

11 The 2014 national elections from the margins of modern India

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On 16 May 2014, Narendra Damodardas Modi was voted in by 31 per cent of the Indian electorate as India's new Prime Minister (FP Politics 2014). The BJP currently enjoys a clear majority in the Lok Sabha, a remarkable result that overturns a quarter century of multi-party coalition governments in New Delhi. In fact, with its allies, the BJP is within striking distance of an absolute or two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution as they deem fit. After winning power in the states of Maharashtra, Haryana, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Goa, Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh, the BJP aims to secure a dominant position in the Rajya Sabha too.

Now, with the advantage of hindsight, we may probe into the wider socio-political implications of the BJP's rise to power in the 2014 national elections. Drawing on my own research over nearly a decade in rural eastern and central India, I analyse the election results and their implications from these 'tribal' margins of the country. My argument, briefly, is that the 2014 elections signify the coalescence of political developments from above and below that have given rise to a new social contract based on the twin logics of governance and representation. This new social contract ought to be seen as a departure from both the 'Nehruvian consensus' during the heyday of the 'Congress system' (Kothari 1964) as well as the 'second democratic upsurge' following the *Emergency* (Yadav 2000). The Nehruvian consensus, which existed during an era of one-party rule in the early decades after independence, rested on the unstated assumption of power concentrated in the hands of a benevolent upper caste Hindu elite. The democratic upsurge after the turbulent years of the *Emergency*, however, challenged the domination of an elite minority and broadened the social bases of power to include leaders from OBC, SC, and ST communities across India. The current phase in India's democratic history draws on both these earlier phases but also departs from them. It

consolidates the power of the Centre in order to undertake a welfarist agenda of ‘good governance’, yet it also seeks to deepen democratic representation amongst the myriad insurgent fragments that make up the Indian nation today.

Although the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), too, attempted to combine the twin logics of governance and representation over the last decade, the new BJP-led government consolidates and repackages recent trends in Indian politics and society. A new consensus has emerged in the country in the early twenty-first century, and I refer to it as ‘Hindu fascism’. This political consensus is Hindu because it explicitly understands the nation to be so. It is, furthermore, fascist because it melds together an emphasis on organic social unity, political stability, and a powerful state. The new Hindu fascist consensus, however, is arguably more fragile than the Nehruvian consensus of the 1950s and 1960s. This is not only because the Nehruvian Congress lacked a serious political rival in the early postcolonial decades, but it is also because the Modi government must enter into complex negotiations with the multiple margins that it seeks to represent within its organic Hindu nationalist vision of Indian society. Hindu fascism in contemporary India, I argue, must be seen as an uncertain social formation subject to centrifugal forces that threaten to hollow out the political centre. What some recent commentators have called the ‘Bahujanisation’ of Hindutva (Gudavarthy and Suthar 2014) ought to be seen as an open-ended process. Its precise contours will depend, ultimately, on the manner in which Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi groups are able to assert their own political agendas within the broad umbrella of Hindu fascism.

The nation and its margins

In a perceptive essay written after the 2009 national elections, Yogendra Yadav (2009) argued that political parties that had emerged during the second democratic upsurge as advocates of ‘social justice’ had reached a ‘dead end’. These parties, Yadav claimed, had defined social justice too narrowly in terms of reservations in the public sector and educational institutions, and identified political success exclusively with electoral wins for leaders of marginalised communities. For these reasons, the social bases of power had certainly broadened since the 1980s, but advocates of social justice had failed to attend adequately to pressing problems such as poverty, inequality, and gender discrimination in the country. The Third Front had thus failed to

capture the public imagination, and, over time, it had ceded ground to a Congress-led coalition at the national level. In response, Yadav recommended rethinking the politics of social justice by amending and widening the scope of affirmative action policies to target the poorest and most marginalised sections of Indian society. Such a change would not only overcome the roadblock posed by reservations being captured by a few within historically discriminated groups, but also bring women and Muslims within the ambit of affirmative action policies.

The UPA government led by Manmohan Singh did, in fact, arrive at a similar conclusion to Yogendra Yadav's. Its flagship programmes such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), for instance, targeted rural unemployment and poverty without using caste as the sole criterion for targeting welfare beneficiaries (Khera 2011). Other UPA initiatives in rural livelihoods – promotion, skills development, universal education, and mid-day meals for schoolchildren – did not distinguish between beneficiaries on the basis of caste. Socio-economic deprivation, conceptualised in multidimensional terms, came to be identified as the principal criterion for policy interventions. Of course, it is true that administrative corruption and systemic leakages in delivering public goods hampered the effectiveness of state welfare programmes such as NREGA (Shankar and Gaiha 2013). The effectiveness of welfare programmes was, moreover, uneven: whereas they were successfully implemented in states such as Bihar and West Bengal, that was certainly not the case in, say, Jharkhand or Uttar Pradesh. A similar problem beset the public distribution system for essential commodities, which worked well in Chhattisgarh, for instance, but not in adjoining Madhya Pradesh. In sum, the UPA government's new welfare agenda, which supplemented reservations for marginalised groups, inaugurated a new phase of 'good governance' in Indian politics that ventured beyond the caste-centred politics of social justice in the two previous decades. However, insofar as the UPA's welfarism fell short on implementation, islands of misery and discontent remained, and the BJP would target these islands strategically during Narendra Modi's 2014 election campaign.

States such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh with large Adivasi and Dalit populations had, in particular, missed out on the 'silent revolution' (Jaffrelot 2003) that swept through north India in the previous generation. They also had divergent experiences with the UPA's new welfarism over the past decade, Jharkhand being one of the poorest performers in the country and Chhattisgarh making big strides towards poverty alleviation. Both states grew out of movements for statehood

and autonomy, though the BJP-led government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee played a decisive role in eventually carving these small states out of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (Tillin 2013). In Chhattisgarh, the Congress, in fact, formed the first government under Ajit Jogi's leadership. Thereafter, the BJP has held power for three consecutive terms in a state in which 31.8 per cent of the population are Adivasis and 11.6 per cent are Dalits (Thachil 2011). Moreover, the RSS and its affiliate organisations have worked extensively in the fields of education, healthcare, and development there. In Jharkhand, the formation of the new 'tribal' state in 2000 mocked aspirations for Adivasi autonomy over the past century. The new state excluded the Adivasi-majority districts in neighbouring Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and West Bengal, and included districts of Bihar in which non-Adivasis were overwhelming in the majority. As a consequence, the 2001 census recorded only 26.3 per cent of Jharkhand as Adivasi, and the 2011 census shows the corresponding proportion to be 26.2 per cent of the state's population (Ojhal 2013). The BJP has clearly benefited from the demographics of the new state and vied for power with the Jharkhandi parties over the past fifteen years. Let us now consider each state in turn to analyse why the BJP, which midwived their birth, has continued to enjoy electoral success there.

In Chhattisgarh, the BJP under the leadership of Dr Raman Singh has been in power since 2003. The successful re-election of the BJP in subsequent state elections in 2008 and 2013 was arguably built on two foundations: public goods delivery and cultural outreach activities. To understand the BJP's politics of 'good governance' through effective public goods delivery, it is important to appreciate how it had to be presented as 'apolitical' to rural communities that distrusted them (Thachil 2011: 436). Jean Drèze and Reetikka Khera (2010) explain that, soon after coming to power, the Raman Singh government sought to dismantle networks of traders who ran ration shops, which were then placed under the direct control of local bodies such as village panchayats and self-help groups. Additionally, the BJP government delivered foodgrains directly to these locally-run ration shops, and eliminated middlemen who typically profited from siphoning off a proportion of the grains to sell at higher prices in the open market. Over 85 per cent of households with ration cards, Drèze and Khera (2010) found in September–November 2009, received their full quota of 35 kilogrammes of grains at the stipulated subsidised prices; the rest received at least 25 kilogrammes. Only 17 per cent of households below the poverty line missed a meal in the quarter preceding their survey as opposed to 70 per cent in Bihar, though their poverty headcount

ratio stood at 56 and 55 per cent respectively in 2009–2010. Drèze and Khera (2013) thus calculated an implicit reduction of poverty by at least 39 per cent on account of Chhattisgarh's well-functioning public distribution system. To the extent that 'political will' matters in delivering 'good governance', it is obvious that the BJP government in Chhattisgarh had strategically targeted its poorest and most marginalised citizens through its welfare agenda.

Good governance was accompanied by cultural outreach activities aimed at poor voters, especially Adivasis who are not traditionally BJP voters. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams (VKAs) sought to fill a vast gap in the state's social infrastructure where teacher absenteeism in state-run schools ranked among the highest in the country and a primary health centre is usually over ten kilometres away (Thachil 2011: 443–447). While social scientists such as Tariq Thachil, Jean Drèze, and Reetika Khera have focused narrowly on the instrumental logic of public goods delivery over multiple election cycles, the BJP's good governance agenda rests crucially on the cultural politics of the RSS and its affiliates who run schools and mobile health centres. The anthropologist Peggy Froerer (2007) has examined the rise and growth of VKAs run by the Sangh Pariwar as part of its wider campaign against Christian missionaries and their wards in rural Chhattisgarh and nearby Odisha. The VKAs actually seek to emulate Christian missionary activity by focusing on existential concerns over illness via everyday practices of healing. Amit Desai (2007) found a similar focus on the politics of the body during his fieldwork in eastern Maharashtra, along the border with Chhattisgarh, where both disease and witchcraft threaten rural Adivasi communities and draw them closer to their benefactors from the Sangh. The VKA's commitment to social service in the realms of educational and healthcare far exceeds the instrumental quid pro quo logic of elections. Much like the Christian missionaries whom they seek to emulate as well as supplant, VKA volunteers consciously embody an ethos of selflessness and austerity, which draws ordinary villagers to them in circumstances where state-sponsored welfare activities are sorely lacking. For the Sangh, furthermore, Adivasis practice a '*jangli* Hinduism', which differs from 'mainstream Hinduism', and education is more about their civilising mission than secular considerations such as investing in human capital or winning votes locally (Froerer 2007: 41). Remaking Adivasis as 'proper' Hindus is a goal that exceeds the bounds of secular politics even as it has clear implications for the BJP in elections. By the time of the 2009 national elections, for the first time in the region's history, more Adivasi voters preferred the BJP (43 per cent) over the Congress (40 per cent) (Saxena and Rai 2009). Tariq

Thachil's (2011: 460) surveys conducted around this time found that that Adivasis (and Dalits) who participated in the VKA's activities were 55.82 per cent more likely to vote for the BJP than those who did not participate in these activities. Good governance and cultural outreach undoubtedly complement each other, but their logics and goals are distinctive.

Adivasis in Jharkhand, by contrast, have been far less attracted to either the cultural politics of the Sangh Parivar or unfulfilled promises of good governance by the BJP. On its own, the BJP has never won a simple majority in the Vidhan Sabha over four electoral cycles, but it has to come to power in each cycle so far. On every occasion, the BJP has allied with a Jharkhandi party to form an uneasy coalition government, thrice with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and, most recently, with a JMM splinter group, the All India Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU). As a measure of political instability in Jharkhand, consider that, in the past fifteen years, the state has been ruled by six Chief Ministers, two of whom – Shibu Soren and Arjun Munda – have enjoyed three truncated terms in power, and it has further experienced three uncertain periods under President's rule. It is not surprising then that 'many of the poorest adivasis . . . in rural Jharkhand . . . did not really know, and moreover did not care, much' about who exactly ruled in Ranchi at a given point in time (Shah 2010: 7). Indeed, as one of the anthropologist Alpa Shah's informants puts it, '[W]hat does it matter? What will it bring?' (ibid: 5). If Chhattisgarh is the BJP's model of good governance, therefore, Jharkhand is apparently the very opposite: a model of mis-governance.

Amidst such apathy as one discovers during fieldwork, it is easy to forget that elections are routinely held in Jharkhand and that the BJP has won power each time. It has done so by adopting a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, it has appealed to the non-Adivasi majority in the state, seeking to consolidate the Hindu vote across caste lines. By doing so, it has taken advantage of the demographics of the state that it had helped create in 2000. There is, after all, no viable political rival for the BJP as it appeals to voters in unreserved constituencies. In undivided Bihar, the Janata Dal and its fragments would have contested these seats, but the politics of creating a new state have ensured that the likes of Laloo Yadav and Nitish Kumar concentrate their energies farther north. Additionally, the Congress, which once enjoyed popular support in the Jharkhand region after independence, has long ceased to be a political force there. Furthermore, the JMM, which earlier enjoyed a critical mass of non-Adivasi support during the movement for Jharkhand, especially from so-called backward caste groups, has

been more or less confined to the reserved constituencies. For the BJP, mercantile and landed castes have been at the heart of their electoral consolidation of the Hindu vote in the state. Equally important to the rise of the BJP, however, albeit often neglected, is the upward mobility of traditional service castes in Jharkhand's villages such as *telis* and *lohras* and their identification with the BJP. The recent ascension of Raghubar Das, who belongs to the oil-pressing *teli* caste, to the Chief Minister's chair, makes it amply clear how much these new bases of support matter to the BJP.

On the other hand, the quarter or so of Jharkhand's population that is officially classified as 'scheduled tribe' (ST) has posed a trickier challenge for the BJP. A Maoist insurgency has engulfed the scheduled areas in Jharkhand over the past decade. Although splintered into numerous outfits, the CPI (Maoist) and their breakaway factions have enjoyed considerable popular support in the countryside. While this support has not led to the formation of 'liberated zones' in rural Jharkhand, it has rendered rebel leaders from various Maoist groups as legitimate electoral candidates in the eyes of the poor Adivasis. Above all, the JMM has benefited from current or former Maoists who have used their bullets to win ballots in rural Jharkhand. As Deepu Sebastian Edmond (2014) reports, of the twenty-two such candidates in the 2013 state election in Jharkhand, the JMM fielded eight. The BJP, unused to such intimacy with the extreme left, fielded two such candidates, though one of them was eventually dropped because the Maoist splinter group to which he belonged complained of the police cases against him (Edmond 2014). What is noteworthy, however, is the BJP's willingness to grapple with the messiness of Maoist politics in pursuit of power.

In a similar vein, the cultural politics of indigeneity that dominates Adivasi lifeworlds (Chandra 2013) has been harder to penetrate for the BJP. Popular discourses of indigeneity have, since colonial times, pitted the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Ho against the *diku*, a resident alien who is a caste Hindu from the plains of Bihar or Bengal. To reconcile these opposites today in a unified whole is easier said than done. Additionally, the historical depth and strength of Jharkhand's churches, especially its Catholic and Lutheran churches, has made it harder for the BJP and allies to replicate their success in Chhattisgarh among Adivasis in Jharkhand. Yet, as a proselytising RSS ideologue in the state explained to me, the logics of Hindutva and indigeneity are not incompatible. Whatever their antagonisms in the past, Hindutva as the ideology of a Hindu nation-in-the-making can potentially accommodate Adivasi claims to a distinctive and prior sociological

formation in particular places. Claims to indigeneity, in other words, do not unsettle the overarching order of the Hindu nation. As such, we should not be surprised by the BJP's stunning recent victory in the JMM's stronghold in the Santal Parganas, where Louis Marandi defeated Hemant Soren in the state election after losing to him narrowly in 2009. Marandi is a Santali Christian woman whose victory after a Modi-backed campaign in the Dumka constituency, held for long by the Shibu Soren and his son, suggests that neither indigeneity nor even Christianity pose an insurmountable challenge to the BJP in Jharkhand.

Despite the differences between Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand outlined so far, what is striking is how similarly fared during the so-called Modi wave last year. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won ten out of eleven seats in Chhattisgarh and ten out of twelve seats in Jharkhand. Notably, the party won all five reserved constituencies in Chhattisgarh, including all four ST constituencies, and four out of six reserved constituencies in Jharkhand, including three out of five ST constituencies. If we aver that a combination of 'good governance' and cultural outreach explains the BJP's performance in Chhattisgarh, then we can say with an equal conviction that neither holds the key to understanding the results in Jharkhand. If the former teaches us about what Hindutva under Modi offers to the margins of the nation today, then the latter shows how both Adivasi and non-Adivasi voters can repose their faith in the BJP without any deep ideological commitment to the Sangh's ideology. Governance and representation emerge, accordingly, as key elements of a pragmatic new social contract in the 'tribal' margins of India today. The new welfarism inaugurated by the UPA is thus amalgamated with a deepening process of democratisation by which the nation and its myriad margins interpenetrate each other. For the Hindu nation-in-the-making, top-down social engineering and developmentalism are as vital as negotiation with social forces from below.

The making of Hindu fascism

Standard leftist commentaries on fascism, as Jairus Banaji (2002) has pointed out, often suffer from two basic flaws. They assume that fascism is simply 'the dictatorship of the most reactionary elements of finance capital' that is imposed on the masses. Furthermore, these leftist accounts of fascism tend to imagine it as an aberration from 'normal' politics, a cataclysmic event that unsettles everyday life. Banaji draws on the writings of the communist historian Arthur

Rosenberg and the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich to argue that fascism must be seen as a mass phenomenon within its social-psychological and cultural-historical contexts. Fascism ought not to be seen as a top-down imposition on the masses. What distinguishes it from other forms of reactionary politics is that 'it is supported and championed by masses of people' (ibid: ix). As Reich (1946: xi) put it,

Fascist mentality is the mentality of the subjugated 'little man' who craves authority and rebels against it at the same time. It is not by accident that all fascist dictators stem from the milieu of the little reactionary man. The captains of industry and the feudal militarist make use of this social fact for their own purposes.

Reich, as a psychoanalyst, overstates the role of 'mentality' in explaining mass support for fascism. This leads him to ignore the contingent and strategic nature of subaltern agency in fascist movements. Nonetheless, we may safely conclude that social forces from both below and above interact to produce fascism in modern times. Whereas reactionary forces may reap the rewards of fascism, it would be impossible without the active participation of ordinary men and women with their own aspirations (Browning 1992). Moreover, fascism is not an 'event' isolated from the dynamics of the 'everyday' (Das 2006), but a phenomenon borne out of the fabric of everyday life. The rise of Hitler – or, indeed, Modi – did not occur in a day, but arose out of the peculiar historical circumstances of their societies. It must also be noted that fascist leaders came to power through democratic elections rather than the usual coups d'état that bring military dictatorships to power across the Third World.

But, a sceptical reader may ask at this point: is it fair to characterise Modi and the BJP as 'fascists'? Might we not see them simply as conservatives or Hindu nationalists? In response, let us ask ourselves what we mean by 'fascism' in the first place. Fascism is a social revolution, whether violent or silent, by which a significant majority of the democratically empowered masses come to regard the rise of a charismatic, authoritarian leader as a symbol of their unity and emancipation (Gregor 2001; Paxton 2005). The state under fascism is both omnipotent and non-existent: the people are the state and the state stands for the people. The fascist state represents the sum total of social forces sans their antagonisms and contradictions, that is, it conjures an organic social unity (*fasces* in Latin literally means 'a bundle'). Such unity rests on the fear and hatred of the Other, whether in the form of ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities or political rivals. The

fascist state promises social stability, national solidarity, and popular rule. It relies on the active participation and, indeed, sacrifices of ordinary people who identify with the organicist ideology propounded by the Great Leader. Whereas many commentators treat mass participation in fascist politics to be a mark of irrationality, it is far more useful to take actions of ordinary men and women to be meaningful and contingent. Social scientists can legitimately seek to understand why and how they come to identify with the organic unity of the new revolutionary collective conjured by a distinctive leader. A fascist consensus in any society is thus a negotiated outcome, not one that is produced mystically *sui generis*.

To understand fascism in this manner is to admit the possibility that it is not merely a political phenomenon confined temporally to interwar Europe. Indeed, as A. James Gregor (2001), one of the leading scholars of fascism today, notes, it is likely that fascism will not remain a twentieth-century affair because it will reappear in our own times in new forms. In the case of the BJP under Narendra Modi, the authoritarian cult of personality is tied to a new national unity in which religious minorities, leftists, and environmentalists are, for instance, treated as social deviants. Support for Modi from the 'tribal' margins of the nation as well as a critical mass of Dalit and Bahujan populations is, moreover, undeniable. In the infamous anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat under Modi's leadership in 2002, for instance, the participation of marginalised Adivasi groups such as Dharalas was especially conspicuous (Lobo 2002; Devy 2002). The BJP is no longer simply a conservative upper caste party dominated by Brahmins and Banias. It is a party that seeks to appeal to anyone who is willing to see his/her own self-advancement and that of his/her community with national progress. Modi's victory is not merely a personal achievement for him, but a symbol of popular sovereignty. Modi's repeated assertion that he grew up poor and understands the needs of the poor better than other politicians, including those he displaced within the BJP, must be seen in this light (see, for example, Outlook 2017). The state under Modi's leadership promises to be strong and decisive, unencumbered by the humdrum modalities of coalition politics. Yet strength and decisiveness are as much the Prime Minister's qualities as they are of the populace that exercises its sovereignty through democratic elections. If the personalisation of power under Modi is evident in the way his Cabinet colleagues are rarely seen or heard of nowadays, popular identification with him may be seen among trolls in cyberspace as well as in middle-class homes and slums. To mock or criticise Modi in the public sphere, therefore, may be an invitation to be punished by the

state or the demos at large. Fascism, in this sense, is alive and well in contemporary India.

Contemporary Indian fascism, of course, takes a distinctive Hindu majoritarian form. Much like its German predecessor, Hindu fascism in India traces its roots to nineteenth-century Indo-European notions of Aryan supremacy. As Dorothy Figueira (2002) has shown, the mythology of Aryan pasts co-evolved in Europe and South Asia, generating frenetic calls for reform and purity on the one hand and demonisation of the Other on the other hand. In India, the efforts of upper caste elites, alongside colonial officials and Christian missionaries, to construct 'Hinduism' as a world religion on par with the Abrahamic faiths may be seen as a decisive break from the past. Figures such as Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda were pioneers in Hindu nationalist thought. They abhorred caste and saw the territorial limits of Victorian India as a sacred space, violated by Muslim and Christian invaders over the centuries, which necessitated a return to a mythical golden age when all Indians qua Hindus apparently enjoyed peace and prosperity. In their own characteristic ways, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mohandas Gandhi, and Vinayak Savarkar took on the mantle of their nineteenth-century predecessors and gave practical form to notions of Hindu majoritarianism. Gandhi, who emerged as the leader of the Congress in its campaign for decolonisation and bid for power, showered fulsome praise on his friend Benito Mussolini when he visited him at the height of his popularity in Rome (Gandhi 1931; Hayes 2011: 8). It was Gandhi who remade Hinduism as a viable form of mass politics, effacing the traditional marks of caste that threatened to render asunder the Indian nation-in-the-making. It was also Gandhi who explicitly discouraged cow slaughter by Muslims (Lelyveld (2011) and forbade conversion to Islam or Christianity (Roberts 2016: 111–151). Each of these aspects of Gandhian politics would become key planks of Hindutva over the twentieth century. By comparison, Savarkar's mass following was negligible, and Tilak's political activities were confined to the Bombay Presidency. Long before Modi, therefore, the seeds of Hindu fascism were sown by his predecessors, perhaps most notably by M.K. Gandhi.

Accordingly, the BJP under Modi today owes much to its proto-fascist ancestors. If Gandhi was fascinated by Mussolini's fascist experiment in Italy, the RSS has been equally fascinated with the Nazis in Germany. *Mein Kampf* is widely available and read in contemporary India, and it is easy enough for Hindu fascists to replace Jews with Muslims in their ideological fantasies. Narendra Modi, like most BJP leaders, entered politics after a lengthy training in Hindu fascism in

the ranks of the RSS. Modi represents the apogee of this religious ideology, replacing the covert violence of earlier Hindu violence against Dalits and religious minorities with an overt belligerence towards the non-Hindu Other. Within four months of taking over as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi masterminded anti-Muslim pogroms in the cities of central and south Gujarat, especially in areas where electoral competition, underemployment, and Muslim in-migration were high (Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012). Once Lebensraum had been created, and Muslims killed or forced into ghettos, a model Hindu society was hailed as a new golden age of peace and prosperity. Caste divisions were neatly subsumed within the organicist ideology of Hindu fascism (Shani 2007). Furthermore, the selective participation of Dalits and Adivasis in these pogroms (Lobo 2002; Devy 2002) pushes us to consider the calculations that individuals and groups make in the course of their negotiations with Hindu fascism. After three terms as Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat, Modi now promises to take his brand of Hindu fascism to an all-India level. The Nehruvian catchphrase 'unity in diversity' has thus acquired a far more sinister connotation today.

Beneath the bluster and bombast of the BJP under Modi, however, cracks do exist. In a country where over four-fifths of the population is nominally 'Hindu', the fact that only 31 per cent voted for the BJP in the 2014 national elections suggests that there is a long, arduous road ahead for the Hindu fascists. Even among those who did vote for the BJP in the 2014 elections, we cannot assume that all of them are committed *a priori* to the core ideology of Hindu fascism. Nor can we assert that Hindu fascism exercises a kind of hegemony over the subaltern classes *in toto*. The 'Bahujanisation' of Hindutva is an open-ended process by which Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi groups assert and negotiate their own political agendas within the broad umbrella of Hindu fascism. These negotiations are context-specific, and the calculations that underpin them ought to be understood in their strategic contexts in each region. A good example is the decision of Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP to ally with the BJP in Bihar in the 2014 elections. Upper caste commentators often infer from this strategic marriage of interests that *all* Dalit communities in Bihar are turning to Hindutva today. Such an inference is as misleading as it is false. It fails to capture the partial, contingent, and, ultimately, reversible nature of cross-caste political alliances that propel Hindu fascism today. Mere lip service to the organicist ideology of Hindutva suffices for now, and instances of deeper social change in the form of, say, 'Sanskritisation' are rare. All we can say is that, in the present historical conjuncture, a range of

social forces from above and below have coalesced to bring Narendra Modi's BJP to power.

Insofar as we may speak of fascism in contemporary India, it is an uncertain socio-political formation. Hindu fascists may have won handsomely for now, but their success remains uncertain in the long run. Only one in seven Indians and one among five eligible voters endorsed the BJP in its greatest moment of triumph. The BJP knows that the first-past-the-post system worked to its advantage in the 2014 elections, but it could easily work against the party in future as it did in 2004 and 2009. The social forces from above and below that drive Hindu fascism today do not work in happy unison because their claims compete and even undercut each other at times. The federal structure of Indian democracy, within which Hindu fascism has emerged, also encourages fissiparous tendencies in different regions and localities of the country. Lastly, Hindu fascism faces a conundrum as far as the economy is concerned. On the one hand, private corporations supporting the Modi campaign, most notably Reliance and the Adani Group, have already seen their profits rise appreciably (Ismail and Thakur 2014), and the prospect of quick environmental clearances and sweetheart land deals excite them now. Yet, on the other hand, it is not at all clear how the Modi government will balance the divergent interests of the country's half a billion poor men and women, the urban salaried classes, and big business. If the new government fails to deliver populist economic policies, it will undoubtedly be punished by future voters. But if the Modi government fails to attend to the interests of big business, it will end up where the UPA did. There is much confusion and little certainty in the corridors of power. The tried-and-tested ways of balancing economic growth and welfarism seem inadequate, but the alternatives are not so easy to find either. In sum, it is fair to say that an uncertain fascism has assumed power in India today. It is here to stay and will assume protean forms as it seeks to remake Indian society in its own image. But it will not go unchallenged either.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that a Hindu fascist consensus dominates Indian politics today, consolidating the gains of the second democratic upsurge of the previous generation and consciously seeking to emulate the Nehruvian consensus of the early postcolonial era. Narendra Modi's victory in the 2014 national elections promises organic social unity, political stability, economic growth, and a powerful state. Yet this victory rests on a complex coalition of social groups and interests,

which gives Hindu fascism today its vitality even as it threatens to fragment its carefully crafted ideological consensus. In the margins of modern India, negotiations with Hindu fascism take myriad forms in states such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh, and a measure of the mass support for the BJP there cannot be understood without acknowledging the pragmatic compromises and calculations that undergird these cross-caste alliances. If the term ‘fascist’ seems too strong to describe the BJP today, it is because popular common sense tends to isolate the term spatially and temporally to interwar Europe. Rethinking the nature of fascism in the light of global experiences over the past century, however, pushes us to consider that our own times are pregnant with fascist possibilities. In fact, even new socio-political formations such as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have tended to mimic the BJP’s outreach tactics and authoritarian personality cult with some success. We need to appreciate that fascist formations such as the BJP or even AAP are quite content to work within democratic structures to produce and sustain majoritarian rule. Subordinated castes and ‘tribal’ groups are now increasingly seen as valued members of the Hindu nation-in-the-making. Even religious minorities may, in theory, be accommodated under a Hindu majoritarian order as long as they acquiesce in their second-class status, or better still, indigenise or renounce their ‘foreign’ religions. Pogroms are unnecessary when violence can assume subtler forms. In a world where dictators for life pretend to rule by popular consent, Hindu fascists are unlikely to let go off the tag of the ‘world’s largest democracy’.

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