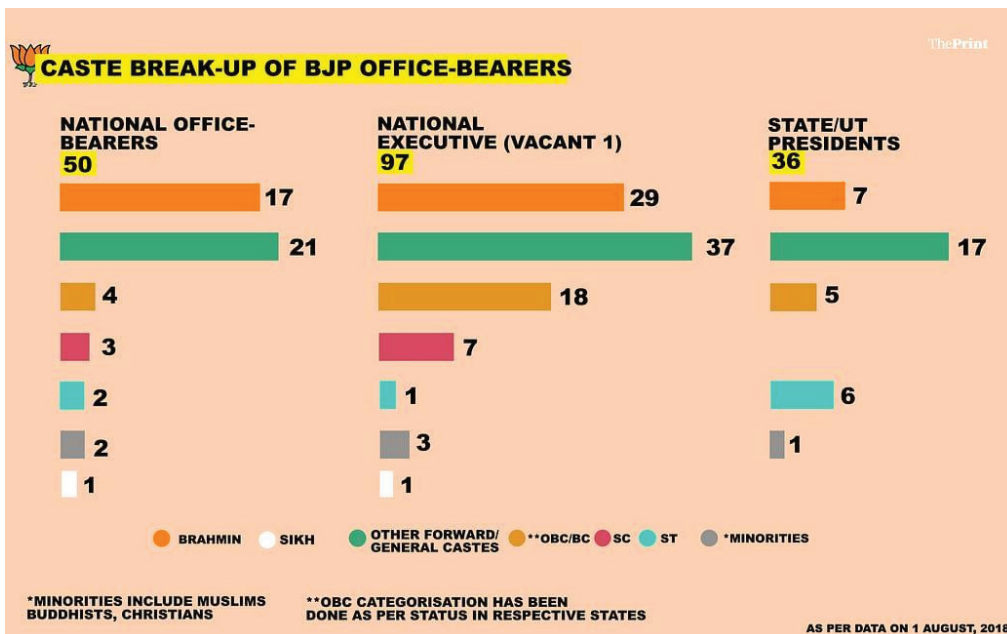
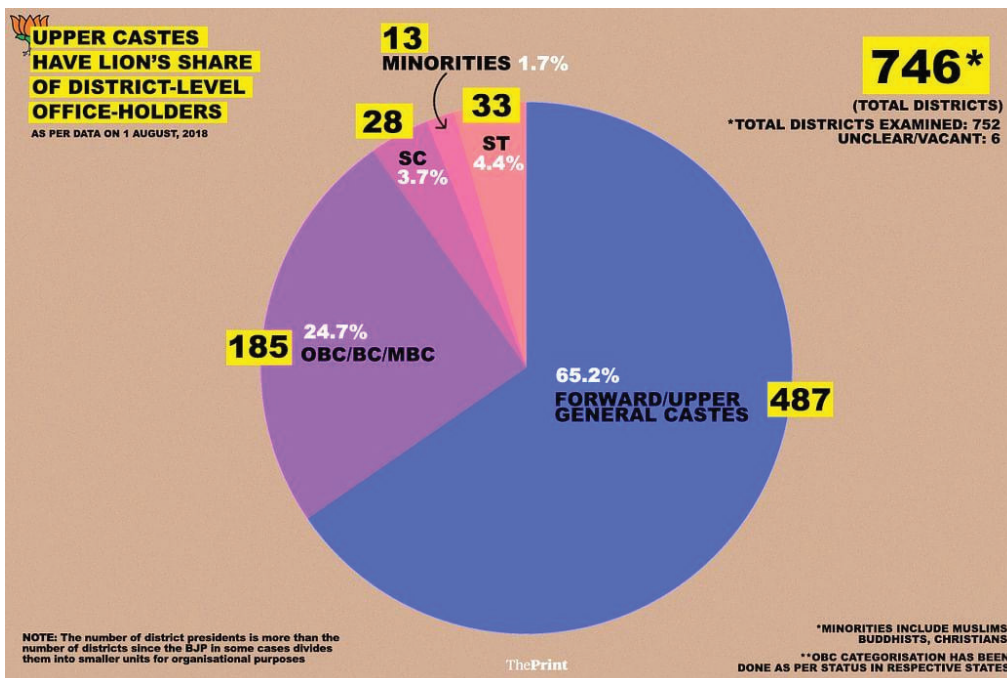
14. <https://theprint.in/india/uma-anandan-lone-bjp-winner-in-chennai-municipal-polls-is-supporter-of-godse-caste/843766/>

15. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/tamil-nadu-will-be-divided-if-needed-bjp-leader-nainar-nagendran-1970642-2022-07-05>

16. <https://www.timesnownews.com/videos/times-now/newshour/is-bjp-gaining-ground-in-tamil-nadu-party-chief-k-annamalai-exclusive-news-hour-agenda-video-92732597>

17. <https://journals.library.brandeis.edu/index.php/caste/article/view/44>

The Print did a detailed analysis of BJP leadership and found that the party remains one of Brahmin-Baniya (non-brahmin upper caste) hegemony.<sup>18</sup> The illustrations below from their analysis make this amply clear:



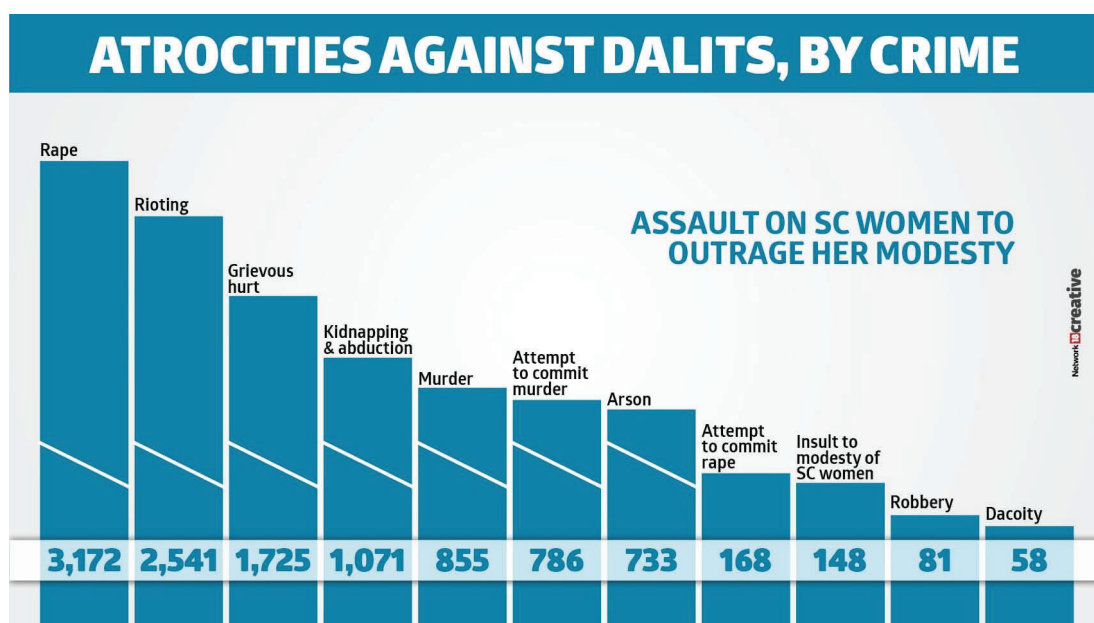
<https://theprint.in/politics/ambekar-on-its-agenda-but-bjp-has-little-place-for-dalits-is-still-a-brahmin-baniya-party/91449/>

18. <https://theprint.in/politics/ambekar-on-its-agenda-but-bjp-has-little-place-for-dalits-is-still-a-brahmin-baniya-party/91449/>

With regard to the use of caste dynamics within the Hindutva project, the inherent faith in maintaining caste-based hierarchy has been combined with a strategic flexibility which makes space for diverse methods of recruitment of different castes into the fold. Hindutva provides oppressed castes a sense of belonging in the “Hindu” ambit, thus giving them the idea of space that is otherwise denied to them while also ensuring that there are no actual material changes to oppressed castes. Given the enormous significance of caste-based politics in all parts of India, this strategy employed by Hindutva forces is deeply worrying and can perhaps only be countered by a fundamental commitment to the annihilation of caste and a deeper understanding of what such a process would mean locally across different parts of India. It then does not come as a surprise that these political manoeuvrings with oppressed castes coexist with direct violence meted out by the Hindutva against them.

### Violence against Dalits

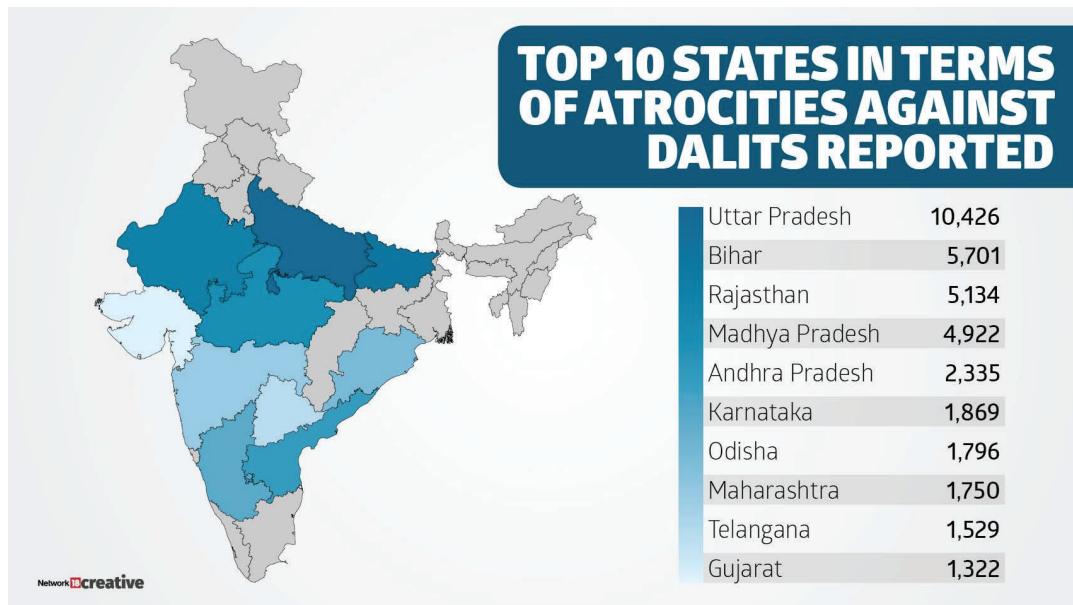
The other unfortunate way in which caste plays a big part in Hindutva mobilization and strengthening is in the form of violence against Dalits. Much of this violence is against Dalit women thus highlighting the all-pervasive gendered dimension in this history. Due to the existence of long-standing social consciousness around this violence and the presence of a few committed news agencies and scholars, there is, to a large extent, documentation of this violence, especially in states where the BJP are powerful and stand upon the shoulders of dominant castes, such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand etc. The existence of the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act also enables segregated data that clearly shows violence upon oppressed caste persons and communities. The data presented below is collected from the National Crime Records Bureau in 2016. The situation is much worse now. A few telling maps from a News18 feature documenting violence against Dalits in 2016 paint a grim and clear picture.<sup>19</sup>



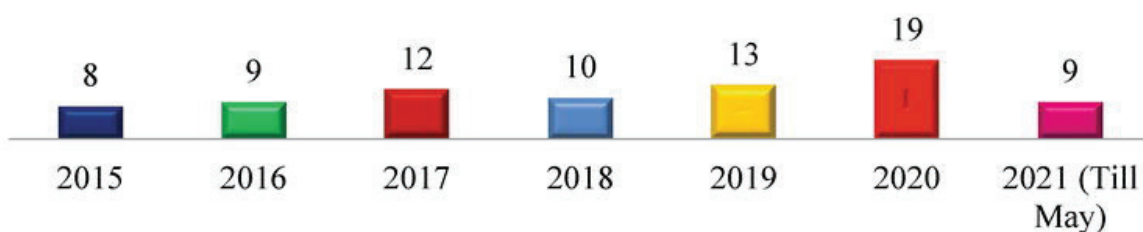
19. <https://www.news18.com/news/immersive/documenting-violence-against-dalits-one-assault-at-a-time.html>

26% of all crimes were against Dalits in Uttar Pradesh, the state with the highest number of crimes against Dalits.

The list of states in this map, except for a few exceptions, corresponds to states where exponents of Hindutva hold social power, political power or both.



The topic of the parallel increase in violence against Dalits with the increase in Hindutva hegemony in India is vast. For now, two main forms of violence can be used as an illustration. First is the violence faced by Dalit students in institutions of higher education, especially the prestigious ones, and second, the killing of Dalits in the name of protecting cows that has come to be known as cow lynching. Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar in science at the University of Hyderabad, a Dalit person, committed suicide on January 17th 2016.<sup>20</sup> Rohith is only one among many. Between 2015 and 2021 a total of 80 Dalits committed suicide. Among them, 29 were women, all of whom committed suicide due to sexual victimization. The majority of these suicides was due to students being victimized in educational institutions.<sup>21</sup> There has been a steady increase in Dalit student suicides in the past few years as this chart show



<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/77988>

20. <https://scroll.in/article/802020/i-loved-science-stars-nature-suicide-by-suspended-dalit-student-sparks-nationwide> - pro tests.  
 21. <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/77988>

A recent report following the institutional murder of Dr. Payal Tadvi<sup>22</sup> does a thorough analysis of Dalit student suicides, specifically in institutions of medical education.<sup>23</sup> After doing a robust analysis where they methodically show that institutional casteism is a “steady drumbeat” and not a “thunderbolt” they make the following recommendations:

1. We begin with **urgent recommendations in the case of the institutional murder of Dr Payal Tadvi**. It is more than two years since her death and it is imperative that these steps be taken to prevent any further delay in delivery of justice.
2. Recommendations towards **closing the gaps in the existing regulatory frameworks** provided to ensure equitable opportunities in Higher Education Institutions, including the provisions against ragging; designing stringent mechanisms instead of the current ones which are either inadequate or weak; and ensuring strict compliance with current regulatory frameworks.
3. **Emphasising reservation as affirmative** action we suggest measures to be taken to safeguard this policy in letter and spirit towards achieving substantive constitutional equality.
4. Recommendations to bring in a **new legislative framework to enable protection from caste based discriminatory practices at HEIs** which would be separate from the law on ragging. The new act would draw upon legal frameworks, such as, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and build upon the demands for introducing such a legislation in response to similar incidents in the past. These are referred to as the Rohit Vemula Act since it was the nationwide agitations and protests after Rohit Vemula's institutional murder in 2016 which brought into sharp focus the need for such an act with its broad suggested contours.
5. Next, we articulate recommendations the arena of **curricula and approaches to learning methods** in health care professional trainings with a focus on medical education.
6. Further we offer recommendations to ensure **transparency of various institutional bodies at the State and University level**. Lack of transparency, as we demonstrated in the report, has contributed to exacerbating adverse attitudes to reservations, and individuals availing reservations in medical colleges and strengthening hostile public narratives about affirmative policy, especially amongst students from dominant communities in medical and nursing colleges.
7. And finally, we make a case for commitment from the state for a **robust public health care system** because without it there can be no equitable medical education possible.

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22. <https://www.livemint.com/mint-lounge/features/payal-tadvi-suicide-case-the-death-of-a-doctor-1559891147950.html>

23. [https://fmesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Steady-Drumbeat-of-Institutional-Casteism-Recognize-Respond-Redress\\_Final-report\\_27Sept21.pdf](https://fmesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Steady-Drumbeat-of-Institutional-Casteism-Recognize-Respond-Redress_Final-report_27Sept21.pdf)

The Recommendations themselves point to the gamut of issues involved in what is now being recognised widely as an emerging problem – the institutional murder of Dalit students that takes the form of suicides.

With regard to cow lynching,<sup>24</sup> during the time frame 2012-18, 88 incidents of violence, including 33 murders related to protecting cows, have been documented. Of them, 86 were since 2014, when the BJP came to power. From available data it can be ascertained that 56% of the victims were Muslim and 11% were Dalits. While the incidents seem to have begun in northern India they have also spread to the southern and eastern states. Much of this violence is in states where the BJP is in power.<sup>25</sup> Since 2018, it feels like this specific form of violence seems to have abated. However, it has made space for two things that have come to stay; first, a culture of mob violence which has since been mobilized for various purposes, and second, a sense of fear among Muslims and Dalits with regard to the practice of eating beef as the cow has been affirmed as a symbol of “Hindu/Indian identity.” One concrete form that this instilling of fear has taken is a law in the BJP stronghold of Karnataka – the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill (2020). Alok Prasanna Kumar writes that this law is specifically drafted with an exorbitant increase in fines and imprisonment provisions and that it looks like it was drafted precisely for the purpose of being used as a tool of state-sponsored violence. The new provisions empower police to search and seize property on mere “reason to believe” that an offence has been committed. No other law, the author argues, gives the executive such wide, uncontrolled authority to seize and dispose of citizens’ property in such a crude manner. Furthermore, in the context of a deep agrarian crisis, he says, this law legally impoverishes Muslim and Dalit cattle farmers.<sup>26</sup> Karnataka is only one among 19 states in India that have inconsistent laws around cow slaughter. While many of these laws are older and are connected to some older, less hardline upper-caste Hindu sentiments around cows, along with the intention to protect cattle for their role in agriculture,<sup>27</sup> these laws are now being weaponized by the BJP and the Hindutva brigade.<sup>28</sup> In effect, over the past eight years, cow lynching that began as mob violence that undermined the rule of law in India<sup>29</sup> has now been neatly included within the law in order to be able to enact the same violence using the state machinery.<sup>30</sup>

**In sum, since the 1980s, the use and manipulation of caste dynamics has been an important element which is at the core of Hindutva politics. With both the institutional murders of Dalit students and the lynching and later intimidation of Dalits in the name of protecting the “sacred cow,”**

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24. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cow\\_vigilante\\_violence\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cow_vigilante_violence_in_India)

25. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/88-incidents-of-cow-related-violence-since-2012-86-of-them-during-bjp-rule-1817051.html>

26. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/50/law-and-society/cow-slaughter-laws-state-sanctioned-violence.html>

27. <https://article-14.com/post/the-dark-chronology-of-india-s-cow-slaughter-laws>

28. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/states-where-cow-slaughter-is-banned-so-far-and-states-where-it-isnt-1413425.html>

29. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/1/3/how-cow-vigilantism-is-undermining-the-rule-of-law-in-india/>

30. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/50/law-and-society/cow-slaughter-laws-state-sanctioned-violence.html>

the period after 2014 has ushered in an era of formalizing and institutionalizing this violence. This malleable and adaptable process of propagating violence coexists with the luring of oppressed castes as a voting block without any material benefits to them. They are provided an abstract sense of belonging to “Hinduness” which is a collective emotional manipulation of the fundamental exclusionary oppression and the resultant desire of the oppressed castes to “belong” in India.

## SEXUALITY AND HINDUTVA

One of the main tools of propagating Hindutva, given its fraternal relationship with patriarchy, is to control sexuality and unleash violence upon the scorned bodies, especially those among them who are assigned the female gender at birth. For the remainder of this essay, I will use the term women as much of the literature, discourse, and understandings in this regard use this term. But I want to clarify at the outset that this refers to persons assigned the female gender at birth.<sup>31</sup>

There are a few key processes that can be expanded upon to clarify the violence and control of the bodies of, in this case, Muslim women. **First, and most recent is the “selling” of Muslim women on the Bulli Bai app in January 2022.** Photographs and profiles of Muslim women were put on an app with an option to bid on them. This was not the first time, as in July 2021 there had already been another app called the “Sulli Deals” with the same modus operandi. Not only did this cause literal physical danger to the women involved but, as Aaliya Zafiri, daughter of a literary historian who was “sold” on Bulli Bai also put it, it propagates “stereotypes around the fetishization of Muslim women that lie underneath this selling of Muslim women as ‘Bais’ – the disfavoured and condemned, the overlooked and underrepresented, the object and the subject, equally exotic and secluded.”<sup>32</sup> She also points out that, as the case against Sulli Deals remains with no end in sight, there is nothing preventing this from happening again as it has largely been met with impunity thus far.

**Second, are the long-lasting attempts to control the use of the Hijab.** Fundamentalists and feminists, with sometimes shocking similarity, have attacked the Hijab in many parts of the world for decades. It is only more recently that Muslim women who may or may not cover their heads, have expanded the discourse on the hijab, making it less likely for feminists to take simplistic stands on it. As for the Hindutva, the hijab has been attacked by them for a long time but has gained renewed focus recently.

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31. See here for more information on the framing of ‘persons assigned gender female at birth’: <http://orinam.net/breaking-the-binary-labia-study/>

32. <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/sulli-deals-bulli-bai-daughter-writes-about-mother-auctioned>



Sana Aziz argues that this focus is also the result of Muslim women being at the forefront of the struggles against the Citizenship Act and the National Register of Citizens.<sup>33</sup> Their growing presence in public, indicative of confidence, education, economic independence etc. is being targeted by the Hindutva with the hijab as the symbol. Earlier in 2022, in Karnataka, a BJP-ruled state, school-going young women were banned from wearing the Hijab to school. The row saw aggressive masculine attacks on these students by mobs of Hindutva men and young Muslim women fighting back along with some of their Hindu friends.<sup>34</sup> The Dalit students' group in the area stood in solidarity with the Muslim women even if done so in their own breed of machismo.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, it went up to the High Court in Karnataka which held up the ban on the Hijab. Since then, the struggle of the young women continues with some of them even refusing to take the all-too-important final board exams in school in protest of the judgment.<sup>36</sup> The case led to a split judgment in the Supreme Court and has now been referred to the chief justice who is to set up a committee. The end is not near for the young women whose education is being interrupted by this.<sup>37</sup>

**Third, is the unfortunately famous “love jihad.”** Love Jihad refers to the alleged conversion, primarily of women from Hindu (read upper caste) backgrounds into Islam by “making them fall in love” with Muslim men. The older iteration of this has been and continues to be the violent control of young couples who fall in love and seek to marry across castes. Paromita Vohra made a film on “Love Jihad” and its sensationalizing of it in the earlier days of Hindutva, in 2007.<sup>38</sup> This phenomenon has been identified by scholars as an “Islamophobic conspiracy theory.”<sup>39</sup> Charu Gupta who has studied the phenomenon extensively shows that protecting a Hindu woman's “purity” forms an integral part of the self-image of the community as understood and propagated by Hindutva.<sup>40</sup> In essence, love jihad is the violent collusion between the hetero-patriarchal society and its emphasis on compulsory marriage for the propagation of the “pure” caste/community/religious lineage and the larger political project of Hindutva. The institution of the heteronormative family that remains within the strict boundaries of caste and religion, according to Hindutva, is the building block of the Hindu nation. Love Jihad is seen as a challenge to that.

**Fourth, and perhaps the most insidious instance of the use of sexuality in Hindutva, is the emerging voices, groups and space of right-wing Hindu fundamentalist LGBT persons.**

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33. <https://scroll.in/article/1018259/why-indian-muslim-women-are-a-special-target-for-hindutva-hatred>

34. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60079770>

35. <https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/in-focus/article/karnataka-hijab-row-dalit-students-sport-blue-scarves-in-solidarity-with-muslim-students/856992>

36. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/two-pro-hijab-petitioners-in-karnatakas-udupi-not-allowed-to-take-exams-wearing-hijab-leave-college-premises-2909571>

37. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/karnataka-hijab-ban-case-supreme-court-delivers-split-verdict-101665640868155.html>

38. [https://youtu.be/kTFjfn9nl\\_w](https://youtu.be/kTFjfn9nl_w)

39. <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/love-jihad-islamophobic-campaign-whose-honour-is-it-anyway>

40. *ibid*

The emergence of the pink rupee since decriminalization of adult consensual same-sex sexual activity has contributed to a depoliticization of the struggle, the kernels of which existed throughout the history of LGBTQIA struggles in the country. This depoliticization has taken many forms and one among them is the Hindu fundamentalist face of LGBT rights. The articles on LGBT rights on the notorious Hindutva site Swarajya are written to win the support of LGBT community for the Hindutva programme.<sup>41</sup> These articles make a few points repeatedly. First, the criminalization of LGBT rights is a legacy of western colonialism and native tradition did not criminalize them and even when they did, the punitive measures were much “milder” than towards other transgressions. Second, it was during Narendra Modi’s tenure that 377 was abolished. This establishes that Hindutva is not fundamentally opposed to LGBT rights. Third, that minority communities that left-liberals love are way more opposed to LGBT rights than the majority (read Hindu) community. Even if prominent Hindutva activists have a dislike for LGBT rights and view LGBT people as “diseased,” they still won’t argue for stoning them to death, which they argue is what the “minority community” (read Muslim) wants to do. Fourth, they argue that the need to resist different oppressions is an unnecessary burden for a community already marginalized. In essence, the argument is that by aligning with the popular ideology, the LGBT community can win the trust of the majority community and create “normal” lives for themselves. This development in the Indian context is especially disturbing. The queer movement in India has its roots in the feminist/women’s rights movements. A little later, it became connected to the movement for civil rights – multiple people’s movements across the country. Thus, most queer spaces and movements for justice have been part of progressive voices that argue for an inclusive and diverse Indian society and have opposed violence in all forms. Queer movement spaces have played a key role in making the connection between conservative ideas with regards to religion, heteropatriarchy and oppression of queer lives and being. As a result of this history, the queer movement always saw, acknowledged, and spoke of the interconnectedness of oppressions and thus the need for connections across resistance. Struggle for rights from a queer perspective in India has a long history of being a holistic demand for rights, freedom, justice and dignity for all. Queer rights in India have always been far from a reductionist fight for rights based only on sexual and gender identities. Given this history, Hindutva ideology to be proposed to and by the LGBT community, in the name of ensuring Queer rights, is a travesty.

**Hindutva through its control and violence upon Muslim and Hindu women’s bodies, the former through dehumanizing and the latter, in the name of purity and protection, has ensured the place of bodies at sexuality at the core of its ideology. Hindutva promises inclusion, even to the LGBT community whose very being, desire, expression, and identity, are opposed to their singular idea of the heteronormative “pure” Hindu family – the building block of the Hindu nation. This inclusion, just as with the Dalits, does not ensure much material changes except perhaps for the elite LGBT community. But it uses and manipulates, yet again, the fundamental exclusionary oppression of heteronormativity and the resultant desire of those from the LGBT community to “belong” in the Hindu/Indian family.**

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41. <https://swarajyamag.com/culture/a-hindu-approach-to-lgbt-rights>

# EXTRAORDINARY LAWS AND INCARCERATION

India, like many other parts of the world, has a long-standing history of extraordinary laws that have been used to legally oppress the marginalized and those who speak up for justice. This includes the various anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, Prevention of Terrorism Act, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act,<sup>42</sup> and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.<sup>43</sup> The impact of these laws on the curbing of civil and democratic rights in the name of “terrorism” has been observed and documented well, even before the Modi Era.<sup>44</sup> India has slipped further down in international lists of democratic nations since 2014. The connection between the coming to power of the BJP and the curbing of democratic rights has been so widely acknowledged<sup>45</sup> that the right wing has responded, denying the veracity of these lists, as they often do when they are critiqued internationally. Within the country, many voices, including from those within the legal system, have spoken up against the progressing trend of anti-terror laws being used as a tool to curb civil rights.<sup>46</sup>

For the purpose of this essay, let's consider the example of the Sedition Law. This law, a colonial formation used during colonization against those acknowledged in independent India as “freedom fighters,” is now being used extensively against human rights activists, lawyers, teachers, students and ordinary people who may have written, spoken, and shown the slightest support for human rights. Today, the Sedition Law is one among the many laws used that has led to the growing list of political prisoners.<sup>47</sup> The Sedition Law is interesting to analyse at this moment as the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, the National Register of Citizens and the farmers' protest, all reclaimed national symbols – the flag, the constitution, and the term “Jai Hind” – in a manner that spaces of resistance had not done before in independent India. Resistance was being framed in all of these protests on the basis of citizenship in the country. It is in this political milieu that the Sedition Law, which was already being misused, has been used increasingly since 2014 in the BJP regime.<sup>48</sup>

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42. [https://legalthirst.com/anti-terror-laws-in-india-a-short-view/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1659009117.6968679428100585937500](https://legalthirst.com/anti-terror-laws-in-india-a-short-view/?doing_wp_cron=1659009117.6968679428100585937500)

43. <https://www.thequint.com/explainers/explained-afspa-or-armed-forces-special-powers-act-why-prompts-dissent>

44. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiLgnsZwJv5AhU7ErcAHbCUDEcQFnoECAMQA-Q&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nycbar.org%2Fpdf%2FABCNY\\_India\\_Report.pdf&usg=AOvVaw159Xvmat3tGNGCSfZH0i4s](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiLgnsZwJv5AhU7ErcAHbCUDEcQFnoECAMQA-Q&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nycbar.org%2Fpdf%2FABCNY_India_Report.pdf&usg=AOvVaw159Xvmat3tGNGCSfZH0i4s)

45. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/06/g7-india-narendra-modi-democracy/619144/>

46. <https://theleaflet.in/anti-terror-law-must-not-be-misused-to-quell-dissent-justice-dy-chandrachud/>

47. <https://theprint.in/opinion/indians-regret-silence-modi-political-prisoners/470594/>

48. <https://www.article-14.com/post/our-new-database-reveals-rise-in-sedition-cases-in-the-modi-era>

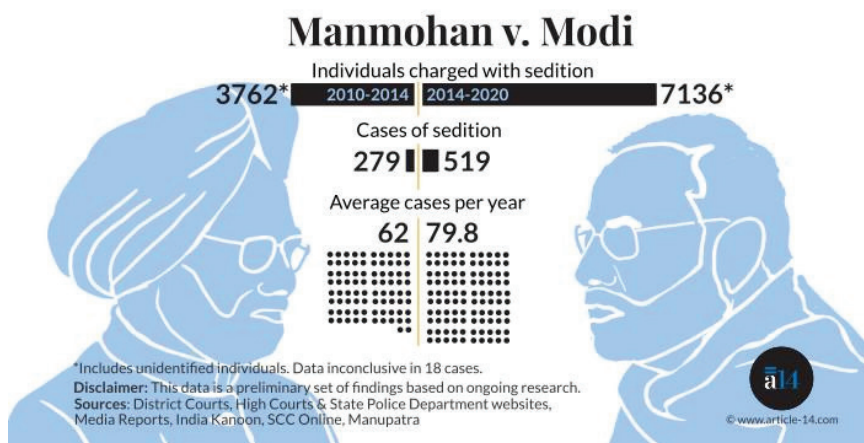
Here is a snapshot of some data for the period since 2010:

- 65% of nearly 11,000 individuals in 816 sedition cases since 2010 were implicated after 2014 when Modi took office. Among those charged with sedition: opposition politicians, students, journalists, authors and academics.
- 96% of sedition cases filed against 405 Indians for criticising politicians and governments over the last decade were registered after 2014, with 149 accused of making “critical” and/or “derogatory” remarks against Modi, 144 against Uttar Pradesh (UP) chief minister Yogi Adityanath.
- A.28% increase in the number of sedition cases filed each year between 2014 and 2020, Modi’s time in office, ‘compared to the yearly average between 2010 and 2014, the second term of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) administration.
- Much of this increase is due to a surge in sedition cases after protest movements, such as those against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 and the rape of a Dalit teen at Hathras in UP.
- During the anti-CAA protests, 22 of 25 sedition cases involving 3,700 people were filed in BJP-ruled states. After the Pulwama attack, 26 of 27 sedition cases involving 42 persons were filed in BJP-ruled states.
- Of the five states with the highest number of sedition cases, a majority were registered during the BJP’s time in power in four of them—Bihar, UP, Karnataka and Jharkhand.
- In UP, 77% of 115 sedition cases since 2010 were registered over the last four years, since Yogi Adityanath became the chief minister. More than half of these were around issues of “nationalism”: against those who protested the CAA, for shouting “Hindustan Murdabad”, allegedly celebrating Pulwama attack and India’s loss in 2017 ICC Champions Trophy.
- In Bihar, between 2010-2014, the majority of sedition cases related to Maoism and counterfeit currency. After 2014, 23% of sedition cases were against those who protested the CAA, against celebrities who spoke up against lynching and intolerance and those who allegedly raised “pro-Pakistan” slogans.

<https://www.article-14.com/post/our-new-database-reveals-rise-in-sedition-cases-in-the-modi-era>

Here is a comparison of sedition cases between Modi and his predecessor from the Congress Party, Manmohan Singh:

Graphics by Jameela Ahmed.



Two cases can be used as illustrative of how the law has been used to curb dissent. First, in the Bhima Koregaon case which involves violence that broke out at a large gathering of Dalits. Hindutva leaders in the area openly took responsibility for unleashing the violence. A few months later, 16 well-known human rights activists, lawyers, professors, and writers were named as those who incited violence and are all under trial, some are in prison and others such as Father Stan Swamy died in prison due to the lack of basic health care.<sup>49</sup> In yet another case, a 22-year-old woman in Bangalore was arrested under sedition and other charges for circulating Greta Thunberg's toolkit for protest online, in the context of the farmers' protest.<sup>50</sup> The toolkit and thus by extension this young Climate Activist was linked to violence that occurred in Delhi in January last year during the Farmers' Protest. While she is out on bail, the case is still ongoing although the police are making no headway in the investigation.<sup>51</sup>

At this current moment, the use of terror laws, sedition and various other criminal provisions has put a significant number of human rights activists from all walks of life or even ordinary citizens in jail, having to face the challenges of having a criminal record and cases that are ongoing for years. Much of the energy of those who wish to express dissent goes towards the legal and social campaigning that has to be done for their basic needs to be met in jail and for them to have access to a fair and prompt judicial process. It is in this milieu of stress and fear that a little over a month ago, Teesta Setalvad, an activist who has untiringly worked to expose the horrors of the Modi Regime, especially since the Gujarat riots in 2002, was detained.<sup>52</sup> She was detained under the so-called "ordinary" provisions of criminal law. This makes for a troubling trend where the fight is no longer just around extraordinary laws or misuse of laws, but a blanket victimization of activists using any law they see fit. While she is out on bail now, like many others, she will be in the legal battle for years and forced to step away from expressing dissent in the meantime due to the threat of it being sub judice.

**The realm of dissent in India is now consumed by incarceration or the threat thereof. The unleashing of this legal violence using all possible legal mechanisms by the current regime is a worrying trend. Much energy, time, and resources are invested by activists, lawyers, and ordinary citizens in legal processes leaving little room to think through dissent or even just live a stable life. All progressive voices in the country now HAVE TO consider and make choices with regard to the possibility of legal action or incarceration before they speak. The impact of living under this threat across generations of activists is yet to be fully fathomed. For now, this has created an atmosphere of stress, exhaustion and fear that are not conducive to sustaining dissent.**

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49. <https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/01/02/bhima-koregaon-case-three-years-of-legal-and-rights-violations>

50. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/farmers-protest-why-activist-disha-ravi-arrested-over-toolkit-argued-her-own-case-2370762>

51. <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/disha-ravi-toolkit-case-with-probe-making-no-headway-closure-report-may-be-an-option-7590653/>

52. <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/india/teesta-setalvad-arrest-modi-gujarat-riots-b2109621.html>

# EROSION OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

All of the above sections address specific incidents, laws, or even governments that can be changed and often are, every few years. The targeted attack on institutions outlined below is perhaps the most longstanding changes being made by the Hindutva forces to ensure that their political ideology and ways of viewing the nation outlive Modi and the BJP government being in power. These changes will continue to have an impact irrespective of the person or party who is at the helm of power. We will look at five key institutional spaces that have been changed by this regime, namely education, media, NGOs, elections and the judiciary. At the end of this, we will cull out the key ways in which these institutions have been changed to propagate a Hindu fundamentalist idea of Indian society and the nation.

## ***Educational Institutions***

Since independence in India, higher education has been a significant space in which there was to be holistic growth of a person and a widening of the world as they know it. The country has a sprinkling of institutions which intentionally bring together students from diverse backgrounds who are taught with curriculums that are focused on critical thinking. These universities known as 'Central Universities' as they were directly supported by the Central Government, as opposed to those that are supported by state governments or private entities, have been the breeding grounds for those who build the nation – scientists and social scientists alike. We already saw the connection between caste, Hindutva, and the institutional murders of numerous Dalit students in different institutions in the country, including medical schools. While that is on a continuum from previous regimes as caste-based discrimination in all its forms is a continuing form of violence in India, these other interventions in educational institutions are connected to the BJP rule.

Scholars have acknowledged this multifaceted attack on educational institutions and academia in general,<sup>53</sup> especially in spaces that have created thinkers and doers who were previously thought to be the future of the nation. We will delve deeper into some such institutions in Delhi that are now being destroyed. Jawaharlal Nehru University – “one of India's premier educational institutions, has fostered high academic values and norms, pioneered forms of inclusion which have made for an exceptional student body, and created space for critical thinking, while also deepening respect for democratic traditions”<sup>54</sup> – has been attacked from many directions. The protests in JNU began as soon as the BJP came to power as interventions in the university coincided with the change in central government.<sup>55</sup>

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53. Academic freedom and Indian universities, June 2018, Economic and Political Weekly 53(24):48-57

54. JNU stories book

55. <https://thewire.in/politics/jnu-protest>

Vice Chancellors have been changed to place in positions of power, those supporting the Hindutva agenda. In 2016 there were massive prolonged protests at JNU about many issues. These included the death of Rohith Vemula, the lack of filling the Dalit students' and faculty quotas in the university, and fee hikes, among other things.<sup>56</sup> It was in that context, with the pretext of a few students having raised "anti-India" slogans, that many key leaders of the student body, including the Students' Union president, were arrested under the Sedition Law. Student protests against fee hikes continue as the fees that used to be markedly low have been increased to make the University the second most expensive central university in the country.<sup>57</sup> Students protesting the loss of stellar quality public education are exemplified by the longstanding ongoing protests in JNU.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, even as the neoliberal wave swept through India and led to the formation of a large number of private educational institutions, institutions like JNU withstood that storm. This has led to them being even more viciously targeted by the current regime. The loss of affordable public education means the destruction of campuses that are markedly diverse in terms of caste, class, region, language, gender etc. This destruction of diversity is the goal of Hindutva, as this, they hope, will ensure that students' perspectives on their country, their lives and the world at large will remain stunted, singular, and within limited bounds, thus making for a fertile ground to teach and normalize a "Hindu India."

Apart from this, there have been violent attacks by mobs of Hindutva men upon students in all premier Central Universities that have raised a voice against Hindutva, namely Aligarh Muslim University,<sup>59</sup> Delhi University,<sup>60</sup> and JNU.<sup>61</sup> All of these attacks were connected to students on these campuses raising their voices against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that discriminated against all non-Hindu Indians explicitly and required all Indians to provide diverse sets of documents to "prove citizenship." In what was the most blatant misuse of state power, students at the Jamia Milia Islamia University, including those who were studying at the library, were brutally attacked directly by the police.<sup>62</sup> These attacks have occurred in campuses which have had a longstanding history of student organisations and leaders belonging to all parties across the political spectrum who have battled out their ideologies and have engaged in electoral battles democratically only with the occasional physical scuffle. This relatively healthy culture of democratic debate has been destroyed by attacking students who are either part of anti-regime students' groups or are bystanders. Simultaneously, a generation of Hindutva student activists is taught to believe in violence as a justified means, even within educational institutions, against their own peers and sometimes teachers.

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56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxcE7LhrqQc>

57. <https://theprint.in/india/education/after-hostel-fee-hike-jnu-will-become-indias-most-expensive-central-university/320897/>

58. Student Struggle Against Attack on Public Education in India - EPW

59. <https://thewire.in/government/amu-cao-protests-up-police>

60. <https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/delhi-university-protest-students-attacked>

61. <https://thewire.in/rights/jnu-violence-protests-abvp-students-teachers>

62. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/18/we-heard-gunfire-jamia-students-detail-police-attack-on-campus/>

After the CAA protests, a number of students have been arrested from various universities in Delhi<sup>63</sup> and have been framed as being responsible for the riots in Delhi enacted by the state and its goons.<sup>64</sup> This is very much along the same lines as the Bhima Koregaon case where right-wing goons enacted the violence and long-standing activists working for justice and democracy were framed as the accused. This seems to be the latest modus operandi of the government. This makes for a mind-numbingly confused media battle, which in turn feeds the Hindutva machine's creation of an insidious public image against all those who critique it, and is now all pervasive in Indian society.

Along with attacks on universities, important institutions in the country that were put in place to enhance academic autonomy and integrity such as the University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and Indian Philosophical Council (IPC) have been filled with bureaucrats rather than scholars in the respective areas of study.<sup>65</sup> The bureaucrats are cronies of the BJP government. There is widespread analysis and acknowledgement that this thorough takeover of the national-level institutions that enable academic creativity and growth in various areas of study is being done as part of the Hindutva agenda of "homogenizing Indian culture" and shrinking or removing space for critical thinking and support for liberty, justice, equality etc. – the very the pillars of Independent India as it was imagined.

Two months ago, the present Hindutva VC of JNU stated, among other things, that "India is not a civic state bound by the constitution, but a civilizational state." Such statements which lack academic rigour, historicity or basic common sense are becoming common utterances from within the highest echelons of power in India. This VC makes it absolutely clear in the remainder of her speech that universities such as JNU must play their part in reclaiming the "Hindu past," whatever that may be, as the ONLY lineage for India.<sup>66</sup> This instance is a symbol of the effects of the takeover of universities that once were the beacons of critical thinking, hope, and creativity for the nation. They are now becoming training grounds for bigoted violent thinking that is unconcerned with academic integrity or rigour. The scale of the impact of this for generations to come is too overwhelming to even consider.

Apart from these changes to the history curriculum in school textbooks<sup>67</sup> that highlight the rule of certain kings over others (divided by their religious belief of course), certain periods of history over others and the complete erasure of some histories have been a petrifying intervention.

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63. <https://theprint.in/india/umar-khalid-not-alone-7-more-students-were-arrested-under-anti-terror-law-for-delhi-riots/503185/>

64. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi2pa6NmvX6AhUNRWwGHWaTAVEQF-noECEAAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2FDocuments%2FIssues%2FReligion%2FIslamophobia-Anti-Muslim%2FCivil%2520Society%2520or%2520Individuals%2FRitumbraM2.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1lbXeZM8MugftFel2LAhYr>

65. <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/india/disbanding-ugc-2-rss-agenda-of-indias-homogenisation-at-the-core>

66. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/india-not-a-civic-nation-but-a-civilisation-state-jnu-vc-101653070322039.html>

67. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/historians-write-to-parliamentary-panel-against-proposed-changes-to-ncert-history-textbooks/article35419380.ece>



This will deeply influence generations of Indian children's thinking from a very young age. While this isn't the first attempt at altering school syllabuses to suit political agenda, this time the fight to stop it has been a losing battle.<sup>68</sup>

**Thus, the Hindutva agenda in education has extended its fangs into educational institutions – both specific universities and national-level bodies that govern all educational institutions. These spaces provided for a diverse student body across caste, class, region, religion and gender; they prioritized intellectual rigour and critical thinking; through such rigour, they upheld the original pillars of thought and values of independent India such as democracy, liberty, equality, non-discrimination etc. This was all possible as the children of this country got to read textbooks that reflected these values. These textbooks too have been changed. The present generation of student leaders led young people to stand up for the values of democracy, diversity, and inclusion in the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, among many other such battles. These young leaders have been systematically attacked through incarceration. Such incarceration has been done by illegally connecting them to the brutal violence against Muslims in north-east Delhi in 2020. This has left other student leaders and activists who are outside prison, to invest energy in affirming the rights and release of those incarcerated while having to be extremely careful of engaging in any other actions within and beyond the university. There is a persistent, multipronged attack on the institutional culture of higher education that sought to preserve the integrity of the nation's values. Even as the Hindutva brigade continues its concerted action based on the accurate assumption that this progressive culture must be done away with to resolutely put in place their singular ideas of Hindu India in the minds of the coming generations, the voices of dissent within universities continue to survive even if not thrive.**

## **Media**

As with every other area discussed above, here too, it is apt to start with violence perpetrated against journalists in the Modi regime. The Polis Project as part of their Watch the State programme has collected data from 2019-21 creating a comprehensive mapping of such violence.<sup>69</sup> Their key findings indicate as follows: **'256 instances**, 26 were during the Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) Protests; 46 related to COVID-19 reporting and the lockdowns; 19 during the Delhi pogrom in March 2020; 10 during the Farmers' Protest in 2021; 51 in Jammu and Kashmir and 104 others.<sup>70</sup> They have documented different kinds of violence including "First Information Reports (FIRs), physical assault, threats, detention, defamation cases, arrests, sexual assault, charges of sedition and charges under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)."<sup>71</sup> Their findings about the causes and consequences of the violence are unsurprising and yet chilling.

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68. <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/ncert-through-the-years-how-syllabus-changed-along-with-governments-news-204112>

69. <https://www.thepolisproject.com/research/mapping-patterns-of-violence-against-journalists-in-india-2019-2021/>

70. <https://www.thepolisproject.com/research/mapping-violence-against-journalists-in-india-key-findings/>

71. *ibid*

From the analysis of the data collected, we found that:

- The Police are the main perpetrators in BJP ruled states, in Jammu and Kashmir and in Delhi, where they directly report to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Most reported instances of violence were in BJP ruled states. The highest numbers appear in Uttar Pradesh (68), New Delhi (59), Kashmir (51), Madhya Pradesh (25) and Haryana (17).
- The judiciary has not only failed to prosecute crimes against journalists, but it has also contributed to their persecution through the systematic violation of their rights. While the Police are quick to file FIRs based on complaints by members of right-wing groups, when it comes to responding to violence against journalists, they are slow and uncooperative.

<https://www.thepolisproject.com/research/mapping-violence-against-journalists-in-india-key-findings/>

The intimidation, stress, and the reality that being a voice of dissent in the media against the current regime is physically dangerous, is not to be underestimated. However, there are many other interventions in the Indian media by the regime that enable such violence to occur with complete impunity. These include the **corporatization of the media, spread of misinformation, hateful propaganda and the takeover of everyday media spaces by Modi himself.**

A potent example of this is Modi's way of taking himself widely across the country – his radio show that airs every last Sunday of the month on the national radio station, All India Radio – Mann ki Baat – which translates to “From the heart.” Analyses of this programme have shown that he “generally steers clear of political reference or political statements... which is used for talks on the social sector, highlighting success stories from different parts of the country and reading interesting letters sent to the PM by his followers.”<sup>72</sup> This seemingly harmless show is perhaps one of the most brilliant ideas executed by this regime. In a careful analysis of many episodes by The Print, they noted that “Mann Ki Baat has sometimes been fun and games, sometimes sombre, often policy-oriented, frequently motivational and philosophical, and never overtly political. They show how PM Modi has craftily used the radio show to broadcast his political messages and convey his government's position through his choice of words and issues, as well as the personalities he mentions in the show.”<sup>73</sup> The show that began soon after he came to power in October 2014 has now been running for close to eight years. The content of the show is then covered in media platforms online and has even spawned “scientific studies” that analyse the sentimental impact of the show, studies that are then referred to extensively in academic writing.<sup>74</sup>

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72. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-9-mann-ki-baat-episodes-of-2019-pm-modi-mentioned-india-220-times/story-D5I1ZptsuAUJLYiDiqb8nl.html>

73. <https://theprint.in/politics/four-years-of-modis-mann-ki-baat-lots-of-policy-motivation-not-one-mention-of-bjp/127773/>

74. Garg, Kanika, “Sentiment analysis of Indian PM's ‘Mann Ki Baat’,” *International Journal of Information Technology*, 12, 2019.

These so-called scientific studies are also a propaganda mechanism. The show itself, the coverage of the show on social media and “research studies” on its impact all make for well-crafted propaganda for the regime. This propaganda however is unrecognizable as such and instead sounds and “feels” like a simple chat with the Prime Minister. In that way, it contributes to and normalizes the regime’s ideas through the sustained presence of Modi’s voice in people’s homes, minds and psyche.

The spread of hate speech and misinformation in the media, researchers at the Polis Project have shown. has involved “disinformation and propaganda employed with zero accountability make(ing) mainstream media complicit in furthering state violence in India.”<sup>75</sup> India is one of the largest media markets in the world. If such media is controlled by any singular political agenda, it is a serious threat to democracy.<sup>76</sup> Studies have shown that the dominance of corporations in the media also makes it a space run by upper caste, upper class elites in India.<sup>77</sup> Private media houses, in the absence of any legal and policy level checks and balances to ensure diversity of caste, class, region, religion and gender, have become a reflection of dominant voices in society at large. This in turn is reflected in the kind of media output that is created by such institutions. The mainstream media, specifically the news media, participates in propagating the regime while also making profitable content in the following ways: spreading misinformation that has resulted in violence, illegal arrests, and other serious consequences for those protesting the regime; stark difference in tone and language while addressing government and anti-government programmes/incidents; popularization of government propaganda hashtags; popularizing terms being used by the regime to minimize and quell dissent such as “urban Naxal” (used to refer to critical voices in urban areas as “Naxal” which is the armed struggle against caste/class oppression in rural and forest areas) or “tukhde tukhde gang” (meaning segregated small “gangs”); and vilifying of specific communities such as Muslims, farmers, university students etc., in the country. At this point in India, it is close to impossible to differentiate between news and propaganda in the widely watched mainstream news media which includes television, radio, newspapers, and all of their online presence.<sup>78</sup>

It is in this background that we must consider the impact of the corporatization of the media. As mentioned earlier this process began as early as the 1990s with the Structural Readjustment Programme of the Indian economy.<sup>79</sup> Since the beginning of BJP rule, this trend has been firmly solidified. Corporatization of the media is both local and global with global players being unconcerned with any role that the media outfits they own play in the societies they are influencing as the only relevant matter for them is profit.<sup>80</sup>

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75. <https://www.thepolisproject.com/read/mainstream-news-media-and-majoritarian-state-violence-in-india/>

76. <http://india.mom-gmr.org/en/media/>

77. <https://academic.oup.com/book/3014?login=false>

78. <https://www.thepolisproject.com/read/mainstream-news-media-and-majoritarian-state-violence-in-india/>

79. <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/corporatization-of-media.htm>

80. <http://india.mom-gmr.org/en/findings/corporateownership/>

Meanwhile, local corporate conglomerates have been the main players in the media as well.<sup>81</sup> It has been noted that this process profoundly impacts which issues get covered in the media and which do not. Social concerns are covered only through sensationalizing or are often silenced as press freedom is hugely curtailed by an overwhelming profit motive.<sup>82</sup>

The description above merely scratches the surface of the issue of the role of the corporate media in enabling the Hindu fundamentalist regime. But it shows clearly that there no longer exists a broad-based media presence that prioritizes media freedom and integrity. A few spaces such as the Quint, The Wire, Scroll, The Print etc. are a few sources of hope in this area which too are under constant threat from the government and corporate interests alike. The recent forced acquisition of NDTV, one of the few remaining voices of press integrity within the news media, by the Adani group, which is very close to the regime, is the latest nail in the coffin of press freedom and integrity in India.<sup>83</sup>

**The takeover of the media has been done structurally through corporate influence along with careful and consistent creation of discourses that favour the regime and quell dissent. Any presence of an independent media that can serve as a voice of dissent and represent the realities in the country beyond the dominant political agenda, exists in an atmosphere of fear. This fear is for physical safety, legal backlash, and corporate takeover, as has been done with NDTV. In spite of it, the independent media labours on to survive and, at the least, document the realities of the times we are living through even if they are not able to influence public opinion as they remain overshadowed by media backed by corporate and government giants.**

## **NGOs**

The curbing of the rights of Non-Governmental Organisations to pursue their work freely began as soon as Modi came to power in 2014. Within a few months, a “hitlist” of NGOs was prepared.<sup>84</sup> By June 2015, 4470 NGOs were cracked down upon. The organisations were an eclectic mix, as the Scroll explains: “The names of the penalized organisations are diverse and surprising: it includes the Supreme Court Bar Association, the Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, the All-India Lawn Tennis Association and even a host of premier educational institutes like the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Gujarat’s Sardar Patel University and the National Institute of Fashion Technology.”<sup>85</sup>

All of this was before the amendment to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) 2010, in late 2020.

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81. <https://www.thekashmirmonitor.net/corporatization-of-media-in-india-a-brief-analysis/>

82. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/corporatisation-of-the-media/cid/1540547>

83. <https://scroll.in/latest/1031142/adani-group-to-acquire-29-18-stake-in-ndtv>

84. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/narendra-modi-govt-cracks-down-on-ngos-prepares-hitlist/story-Q9IGg6i2YimcSeh-gA7W4IN.html>

85. <https://scroll.in/article/733536/scroll-explainer-why-4470-ngos-have-lost-their-foreign-funding-licence>

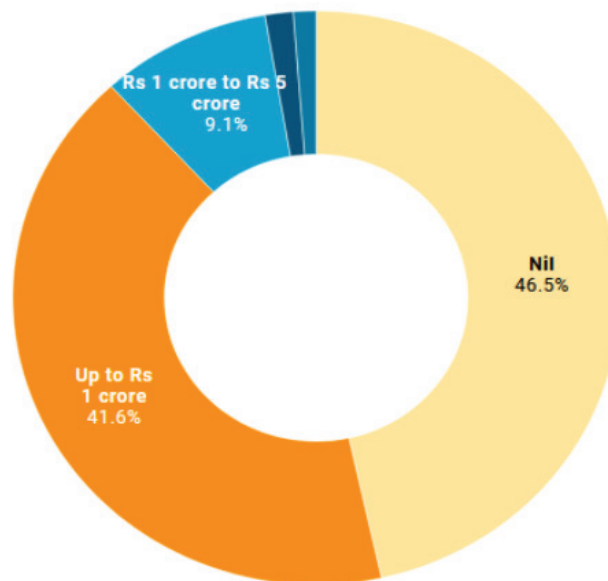
These amendments brought about changes in the name of increasing transparency and accountability, that required NGOs, irrespective of where in the country they were based, to open a pass-through bank account in a specified branch in New Delhi through which the government can track all of their financial transactions. These amendments stopped NGOs from transferring foreign grants to other smaller registered NGOs which did not have FCRA and the cap on administrative expenses was lowered significantly. Each of these changes has a major impact on the financial structures for NGOs.

For instance, while 93% of NGOs are outside Delhi, all of them have to open a bank account at a specified bank in Delhi.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, stopping the practice of regrantsing has been a blow to numerous small NGOs that work in remote areas on a small scale and do not have the resources to raise their own funds. The supposed intention of these amendments to increase transparency and accountability in what is alleged to be a major source of foreign funding in the country – NGOs – is proved blatantly false by the actual data presented below:

### Nearly 90% of FCRA-registered NGOs do not receive big foreign grants

Share of FCRA-registered NGOs (%) by quantum of foreign grants received in 2018-19

■ Nil   
 ■ Up to Rs 1 crore   
 ■ Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore  
■ Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore   
 ■ Above Rs 10 crore



Source: 2019 report titled 'Estimating Philanthropic Capital in India' by the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, Ashoka University  
 • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-s-crackdown-on-ngos-in-four-charts-11601363086584.html>

86. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-s-crackdown-on-ngos-in-four-charts-11601363086584.html>

Yet another amendment, also enacted in early 2020, this time to the Income Tax Act forces organisations to renew their registration every five years. This is a redundant provision as the previous practice that allowed for registrations to be automatically renewed only upon submission of proper tax returns was more than sufficient to ensure accountability.<sup>87</sup>

Before and after the enactment of these laws, NGOs were targeted and constantly harassed. Raids were conducted and bank accounts were frozen. This process has been well documented along with the repercussions of this for voices of dissent and the existence of a vibrant civil society in India.<sup>88</sup> Organisations such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace have had to shut down and downsize operations in India.<sup>89</sup> Such undemocratic actions have been noted internationally and condemned by most international bodies already. It took on a horrifying dimension during the COVID crisis. Aakar Patel writes as follows:

“When the second wave of the Covid pandemic hammered India, Modi turned to the same NGOs he had brutalized for help. Ten NGOs the BBC spoke to for a report on its Newsnight show said they all had trouble distributing aid because of FCRA. Indian hospitals and charitable trusts could not receive Covid relief material sent by donors abroad because, although the Modi government on 3 May 2021 permitted imports without GST for these items, it did not exempt them from FCRA law. This jeopardized plans to donate oxygen plants and concentrators, especially for rural areas. In one hospital where two dozen people had already died for lack of oxygen, foreign donors could not donate an oxygen production plant because FCRA approval was holding up the process. No entity could receive foreign aid, even as medicines or equipment, without FCRA registration. Moreover, the very stringent provisions of the law meant that the intended use of the foreign contribution had to also “match the specified objective of the trust at the time of FCRA registration.” In addition, remember that the 2020 amendment prohibits entities receiving aid in whatever form from regranteeing it to others. The damage could not be undone and the direct harm to Indians from Modi’s FCRA changes now became apparent to the world.”<sup>90</sup>

NGOs in India today work in an environment of danger and fear. This curbs not only their everyday activities but almost effectively stops them entirely from directly expressing dissent against the government. This does not bode well for a society that is supposed to be built on democratic principles. The profound impact on the fulfilment of basic services for the marginalized undertaken by NGOs is restricted in the context of state services being inaccessible to large numbers of people in a heavily populated, vast place such as India.

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87. <https://scroll.in/article/952149/ngos-fear-more-harassment-as-modi-government-changes-rules-for-registrations>

88. <https://article-14.com/post/my-amnesty-experience-how-modi-govt-wreaked-havoc-on-india-s-ngo-sector-61b02302c6324>

89. <https://thewire.in/rights/amnesty-international-india-shuts-down-inquiries-investigating-agencies-ed-cbi> and <https://scroll.in/article/769357/full-text-you-cant-sink-a-rainbow-or-muzzle-dissent-in-democracy-says-greenpeace-india>

90. <https://article-14.com/post/my-amnesty-experience-how-modi-govt-wreaked-havoc-on-india-s-ngo-sector-61b02302c6324>

NGOs as an institutional pillar of society have held the place of being service providers, non-partisan observers, documenters, and those who can hold the state accountable especially in times of conflict, disasters, and violations of rights. This role has been hugely curtailed by the current regime thus silencing yet another quarter from which the government would have otherwise been held accountable. This then is yet another hindrance they have removed from their path to take forward their agenda of a singular Hindu India built of fear, intimidation, and multiple kinds of violence.

## **Elections**

India being the “largest democracy in the world” mostly gets this epithet for having a large number of persons casting their votes in various elections in the country. However, the elections themselves have been fraught with corruption, violence, and a large number of violations of different kinds. This is habitual and taken for granted in the country. However, as with everything else, the current regime has perfected the ways to use these trends to their benefit while also legalizing and thus legitimizing practices that have been underway for a long time illegitimately. There are three areas to look at in this regard that have been visible since the BJP came to power. **First is their role in election code violations during the last election when they came to power. Second is Modi’s attempts at giving a vote to non-resident persons of Indian origin. Third is the legitimizing of election bonds through law.**

We will address the code violations and votes for non-resident Indians briefly and move on to take a more detailed look at the election bond scheme. In the last major election in India – the Lok Sabha elections in 2019 – the majority of complaints received by the Election Commission with regard to code violations was against BJP politicians.<sup>91</sup> One election commissioner who opposed clearing Modi and the BJP of such code violations continues to face the repercussions of standing up for honesty and truth. His family hasn’t been spared either.<sup>92</sup> With regard to code violations, there is enough reason to believe that in local elections that have happened since and in the upcoming national election in 2023, we will see similar instances that will continue with impunity.

As for voting rights for diasporic Indians, consider the following facts: India has one of the largest diasporas in the world;<sup>93</sup> a large number of them, especially over the past decade, have been vociferous about affairs back home and have expressed support to the Modi government.<sup>94</sup> Given this, it is no surprise that Modi himself and his mouthpieces in the diaspora have been encouraging the diaspora to vote.<sup>95</sup>

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91. <https://indianexpress.com/elections/ec-got-most-poll-code-violation-complaints-against-bjp-leaders-lok-saha-elections-5715947/>

92. <https://scroll.in/latest/948135/honesty-always-comes-with-a-price-says-ec-lavasa-who-opposed-clearing-modi-of-poll-code-violation>

93. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/how-nris-could-vote-by-post-7088800/>

94. <https://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/210419/nris-from-20-countries-campaign-for-pm-modi.html>

95. <http://www.modiforpm.org/how-nri-can-vote.aspx>

It began with an amendment to the law in 2017 that allowed for them to be able to register in person to vote.<sup>96</sup> That was still only an on-paper shift as not many, relative to the total number of NRIs, could travel to vote. Even then a large number did travel and register to vote.<sup>97</sup> Since 2019 there has been talk of allowing proxy voting which is currently only allowed for defence personnel.<sup>98</sup> A postal ballot is also being considered.<sup>99</sup> The impact of this in increasing the number of votes for the BJP and in fact, swinging electoral results in Indian politics is abundantly clear.<sup>100</sup> This remains one of the biggest threats to being able to defeat the BJP in the electoral realm in the upcoming national election.

The main structural shift in elections brought about by this regime concerns the Election Bond Scheme. Funding of political parties in India has always been a murky terrain with all political parties being equally sullied within it. In this context, the BJP proposed an Election Bond Scheme that it declared to be an attempt to bring transparency to the funding of political parties. According to this:

1. Any person or entity can buy a bond – which is a non-interest-bearing promissory note from the State Bank of India. This will leave a digital trail of paperwork and the bank will have details of the purchaser.
2. Bonds purchased this way can be deposited into the bank accounts of political parties and the donor is not required to reveal their own identity or that of the party they are contributing to.
3. They can buy bonds worth up to 1 crore.
4. This comes with two other changes where the cap on corporate giving has been removed and the provision requiring corporates to declare their political donations in their profit-loss statements has been done away with.
5. While cash donations beyond Rs. 2000 have been done away with, it has not been done away with completely, still making room for the use of black money.

The bond scheme that was to encourage transparency and discourage the use of black money does neither. The government has information on donors and received funds, information that is denied to the general public, press and civil society.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the Law Commission in India in itself noted that the provision for electoral bonds was passed through the upper house with a range of illegal practices. The Law Commission signed off on it anyway with a warning to the government to not repeat such things.<sup>102</sup> Soon after the bonds became available, 95% of them went as donations to the BJP.<sup>103</sup>

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96. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/how-nris-could-vote-by-post-7088800/>

97. *ibid*

98. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/centres-decision-allow-proxy-voting-rights-nri-may-kick-hornets-nest>

99. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/nris-in-south-africa-told-to-sign-up-as-overseas-electors-ec/article65344486.ece>

100. <https://lifestyle.livemint.com/news/big-story/how-the-nri-voter-can-swing-indian-politics-111611325325514.html>

101. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/01/08/electoral-bonds-prize-anonymity-you-won-t-know-who-s-bought-them-pub-75176>

102. [https://www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/electoral-bonds-rti-arun-jaitley-law-ministry\\_in\\_5e2eccb1c5b6d6767fd8733f](https://www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/electoral-bonds-rti-arun-jaitley-law-ministry_in_5e2eccb1c5b6d6767fd8733f)

103. <https://factly.in/its-official-95-of-the-electoral-bonds-purchased-in-2017-18-went-to-the-bjp/>



In 2020, it was 76% of electoral bonds to the BJP while 9% went to the Congress, the second major national party.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, there is evidence that the increase in donations to the BJP is directly proportionate to its ascent to power.<sup>105</sup> The Chief Election Commissioner during the time that the Bond scheme was introduced registered his apprehensions as follows:

“While we have not done a full assessment yet, prima facie, I feel that none of our concerns have been addressed in the [electoral bonds] scheme... there are many grey areas in this because when there is **no ceiling on party expenditure and the EC cannot monitor it, how can you be sure that what is coming in is not black money as there is a secrecy of the donor. Even foreign money can come and even a dying company can give money now because the clause that insisted that only companies with minimum 7.5% profit in the last three years could donate has been removed. So, prima facie, it appears that the scheme cannot really deliver whatever it was intended to.**”<sup>106</sup> (Emphasis added)

Overall, it has been established without a doubt that far from addressing the opacity in party funding in India the bond scheme only legalizes it.<sup>107</sup> As if adding fuel to fire, the transaction costs of these bonds, which accumulate to the millions given the amount of money involved, are paid not by the donor or the receiver but by the government with the Indian citizens' taxpayer money.<sup>108</sup>

Electoral Bonds are just one small part of the larger Corporate-Government nexus where corporate electoral trusts have been set up and have consistently been increasing their contribution to political parties. Privatization of state entities to the benefit of specific companies is directly proportionate to their contribution to their electoral trusts.<sup>109</sup>

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104. <https://scroll.in/latest/1025223/bjp-got-nearly-75-of-donations-to-political-parties-in-2020-2021-shows-election-commission-data>

105. <https://scroll.in/article/825018/these-two-charts-show-how-the-bjps-donations-have-paralleled-its-political-ascendancy>

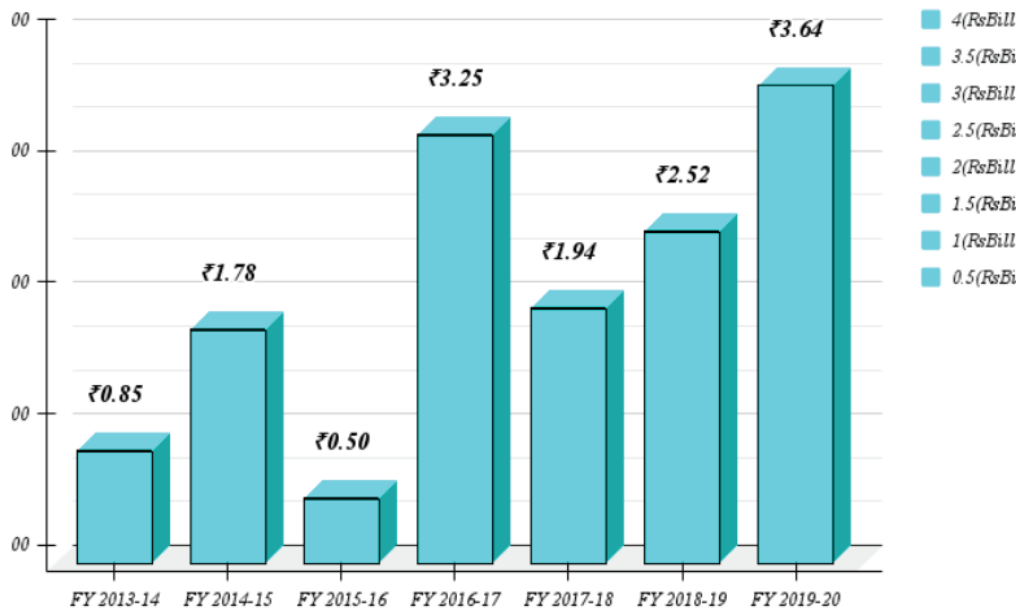
106. <https://scroll.in/article/903623/the-daily-fix-centre-must-address-ecs-concerns-about-electoral-bonds-encouraging-corruption>

107. *ibid*

108. <https://scroll.in/article/932516/should-the-indian-taxpayer-pay-the-hidden-cost-of-donations-to-political-parties>

109. <https://www.thepolisproject.com/read/the-corporate-government-nexus-in-indian-politics-an-analysis-of-corporate-backed-electoral-trusts/>

**The flow of Corporate Contribution to Electoral Trusts in FY 2013-20**



<https://www.thepolisproject.com/read/the-corporate-government-nexus-in-indian-politics-an-analysis-of-corporate-backed-electoral-trusts/>

Overall, at the present moment, apart from all the other institutions discussed above, the BJP regime has ensured its hold over the very institution that is at the core of ensuring that they remain in power – the elections. Just as mentioned earlier in other sections, this takeover is done with the full complicity of corporate entities that reign supreme in the post-neoliberal era. Furthermore, just as in many other instances, actions that defy the principles of fairness, transparency, and justice that were earlier done illegally or extra-legally have been brought within the ambit of the law. This has been done irrespective of voices of reasoned dissent, even from within state structures, that clearly show that these laws do not fulfil their stated intentions. The election bond scheme stands as a clear symbol of that which is at the crux of the most harmful aspect of the current regime’s propagation of violent ideology and action – that it is done not beyond or against democratic practice but within democratic practices such as elections.

### **Judiciary**

Among all of the institutions discussed above, the erosion of the Judiciary is perhaps the most troubling. This isn’t just because the Judiciary is a well-respected institution, at least among the elites in Indian society, but also because it is the paramount role of the Judiciary to keep the other arm of government, the executive, in check. This system of checks and balances is of enormous importance for a functional democracy. As retired Justice A.P. Shah writes:

“A democracy derives its legitimacy from representing the will of the majority. But this legitimacy comes at a cost, which is invariably borne by minority groups, and especially those that are unpopular or victims of deep prejudice and who cannot influence the legislature in any way. This power to protect minorities from the tyranny of the majority is the basis of judicial review powers that allow courts to strike down laws for violating the constitution.<sup>110</sup>”

The Judiciary has not always been impeccable in India. It has had its limitations and some severe ups and downs in its role within the democratic structure.<sup>111</sup> This becomes all the more apparent when analyzing the role of the judiciary from the perspective of those marginalized based on class, caste, or gender.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, it is widely acknowledged that the period during Congress leader Indira Gandhi’s rule as Prime Minister was also a time of curbing of civil rights. During this time the judiciary was held at the whim of the executive, specifically a dictatorial prime minister.<sup>113</sup> Even during that time, there were sections of the judiciary that have since been hailed for defying hegemonic power and upholding constitutional rights.<sup>114</sup>

Since the BJP came to power in 2014, this sometimes flawed but largely dependable institution, in terms of upholding democracy, has been eroded methodically. As soon as Modi came to power an effort was made to take the power of appointing supreme court judges away from the judiciary. In this instance, the judiciary fought back and won.<sup>115</sup> However, we know now that this was an insignificant victory given all that has happened since. ***The judiciary has been complicit in many actions by the current regime by delaying judgment in many significant cases; curbing freedom of expression and dissent with an iron fist; not upholding constitutional rights; not taking a non-majoritarian stance in judgments; and abdicating justice altogether. All this is being done, not by a complete takeover of the judiciary by pro-government judges, but by placing a few in strategic places to get the job done while unceremoniously denying appointments or transferring judges who may stand up against them.***<sup>116</sup> Whether it is the horrific custodial death of aged human rights activist Fr. Stan Swamy who was denied medical care,<sup>117</sup> or the arrest of disabled University professor Sai Baba,<sup>118</sup> the judiciary has over and over again chosen not to uphold the rule of law which might, in turn, ensure compassion.

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110. <https://thewire.in/law/supreme-court-rights-uapa-bjp-nda-master-of-roster>

111. <https://scroll.in/article/979369/the-indian-judiciary-didnt-suddenly-decline-in-the-modi-years-it-was-always-broken>

112. *ibid*

113. <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/the-darkest-hour-in-indian-judicial-history-when-the-supreme-court-surrendered-its-autonomy-during-emergency-254859.html>

114. <https://thewire.in/history/how-the-judiciary-defied-the-government-to-uphold-constitutional-values-during-the-emergency>

115. <https://thewire.in/law/supreme-court-rights-uapa-bjp-nda-master-of-roster>

116. *ibid*

117. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/darkness-at-noon-felled-by-the-judiciary/article35201982.ece>

118. <https://www.newsclick.in/injustice-unlimited-court-verdicts-aseemanand-and-saibaba> . Prof. Sai Baba was since granted bail at the Bombay High Court which was swiftly overturned by the Supreme Court. Refer here: <https://scroll.in/latest/1035083/gn-saibaba-to-remain-in-jail-as-sc-suspends-bombay-hc-acquittal-order-in-maoists-link-case>

It is impossible here to outline the numerous cases and judgments that will illustrate this erosion in the judiciary. A few broad trends, however, can be outlined.

**First, the judiciary, instead of protecting people from unconstitutional laws such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, is reaffirming it, making them stronger with every passing day.**

The Bhima Koregaon case mentioned above is only one case in point.<sup>119</sup> **Second, multiple senior judges are gushing about the government and the supreme leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in public.** At least one such judge has been offered a seat in parliament post-retirement, bringing into question all his judgments during his tenure which were in favour of the government and doing a deep disservice to democracy as we know it in India.<sup>120</sup> **Third, the court, when called upon to intervene and speak up against the government's misuse of power, has routinely absolved of its responsibility to do so.** For instance, the Supreme Court validated the Election Bonds Act discussed above.<sup>121</sup> **Fourth, is inordinate delays in justice even when the court cases are accompanied by, among other movements, the movements against the Citizenship Amendment Act or the Farm Laws.** Even the taking back of the Farm Laws, the only major victory that movements in India have seen in years, happened through the sheer might of the farmers' persistent protests with no help whatsoever from the judiciary.<sup>122</sup> With every other law that the government had brought in, there are cases pending that challenge them – the abrogation of Article 370, which effectively denies all rights accorded to Kashmir's citizens; the Citizenship Amendment Act; the sedition law; the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA); and the electoral bond scheme, among others.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, the Pegasus investigation has revealed that the Indian government's use of sophisticated Israeli technology to spy on people was used in various institutions including the judiciary.<sup>124</sup> Along with this, the strong contingent of lawyers who have toiled for decades defending human rights is being denied their civil rights<sup>125</sup> to practice and provide legal representation. Some lawyers have also been imprisoned. The glimmers of hope in the Judiciary have been on issues that the government does not care about, namely privacy rights or decriminalizing adult consensual same-sex sexual activity in private.<sup>126</sup> **In sum, the judiciary has been battered and enfeebled<sup>127</sup> and is slipping towards judicial barbarism.<sup>128</sup> As A.P. Shah laments about the apex court in India, "the only institution capable of stopping the death of democracy is aiding it."<sup>129</sup>**

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119. <https://www.newsclick.in/injustice-unlimited-court-verdicts-aseemanand-and-saibaba>

120. <https://theprint.in/opinion/supreme-court-judges-gushing-over-modi-is-a-problem-for-judiciary-and-democracy/370935/>

121. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/supreme-court-narendra-modi-government-6585721/>

122. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/18/india/india-farm-law-repeal-modi-intl-hnk/index.html>

123. <https://thewire.in/law/constitution-day-court-challenges-basic-rights>

124. <https://scroll.in/article/1001082/pegasus-raises-dark-questions-about-the-supreme-court-and-judicial-independence>

125. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/in-india-narendra-modis-government-is-using-the-courts-to-attack-civil-rights>

126. <https://thewire.in/law/supreme-court-rights-uapa-bjp-nda-master-of-roster>

127. <https://thewire.in/law/supreme-court-modi-years>

128. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/supreme-court-arnab-goswami-bail-article-32-pratap-bhanu-meh-ta-7055067/>

129. <https://thewire.in/law/supreme-court-rights-uapa-bjp-nda-master-of-roster>

## **Other institutions**

The above description isn't even complete. **Analyses of public administration, the manipulation of statistics around the economy, interventions in parliamentary administration, and even the military restructuring are all part of this all-encompassing erosion of institutions.** Public administration studies show that a ranking system has been put in place, without any repercussions on resource allocation per se. This sets up a culture, across local administrative units, where they compete not for any material benefit that will help them serve their area better, but ONLY for being congratulated by the Prime Minister,<sup>130</sup> thus contributing to his cult of personality.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, economists have noted with concern, the manipulation and erosion of independent structures such as the National Statistical Mission.<sup>132</sup> This has enabled the government to manipulate data to maintain the perception that this regime has been good for the Indian economy, when in fact, it has often had disastrous effects. Apart from this, as mentioned earlier, ordinances have been passed without following due procedure, thus bypassing proper scrutiny of parliament. This has led to the shrinking of the democratically assigned role of parliament in ensuring scrutiny with regard to laws that have an impact on the people of the country.<sup>133</sup> Last but not the least, the current regime's foreign policy has moved away from what India usually practised in this regard, which was limited and subtle to a more aggressive stance, while simultaneously engaging in censure of things to do with India being discussed internationally. The latter is not a practice with much of a precedent in India.<sup>134</sup>

The thorough and insidious rupture and erosion of almost every conceivable institution that is essential to living in India described above mean that the transformation in the country has been undertaken methodically by the current government. The scariest elements when considering all these changes together are two-fold: first that the regime intends to change the country's very essence. This essence lies in the historical prioritizing of diversity, inclusion, equality, liberty, and non-discrimination among other things, however incomplete and flawed such prioritizing may have always been. This desired change is being brought about with a long-term perspective. Irrespective of who may officially hold power in the country after this current period, these changes will continue to have an impact. Second, these all-pervasive changes in institutions that make up the pillars of society and the affirming effect of these changes upon existing hegemonic caste, class, gender, or sexuality norms, make for an atmosphere where the regime no longer needs to impose their ideas using literal physical violence.

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130. Sharma, Karnamadakala Rahul. 2021. "Swachh Survekshan Needs to Clean up its Methodology: An Assessment of Ranks as Performance Incentives for Indian Cities". *Urbanisation*. 6 (2): 133-144.

131. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/modi-cult-of-personality/2021/03/18/dc7ee180-8773-11eb-bfdf-4d36dab83a6d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/modi-cult-of-personality/2021/03/18/dc7ee180-8773-11eb-bfdf-4d36dab83a6d_story.html)

132. <https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/6882#tocto1n1>

133. <https://article-14.com/post/how-india-s-govt-is-setting-in-place-a-new-structure-for-a-dysfunctional-parliament-619c5af27c1d2>

134. <https://caravanmagazine.in/commentary/modi-government-deflects-international-censure>

These ideas will become the norm and slip into everyday life smoothly and will no longer need to be continually asserted by those in power. As a result, the less visible violence and assertion there is, the harder it is to observe and thus resist the harm these ideas cause to the well-documented foundational values and ethos of the country which includes democracy, diversity, tolerance, coexistence, freedom, equality and non-discrimination among others.<sup>135</sup>

**The erosion of public institutions is perhaps the most organized, insidious, and long-standing impact that the regime will have which will fulfil its goals without requiring them to even be blatantly violent. This is then at the very core of their complete takeover of India to create a singular Hindu India, contrary to how it was imagined and created since independence. This imagination and creation is what has sustained the dissent against the regime's methodical attempts to undo this ethos of India described above.**

## MOMENTS OF VIOLENCE AND PROTEST AGAINST THEM

The above narrative already includes a number of instances of brutal violence. Since 2019, it has been striking to observe the mass-scale protests against such concerted violence unleashed by the current regime. This is not to say that there hadn't been mass-scale protests or smaller-scale persistent protests even before that. It is close to impossible to make an exhaustive list of all of the protests that have happened against government actions since 2014. It is also important to remember that some protests, specifically those that are centred on metropolitan centres, always garner a lot more attention than those in marginalized areas, even if they sometimes have involved scores of people. Taken together, in the least, this affirms that wherever there is a process of repression, there will always be resistance.

In 2016, a group of Dalit men were beaten up and paraded in public for skinning a cow carcass, which was part of their profession, in Una in Gujarat. A video of the beatings went viral. A few weeks after, a massive rally of thousands of Dalits took place in Gujarat where they all took an oath to not pick up cow carcasses.<sup>136</sup> This had a massive impact in the region as only specific sections of the Dalit community had the expertise on processing cow carcasses and with them refusing to perform that work, the carcasses piled up with no one knowing how to deal with them.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, the #NotInMyName protests began in 2017 in response to the killing of 16-year-old Junaid for "eating beef." This movement involved huge marches across many places in the country and was made possible by information spreading on social media.<sup>138</sup>

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135. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/recommitting-to-india-s-core-values-101643134768046.html> and <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-at-75-five-fundamental-rights-granted-to-citizens-since-independence/article65765858.ece>

136. <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/jignesh-mevani-dalit-leader-una>

137. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/Cattle-carcasses-rot-in-Gujarat-as-angry-Dalits-stay-away/article-show/53425639.cms>

138. <https://www.firstpost.com/living/not-in-my-name-what-have-the-protest-marches-across-india-been-able-to-achieve-3764571.html>

The NotInMyName moniker was revived again in 2018 in response to the brutal rapes of Muslim and Dalit girls and women in Kathua, Unnao, Surat etc. In 2019, millions of Adivasis protested against the shoddy implementation of the Forest Rights Act<sup>139</sup> with barely any media attention in spite of the scale and numbers that participated in this protest. Perhaps the most brutally suppressed of all the protests were those in Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 that led to the removal of the special status of Kashmir.<sup>140</sup> Three years on, this continues to be protested in the streets of Kashmir and in other parts of the country and in court. Days after the protests began Kashmir witnessed mass arrests of political leaders and civilians as well as a complete cut off from the internet making for the longest internet shutdown in any democracy ever.<sup>141</sup> While the shutting down of the internet has become routine practice, the length of it in Kashmir, of eighteen months, remains unprecedented.

It is in this context that the Shaheen Bagh protest emerged in December 2019 as soon as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that explicitly excluded Muslims from citizenship became law. A group of women took over a road in their area and refused to move till four months later in spite of intimidation and violence. It was only the COVID pandemic and the lockdown thereof that could be weaponized by the regime to clear the protesters from this space. By then, however, Shaheen Bagh had led to the formation of many other protest sites around the country, most of which were led by Muslim women. These sites had become a beacon of hope and a model for future protests in the country.<sup>142</sup> This impact cannot be undone even though the protests themselves no longer continue. The protests against the CAA galvanized all sections of Indian society with women and the youth at the forefront. As discussed earlier many attacks on students on campuses coincided with their role in the anti-CAA protests. The state-orchestrated brutal riots in Delhi in February 2020 was a targeted attack against Muslims. The illegal arrests that have followed, which have implicated progressive voices in the riots, are an attack on the right to dissent and the atmosphere that was created and sustained in Delhi, of coming together across identities to rise up in protest against injustice. Shaheen Bagh being one area that was part of the large-scale demolition drives in Delhi this year is not a coincidence. Yet another mass-scale protest that shook the nation is the farmers' protest that began in June 2020.<sup>143</sup> This protest, the only one that has yielded a positive result in the past few years, with the withdrawal of the farm laws, has been a ray of sunshine in the darkness.

A few key features have emerged from these protests over the past few years. First, there has been a reclaiming of specific national symbols, the flag, and the constitution by popular protests. The reclamation of the flag and sometimes the national anthem is an attempt to wrest the idea of India away from Hindutva ideology. The constitution on the other hand is a handbook, a tool, and perhaps the strongest weapon in the hands of the people.

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139. [https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2019/0804\\_pd/advivasis-protest-against-fra-amendment-bill](https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2019/0804_pd/advivasis-protest-against-fra-amendment-bill)

140. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>

141. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/indias-internet-shutdown-in-kashmir-is-now-the-longest-ever-in-a-democracy/2019/12/15/bb0693ea-1dfc-11ea-977a-15a6710ed6da\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/indias-internet-shutdown-in-kashmir-is-now-the-longest-ever-in-a-democracy/2019/12/15/bb0693ea-1dfc-11ea-977a-15a6710ed6da_story.html)

142. <https://caravanmagazine.in/books/politics-shaheen-bagh-model-for-the-future>

143. <https://www.thepolispject.com/read/one-year-of-farmers-protests-in-india-june-2020-to-june-2021/>

Ambedkar's vision of the constitution as a moral compass for the nation-state has been in full view for the past few years. The preamble has been publicly read in large gatherings to reaffirm the very commitments to the people of India that the current regime is brazenly rupturing on a daily basis. Second, the protests are being led, albeit in a decentred manner, by a new generation of young people. Some among them are promising future political leaders such as politicians Jignesh Mewani and Kanhaiya Kumar. However, more sustained hope emerges from the countless unknown young people, especially women who have been persistently protesting all over the country. The image of the two activists from JNU's feminist organization Pinjra Tod – Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal – walking out on bail after 13 months in prison for allegedly 'masterminding' the Delhi riots with heads held high and hands raised with slogans to a cheering crowd of friends, family, and supporters is a symbol of this new generation.



<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-57648106>

They are one among thousands of such women who have stood up against this regime. A generation of young people across the country has been subject to the propaganda of the regime outlined above. Many among them have borne witness to or participated in protests for their fundamental rights and to protect their nation's progressive foundational principles. This generation understands through first-hand experience the multifaceted attack on the history and values of all those with a relationship to the Indian nation-state with all its vibrancy and diversity.

Since the farmers' protest, although protests have continued including the ongoing one around price hikes and inflation, a huge amount of energy is being taken over by the legal fights for all those who are incarcerated. In spite of the large number of progressive persons who are available for such work in India, there is an overwhelming sense that has set in given the large-scale arrests of significant thinkers, writers, activists, lawyers, and others. The responses to the most recent arrest of Teesta Setalvad and the legal battle ahead of her and her supporters,



after she came out on bail expose this exhaustion and overwhelm. This is only understandable given the massive ruptures in many of the public institutions that may have otherwise been approached to support such fights. In spite of this, writing, stellar journalism, creative research that contributes to movement building and the everyday grind of ensuring safety and justice for all continues in India.

One observation in this regard is whether it might be worthwhile for those opposing the regime to think through means of envisioning opposition that is not just reactive but also creative. This is often seen as a redundant suggestion given the immediate need and overwhelming nature of the work to even acquire bail for our fellow fighters. However, given the scale and depth of the regime's intrusion that is all too apparent, it is imperative to ask what it is that is needed to actively create and leave behind a generation to continue this fight. What institutions need to be built, however small, to keep inclusivity, openness, and other progressive values alive in India? How can future generations of students, lawyers, public administrators or the general citizenry be influenced to not lose sight of diversity, truth, and justice? These are some of the questions to hold close as we complete this narrative of the resistance that has been mounted to the current regime.

This description of resistance to the regime is only an indication and does not even begin to be a detailed narrative. The main purpose of this essay is to show clearly how the Indian state is institutionalizing violence and hate while creating a singular idea of the nation. Moments of resistance against this process are mentioned here to put on record that in spite of the curbing of dissent, there are constant attempts to keep alive the spaces of resistance. A more detailed analysis of the ongoing resistance to the regime's actions is outside the scope of this paper and requires its own space.

***As for the question of moments of brutal violence, they are becoming less and less essential for the regime. Even when they do occur such as with Bhima Koregaon and the riots in Delhi, they are twisted and legally blamed on the very people who are fighting for the rights of the victims of such violence. The nature of the regime's activities and the form that its creation of singular and extremist ideas of Hindu India is one which is institutionalized, included within the law, and cushioned by a carefully constructed broad societal consensus on such violence.***

## HATE AS METHOD

Feminist Historian Uma Chakravarti who has lived through and has been observing decades of communal tensions, violence, movements of resistance, and change, observed that there is a broad-ranging societal complicity with the ongoing violence. This complicity has aided in Hindutva moving from being a fringe idea to the norm in India today. How has this complicity been created? It is important to understand this to put the pieces of the puzzle together and understand the Indian state's violent extremism.

As an illustration, what follows is a discussion of one crucial element that is an integral part of the regime's activities that contributes a great deal to constructing this complicity – hate speech. The widespread use of hate speech propagates some key messages such as the alleged threat to Hindu “civilization”/people and the need to annihilate others to protect the Hindus. Towards this end, India is to be made a Hindu nation and Muslims primarily and also Christians and Sikhs must be eliminated. Anyone who disagrees with this idea is to be declared anti-national, diminished in significance, and preferably incarcerated. Upon initial reading, it may seem as if the last three sentences are exaggerated descriptions that cannot by any stretch, be the reality. However, with the planned nature in which this project is being undertaken, the reach and success are palpable.

In 2021, multiple observers asked if India is inching towards genocide of all non-Hindus (and this includes most of the oppressed castes).<sup>144</sup> The use of the term genocide is not a choice made lightly. Among the gamut of reasons why this line of questioning has become commonplace, is the prevalence of hate speech. To give a sense of how hate speech is operating in India right now, let's take a look at the **Dharam Sansad, a national conference of Hindu religious leaders held in December 2021; hate speech that spread in the run-up to the Delhi riots; and some undercover journalism by News Laundry on the building of a “Hindu Ecosystem” online.**

During the Dharam Sansad, multiple speeches were made that openly called for the annihilation of Muslims. Thousands of followers of Hindutva took oaths to kill for their cause. This occurred in Haridwar in the BJP-run state of Uttarakhand.<sup>145</sup> A similar event also took place in the Congress-run state of Chhattisgarh where similar remarks were made.<sup>146</sup> In both places, even more shocking than the flagrant hate speech is the fact that the state and police did not respond to them at all and they occurred with complete impunity.<sup>147</sup> Many commentators on the speeches that were heard by millions online after the event, were reminded of the speeches in Nazi Germany.<sup>148</sup>

Similar speeches were made and spread widely online in the run-up to the Delhi Riots in February 2020. These are the same riots for which multiple student leaders and others have been booked for being the “masterminds” under the UAPA. On Facebook and other social media platforms, multiple self-identified Hindu men and women made flagrant speeches asking their brethren to take up arms and kill. Anti-CAA protesters and the specific areas in which the protests occurred, including Shaheen Bagh, were the targets. The information and motivational speeches on social media were used to update those engaged in the riots on where to reach to partake in specific acts of violence.<sup>149</sup>

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144. <https://thewire.in/communalism/is-india-lurching-into-a-genocide>

145. <https://www.firstpost.com/india/haridwar-dharma-sansad-event-sparks-outrage-over-hate-speeches-heres-what-happened-at-the-three-day-event-10232871.html>

146. <https://hindutvawatch.org/shoot-them-in-congress-ruled-chhattisgarh-hate-speech-against-muslims-christians-goes-unchecked/>

147. <https://countercurrents.org/2022/01/spewing-hate-calling-for-genocide/>

148. <https://sabrangindia.in/article/citizens-compare-dharma-sansad-nazi-germany>

149. <https://www.article-14.com/post/the-hateful-facebook-adventures-of-ragini-tiwari-friends>

This along with pictures and videos of people engaged in violence have been proudly shared on social media even as the Delhi police denies any involvement of Hindu groups affiliated to the ruling party in the riots.

It may seem, to the uninformed, that this is an unorganized spread of hate that is a result of and is enabling of collective change of minds and hearts in the country which in turn is costing the lives of members of specific communities. However, the efforts online are thoroughly organized. This has been made visible thanks to committed journalists and researchers in India. In one instance, journalists infiltrated the “Hindu Ecosystem” being created by a Delhi politician.<sup>150</sup> The process involved signing up online to be added to a telegram group. Apart from generic questions, the form asks about specific interests and the examples given involve “cow protection,” “fighting love jihad”, and enabling “ghar wapsi” – the campaign to bring in Dalits into Hindutva, service to temples, or general service. The registration also asks you to commit to the Hindu Ecosystem not just online but also ‘on the ground.’

Any Special area of interest? (Gauraksha, Gausewa, Fight Love Jihad, Ghar Wapasi, Halal, Mandir Nirmal, Hindu Ekta, Sewa in general etc) \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Declaration: by clicking yes below, you are committing to join Hindu Ecosystem Team online and/or on the ground. \*

Yes

No

150. <https://www.newslandry.com/2021/02/15/we-infiltrated-the-telegram-groups-of-the-bjp-leaders-online-network-to-see-what-they-do>

A pinned message on the group points to the main areas in which fake news, ahistorical information, and false propaganda will be created and shared. This list is very telling:

- Hindu Ecosystem**  
Our first 15 Selected topics -
1. Sanatan Dharma – Beyond the Geographical Boundary of India.
  2. Glorious Temples - Amazing temples - architecture, timeline, king , VS world's buildings
  3. Hindu temples contributing in developments - school , colleges , food , shelter, economy
  4. Lost temples ( replaced by church , masjid )
  5. Common Festivals connecting Bharat's every corner ( . eg Kartik Purnima celebrated in every part of Bharat )
  6. Science behind festival and rituals
  7. Great Ruler and Great War.
  8. Lost cities ( destroyed and renamed ) - history of cities , kiske naam pe rakho aur kyun rakha , kiske naam badla , toda , attack kiya
  9. Targeting Hindu festivals only – Assault of Secularism and Appeasement,
10. Hindu revolutionaries - as local as possible – In reference to Freedom Struggle.
  11. Hindu holocaust - exact killing of hindus.
  12. Wrong teachings in School - College books- Academic and cultural Invasion.
  13. Hindu minority in states. –

Based on these master lists, they circulate toolkits (remember the young environmentalist who was arrested for circulating Greta Thunberg's toolkit?) and convenient ways in which to be part of a Twitter storm with a simple click. This is only one model of online Hindutva work. We know from the attacks in JNU and other places the role of WhatsApp groups and of course the wide network of Hindutva members whose full-time job it is to populate the internet with fake news.<sup>151</sup>

151. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwilm4SF9PX6AhW74HMBHSbKD2oQFnoECB4QA-Q&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mdpi.com%2F2077-1444%2F13%2F8%2F739%2Fpdf%3Fversion%3D1660306380&usq=AOvVaw0BjEnVEXg11vb-56zgZBJdJ>

Hate speech has now become commonplace and the impunity extended to it has emboldened more and more people to engage in it. Early this year, following the Dharam Sansad, students from the premier management institution in India, the Indian Institute of Management, wrote an open letter to Modi beckoning him to break his silence as his silence is emboldening those engaged in blatant calls to destroy whole communities merely based on their religious identity.<sup>152</sup>

As of early this year, hate speech, ONLY among senior politicians was observed to have increased by 1130% since 2014.<sup>153</sup> What does this hate speech do to us?<sup>154</sup> As in the case of the Delhi riots, it sets the stage for actual physical violence. This happens both in terms of instilling fear in those being hunted and providing rationale and a sense of community to those who are to do the killing. Both of this contributes to a dehumanizing of us as a society whose ramifications will be palpable for generations to come. Perhaps even more insidious than this is the way hate speech, especially a consistent overdose of it in the public realm, slowly succeeds in making all those consuming such information in some form or another begin to hate the community being attacked, namely Muslims and also Christians and Sikhs, and internalize the fear being propagated about one's own community, namely Hindus. The fear and the hate are two sides of the same coin. Before we know it, the hatred will become so commonplace that we will no longer recognize it as such. It will simply become a way of thinking and viewing the world around us. Furthermore, hate speech shrinks any room left for rational conversations or responses in public debates about any subject. It makes it the norm to always have to respond in a state of heightened emotion with no room for reasoned arguments.

**The propagation of Hindutva hate speech in India right now is being done at all levels and with an extremely well-funded resourceful army of online and offline 'Sewaks' – those who serve Hindutva. Over time, it is becoming clear that hate speech does not need to take the form of the shrill voices of the saffron-clad men at the Dharam Sansad. It can be propagated with the calm tone of the Prime Minister himself through the likes of his programme Mann Ki Baat. This saturation of fake news and hate speech, all from persons who are trusted and respected in society, is crucial to the building of this broad societal consensus for the Indian state's violent extremism. This consensus emerges from a fundamental change in people's opinions about their society from one that may have been based on diversity and coexistence to one that is filled with fear. This fear in turn feeds the hatred. Hatred then is used as a method to give the "Hindus" a sense of belonging and put the fear of life into all other communities in India, especially the Muslims.**

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152. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/your-silence-emboldens-hate-filled-voices-iim-students-staff-to-pm-2696013>

153. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/bjp-tops-indias-vip-hate-pandemic-ndtv-finds-2703827>

154. <https://thewire.in/communalism/the-slow-poison-of-hate-speech-harms-in-obvious-and-insidious-ways>

## CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the extensive survey above, a description of how Hindutva has been methodically established as the norm by the current regime in India, remains incomplete. The areas that haven't been addressed include: the public expenditure on Hindu symbols<sup>155</sup> such as temples etc.; the careful crafting of Modi's cult of personality; the thorough establishment of a security state; weakening of the power of state governments and the hegemony of the centre over federal powers; delegitimizing of the very concept of protest/dissent; and the servile media.<sup>156</sup> Even though it is incomplete, having established to some extent the processes that are underway in India right now, a few broad conclusions can be made.

First, with regards to actual physical violence, the need for it as a means of furthering their agenda, is slowly being done away with, by the voices within the state. This is significant as it amounts to some minimal safety of the life and limb of the marginalized. However, the reason actual violence can be done away with chillingly points to a profound insidiousness with which their agenda is being propagated. By legitimizing their actions within the law, they are enacting long-term structural change in Indian society. Remember the instance of how cow lynching have been replaced with legal curbs on the slaughter of cows? This change is already altering the foundational values upon which the Indian nation-state was imagined and built, albeit always in flawed and limited ways. Hatred and exclusion are becoming commonplace and no longer require visible external expression. It is instead becoming a way of life. A way of life in which those attacked live in fear and those "included" in the majority internalize the hegemonic power of such an inclusion.

Second, the threat of physical violence is far from absent. The foot soldiers of the regime threaten such violence on a daily basis with complete impunity. This threat isn't just one that endangers physical safety. An oversaturation with hate speech is resulting in a dehumanizing of the "other" and a desensitizing of the majority to their fundamental humanity.

Third, ideas of what the nation was in an ahistorical, imagined "glorious Hindu past" as a vision for the future is being mobilized to incorporate large sections of Indian society within the regime's project. This is being done through a multipronged approach. This involves: affirming casteist and patriarchal structures that form the foundations of Indian society; propagating a constant sense of fear that the majority is in imminent danger from the "other"; providing a false sense of safety and stability through the doing away with "social evils" such as corruption. Corruption, even if defined in the narrowest financial terms, is far from done away with. Furthermore, there is no space for an analysis that recognizes, for instance, that the Election Bond scheme is a mere institutionalizing expansion of pre-existing corruption within the electoral system. On the contrary, the government can in fact use anti-corruption as a reason to garner support for corrupt measures such as the Bond Scheme, among many others.

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155. <https://cjp.org.in/communal-violence-in-the-year-2021/>

156. <https://thewire.in/politics/narendra-modi-punjab-cavalcade-democracy>

Fourth, this multidimensional attack on foundational values of independent India to create a Hindu India using democratic means to establish an undemocratic state and society is a perfect marriage of age-old casteist and patriarchal structures which malleably fit within the mould of the neoliberal economy. This structure is translated from the real world to the digital world and thus rapidly spreads among the population. Just as with literal violence, there is less of a need to be blatantly casteist or patriarchal. The hierarchical logic of these systems of oppression is written into their construction of the caste-pure Hindu family which forms the building block of their Hindu India. This construction is deeply integrated in their discourses and cannot always be pried apart and observed separately. Having said that, the voices that call for and execute brutal casteist and patriarchal violence continue. These include those that call for Hindu men to rape Muslim and Dalit women and those that “sell” Muslim women online and those that beat up and parade brutalized Dalit men and women IRL and on the internet. Fifth, the essential fact that is established in this paper is that the entirety of this violence is being perpetrated with, not just complicity, but active planning and execution by the state. Of the entity that is the state, many different arms are involved in this, led by the central government that is at the helm of power in India.

Given this central fact, let us briefly consider the impact of such state-enacted violent extremism on society as a whole as it can be discerned from India at this historical moment.

First, this form of state-enabled, sanctioned, and executed violent extremism is capable of transforming the very ethos of a society not just in the short run but also for the foreseeable future. Values such as tolerance and co-existence, or those that seem more ambitious given this context, such as viewing difference and diversity as strengths of society rather than a weakness, could become so minimally seen, spoken, or practised that future generations may not even know of them. This then would mean that fear, hatred, and violence against the “other” will become the norm and annihilation of diversity will become the goal. Second, as this form of violence is mounted from every conceivable space that governs our lives, given the powers that are behind it, it leaves those fighting it with no respite as it continues over a long period of time. This leaves them exhausted and with a sense of absolute loss of control over all that happens around them. Thus, a generation of thinkers, artists, and leaders who may otherwise be seen as the spirit or conscience of society will be run ragged. Third, this form of violence resembles war. Just like with war, if anyone wishes to live, not just with physical safety but also disagree with the hegemonic default constructions of hate of specific communities and the erosion or eradication of the values of democratic dissent, freedom, dignity etc., they are left with no choice but to flee. Alternatively, they must live with the constant threat of violence, included but not limited to physical violence. The other option is to brutally suppress their opinions in order to remain safe. We know from history that these were key elements that made up all wars, especially those that were accompanied by authoritarianism and fascism such as in Nazi Germany. Fourth, apart from a brief moment in history with Germany in the second world war, there aren't too many examples of acknowledgement of state-executed extreme violence of this kind targeting its own citizens. There are however numerous ongoing examples of this in the world with Israel, a close ally of India, leading the list with its occupation of Palestine and curbing any form of dissent against the regime in Israel. In this context, the

post-9/11 discourse on terrorism, particularly emerging from the United States of America, which has, in turn, spawned a range of other related discourses, including that of violent extremism, have all focused on non-state extremist ideas and the violence that may emerge from them. Wars and occupation of whole nations by the USA, for instance, have been justified through these discourses on terrorism. The overwhelming focus on non-state actors and the lack of political will to acknowledge the central role of the state in such violence have left a vacuum in international policy and discourse. In this vacuum, large-scale human rights abuses go unacknowledged or addressed. The values of maintaining robust democracies with healthy dissent; the responsibility of nation-states to be equally accountable to all its citizens; for nation states to be based on liberty, equality, fraternity etc. – all of which formed the basis for international discourses to maintaining peace in the world, in the aftermath of the world wars and the cold war, stand threatened.

The situation in India lays bare the dire need for a discourse that will enable us to acknowledge violent extremism executed directly by the state machinery which often involves diverse and complex forms of violence. **It urges us to expand the meaning of violence to include any acts, policies, and institutional changes among other things, that threaten the fundamental values of a nation-state, its residents, their composition, and their ways of relating to one another. Here, basic tenets of diversity, co-existence, respect for fundamental rights including the right to dissent, and a clear opposition to violence of all kinds must be taken as part of the values that are foundational to any place on earth.** Any threat to this from any quarters, including the state, must be treated as a threat to all of humanity. **When such a threat emerges from the very quarters whose essential job is to protect such these values – namely the state and its allied institutions – the danger of this rupture is that much more acute and must be clearly acknowledged as such.**

In sum, the situation in India urges us to specifically acknowledge the profound danger of violent extremism executed by the state, given the exponential access to power of all kinds that this process is able to garner. In situations such as the one in India where every pillar of society has been poisoned with an ideology premised on hate, exclusion, and violence, a language to address this reality in the international realm is not just required but imperative.