Willing Ethnic-Nationalists, Diffusion, and Resentment in India: A Micro-Foundational Account

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Abstract: Using evidence regarding the consolidation of Hindu nationalism in India we put forward new ethnographic data about the variety of popular support for a Hindutva project and a new framework that proposes an interactive theory of social identity. This framework helps us understand how Hindu nationalism becomes embedded in society. We assert that Hindu nationalism in India could be fruitfully analyzed by focusing on the processes through which ideas of exclusive nationalism spread among common middle classes and are expressed in micro-level psychological changes at the individual level. The consolidation of Hindu nationalism in India is being authored not only by parties or the state, but also by societal actors, specifically, ordinary middle-class Indians. Hindu nationalism has been spreading in micro-public spheres in times of apparent peace and between elections and with the participation of willing supporters, bystanders,

and hardliners. Further, we suggest the need to focus on inter-linked micro-level mechanisms such as diffusion and emulation of Hindu-centric beliefs and ideas, mobilization by hardliners and organizations, and impunity protected by state agencies [172 words].

Willing[1] Ethnic-Nationalists, Diffusion, and Resentment in India: A Micro-Foundational Account

Introduction and Argument

"To stop hate, we have to understand it" (Darby, NYT, 2020).

A consolidation of majoritarian nationalism is underway across the world. The election of populists in United States (Donald Trump), India (Narendra Modi), Turkey (Tayyip Erdo`gan), Philippines (Rodrigo Duterte), Brazil (Jair Bolsonaro), and the electoral march of right-wing parties across Europe [Austria -Freedom party of Austria, Hungary-Viktor Orba`n, Poland--Law and Justice Party, Germany-Alternative for Germany, AfD] has renewed the attention of scholars to this resurgence. Using evidence from a crucial test case—the consolidation of Hindu nationalism in India—we put forward some new data about the variety of popular support for a Hindutva project and a new framework that proposes an interactive theory of social identity. This framework helps us understand the transformation of Hindu nationalism from civic nationalism— wherein citizenship and rights are accorded to all born or living inside a country—to ethnic nationalism—where an ethnic, religious or racial group, usually the majority, defines the boundaries of the nation[2]— and shows how Hindu nationalism becomes embedded in society. We

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[1]Goldhagen's provocative book "Hitler's Willing Executioners" (1997) provides a direct reference point for the phrase 'willing.'
[2]These definitions are drawn from Varshney (2018).

assert that Hindu nationalism in India could be fruitfully analyzed by focusing on the processes through which ideas of exclusive nationalism spread among common middle classes and are expressed in micro-level changes at the individual level. The consolidation of Hindu nationalism in India is being authored not only by parties or the state, but also by societal actors, specifically, ordinary middle-class Indians.[3] Hindu nationalism has been spreading in micro-public spheres in times of apparent peace, between elections and with the participation of willing supporters, bystanders, and hardliners.

In our view, Hindu nationalism is a dynamic and circular process involving both bottom-up and top down mechanisms. The central idea is that the transformation of India into an "ethnic democracy" (Jaffrelot 2017) is a joint product of state-party actions but also socially produced through multiple micro-level changes in Indian society and urban demographics, which have psychological effects of ethnic attachment, resentment, and othering. Our conversations and fieldwork have also helped us identify profiles of different types of Hindu nationalists, which we categorize as *bystanders, hardliners and willing ethnic-nationalists*.[4] Further, we suggest the need to focus on inter-linked micro-level mechanisms such as *diffusion and emulation of Hindu-centric beliefs and ideas, mobilization by hardliners and organizations, and impunity protected by state agencies.*[5] In our argument, despite a widespread recognition that Hindu nationalism is seeding into society, the micro-foundations of these changes remain puzzling. We need answers to a puzzle: How did our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, colleagues, and kin become

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[3]A small group of ideas in the comparative studies of riots or genocide have focused on understanding the motivations of "ordinary men and women" and we need to extend that shift of perspective to studies of rightwing nationalism, which is a much more commonplace phenomenon.

[4] See section 2 for a conceptual elaboration of these concepts.

[5]For a focus on causal mechanisms see Waldner (2015). This focus on mechanisms also addresses the call for analyzing processes of "ideological transmission" that Chhibber and Verma (2019) briefly mention but do not elaborate at the end of their paper. It also responds to Mehta's call to focus on the fuzzy boundaries of state-society relations going deeper than movements and parties' inter-linkages that Basu's (2015) analysis attends to.

participants in a Hindu-centric political discourse and sensibility? Our analysis builds on the insights of many observers and goes beyond by offering new concepts and ethnographic empirical analysis. Attempting to answer these questions about micro-level attitudes, behavior –how people think—and societal changes also helps us focus not only on the important question of why parties try to create a Hindu bloc but also as Kalin and Sambanis ask: ". . .why the manipulation of such emotions resonates with an audience in the first place" (Kalin and Sambanis 2018, 241). Thus, this paper shows a new direction by conceptualizing the diffusely structured support that Hindutva receives by common people and by focusing on the ways different sections of society internalize the discourse, and the sensibilities that Hindutva employs and seeks to popularize.[6] These ideas lead us to create a framework that focuses *both* on the incentives and political strategies of parties and the bottom-up support, popular consciousness, discursive frames, and social relations.

While the hardliners constitute the core support base of the BJP, the expansion of BJP's validation among the ordinary middle classes also points towards a growing support from what we call 'willing ethnic-nationalists,' and the silencing of the moderates. Willing ethnic-nationalists are not party workers or rioters but supporters of a Hindu-centric view and they have grown exponentially in the past decade or so. They are ordinary members of society who are committed supporters and passionate believers but do not belong to parties or organizations or participate in riots. Bystanders are common people who may be indifferent but one of the striking developments has been the transformations of many bystanders into willing supporters. So, some of willing supporters started as bystanders in that they were more agnostic about a majoritarian sensibility but have become more committed, active, supporters over time (Staub 1989). Poignantly, moderate voices are not absent but are rendered impotent in the face of such a resonating consensus as people

[6] We thank communication with Palshikar on these ideas.

opposed to this Hindu-centric, anti-Muslim worldview become reluctant prisoners of a social sensibility around them.

Many argue that BJP's 2014 and 2019 electoral victories and "dramatic expansion of its electoral base" (Rehman 2018) has consolidated the rise of Hindu-centric nationalism, what many call ethnic nationalism in contrast to civic nationalism (Varshney 2018; Jaffrelot 2019).[7] Some argue that these trends are revealing a 'critical realignment' in party politics and the structure of the party system (Heath 2015) and a new hegemony and "rupture" in India's democratic life (Palshikar 2019a; Heidelberg University, Video Lecture, November 20, 2020). Some even argue that India is on the cusp of a new republic or a new political system (Yadav 2020; Palshikar 2019b; Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020). We also know about parties and perpetuators of Hindu nationalism through an analysis of electoral results, vote shares (Heath 2020; Sardesai 2019; Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020), inter-ethnic civic networks (Varshney 2002), social service strategies of the BJP and RSS (Thacil 2016), and especially the scholarship on religious riots (Varshney 2002; Wilkinson 2004; Brass 1996, 1997, 2003, 2004; Basu 2015; Shani 2007). Now, we also need to analyze societal mobilization and a perceptual shift before and after violent incidents. In essence, going beyond the organizational forms of Hindu nationalism, we need more research into why ordinary people, who may or may not belong to parties, support the worldview of exclusive or ethnic nationalism without being active perpetuators of riots or violence. In our view, political scientists of India have focused on the perpetuators and the parties benefiting from religious violence, the "well-organized Hindu nationalists" (Jaffrelot 2017, 52) as well as institutions of the party system and the state well. Varshney's theory of civil society focuses on the organizational elements of civil society like business associations, trade unions and organized civic networks

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[7]Another relevant distinction is between nationalism of exclusion and resistance (Varshney 2003). Adeney and Jaffrelot argue that India is becoming an "ethnic democracy" (Adeney 2020; Jaffrelot 2019).

going beyond parties. Despite these analytical gains, we have limited information, and concepts about how people think and become willing supporters of a Hindu-centric project.[8] So, analytical attention also needs to focus on how the support of Hindutva forces comes from ordinary middleclass Indians, who have become active and committed supporters for a Hindu-centric project. We call them willing ethnic-nationalists to denote the need to look at them, not as passive recipients supporting a Hindu specific version of nationalism, but rather as active participants in a Hindu-centric worldview. We also pay attention to bystanders and hardliners in creating a three-fold typology and continuum of a variety of popular support for Hindu nationalism. This argument leads us to go beyond the electoral realm or party politics exclusively to focus on societal and psychological facets that are sustaining Hindu nationalism in India as well as the horizontal processes of diffusion and mobilization through which willing ethnic-nationalists are created and hardened.

This shift in perspective can better be understood by a *two-way theory of social identity*, where parties and state action interact to change perceptions and identity of ordinary public but the ordinary micro-public spheres deserve separate and full-length analysis as it exerts an independent force on parties, organizations, and the state. Our argument builds on intuitions that many scholars and observers have been alerting us to, and it does so by creating a new framework that focuses *both* on the incentives and political strategies of parties and the bottom-up popular consciousness, discursive frames, and social relations. Our fieldwork and the literature from psychology also leads

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[8]Two ideas are central to a Hindu-centric project: the idea that Hindus need to be stronger and organize themselves to face external and internal threats (what various activists call a Hindu-phobic media and society) and the claim that minorities like Muslims, and by now the moderate liberals, need to be subsumed by the majority religion in India. These ideas are not necessarily true but have become part of the perceptions held by willing ethnic-nationalists, many bystanders and certainly the hardliners.

us to offer new concepts such as willing ethnic-nationalists, bystanders, and mechanisms of diffusion, mobilization, and impunity.

Many have come to recognize deeper changes within Hindutva variously labeled as the "the saffron wave," (Hansen 1999) "institutionalized everyday communalism" (Pai and Kumar 2018), "ethnopolitical majoritarianism" (Jaffrelot 2017; Chhibber and Verma 2019), "non-Brahmanical Hindutva" (Pai and Kumar 2018), the reach of ideological neo-Hindutva in "every nook and corner" (Hebbar 2019), "subaltern Hindutva" (Singh 2019), the "hinduization of the public sphere," (Anderson and Jaffrelot 2018), "vernacular Hindutva," (Reddy 2011; Reddy 2018), "majoritarian nationalism" (Adeney 2015), and "neo-Hindutva"[9] (Reddy 2011; Anderson 2015).[10] These terms and ideas need a more grounded theory of how everyday communalism becomes rooted among ordinary people. Scholars have alerted us to focus on the appearance of Hindu-Muslim conflict as "everyday ethnic conflict" (Mehta 2010), in "quieter times" (Brass 2003, 9), "violence on the "margins" of the state (Pai and Kumar 2018; Das 2007), "understanding Hindutva not just through spectacular interventions, but in a more mundane everyday sense. . ." (Mehta 2017, 15), riots as a dynamic process with dormant phases (Brass 2003), and quotidian violence that precedes and follows large-scale violence" (Basu 2015, 8).[11] Anderson and Longkumer write

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[9]'Neo-Hindutva' as a way to identify and understand "idiosyncratic expressions of Hindu nationalism which operate outside of the institutional and ideological framework of the Sangh Parivar" (Anderson 2015, 47). Also see Reddy (2018). Palsikhar's idea of a "'new-Hindu' democracy" is also relevant (Palshikar 2015b): "It is 'neo-Hindu' in the sense that it does not always follow religious orthodoxy but nevertheless resorts to it occasionally; it conveniently draws on Hindu religious tradition and symbolism, but moves away from the traditional culture and religiosity if tactically required. Rather than following only Guruji Golwalkar, it draws heavily on the nationalist vision of Savarkar. It is also neo-Hindu in the sense that its main votaries are the non-Brahmanical castes – mostly the OBCs. It mixes the modern nationalist imagination with popular belief in a glorious past and in Hindu mythology, and it adopts a militant, confrontationist posture vis-à-vis perceived adversaries of Hindu nationalism."

[10]Hindutva has been defined as "majoritarian, assertive, chauvinist and sometimes-militant ideology of Hindu Nationalism" (Anderson 2015). There is a humongous literature on Hindu nationalism; some select works include: Hansen (1999), Brass (1996; 1997; 2003), Anderson and Damle (1987; 2019), Graham (1990), Jaffrelot (1996), Zavos (2000), Zavos et. al (2012), Varshney (2002), Basu (2015), Bhargava (2002), (Rehman 2018), and Wilkinson (2004).

[11]A special issue devoted to new forms of Hindutva examines Hindu nationalism beyond the world of parties and elections and focuses on courts, social media and the Northeast regions. See Anderson and Longkumer (2018). Also see an edited book devoted to the idea of public Hinduisms (Zavos et. al. 2012).

in an introduction to a special issue devoted to neo-Hindutva and diasporic politics: "Hindu nationalism now permeates into new spaces: institutional, territorial, conceptual, ideological" (2018, 372). Pai and Kumar (2018, 27) emphasise the need to think about the state-society boundaries through their idea of four overlapping circles of BJP hegemony comprising of BJP leaders, local leaders, fuzzier group of educated unemployed youth that are a reservoir, and social media; together these circles: " . aim to create a permanent anti-Muslim societal prejudice and make it acceptable in popular discourse" (2018, 26, 27).[12] Anderson (2015) makes a distinction between hard Hindutva and soft Hindutva to demarcate the organizational and more nebulous forms of Hindu majoritarianism.

Simultaneously, a rise in "social hostilities" in India has been observed, so much so that India moved into a "very high category with a score of 9.7 on a scale of 10 (Pew Research Center 2019; Majumdar 2018), even while on the "government restrictions" measure India's score was lower: 5.4 out of 10.[13] Chhibber and Verma found that "upper caste, OBCs, and Dalit respondents all showed prejudice against Muslims" when asked about reservations for Muslims (Chhibber and Verma 2018, 100-101). CSDS poll surveys on religious attitudes are also finding some degree of social hostility and distance.[14] Ajay Verghese's surveys in Bihar found that: ". . . Hindus in Bihar overwhelmingly support many of the ideals of Indian secularism — even government support for mosques. Critically, however, this is not true for more pious Hindus: The more religious voters are, the more they subscribe to the tenets of Hindu nationalism, especially the idea that Hindus deserve preferential treatment over Muslims" (Verghese 2019).

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[12]Also see Narayan (2014).
[13]Also see: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/29/5-facts-about-religion-in-india/ ;
https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/india-politics-religion-cows/ ;
https://www.pewforum.org/2009/12/17/table-social-hostilities-index/
[14]There was a CSDS survey on "religious attitudes" done in 2015 CDS-Azem Premji University 2015). This has been followed by three separate surveys that measure political and social attitudes between elections (CSDS-Lokniti 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019).

Suhas Palshikar (2004) was an early proponent of a shift in perspective but it was not taken up in empirical analysis or further theory building, which we hope to do in this paper.[15] In 2004 at the time of the defeat of the BJP by the UPA he noted (2004, 5430): "Two lessons follow from this: one is that a long and sustained campaign by Hindutva forces has already won the battle half way to 'secure' the Hindu mind. It is not necessary to have a surcharged electoral campaign; the BJP has already been identified as the party of the Hindutva interests. More importantly, the public opinion has been shaped in such a manner that now the party difference becomes less relevant. The majoritarians or the expressively religious people and the supporters of group boundaries are spread in the Indian society in such a manner that they are now to be found in both the Congress and the BJP in roughly equal proportion."[16]

Inspired by these insights, we provide an account of Hindu nationalism's spread across public life going beyond electoral politics. Our goal is to distil the insights from these suggestive ideas into a more empirically cogent model of Hindu nationalism while also contributing a new conceptual framework for future research into varieties of bottom-up popular support. We urge an attention to mechanisms of spread—what we call diffusion and emulation-- and how common people view and have come to commit to a Hindu nationalist world view. Our fieldwork in New Delhi and Bangalore confirms and foregrounds many of the emerging insights of this literature. As one of our interviewees observed: "There are outbursts of violence, but in addition, there is an everyday communalism, an everyday communal view people have. So that is the social crucible, where attitudes ferment. And certainly, as I said, Covid19 is continuation of politics by other

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[15]One exception was Mehta in her study of everyday communalism in her thesis (2010).
[16]Palshikar (2004, 5427) also notes: "Having said this, let us also admit that some polarization in terms of party-religion association has also been taking shape. More Hindus vote for BJP and its allies (40 per cent) than they vote for Congress and its allies (34 per cent). Similarly, the BJP gets only 7 per cent votes among the Muslims and its allies get even less (4 per cent)." Also, see Palshikar (2019a).

means, so it provided an opportunity to continue communal politics. And certainly CAA/NRC was relevant. But I think this is so much bigger than CAA/NRC. Here is an opportunity for people to really target Muslims in general."[17]

We find that ordinary people from a large slice of Indian middle-classes and professionals have become the agents and participants of Hindu nationalism.[18] Many ordinary middle class Indians have come to believe that "Muslims" are a problem not because they were manipulated to do so but because they have developed passionate commitments regarding Hindus, Muslims and terrorism. Many people also believe that Hindus are besieged and the social context around them is "hindu-phobic," even as these are perceptions not based on facts. In order to understand the diverse yet common sensibilities or perceptions at the societal realm, it is important, we argue, to create ideal-typical profiles of different kinds of responders to get at important variations even as we recognize these typologies are not rigid but are a continuum. Using our fieldwork we map three distinct profiles: *bystanders, hardliners and activists, and willing ethnic-nationalists*, which describes different types of support for the project of Hindu nationalism but also highlights the common elements of all these group types. While the scholarship focuses on BJP and their support for a strongly Hindu-centric, anti-muslim agenda, thousands of willing committed supporters of a majoritarian view have been created across, at least, middle class India. Importantly, while this phenomena consolidated and accelerated under Modi (2014 onwards), it actually started earlier, as Palshikar (2015a) and Sarkar (2012) note. In fact, the rise of Modi's BJP can be partly attributed to this larger shift at the societal level constituted by everyday street and home-level changes that preceded him. We present a micro-analysis of public attitudes across a few cities that reveal how

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[17]Interview 1 in July 2020 Delhi.
[18]For a study of middle class in India see Fernandes (2009), who focuses on their consumerist culture and linkages with economic liberalization of 1991.

Hindu nationalism has become embedded across the crevices of society and its micro-institutions apart from macro-state institutions and parties.[19] The consequence is a "self-reinforcing dynamic of polarization at the macro-level" (Schedler 2020) but also rising majoritarian resentments and what Pratap Mehta calls "a nation of resentful hearts, small minds and constricted souls (Mehta 2019)" at the micro level. Not all is negative about the ordinary Indians, who may believe in religious or even civic nationalism. We also have to respect and recover the ordinary sense of nationalism that is pervasive among ordinary middleclass Indians (Yadav 2020). But, the conviction and commitment of ordinary willing ethnic-nationalists has acquired an agency of its own and needs independent analysis going beyond electoral strategies of parties. This two-way theory of social identity allows us to go beyond the idea that individuals are manipulated by elites and parties or "led astray by power hungry politicians" (Berenschot 2009, 415) but rather that committed supporters have mushroomed across middle class society through the process of diffusion and mobilization. At the electoral level this is evident in what many observers define as Hindu consolidation behind the BJP, which does not mean that most Hindus support the BJP, but rather that a majority of those who vote for the BJP are Hindus (Sardesai and Attri 2019; Heath 2020).[20] We are faced with a social contagion that spreads through insular but powerful social networks in our urban societies and all political parties—including opposition parties such as Am Adami Party [the Common Man's party, AAP), and the Congress party— have to adjust to this new landscape.

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[19]Our interviews and fieldwork focused on the cities of Delhi and Bangalore. We recognize that important counterhegemony is present in states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu; in future work we hope to expand the empirical analysis to cities in these states.

[20]In 2014, 36% of all Hindus and in 2019 44% of all Hindus voted for the BJP but the caste-specific data show that most Hindu-castes are consolidating behind the BJP.

Methods and Research Details

What is the basis of our framework? How did we gather our information? First, we build upon insights of scholars who focus on new forms of Hindu nationalism as documented above. In our view, this scholarship is calling for a new framework to understand transformations in India's Hindu nationalism, which we present in the next section. In addition, we relied on poll surveys conducted by CSDS,[21] social media posts (see appendix for images) but most importantly, we (authors) conducted interviews among many diverse communities across two Indian cities (Bangalore and Delhi) to understand the deeper sources of a rising resentment taking root across urban cities. We went deep into communities especially of middleclass voters to understand their "reasons" and the way they thought about politics.[22] So, our conclusions are largely drawn from middle class interviews, who we believe are key agents shaping and supporting the larger sensibility of a Hindu-centric project. We suggest that while this phenomenon may not only be limited to middle class, it is important to assess its contours in one section of society, which plays a crucial role in shaping discourse, before broadening its analysis across classes.

Interviews were held in Bangalore urban area in three rounds by one of the co-authors and then in Delhi with the support of a RA: (a) After State Vidhan Sabha elections in May 2018—in June and July 2018 followed by another round of interviews in September-October 2018. These interviews took place in the posh urban locality of Jayanagar and Banashankari in Bangalore. These are residential areas of well-to-do mostly Kannadigas. All those interviewed are well educated professionals. (b) A round of interviews was held with middle class professionals in

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[21]We especially acknowledge Prof. Sudha Pai's help in helping us get access to CSDS surveys. CSDS's director of Election studies, Dr. Sanjay Kumar and Prof. Rajeev Bhargava shared the data of the 2015 Religious attitudes Survey with us.

[22]Philosophy makes a distinction between understanding reasons, understood as the meanings that we give our actions versus causes, which refer to a discussion of why things happen. Some argue that reasons are causes while others deny that claim (Macklin 1972).

Indira Nagar and in the educational campus of Jain University in September October 2018. (c) A third round of interviews were held soon after the Lok Sabha elections for the national Parliament in June 2019 with a focus on youth, especially working in the technology sectors. One of the authors also did many focused groups in Bangalore. In Delhi, detailed interviews were conducted during the eruption of the JNU controversy (2017), coronavirus period (March-June 2020) and after the rioting that took place in Delhi in early Spring 2020 in addition to detailed ethnographic research into the urban communities at various other times. A total of around 40 open-ended interviews were conducted between 2017-2020; each of them was between 1-2 hours long (see Appendix for the interview method). Kathy Cramer also used this method to gain a deeper insight into rural Wisconsites's resentments (Cramer 2016). We use a similar methodology to gain a window of the worldview of urbanities in select cities of India. While we don't claim that our arguments apply to all of India or to all sections of society–for example Kerala and Tamil Nadu might throw up important variations—the pervasiveness of our findings across middle class India in Northern, Western and some parts of Southern (Karnataka)—is notable and deserves a deeper look towards ordinary people as agents of Hindu nationalism. Both Delhi and Bangalore also have immigrants from all over India, which meant that the sample of interviews were more diverse than otherwise.

While we are unable to explore fully the causes of these developments in this paper for reasons of space, we postulate some tentative ideas about the embedded fragmented neighborhoods that are embodied in an active but segmented civil society across many cities, where resident welfare associations (RWAs) pursue social and public activism combined with Hinduization of the public sphere.[23] While the analysis in this paper does not directly focus on violence and riots

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[23]For an analysis of urban "megacities" and middle class life, see Mehta (2016).

or even electoral results the findings help us place in context the riots that took place in March-April of 2020 in Delhi, the responses to these riots at the level of ordinary Hindus and the electoral success of the BJP especially in consolidating the Hindu vote.[24]

Argument and Framework: A Two-Way Theory of Social Identity

A process of redefining India's national identity is underway. What is an identity? Shayo (2009) notes: "We say that an individual identifies with group J if he cares about (a) the status of group J (and in particular the payoffs of ingroup members relative to the payoffs of outgroup members); and (b) his similarity to other members of that group." Building on this definition of social identity we make two conceptual advances in this article: First we suggest that identity be conceptualized as an overlap between identity the way Shayo defines it, and perceptions.[25] As an example, identity refers to feelings of belonging –of being a Hindu for example— and may arise from your participation in a larger community of believers (Chhibber 2014). Perceptions refers to how people perceive the issues and conflicts of the day and may change over time. A person may belong to a specific ethnic or religious group but their perceptions about the salience of that identity or notions about who gets, what and how as well as ideas about the 'out-group' may change over time. Perceptions of threat may also make the identity more salient or exclusive. When perceptions about who benefits from a policy or order combine with ideas about identity boundaries and perceived status, we have the beginnings of a mobilized identity. Thus, perceptions play a major role in making an identity salient, relevant and making it more or less intense—a process of dynamic re-invention. Together, identity and perceptions create an "Us vs. Them" mentality and

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[24]Around February 23, 2020 New Delhi erupted in days of brutal bloodshed, property destruction (destruction of mosques) and rioting in North-east Delhi with 53 people killed, the majority of them Muslim and a dozen Hindus and a couple of police officers. There are some positive local stories but the larger narrative is of organized brutality and hostility. The Wikipedia page has a large list of newspaper accounts of the rioting: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Delhi_riots#cite_note-Barton2020-42

[25]This idea appears in Cramer's book (2016) as "rural consciousness" and was also discussed during one of the author's class discussions. In this class we discussed how politics is not only about material interests but perceptions.

a psychological state that views other communities as outsiders. Some evidence suggests that it is not that middleclass Indians in India have become more religious (Chhibber 2014) but their **perceptions** regarding other communities and their own sense of a being a besieged majority has changed. The extent of in-out group behavior and feelings are an overlap between the two. As an interviewee said to us: ".. .the whole anti-CAA movement which had started before that, then came this particular [corona] virus and so suddenly, a community became the target. . .it was just a perception. It was an anti-Muslim perception.[26] It was just that whole thing. Like "oh, they were responsible for all those riots [CAA protests] and now they are suddenly responsible for this." So it's like a herd movement. Everyone just moves in this one particular direction and then it becomes very difficult to stop everyone." Figure 1 outlines a dynamic model of social identity which discomposes identity into two components but also includes the mechanisms of diffusion of ideas about salience, threat and emulation, that may translate perceptions into a "collective identity," and thereby creating an "other."
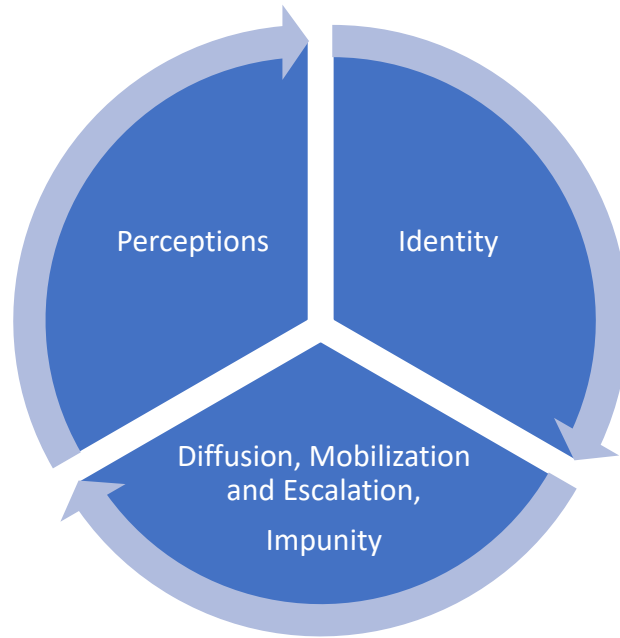
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[26]Interview No. 3, Delhi July 2020.

Figure 1: Overlapping and Changing Hindu Identity

Second, our theories of identity-in-formation about India rely on elite-centric and strategic models, focusing on party strategy and electoral politics or horizontal accounts that focus on the "institutionalised riot systems," social capital or civil society. While the top down theories focus on the material and rational—political— benefits and incentives of leaders and parties, the bottom-up theories focus on riots and programs and do not address the attitudes and feelings that go beyond violence.[27] Importantly, Basu's work (2015) tries to bridge this divide by linking riots and violent events to a variation in party-movement nexus across Indian states.

Building on that insight and going beyond we argue that movement politics needs to be understood in terms of how it changed the psychology of common people at the street (and home) through diffusion, by increasing salience but has also created more societal space for bottom-up

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[27]Paul Brass's conceptualization of the riot system (2004) comes close to looking at what he calls the "edge of violence."

Hindutva. These ordinary middleclass groups consume and then demand a more aggressive Hindu-centric discourse and policies. In order to understand this phenomenon, we need a two-way theory of social identity formation which thinks about how parties behave but also how ideas of social movements and parties circulate and disseminate at the societal level and ricochet back. So, we create a two-way model to foreground the micro-foundations of support for a Hindu-centric agenda. This model –Figure 2— highlights that even when the government takes preemptive action, endorsement by local level leaders and finding resonance from common people makes the campaign stronger and durable and reinforces perceptions in society. This may even create a new language, and norms that reinforce social hostilities.[28] As an important complement, our ethnographic research helps us create a profile of different types of citizens; some of them—hardliners and activists and local organizations and willing nationalists—become intermediaries between parties and grassroots voters and citizens. This intermediation role allows the two-way dynamic to become enduring and sustain itself. We do recognize that impunity and mobilization harden the bystanders and willing nationalists but they are acting upon a fertile ground of "resentful hearts." The study of Hindu nationalism demands a two-way conceptualization and data collection based on this formulation.

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[28]For example, the phrase, Jay Shri Ram.

Government Decision to Ban Beef

Supported by Social/Community Level
= Actions **Diffuse and Spread**

Ratified by Local Leaders and
Organizations and
Provocateurs

**Manifests as Acceptable
Behavior in Society**

Society begins to replicate ban and support it
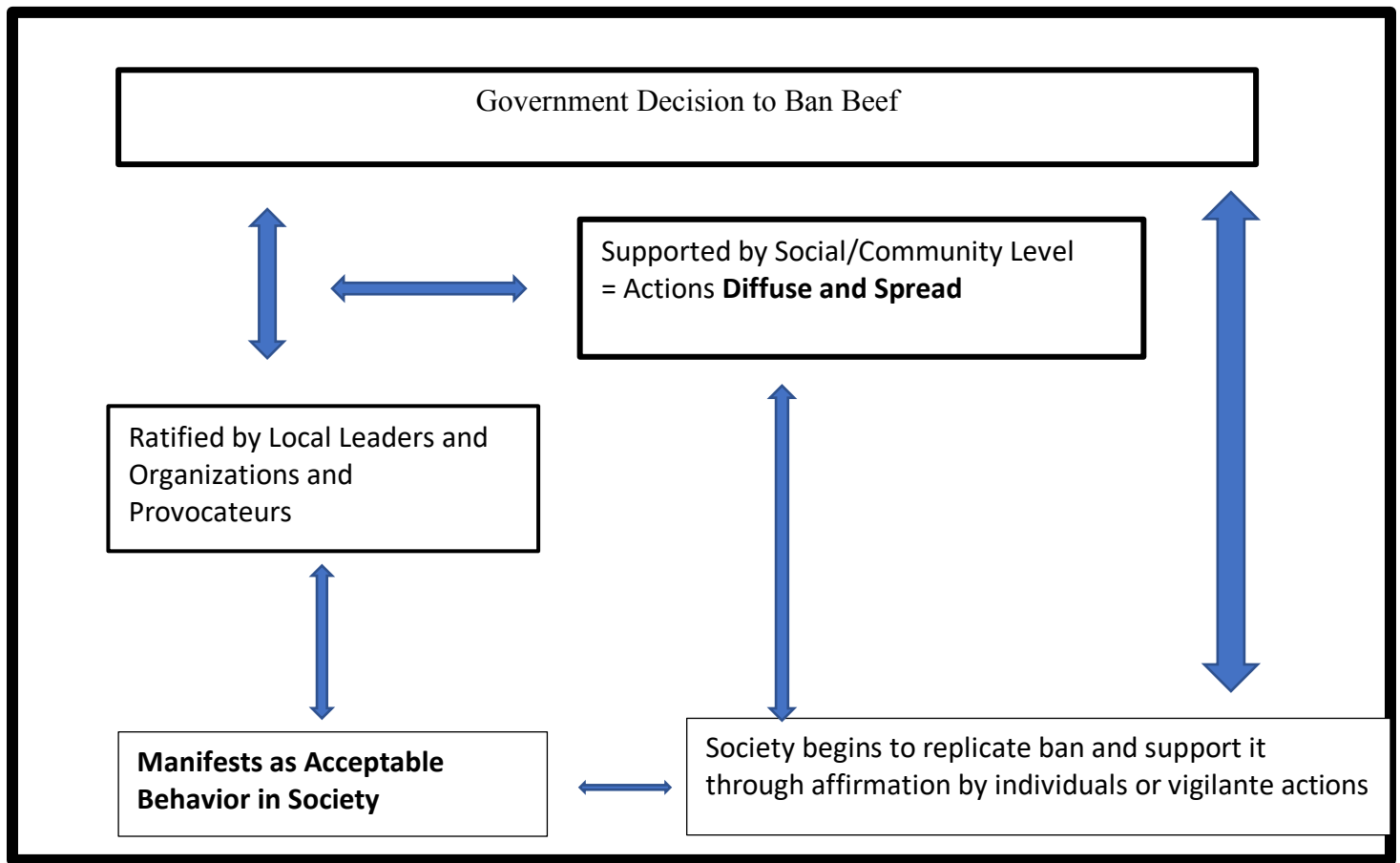through affirmation by individuals or vigilante actions

Figure 2: An Interactive Theory of Social Identity

These twin ideas—accounting for the role of perceptions and deep-seated identity —and conceptualizing changes in Hindu nationalism in terms of an interactive dynamic of elite-driven and bottom up processes helps us account for the specific form of ethno-nationalism in India witnessed today.

Profiles of Support for a Hindu-Centric Worldview: Hardliners, Willing Ethnic-Nationalists, and Bystanders and the Silencing of Moderate Liberals

An implication of the dominant models of violence and electoral strategy is that common people are pliable and can be easily manipulated by leaders and parties who flood them with negative messages. While leaders are utility maximisers and therefore rational and materialistic, voters and citizens are innocent cognitive vassals to receive those ideas. Our conversations have shown us that ordinary voices and sensibilities are a powerful factor and may affect parties' strategies. We use our ground-level fieldwork and readings from political psychology to create a profile of different kinds of willing ethnic-nationalists and bystanders. What we find is that apart from hardliners, who may belong to RSS or VHP or local organizations such as Bajrang Dal and Hindu Yuva Vahini, there is a group of people who can be characterized as "semi-active participants if not in the perpetration of genocide at least in the system. . " (Staub 1989, 42). We label these people as "willing ethnic-nationalists"; the numbers of such willing ethnic- nationalists has dramatically increased in the last few years. So, we arrive at a typology of micro-individual behaviors: Bystander, Willing Ethnic-Nationalists, and Hardliners, which form part of a continuum, and give a sense of the variety of individual-level social attitudes. A bystander is an individual who is "neither a perpetuator or victim (Staub 1989, 42)." Willing ethnic-nationalists are common people who are strongly committed to the idea that Hindus need their place in the sun.

Hardliners are members of organizations related to the Hinuvtva project while moderates are strongly against the Hinduziation of Indian society but are increasingly in a minority and silenced.

Together, all of them contribute to the ethnic polarization we are witnessing, albeit in different ways. These typologies also resonate with conclusions of survey research. A CSDS poll on "society and politics between elections" found that only 13% of Hindus think that Muslims are highly patriotic, while 77% of Muslims think of themselves as "highly patriotic (Express Web desk 2017)." These findings continue for the 2019 survey where more than 30% of Hindus think of Muslims as unpatriotic and 13% think of them as "highly unpatriotic" (CSDS 2019). This means that close to 50% of Hindus think that Muslims are unpatriotic, a striking figure. Interestingly, this view is one-sided: Muslims don't consider Hindus to be unpatriotic in large measure. Similarly, 13% of all respondents believe Muslims to be peaceful, which is a low figure, and 31% believe that Muslims are violent. Perceptions about Muslims' "unpatriotic and violent behavior" as compared to other religions is at the highest, revealing an Islamic-specific religious polarization. Importantly, being "college educated" *reduces* the perception that Muslims are a peaceful community (CSDS-Lokniti 2019, 57), which is in line with our interview results and fieldwork [add the SIIP article on Friendship].

Dinesh Paril, the district head of the Bajrang Dal group in the state of Maharashtra stated: "Everyone in this world is born Hindu. They are turned into Muslims when they are circumcised and Christians when they are baptized" (Siddiqui et. al. 2017).[29] These views have become quite common across middle class India. Surendra Jain, Joint Secretary for Viswa Hindu Parishad said:

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[29]There are many examples of such hardliners: BJP MP Parvesh Verma in UP for example (Pai and Kumar 2018, 16), Rangoli Chandel who called for "killing Muslims" on twitter, and Kapil Mishra, a BJP ex-MLA, who played a role in the Rioting that took place in North-east Delhi in February 2020. Others are: Anurag Singh Thakur, MP and Minister of State for Finance, who is supposed to have incited people by shouting, "Shoot the traitors," and Pravesh Singh Verma, who is West Delhi MP from the BJP and made a statement that Shaheen Bagh protestors would 'rape and kill" Delhi residents (Pandey 2020).

"If the sentiments of the majority community are respected, there would be no such incidents. Can we demand pork in any Gulf country?" These are the faces of the hardliners who participate in attacks on Muslims, and pursue an active and well organized agenda to defend the Hindu faith. Dinesh Arya, state head of the Gau Raksha Dal, acknowledged his group is breaking the law. Arya produced a list of 27 criminal complaints lodged by cattle traders against his members that he said were still pending. "Seizing cattle is not legal and we know that well. We are not authorized to do this, it's the police department's work," Arya said. But he claims a higher calling: "Our religion has given us the right to stop our mother being butchered," he said, referring to "gau mata," or "mother cow." "We have forcefully taken that right" (Siddiqui et. al. 2017).

These hardliners refuse to listen to official statements even by Modi himself. These Hindu activists have mushroomed and contend that this movement has gone beyond the BJP's ambit. "The cow protection movement totally belonged to the BJP before 2014," said the group's leader, Pawan Pandit, a part-time software engineer. "Now groups like ours [Bhartiya Gau Raksha Dal] have the momentum." Many self-styled local groups have come up and they seek to snatch the issue away from the BJP in the process shoring their 'hardliner' credibility. While officially RSS and BJP seek to distance themselves from such illegal behaviour there is an underlying sympathy among many RSS activists: A senior official noted anonymously: "Hindus never had the courage to stand up for their religion and now they are standing up," he said. "The cow issue has led to an awakening." Ashish Nandy notes: ". . but now the majority thinks it is a besieged minority" (Ashraf and Nandy 2019).

These hardliners form the core support base and get a lot of media coverage but underneath this group is a larger group of willing ethnic-nationalists, who while not belonging to the hardliner group as they are not formal members of organizations, empathise with that view strongly. We

met many such individuals during our fieldwork. Sumesh [name changed] is a professional in his 50s and grew up as part of the Nehruvian worldview. Over time especially in the 2000s he became very disillusioned by the repeated terrorist attacks by Pakistani groups and now fervently believes that "Hindus need to show Muslims a lesson." He forms a large group of professionals who sympathise with Hindu-centric views, and re-post many 'fake' stories of Muslim brutality to his friends and social media. In conversations he defends the actions of the activists even when they skirt the law or lead to violence such as the death of a Muslim trader who was carrying cows for dairy as collateral damage. Some of the willing supporters are housewives, students, and ordinary middle class Indians who do not have time to analyse each campaign or story but have come to believe in the larger world view. Many of them are not explicitly religious (that is do not pray regularly or observe ritual etc.) but believe that "Hindus deserve preferential treatment over Muslims.[30] They see their task as rousing other Hindus against Muslims. The numbers of willing nationalists is increasing dramatically but it was not limited to the post-2014 era. Similar interviews can also be found in Udupa's fieldwork conducted around 2014 (2018, 456-461) and confirm that we need a new category to differentiate them from hardliners. We label them as a 'willing ethnic-nationalists.'

Sheela Bhatt's [a journalist] interview of a Modi fan in 2014 is powerful demonstration. Pramod Singh said: "To preserve one's identity one has to do something. I am not from the RSS. I have never been to their *shakha*. I don't think this country should be a Hindu *rashtra*, but in this country at least we should be respected" (Bhatt 2014). Many gurus and saints also defend the use of violence by Hindus. As an illustration a US-trained former mechanical engineer spoke to Mona Mehta and defended the use of violence by Hindus: ". . .the outfit's [Bajrang Dal's] 'use of violence

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[30]Here, our findings conflict somewhat from Verghese's findings about Bihar. He found that mostly "pious Hindus" felt that Hindus deserved better treatment in a majority Hindu society" (Verghese 2019).

is justified because no one listens to Hindus otherwise. The aggression of Muslims makes them heard but the meekness of Hindus leads people to ignore them. Thus, it is not wrong for Hindus to pay back the abuse they have endured for centuries" (Mehta 2017, 12). Some of them also become what Chhibber and Osterman call "vote mobilizers," who may not be members of the party but work for it during electoral campaigns: "individuals whose support for a particular party goes beyond simple voting and instead involves monetary donations, door-to-door canvassing. Leaflet/poster distribution etc." (Chhibber and Osterman 2014, 2).

Radikha [name changed] is a professional who was and remains quite non-political. She never used to vote in elections and rarely followed political trends and events. Her interaction with her family and friends is usually over normal everyday issues. She does not like rioting and violence but has come to believe that "Muslims look different and behave differently." She is a classic bystander who at certain times could become a willing ethnic-nationalist but is more wary of violence. She also does not condone vigilante attacks but feels that Hindus need to be defended and protected. She also admired the aggressive attackers for defending Hindu feelings. In a similar vein Dipanker Gupta argues: ". . .for a successful ethnic operation, innocent insiders must be convincingly cast against seditious 'outsiders' who are out to undermine the society of the nation-state. They did not accept the politics of separatism, but admired the 'heroics' of those who did (Gupta 2011, 29)." What is important to note is that people who strongly oppose such behaviours and attitudes—moderates-- are also forced to act like bystanders: not challenging the status quo perceptions and anti-Muslim vitriol. The feelings of animosity and distance against Muslims have become so pervasive that it is impossible to fight at all fronts, in your neighbourhood, workplace or within your own family. In the early decades of India's independence moderates shaped dominant discourse and ideas; now it is the willing ethnic-nationalists and hardliners who do so.

Psychological and international relations research into motivations of terrorism and racial violence has identified the bystander phenomenon to be important. The psychological effects of bystander phenomena and passivity has been described thus: "The psychological effects of passivity are similar to but less intense than the effects of perpetration. To reduce their own distress, passive members of the perpetrator group tend to distance themselves from victims, in part by accepting justifications offered by perpetrators, and by blaming and devaluing victims. This reduces empathy and inhibits guilt, perhaps with the help of the commonly held belief in a just world, where innocent people do not suffer (Lerner, 1980). As bystanders change, at least some of them join the perpetrators (Lifton, 1986; Staub, 1989a, 1989b) (Staub 2006, 872)." Importantly, bystanders may become perpetuators under the right social political conditions (Staub 1993). Another way to think about bystanders is that in the context of tension between communities even the bystanders interpret every event in "communal terms" (Brass 2003, 18).

Many bystanders and willing ethnic-nationalists emulate and translate the dominant ideas pursued by hardliners. They spread stories, songs and pictures that talk of "Muslim" threat. Many of them may be "gleeful provocateurs" (Schultz 2019) and rabble rousers or hardliners but the larger majority of India's middle classes are passive bystanders and willing ethnic-nationalists. As Subarmanian Swamy, a BJP leader said: On this issue [Muslims] the whole country is with our hardline approach."[31] These willing ethnic-nationalists may be educated unemployed and employed youth and professionals who seek to defend the Hindu faith and proselytize their ideas to their friends and co-workers. The idea that they only belong to unemployed youth is incorrect; such views are found among professionals and college educated and well-off people in large

[31]https://twitter.com/CChristineFair/status/1245859883032776706

measure, as our interviews with professionals confirmed –this view confirmed by SIIP article December 2020.

It would be amiss to fail to acknowledge the group of moderates who are opposed to this larger world view. We found many important voices of resistance and opposition. There is a minority of moderates who oppose or are uncomfortable with the polarization that is sweeping Indian middleclass society. Many of them are linked to Indian central universities or associated with civil liberties movements and are writers and educators. Some of them are journalists. Yet, what was also noticeable was the silence and fear among moderate liberals. Many have become afraid of expressing their opposition and some others are rendered silent given the pervasiveness of the dominant view. An interviewee expressed this angst well:

> "First they said they are like ISIS, they are terrorists and everybody knows Tablighi Jamaat, whatever they may be, they are not terrorists. . . But there is absolutely no reason to label everyone. And this is the classic pattern of communalism in India. You are able to target an entire community largely because they get isolated. And they are visible and easy to target. And that is where I say, social media played an extremely irresponsible role, where they were able to amplify and spread rumours, such as there were 10,000 muslims in Arunachal Pradesh, a 1000 muslims in Andaman and nicobar islands, I mean, come on. These sort of numbers would mean India has a Muslim majority! *But this is what I mean this is the fact that inside most people, there is a communal virus. And you seek an opportunity and it just comes out.* It reflects very badly on Indians (emphasis added)."[32]

Empirical Analysis of Contours of Hindu Nationalism: Campaigns and Mechanisms

How are willing ethnic-nationalists and hardliners created? We highlight the tripartite process of diffusion and emulation, mobilization, and impunity. Diffusion has been defined as "the image of the spread of something across space" (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 36), when prior adoption of a trait or practice in a population alters the probably of adoption for remaining non adopters (Strang 1991, 325), or a process of "uncoordinated interdependence" (Elkins and

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[32]Interview March 2020 in Delhi.

Simmons 2005, 35), wherein people follow ideas and actions found in other contexts and domains through a method of uncoordinated spread. Revati Laul called it as a "tidal wave that built on itself" to refer to the feelings of one of the perpetuators of the Gujarat 2002 riots (Laul 2018, 26). In a similar vein, it can be defined as a process of spread when conflict and ideas in one area alter the likelihood of similar actions elsewhere (Kuran and Sunstein 1999). Diffusion can itself happen through "learning, imitation, bandwagoning, emulation, and mimicry" (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 35). So, diffusion works through different routes. Some of it is a greater circulation and dissemination of pro-Hindu ideas that begin to shape the beliefs of communities by updating their beliefs about different communities as well as updating ideas about the costs of discriminatory actions. It could also work as a demonstration effect where ideas keep getting repeated but then generate a set of examples or norms for future repetitions. It could also work through emulation and translation when people begin to repeat and resonate with certain actions as their actions and statements are reinforced by others. Our empirical analysis highlights that emulation has become a very important part of how Hindu nationalist ideas spread across cities.

Mobilization is an act of bringing forth and focused coordination through campaigns; it has much greater coordination and organization built into the concept. In this section we focus on three distinct mechanisms illustrated through an analysis of campaigns—response to coronavirus, the arrest of JNU students on charges of sedition, and legal-social campaigns such as beef ban and love jihad— to show how middle-class Indians are resonating with deep-seated anti-Muslim sentiments. These are just a small sample from a larger list of campaigns and case studies; for example, similar examples of diffusion from below are evident in response to the abolition of Article 370 in Fall of 2019, and a variety of other issue-specific campaigns.[33] This analysis of

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[33] Some issue-based campaigns are regionally specific, for example the Tip Sultan controversy in Karnataka.

campaigns reveals *both* bottom-up and top down processes encapsulated by three prominent mechanisms that ensure the transmission of pro-Hindu feelings combined with suspicions about Muslims as a group. Our analysis suggests that feelings of resentment are deep-seated and are circulated widely across middle class spaces. When new ideas are germinated they also diffuse extensively. The process of diffusion has also created micro-ideologies and slogans which have been generated from below and then adopted by hardline activists and BJP/RSS party workers and officials of the state.

In our judgment and analysis diffusion and mobilization has begun to affect every member of the middle class household: housewives, educated college-going children, retirees, people who were until recently non-political or apolitical. Diffusion also works to connect local and national process of polarization through social media (Sircar 2020), even music and memes. Notably, a large section of the middle class public are bystanders and choose to remain quiet but have begun to resonate with the idea of a "Muslim threat" brought about by the other processes. As Sircar notes these acts of diffusion have "reduced the social distance between local communal conflict and national communal polarization. Today, a local communal conflict can be made a national issue in seconds, and a larger communal narrative can quickly be constructed from a patchwork of local incidents" (Sircar 2020).

1. *Diffusion and Emulation*

A wide-spread worry about Muslims is affecting everyday life and common people's relationship with their fellow citizens, who happen to belong to a different religion.[34] As the COVID19 spread across India across India, cases of anti-Muslim animus began to spread. It seems

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[34] For a recent analysis of this see Asif (2020).

to have started with a super-spreader event led by an orthodox sect of Islam—Tablighi Jamaat—meeting in Nizamuddin Mosque in Delhi (Dutt 2020). Yet, similar events by the Hindus and Sikhs did not create the same cycle of hostility. An interviewee told us: "So, I would purely put the blame on the Jamaat, not the Muslims. I mean definitely, Muslims have become the collateral damage, you know, most people cannot differentiate, they feel "oh masjid, Muslims, blame karo, blame Muslims."[35] Around April 23rd, 2020 a man refused to accept delivery of groceries from a Muslim delivery man even though his wife was inclined to do so given the intense shortage of food materials.[36] Many such events spread across many states and cities. Ration dealers denied food to Muslims families in Bihar. They said: "Muslims don't get any rations. Muslims spread coronavirus."[37] Natasha Bhadwar, a journalist reported that when a NGOs was distributing food kits to migrants during India's lockdown, they were asked if the person delivering the food kits was Hindu or Muslim, and when told that he/she was a Muslim they refused to accept the rations (Badhwar 2020)." A new term called "Corona-jihad" and images of Muslims entering a religious-like structure and coming out with a corona-virus cell on their head began circulating in social media, including false claims about Muslims spitting on food etc.[38] These stories were circulated and forwarded very widely. Such conversations and fears were expressed in many homes and on the streets.[39]Some comments called for the government to issue "sight and shoot" orders, a reference to an Indian police's practice called "shoot-at-sight" orders usually employed in a riot-like situation."[40] From March 28 to April 3rd, the tweet with the hashtag #coronoajihad appeared

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[35] Interview No. 10, July 2020.
[36]https://twitter.com/ndtv/status/1253376561140494337?lang=en ; https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/near-mumbai-man-refuses-to-accept-grocery-from-muslim-delivery-person-2217212
[37] https://twitter.com/i/status/1254182055597899776
[38]We have collected around 25 such tweets to reveal the biased nature of the images. A selected few can be found in the appendix.
[39]Many of our interviews in Delhi revealed this.
[40]Tweet on "coronajihad forwarded on April 1, 2020.

300,000 times and could have been seen by 165 million people on twitter (Perrigo 2020). One such tweet was re-tweeted 42,00 times with 503 replies.

This anti-Muslim 'virus' reached the Middle East where Indian expatriates faced some punishment over their "vile Islamophobic remarks (Staff report, Gulf News 2020)." The Indian Prime Minister PMO's twitter handle was forced to issue a clarification: "Covid-19 does not see race, religion, color, caste, creed, language or borders before striking."[41] Indian Ambassador in UAE noted: "India and UAE share the value of non-discrimination on any grounds. Discrimination is against our moral fabric and the rule of law. Indian nations in UAE should remember this (Staff report, Gulf News 2020)." Importantly, some of these comments went beyond coronavirus. In March 2020, "Indian chef Trilok Singh who worked at a restaurant in Dubai was fired for making an online threat to rape a Delhi-based law student Swati Khanna over her views on the controversial Citizen Amendment Act (Staff Report, Gulf News 2020)." Resonating with this evidence Dr. Apooravanand found: "One of my former students, now living in Patna, Bihar, recently told me that anti-Muslim hatred has percolated to the point where it looks like it may never be abolished. A young journalist friend of mine from Haryana has been sharing social media posts and hashtags with abuses against Muslims, and laments that teenagers are participating in it (Emphasis added by authors) (Apporavanand 2020)." There is no doubt that the government also played a role in this spread by not clamping upon such behaviour as was done by the UAE government. This shows the role of the "impunity" by the Indian government; however, the unilateral spread of such stories by many middleclass Indians and media houses preceded government complicity but may have motivated the government to ignore the issue. These

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[41]PMO India, 19th April 2020 tweet.

examples highlight how discrimination spreads across society, through a process of diffusion, especially in highly urban and information rich spaces.

Emulation and Translation: The JNU Controversy

In February of 2016 Kanihiya Kumar a, a Ph.D student at India's premier Nehru university was arrested over charges of sedition. At issue were shouting of slogans such as Pakistan Zindabad at an event on JNU campus, which he denied making. India's Home Minister "condemned Anti-national activities on JNU campus." Initially he was kept in Tihar jail when brought for a court hearing was assaulted by large group of lawyers, who boasted: "we have done our bit."[42] Journalists, who were covering the story, were also attacked after the court proceedings. I was in Delhi when this happened and witnessed a remarkable progression; I also conducted many indepth interviews with middle class professionals at that time. First, the mainstream media began circulating what later came to be known as doctored videos about meetings inside JNU. They called "freedom slogans as "antinational."[43] Importantly, common people belonging to middle classes and professions such as bankers, lawyers, and even housewives began commenting on the turn of events and most of their views were negative and critical of "slogans in JNU." As Palshikar notes on this case: "While intellectual circles were aghast at the arrogance of the national fervour, ordinary citizens did not find anything wrong in privileging nationalism over everything else. . in the normative register of a majority of its citizens this resonated: freedom of expression could not supersede nation and nationalism" (2019a, 105). Notably, as information about police action and doctored videos put the government and party defenders on the backfoot, they were hesitant in their defence of the arrest for a few days. However, as middle class responses began to congeal in a crescendo, the government became more aggressive and began to criticise JNU speech as "anti-

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[42] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0l7EDoeYyM
[43] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSq1rTgbyz0

national." There was an interesting timeline to the process of how the issue progressed that showed a two-way interactive process with the BJP activists become more aggressive as they saw the middle class response and support for the arrests.

Another micro case also has the same characteristic of bottom-up emulation (Dutt 2018). In 2018 a citizen of India complained about religious bias by a passport official by tagging Sushma Swaraj, India's then Foreign Affairs minister on twitter. Sushma Swaraj was a long-standing member of the BJP and has fought at least seven national level elections. Her credentials as a hardline BJP activist are well recognized. As a foreign minister Sushma Swaraj had been an active twitter user and had used the medium to signal her government's responsiveness to the needs of her constituents. When the passport official was transferred, Sushma Swaraj was targeted with an attack on social media including a reference to "Islamic Kidney" a reference to a kidney transplant she had to undergo in 2016. While many have noted the actions of what are called "right-wing trolls" or bhakts on social media platforms, many of them are common people who have become radicalised and hold strong views going to the extent of critiquing a member of the BJP party.

Some of them are organized actors employed by the BJP through their IT-cells (Chaturvedi 2016) but decentralized bottom up views of middle-class actors are also common, and once activated, BJP tries to use them and manipulate them. Hindu-centric ideology has moved into the "national-popular common sense"[44] of India, creating a dangerous trend. The role of the media with channels like Times NOW and Zee News that "demonise entire communities," "paint all Kashmiris as pro-Pakistani terrorists, which they are not" and "pit two religions against each other"[45] is important but we need to understand that these channels partly go this route because

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[44]Antonio Gramsci uses the phrase national-popular to suggest that communists become part of the national-popular culture, but it has taken a different hue in the current phase of nationalism.
[45]Amit Verma with Nidhi Razdan, Podcast, "What happened to our Journalism?" Podcast, *The Seen and Unseen*, June 21, 2020.

their ratings and viewership have increased; there is a demand for this polarization among the watchers of Indian media channels, who seek not information but a reinforcement of their feelings and anxieties; their frames damage the social fabric further creating a reinforcing cycle of resentments and fear (Verma and Razdan 2020). The spokespersons of BJP are aware that the Indian reading and watching public "approves" these ideas; that explains their ratcheting up of anti-Muslim rhetoric at key moments.

What is notable in these pejorative slurs and terms is the use of phrases and terms that are group-specific, and link it with the notion that they are antinational. We find that a new language of Hindu nationalism has circulated widely and become household phrases through diffusion and emulation. NDTV did some research into the use of hateful and divisive language by high ranking politicians (Jaiswal et. al. 2018). Scholars too have noticed a discursive shift in India's democratic practice, which according to Adeney and Jaffrelot is showing informal and formal signs of becoming an ethnic democracy (Adeney 2020; Jaffrelot 2019). Some of these phrases are: Jai Shri Ram, Modi Raj vs. the Mughal Raj, Mohamadad, corona-jihad etc. which may have come up in local areas but are then used repeatedly by hardliners and willing ethnic-nationalists. The CSDS poll surveys found that support for government punishment for those who don't respect the cow, don't say 'Bharat mata ki Jai,' eat beef meat, do not stand for national anthem was quite high: upto 72 percent (Express Webdesk 2017), confirming that new norms and views are circulating widely across middle class spaces. Overall, we argue that the BJP and many affiliated organizations seek to nurture, consolidate and channel the underlying resentments but the societal resentments have acquired an independent force and feed back into BJP's strategies in ways we have not yet understood. There is no doubt that mobilization, escalation and reactions by interested actors and state (impunity) are part of this interactive two-way dynamic; we analyze that next.

2. *Mobilization and Role of Impunity: Beef Ban and Love Jihad*

We don't posit an exclusive role of bottom-up mechanisms of diffusion and emulation and acknowledge that these horizontal processes of diffusion are enhanced by a resurgent BJP, and RSS, which seek to spread Hinduism across society and gain politically from these larger trends. Moreover, building upon recent writing on "everyday communalism" (Pai and Kumar 2018) we suggest that many local Hindu organizations such as the Hindu Yuva Vahini have emerged and compete for the definition of the Hindu nation, in the process ratcheting up the Hindu-centric voices and ideas. Their friendly competition with the BJP and RSS expands the reach of organizational Hinduism and begins to intersect with society-level mobilizing groups. Notably, a theory of Hindu nationalism must attend to the individual-level motivations of both hardliners and bystanders so as to provide more grounded micro-foundations. In this case, many hardliners and local organizations seek to mobilize because it attracts the attention of BJP and RSS as well as more popular support.[46] Importantly, these mobilization campaigns prepare the minds of common people for pro-Hindu and Anti-Muslim rhetoric creating a fertile connection between top-down and bottom up processes.

The resounding silence or tacit activation by prominent BJP leaders is also part of the story. Chhiber and Verma argue that BJP leaders, including the Prime Minister, try to activate "latent prejudice among Hindus against Muslims (Chhibber and Verma 2018, 102)." Thus, mobilization by official groups but also by wannabe-Hindu groups, which are usually referred to as vigilante groups emerges as a crucial mechanism that amplifies the Hindu-centric voice and ideas.[47]

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[46]Berenschot (2009, 417) gives an example of the individual level motivations of a local and small-time BJP politician in Ahmedabad who led attacks on Muslims homes during the 2002 riots and by his hardline behavior (speeches and rioting) attracted a lot of popular support and won a seat in the state assembly *after* such hardline actions.
[47]See Kanungo (2012) for a focus on mobilization.

Impunity hardens and gives more confidence to the willing ethnic-nationalists and even bystanders to persist in their views, creating a silent tsunami.

Starting around 2014-2015, local issues such as "love Jihad," a so-called "strategy deployed by Muslim men to marry Hindu women," and a larger issue of banning beef were the focus of mobilization and escalation by a variety of Hindu organizations. The RSS has always focused on mobilizational campaigns targeted to many "social" issues in keeping with its cultural face. Historically these campaigns were about cow protection, and the Ram Mandir. More recently they relate what has been termed as "Love Jihad,' 'Ghar Wapasi' and cow protection. It appears that the fire of various campaigns has been kept alive both by top down strategic choices but also bottom-up campaigns from local organizations that seek to use the election of a RSS Prachrak (PM Modi) with strong Hindu leanings to increase their power and influence at the local level. In fact, new Hindu organizations have mushroomed and they seek to establish their credibility and influence to mobilise people. Their goal is to gain the attention of RSS and BJP so that their members can attract party attention and possibly tickets to fight elections. There is some disquiet within the RSS at the behaviour of these local vigilante groups (Anderson and Jaffrelot 2018) but some RSS leaders are too tempted by their actions to develop a coherent policy against such actions. Gupta (2018) documents how a campaign on "love-Jihad" started in UP in villages, small towns of western UP by organizations such as Dharma Jagaran Manch, the Viswa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. The RSS began publicizing this prominently by devoting prominent space to it on its publications (Organiser for example) and its officials began speaking about it. Christophe Jaffrelot argues that "The converging interests and concerns of the RSS and the BJP government explain the rise of Hindu vigilantism: on one hand, the government remained 'clean,' exterior to illegal forms of cultural policing of society which were in tune with its ideology, and on the other,

the Sangh Parviar could resort to its favorite modus operandi for disciplining society, at the grassroots level, without fearing state intervention" (2019, 57). This explanation points towards an interactive dynamic that our theory of social identity foregrounds. The CSDS data on awareness about social campaigns organised by RSS and other local organizations reveals that in 2015 23% of Hindus knew about Love Jihad (CSDS-Lokniti 2015). On the issue of beef ban, by 2018 "three Fourths of Hindus across states were in agreement with the idea that the state should punish those who eat beef or cow meat" (CSDS-Lokniti, 2018).

Thus, the role of changing middle class perceptions about their identity and about minorities such as Muslims must not ignore the deliberate and conscious attempts by the RSS and affiliated organizations to mobilize Hindu sentiment in a desire to Hinduize India. What is important to acknowledge that up till now, many of its campaigns may have failed to move a majority of middle class public opinion[48] but that is changing as more and more local organizations come up in an effort to launch new campaigns with what they consider new methods and techniques. While the first two issue specific campaigns started from the bottom-up, many other campaigns have been "discovered" by RSS and the BJP as a way to weaponize the Hindu-Muslim cleavage in India. Thus, this micro-foundational analysis of the resurgence of local Hindu organizations must complement a macro-level analysis of BJP's strategy or even RSS's larger goals. However, these mobilization tactics are not new; RSS and local hindu organizations have been focusing on these campaigns and issues ever since the early 20th century (Gupta 2018, 88); what has changed is the reception among Indian society. CSDS surveys of social attitudes in 2018 found that of Indian societal society between elections found that a majority of Hindus believe that

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[48]In 2008 Wilkinson (2008) found that most Indians respect and support India's religious pluralism. There is some evidence that even in 2015 there is respect of co-existence of India's religious diversity but it has begun to decline by 2019.

beef should be banned (CSDS-Lokniti, 2018). Even though its possible that this opposition to eating beef existed earlier, the RSS sponsored campaigns have increased their salience at the local level and diffused these ideas across society creating a new standard (see Figure 2).

Impunity or the Role of the State

Mobilization works hand in hand with support from the state but across different levels of the state, including local police departments, regional states, and a wide variety of officials. So, in keeping with our current models of religious violence and politics, we outline the role of impunity and collusion,[49] which highlights reaction by state actors who seek to use the rise of certain sentiments to create a political effect. Wilkinson's research focused on how the state leadership acts only when Muslims constitute a significant portion of a state and party competition is high (2002). Their response and reaction faced with riots is the crucial determinative factor. When aggrieved Muslims go to the police they are met with ignorance or even harassment. In Maharashtra the regional government scrapped positive reservations or Muslims, in 2015 the sale and possession of beef was made punishable by a fine and prison upto five years, and made religious conversion very difficult (Jaffrelot 2017). Many other states followed with such laws even appointing "Animal welfare officers" in every district combined with new cow shelters (gaushalas) that have mushroomed across UP. They work hand-in hand with local Hindu groups (Siddiqui et. al. 2017) to snatch the cows and even sell to Hindu traders; some estimates report that around 190,000 cows were snatched in this fashion. One such cow vigilante asserted: "The police have to listen to us because the BJP is in power" (Siddiqui et. al. 2017); this is a classic demonstration of the mechanism of impunity. Going beyond laws, and state policies, official statements by BJP MPs, cabinet members, and even the prime Minister during election

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[49]Kim argued that there is a collusion between Hindutva elements and state actors and institutions (2017).

campaigning has created a chilling effect on public discourse and made it possible for common people to be emboldened and confirmed in their anti-Muslim sentiments. Such acts of impunity also have a micro-effect in that they encourage, even urge many hardliners to make provocative statements publicly and by doing so, normalise and sustain such rhetoric and actions among bystanders and willing ethnic-nationalists. These acts of omission and commission by state actors have contributed to tacit even explicit support for the underlying resentments.

What Can Explain these Facts?

Our main contribution in this article has been to reframe our dominant understandings of Hindutva in terms of a bottom up and sideways process of diffusion and emulation that feeds into the top down incentives of resurgent parties and leaders but also exists separately from it. We also need some discussion of the underlying causes of these changes, which can map the effects onto individuals and civil society spaces. Psychological trends, combined with fragmentation of information and urban worlds of common residents across cities of India are creating willing supporters who not only believe in the ideas circulated by organizations and parties but also become key agents spreading and publicly spreading Hindu ideas, stories, and perceptions. Perceptions—which deviate from the real facts—matter more than our current accounts acknowledge and as our interactive framework alerts us to (see section 2).

Many have argued that these threats to democracy in India are a direct result of a top-down spread of fundamentalism or 'saffronization' made possible by the use of brute state power and a majoritarian interpretation of the electoral mandate by the ruling BJP. Because fascism in Weimar Germany came to power riding on the wings of an electoral victory, some observers warn of the fascism-like takeover of Indian democracy. However, this line of explanation misses important dynamics of popular support in a democracy. Here, we identify four possible causes in a brief

manner: (1) Psychological polarization and rising resentments among India's middle and professional classes, (2) a fragmented civil society combined with an intense but polarized (3) information environment which is engendered by popular support for scapegoating and fake stories. These rising resentments, then, get mobilized by (4) insurgent Hindu-centric organizations that go beyond the traditional family of organizations like the RSS, BJP and the Bajrang Dal to encompass many vigilante groups and community activists. The proliferation of diverse vigilante and wanna-be organizations at the local level and proliferation of hardliners and willing supporters has expanded the scope of Hindu-centric views beyond party and political organizations to seed into society.

Our accounts of Hindu nationalism need a political psychology analysis to understand the changes at the levels of individuals especially in the majority middle class communities of India. A deep-seated resentment against especially Muslims has taken hold at an individual psychology level, which is manifested in different degrees across different individuals. Middle class Raju feels a genuine sense of angst at the "terrorist activities in Kashmir and in Delhi." He also feels that the majority community in India has been ignored and not recognized for its acumen, and contributions while policy attention, in his view, is "only focused on the minorities."[50] Hindus in India, while a majority of 85% of the population feel a strong perceived sense of siege and threat. Political scientists need to incorporate attention to such psychological variables in their models where attention to party strategy or voter behavior focuses mostly on parties, leaders, and organizations (Nandy1983 [2009]).

How have cognitive psychological changes happened at the individual level? How did common people become receptive to and purveyors of this social hostility and animus? Does it

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[50]Interview conducted in Delhi in 2017.

have to with the concomitant fragmentation of information worlds they inhabit?[51] In order to understand the micro-level changes, we need to research the role of social media and its effect on psychological polarization at the individual level combined with the creation of urban demographics where middle class neighborhoods organized into ghettoized zones of activism and insularity are creating a fragmented civil society, which is primed for religious intolerance.

We suggest a tentative hypothesis drawn from research on the effect of social media. Settle's book on facebook argued that facebook can create feelings of psychological polarization wherein even non-political individuals tend to view out-groups as outsiders and different than you. Indian North Indian cities are showing signs of such psychological polarization in large measure. These multiple changes at the micro-level are magnifying the social anxieties attendant both terrorist attacks, and increased globalization (Ashraf and Nandy 2019; Mitra 2019). In the words of an interviewee: "What happens is you're inclined to think in a certain way and if you get WhatsApp messages that corroborate such things, then you go all out and believe them without thinking, could this be all right, is there another side to it. You don't. Because that is your half-formed impression in any case. So the WhatsApp group corroborates it in anyway and you believe it. So I think most people tend to do that. And if there are messages to the contrary, then you dismiss them by saying that this must be the anti-government lobby, this is the anti-so and so lobby, that is why they're saying it, so you dismiss them." I think by in large people do get influenced by WhatsApp."[52] Many willing supporters are very active on facebook and whatsapp. An interview by a Modi fan said: "Modi's team gave me points. Like if I shared something on Facebook or Twitter, I earned one, two points for that, if you are posting something important,

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[51]A recent novel by Megha Majumdar, "A Burning" (2020) places a smartphone in the hands of its protagonist and explores its attendant effects of alienation and fake news.
[52]Interview no. 3, Delhi July 2020.

there were five points for that. If I post your article saying that you have said this about Modi*ji,* there were points for that posting. I used to get five points, daily, for such activity. I made famous the 'Namo Namah' mantra on the Web site (Bhatt 2014)." Future work must analyze if and how these everyday micro-level anxieties get deployed during riots or election campaigns, which are the more intense form of political activity but their everyday presence is notable.

It is usually assumed that threats to India's democracy arise from quarters that have mostly been celebrated in the political science literature as the supporting pillars of democracy, namely the middle class and civil society (Berman 1997). Specifically, at the heart of the BJP's political rise and popular support for a majoritarian democracy is the role played by the increasing assertion of India's 'new middle class,' a category that is riddled with complexity and contradictions but which includes upper caste Hindus and lower caste groups. As Palshikar has argued, the "real strength of the new ideological offensive lies in civil society" (Palshikar 2019a, 110). Here we suggest following Berman (1997), Mehta (2010), Jamal (2007), and Varshney (2002) that the form of civil society matters-- the domain of micro-civil society and its institutional spaces, especially neighborhood communities within India's cities have become the conduits from within rising resentments simmer and percolate. Our findings give further texture to the long-standing conclusions of Thomas Hansen: "the xenophobic discourses of Hindu nationalism developed in the heart of the large and expanding middle class…It was in these mainly urban environments, rich in education, associational life, and what Putnam would characterize as 'civic engagement' and 'social capital' (Putnam 2001, 163–170) that the Hindu nationalist movement has found its most receptive audiences. (Hansen, 1999, 7)." We unpack the micro psychological roots of the "receptiveness of these audiences."

The urban political sociology of India's cities must attend to research at this micro level—into neighborhoods--going deeper than state-level civil societies or states (Berenschot 2009). We find that these ideas about Muslims flourish across India's metropolitan cities nested within resident welfare associations across the various colonies of Delhi (and other cities) that perpetuate and percolate and even become agents of surveillance and control. These colonies exhibit strong features of dark associationism but one that prohibits interactions with Muslims and organizes only Hindu festivals. The overall effect is an increase of social anxiety about constructed others and rising resentment and intolerance combined with the diffusion of the social public sphere with Hindu ideas, symbols and festivals. Our findings and analysis show that India is beginning to reveal the dark side of social solidarities that needs to be accounted for in the various celebratory treatises on civil society and public action.

Mona Mehta explored the "the paradoxical tendency of Gujarat's public sphere to produce hegemonic monologues over pluralistic dialogues, not in the absence of, but through the institutional mechanisms of, deliberative democracy" (Mehta 2017, 17). India's democratic public sphere has given rise to a wide variety of sentiments and ideas and "secured the hegemony of the Hindutva discourse in civil society" (Mehta 2017, 17). While India has witnessed fragmented civil societies and malevolent social solidarities similar to Weimar Germany, India of 2019 is an aspirational India. We also need to integrate the logic of aspiration and middleclass sensibilities in this larger story. India's willing ethnic-nationalists are upwardly mobile, professionals and aspirational middle classes. How did they become the home of such resentments?

Tentatively, the logic of psychological polarization brought about by social media and mainstream media, and the urban geography of middle-class space and fragmented civil societies is then activated by organizational Hindusim as well as home-level and street-level Hindutva

politics. These larger societal trends and psychological dynamics get activated by a coherent party strategy, organizational machinery of the RSS/BJP combine and state responses, which then affect electoral outcomes. Electoral politics, however, are a mere tip of the iceberg; beneath the win of the BJP in 2014 and 2019 lies a massive iceberg, what Palshikar calls "discursive dominance" and the "emergence of a new ideological framework within which India's democracy and public life in general seems to be operating" creating a "new politics" (Palshikar 2019a, 101, 103).

Conclusion

Many observers have noted the rise of a "new nationalism" in India, one is aggressive, and exclusive. What approaches can help us understand this? "At the macro-level, the self-reinforcing dynamic of political polarization. . . is well understood (Schedler 2020)" as political scientists and journalists have written about the top down mechanisms of polarization. It is believed that BJP and RSS have engineered this turn toward Hindutva to win more votes and seek greater support. Essentially, this powerful consensus views the turn towards "Hinduism" a strategic choice by top down leaders and institutions and parties such as parties of the Hindu right. A commonly held view is that Modi's win in 2014 galvanized strongly Hindu based organizations and Hindu activists with a passionate non-strategic commitment to Hinduism. Many called them Modi's brigade or bhakts. There is a large truth in these claims.

While we acknowledge an indispensable role of top down polarization strategies adopted by the BJP and its affiliates—what we call mobilization and the role of impunity— the current Hindutva politics is also born of consent and complicity by the larger population and fragmented even ghettoized civil society spaces across neighborhoods of cities. While all nationalisms are rooted in community-centered sensibility, the project of Hindu nationalism's roots in civil society and changing common sense of the people needs more research and analysis. Understanding these

roots must turn to additional micro dynamics, and diffuse, bottom-up and sideways processes, in addition to BJP's attempt to polarize the voters and create a Hindu bloc. This calls attention to micro-foundations and the underlying collective psychology of nationalism, resentment and anger that is sweeping common people especially those belonging to the middle classes. We, thus, need a new explanation to understand the consolidation of Hindu nationalism in India, one that combines attention to social psychology, transformations in a fragmented civil society, analysis of social and political discourse, and interactive and mutually reinforcing relationship between Hindu nationalist parties and affiliated organizations that manipulate but also respond to a changing Indian sensibility especially among India's professional and middle classes. Organizational and party-centric Hindutva is being enhanced by non-institutional—every day and societal Hindutva—that needs our attention.

We offered a two way and reciprocal theory of social identity that builds a micro foundation theory of individual intentions and motivations. Such a theory builds a more robust theoretical foundation for our understanding of nationalism and right-of center populist politics the world over. We argued that ordinary Indians—people who most middle-class Indians interact with each day are India's willing ethnic-nationalists and even vigilante activists. In addition, passive bystanders are more complicit in a new worldview even though they may not actively perpetuate intolerance. We argue that we need a new framework to understand the bystander phenomena, everyday forms of resentment and animus against minorities as well as their supporters in India. This cannot only be attributed to leaders of the BJP and the current incarnation of the BJP although they have enhanced it and made use of it—through the mechanism of mobilization. The BJP and RSS both represent and are responding to a fast-growing assertive nationalism at the societal level, and trying to use it to their benefit but they are as much the outcome of a wider transformation in

Indian society as its agents. Top-down drivers such as party strategy and electoral calculations combine with micro-level changes in people sensibilities and everyday resentments to produce a deep nationalist tsunami that started much before Modi's election in 2014[53] and is here to stay.

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[53]Palshikar (2004) collated the CSDS vote data to find that "In 2004, 35 per cent respondents could be identified as majoritarian[4] while in 2014 it has gone up to 52 per cent (author's calculation based on data from NES 2014, CSDS Data Unit). Though there is a sizable presence of majoritarian voters among Congress too, the BJP attracts a greater proportion of majoritarian voters. It has also been argued that socially conservative voters are more likely to vote for the BJP." There is evidence that this majoritarian societal sensibility started to coalesce before 2014 probably in the decade from 2000 onwards.

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Appendix:

A methodological note: We used the ethnographic method of deeper immersion and contextual questions in our field work of around 40 interviews. One of the co-authors (name to be provided when appropriate, after review process is over) took responsibility for the majority of interviews in Bangalore and Delhi, while both co-authors did interviews in Delhi. One of the co-authors has done extensive research in Karnataka and Delhi in the past. Our interviews lasted 1-3 hours and at times were followed by repeat interviews. First, we asked our respondents questions about their background and their family stories and histories. We asked them about their fathers and mothers to get a sense of their political and social leanings. We were also interested in how recent are their views. We asked about their religious practices but also about their friends and kinship networks. Then, we turned to their views and perceptions about current politics in the relevant city or state. We used the current controversies –for example about Tipu Sulatin in Karnataka—to get at their political sensibilities. We did ask them about who they voted for but our purpose was to find out why they voted for the party they did. We tried to be very careful and emphatic that we seek to understand the worldview and their ideas about Hindus and Muslims. The structure of questions varied across campaigns and cities. So, for example, in Delhi we asked about the JNU controversy in 2017, the corona virus and its spread across communities in 2020 and about terrorism. In Karnataka we asked about the elections especially when interviews were done after the assemble elections. In 2020 the Delhi interviews were conducted over the phone and all other interviews were done face to face. So, the structure of questions changed across cities and time periods. We

asked them if they were active in their resident welfare associations. We asked them about social

media usage—how often they logged on and which websites they visited.

Awara_Pagal_Banjara @pushkardey · Apr 4

Replying to @Never_Again_UK_ and @Zimmlaw175

Be careful, these people have single handedly doubled India's number of #infected. Both #Israel and #India have fought against #terrorism for half a century. This is the new face of #terrorists.
#CCPVirus
#TablighiJamaat
#SuicideSquad
#CoronaJihad
#BioTerrorism
#BioJihad

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