TITLE: RE- HISTORICISING AND RECLAIMING HISTORY - A GAMBIT OF EGEMONIC

HINDUTVA IN AN ETHNOCENTRIC ETHOS

AUTHORS: Purbali Sengupta

PAGES: 18-39

ORIGINAL PDF URL: https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/3505503

RE- HISTORICISING AND RECLAIMING HISTORY - A GAMBIT OF EGEMONIC HIN-DUTVA IN AN ETHNOCENTRIC ETHOS

Purbali Sengupta, Assistant Professor, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

E-mail: Purbali4042@gmail.com

Orcid ID: 0000-0002-7079-9204

Tarihi Yeniden Tarihselleştirmek ve Geri Kazanmak - Etnosentrik Bir Ahlakta Hegemonik Hindutva'nın Bir Oyunu
Öz

Çoğunlukçu siyasetin acımasız gündemini sürdüren Hindistan Halk Partisi hükümeti, metinleri istila ederek durmaksızın devlet propagandası yürütüyor. Althusserci anlamda bireyleri 'Hindu Öznesi' olarak çağırmanın kültürel hegemonyası, medyanın ve demagoji retoriğinin yardımıyla önemli bir yükseliş kaydetti. Tarih, temelde özselleştirilmiş bir Hindu kimliğine odaklanan kusurlu bir Ulus ve Milliyetçilik anlatısı üretmenin odak noktası haline geldi. Hindu milliyetçi ideolojisine uygun yeni bir okul müfredatının tasarımını başlatan Murli Manohar Joshi'nin mirasını takiben, Hindistan Halk Partisi yönetimindeki devletlerin, Hindu yöneticileri İslami 'Öteki'ye karşı savaşlarda galipler olarak tasvir etmek için yapılan önemli doğaçlamalarla sağcı bir dokunuş vermek için tarihi yeniden yazdığı iddia ediliyor. İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası çok ırklı İngiliz toplumunu 'İngilizlik'teki krize olan takıntısından dolayı eleştiren Paul Gilroy, Tarih'i nostaljinin sakatlayıcı etkisine karşı bir panzehir olarak sundu. Çağdaş Hint toplumu, Hindu olmayanları milliyetçilik karşıtı bir yabancı olarak inşa eden kültürel farklılık söylemlerine dayanan benzer bir neo-ırkçılıkla boğuşuyor. Bu makale, günümüzün kültürel tartışmalarına bir müdahale formüle etmeyi ve kozmopolitanizm ve kültürlerarasılık teorileri aracılığıyla kimlikleri yeniden düşünmemize yardımcı olabilecek alternatif bir bakış açısı yaratmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarih, Milliyetçilik, Hindutva, İdeoloji, Kozmopolitizm, Kültürlerarasılık.

Re- Historicising And Reclaiming History - A Gambit Of Egemonic Hindutva In An Ethnocentric Ethos
Abstract

Riding on a brutal agenda of majoritarian politics, the BJP government is relentlessly running a state propaganda with textual invasion. In an Althusserian sense this cultural hegemony of interpellating individuals as 'Hindu Subjects' has seen significant rise with the aid of media and rhetoric of demagoguery. History has become a focal point to fabricate a flawed narrative of Nation and Nationalism which focuses fundamentally on an essentialised Hindu identity. Following the legacy of Murli Manohar Joshi who initiated the design of new school curriculum attuned to Hindu nationalist ideology, BJP ruled states are allegedly re-writing history to give it a right-wing touch with crucial improvisations made to depict Hindu rulers as victors in battles against the Islamic 'Other'. Paul Gilroy, critiquing post-second world-war multiracial, British society for its obsession with the crisis in 'Englishness' offered History as an antidote against the crippling effect of nostalgia. Contemporary Indian society is grappling with a similar neo-racism founded on discourses of cultural difference that constructs the non-Hindu as an anti-nationalist outsider. This paper intends to formulate an intervention into the cultural debates of the day and create an alternate vantage point through theories of cosmopolitanism and transculturalism that could help us rethink identities.

Key words: History, Nationalism, Hindutva, Ideology, Cosmopolitanism, Transculturalism.

Introduction

Such being his attitude, the practical politician - and this is the condition I make-should at least act consistently in the case of a conflict and not suspect some danger to the State in the political theorist's opinions which are ventured and publicly expressed without any ulterior purpose.

Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace

It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words.

George Orwell, 1984

One classic that has consistently topped the bestselling chart for years is, unarguably George Orwell's dystopian novel '1984'. The Trump era particularly, had advertently witnessed the ubiquity of dystopian literature in the reading lists of Americans with '1984' assuming canonical dimensions. Inhabiting a miniscule space in the Global South and living in a repressive environment of Ethnic Populism under the present BJP government, one could easily fathom the inner workings of the Orwellian protagonist Winston Smith who while working at the Ministry of truth to rewrite historical records, secretly harboured the desire of overthrowing the Party. Year 2014 marked the beginning of a populist rule under Bharatiya Janata Party whose political agenda comprises largely of majoritarian politics based on the hegemony of one dominant cultural tradition of Hinduism. Ruling a multicultural society with a diverse cultural ethos like that of India, has never been easy for any political leadership, secular or otherwise. However polarising movements of extremist far-right groups have significantly gained momentum transnationally, be it India, the US or Brazil. In a post-truth world, the manufacture of conspiracy theories and alternate factual universes with the use of propaganda machine has been quite a fruitful mission for most nationalist nation-states. Unquestionably, controlling institutionalised knowledge is axiomatic of power consolidation. The present ruling party is fanatically consumed by the idea of reformulating historical discourses to incorporate positive roles played by Hindus in nationalist historiography and to resurrect Hindu Supremacy in cultural texts. This corrective to History in order to accentuate an 'Essentialised Hindu Identity', is in an effort to create a moral panic that the demographic majority is under threat from minorities. This idea of an existential crisis of Hindus becomes a ruse to exclude all those minorities who in terms of 'heredity' do not have a place in the grand narrative of History and that of the Nation. Selective versions of History are legitimised through truth claims made by Hindu Supremacists to suppress all other forms of knowledge by dismissing them as 'anti-nationalists' or 'unpatriotic'. Debating a similar 'manufactured crisis'- 'the mugging scare',

(1) Stuart Hall elaborates on how the State, Judiciary and Media reports attempted to present 'street crimes by gangs of youth', (popularly known as 'mugging') as some form of national crime committed with an intent of brutal violence. He mentions the Handsworth Crime of 1973 as a case in point where excessive sentences were handed down to the criminals who understandably were from mixed ethnic backgrounds. This ritual punishment was of course to set an exemplary model.

In keeping with Hall's commentary on the persecution of 'Blacks and Asians' in the guise of national security, similar instances of 'beef-lynching' has had overwhelming media coverage in India for quite obvious reasons. School level science textbooks have iconographic representations of the animal 'cow' as 'Gaumata' (Cow Goddess), the gendered connotation is evidently political. The defiling of Muslims as 'beef-eaters' and therefore profane, resulted in a backlash against the minority group, the young men of which were often mercilessly thrashed or lynched on the simple pretext of working in cattle trade or tanneries. Such acts of communal violence were carried out by Hindu Mobs proclaiming themselves as 'Cow Protectors'. This atrocious aspect of mobocracy is ignited by a certain rhetoric of demagoguery by means of which a majority group is persuaded to believe that they are socially, economically and culturally menaced and marginalised by the minorities (particularly the Islamic Other).

This makes the debate around Appropriation of History extremely viable and relevant for further analysis. Mutilating historical record with an intent to situate Hindu subjects on the basis of 'hereditary rights' and thereby silencing the Non-Hindus on the grounds of illegitimacy and illegal claims to a homeland has seen quite some resonance in the political vocabulary of Naturalization, the valid example of which is the recently passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019. To quote The Economic Times (2019), 'The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 seeks to amend the definition of illegal immigrant for Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Buddhist and Christian immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who have lived in India without documentation.' Interestingly, this world view percolates through BJP's efforts in reconceptualising historical discourses where the role of Hindu Nationalism is deliberately aggrandized, crudely displaying a breast beating version of Ethno-Nationalism.

In this context one may consult Hannah Arendt (Arendt.,1951: 227) who coins a specific term 'Tribal Nationalism' to describe such tribal consciousness as, ' In psychological terms, the chief difference between even the most violent chauvinism and this tribal nationalism is that the one is extroverted, concerned with visible spiritual and material achievements of the nation, whereas the other, even in its mildest form (for example the German youth movement) is introverted, concentrates on the

individual's own soul which is considered as the embodiment of general national qualities.'Debating the institutionalization of English literary studies by the colonial administration, (Viswanathan, 1989) Gauri Viswanathan points out how cultural imperialism shaped native subjectivities to mask colonial rule under a pedagogic mission of humanist tutelage; with the study of English acting as a 'Surrogate Englishman'. To borrow a quote (Viswanathan, 1989: 3), 'The curriculum is conceived here not in the perennialist sense of an objective, essentialized entity but rather as discourse, activity, process - as one of the mechanisms through which knowledge is socially distributed and culturally validated.'

Along with interventions into academic curriculum, one can equally detect powerful hegemonic configurations at the level of cultural production and circulation. Mainstream Bollywood cinema has forayed into blatant patriotism with the cinemascape often occupied by a Hindu protagonist battling anti-Hindu (primarily Muslim) antagonism. Movies like URI: The Surgical Strike (2019), Tanhaji (2020), Raazi (2018) and The Ghazi Attack (2017) deserve a note.

Admitting the fact that contemporary tribal nationalisms (term used by Hannah Arendt) are now expanding exponentially as transnational movements, I would like to reiterate that the purpose of this paper is to look at how state initiatives of reshaping history along essentialist ideologies often suppress and subsume marginalised subjectivities which, if provided a free articulational space could have possibly generated alternative transcultural and multi-ethnic models of agency and resistance. That is why people's histories and marginalised knowledge systems deserve independent expression to counter their incorporation into dominant discourses. This paper would make an attempt to debate whether post-national ideas of global empathy, cultural hybridity and cosmopolitanism can actually operate to negate fundamentalist ideologies across ethnic, racial and cultural bounds.

MYTHS OF ORIGIN AND THE 'ORIGIN' OF THE MYTH:

The upsurge of fundamentalist nationalisms across nation-states in the past few years have caused unprecedented alarm among minorities and subaltern classes as the political rhetoric of autocratic states frequently constructed the minorities as the objects of their persecution in the endgame of domination. Therefore if 'any analysis of the State requires us to conceptualize a space that is constituted by the intersection of local, regional, national and transnational phenomena' (Sharma and Gupta, 2006 : 230), it becomes incumbent to analyse the role 'myth' plays in the discursive construction of the State. Highlighting on this aspect of myth in orientalist societies, (Viswanathan, 1989: 123) Gauri Viswanathan makes an emphatic point: In much the

same way that Mill interpreted the narrative structure of Indian drama as perpetuating the beliefs and practices of Hindu society, Levi-Strauss read the structure of myth as a coded message by means of which a culture offers models of belief and action to its individual members. In order to decode the message and probe the sources that give it form, the critical observer had first to break that form and recast the myth in a non-narrative mode. It is precisely in such an act that Levi-Strauss believed the inherent contradictions of the social system are exposed.

Elaborating on why British commentators considered Hindu Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata as problematic texts dealing with caste hierarchy and polyandry (Viswanathan, 1989: 124), Viswanathan indicates, 'When allegorized, these social customs received a sanctity that prevented the reader from distinguishing a moral act from an immoral one'. She further elucidates that the reader must 'learn to sift fact from legend'. (Viswanathan, 1989: 124) and that 'it was imperative to undo that form and recast it in another where the signs would be easily interpretable.'

Mythologizing the historical narrative by claiming mythical king Rama as the powerful ancestor of the present day Hindus has been a powerful conspiracy theory consumed largely on social media, by a ballistic Hindu community and in political circles by fundamentalist ideologues. Digital technology too helped proliferate Hindu supremacist ideas, redesigned in modern fables and legends that circulated virtually. In a conservative Indian society mockery of the polytheistic cult of Hindu deities is considered blasphemous and often social media dissent led to partisan strife wherein cropped up a variety of pejorative neologisms like 'Anti-national' or the more notorious 'Babar ki Aulad' (translated as 'Son of Babar, the Mughal Emperor). Over the past few years a number of stand-up comedians and artists have been rounded up on charges of subversion of authority. It is crucial at this point to examine the genesis of these 'myths of origin' and their functionality in the context of national history. To push the debate further along the lines of race, as a person of colour one has to acknowledge the dire condition of contemporary India, grappling as it is, with discourses of neo-racism where race operates more than just a social marker.

Avtar Brah, (Back and Solomos, 2000: 443) presents a persuasive argument about race; 'Social phenomena such as racism seek to fix and naturalise "difference" and create impervious boundaries between groups.' Theorizing the genealogy of Race and its discursive representation Etienne Balibar (Balibar and wallerstein, 1988: 17) conceptualises it as; 'Racism - a true "total social phenomena"- inscribes itself in practices (forms of violence, contempt , intolerance, humiliation and exploitation), in discourses and representations which are so many intellectual elaborations of the phantasm of prophylaxis or segregation (the need to purify the social body, to pre-

23

serve "one's own" or "our" identity from all forms of mixing, interbreeding or invasion) and which are articulated around the stigmata of otherness (name, skin colour, religious practices)'.

Elaborating further on the popular discourses on 'the story of the tribe' Balibar points out (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988: 19), 'Unlike for example theologians, who must maintain a distance between esoteric speculation and a doctrine designed for popular consumption, historically effective racist ideologues have always developed "democratic" doctrines which are immediately intelligible to the masses and apparently suited from the outset to their supposed low level of intelligence, even when elaborating elitist themes'.

Christophe Jaffrelot in his extensive study of the ideological beginnings of Hinduism (Jaffrelot, 2007) elucidates that the doctrine of Hinduism is not a recent affair and can be traced back to as early as 1925 when the RSS or the National Volunteer Corp was founded. Jaffrelot maintains that Hindu Nationalism in the colonial phase was oppositional to the secular ideology of the Congress Party and all other forms of universalistic thinking of political personalities like Mahatma Gandhi.
Hindutva, as it is better known, stipulated that Indian Culture had to be recognised as Hindu Culture with the power of assimilating minorities to national interests. (Jaffrelot, 2007: 5) Its motto, 'Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan' echoed many other European Nationalisms based on religious identity, a common language, or even racial feeling.' The Ethnic Nationalism called Hindutva which Jaffrelot talks about at length, has undergone profound genealogical changes over the past few decades, witnessing unprecedented rise during the Pandemic of 2020. Manipulating and influencing not just Culture and History but also generating conspiracy theories to target Muslims has been a constant agenda of the BJP in the Pandemic.

 Flawed theories accusing the Muslims as prime contaminators of covid-19 have surfaced all over social media. This hysteria may also have found some resonance across the Atlantic when the virus is given a certain ethnic origin (China virus). Surmising the rationale behind such mythic constructions, (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988: 20) Balibar states, 'Racist myths (the "Aryan myth", the myth of heredity) are myths not only by virtue of their pseudo-scientific content, but in so far as they are forms of imaginary transcendence of the gulf separating intellectuality from the masses, forms in dissociable from the implicit fatalism which imprisons the masses in an allegedly natural infantilism'.

Arguing further (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988: 22), Balibar indicates how 'Neo-Racism' is based less on 'biological heredity' but on 'Cultural differences' (Balibar calls

this 'Culturalist ' Racism) and that 'Culture can also function like a nature, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin'. Tracing the trajectory of 'grand-myths' operational as dominant discourses, one has to acknowledge the potency of the concept of 'fictive ethnicity' (a term coined by Balibar) in this context. (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988 : 49), 'No Nation, that is, no national state, has an ethnic basis, which means that nationalism cannot be defined as an ethnocentrism except precisely in the sense of the product of a fictive ethnicity'. What Balibar actually meant when he theorised ethnicity as 'fictional' is what perhaps Benedict Anderson to a certain extent meant (Anderson, 1983: 7) when he emphasised on a 'deep horizontal comradeship', in both cases not necessarily physiological or physical but ethnic and cultural which through operation of 'myths of origin' and other cultural norms help one connect naturally (innately) to the national space.

The moment we articulate an imaginative space called 'Nation' with people in their 'collectivity', complex distinctions like (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988: 38), 'internal racism (directed against a population regarded as "a minority" within the national space) and an external racism (considered as an extreme form of xenophobia)' crop up. The present form of 'internal racism' that a minority Islamic community is subjected to, in India, makes it necessary to fathom the mythical constructions of identities naturalised through dominant narratives. As Balibar puts it (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988: 86), 'The formation of the nation thus appears as the fulfilment of a "project" stretching over centuries, in which there are different stages and moments of coming to "self-awareness"- something that Immanuel Wallerstein (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988) terms 'pastness' designating a 'golden era' that we (the people of the nation) have fallen from and that this past is endangered by those who do not share 'our ethnicity' and do not participate in 'our' project.

So if such hereditary myths claim (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988: 59), 'annexation ("return") to the national "body" of "lost" individuals and populations (for example, the Sudeten or Tyrolean Germans) which is, as is well known, closely linked to what might be called the pan-ic developments of nationalism (Pan-Slavism, Pan-Germanism, ...)'. Should we anticipate a Pan-Hinduism, a form of Hindu Supremacist movement (or sentiment) that will unite (metaphorically or otherwise) all Hindus around the Globe? Is the present regime diplomatically strategizing construction of 'essentialised identities' as 'means' to 'political end'? Is this resurgence of reinforcing national tropes just a 'passing affair' or a deliberate agenda to culturally exorcise National Memory on 'purist claims'?

Let us look back for a moment to the beginnings of Hindutva in its extremist form under one of its strongest proponents V.D. Savarkar who became a vanguard of the Hindu Mahasabha party in the late 1930s. In 'Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?' (Jaffrelot, 2007: 95) Savarkar clearly delineates the legitimacy of national subject hood in these words:We are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common sankriti (civilization) in the case of some of our Mohammedan or Christian countrymen who had originally been forcibly been converted to a non-hindu religion and who consequently have inherited along with Hindus, a common Fatherland and a greater part of the wealth of common culture - language, law, customs, folklore and history - are not and cannot be recognised as Hindus.

In his detailed study of Hindutva Ideology, Chetan Bhatt (Back and Solomos, 2000: 575) points out certain striking characteristics of the movement:Hindutva movement reproduces a grand epistemology about Hinduism that fundamentally subverts the methods of history and historical sociology.

In this view, Hinduism or its essence is in some fundamental way unchanging and primordial (Hindutva is indeed based on this 'essence').....In this Hindutva conception, ideas such as Brahminism, Sanatana dharma ("the eternal religion") and so forth are detached from the historical processes in which they developed and mobilised as self-evident signifiers of a contemporary identity. In this sense 'Hinduism' becomes an abstraction, an empty but normative signification of something that exists above and beyond the histories of societies and cultures.

The temporal scheme of Hindu mythology are applied to contemporary histories (indeed, a realism is claimed for mythic temporalities).....Much of the structure and power of Hindutva discourse is derived by intentionally blending (and confusing) mythic, archaeological, medieval, colonial and contemporary time, space and event.

Bhatt further explains (Back and Solomos, 2000) how contemporary hindutva movement gained momentum by appropriating the myth of western Aryanism (particularly English and German comparative linguistics and Indology) which suggested that Aryans invaded physical India from outside to instead proclaim Aryans as 'autochthonous' people of India. To commemorate the mythical greatness of the Hindus, the Ayodhya issue (Jaffrelot, 2007) was revived in 1984 by Vishva Hindu Parishad and later in 1989 by L.K.Advani to culturally purify Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama (the protagonist of the hindu epic Ramayana) from any heathen contamination (the presence of a mosque built by the first Mughal emperor Babar on the same site). This perhaps was one symbolic moment when myth and realpolitik reached phantasmagorical proportion.

ALTERATIONS OF HISTORY TO ALTERCATIONS WITH HISTORY:

Over time, the ideological machine of Hindutva mapped a certain discursive tradition covering roughly all academic disciplines including History, Sociology, Anthropology, Theology and often Medicine and Science. It would not thus be wrong to say that Hindutva is to Hindu Ideologues as Orientalism was to European cultural historians. To borrow a thought from Chetan Bhatt, (Back and Solomos, 2000: 583); Hinduism in this sense, is articulated in the Hindutva movement as not a religion at all but an eternally valid ethical code, a distinct orientation to the temporal and spiritual world , the natural social and political order, the fulfilment of civilization and a world-view for humankind. It cannot, therefore be compared with or comprehended by external western or Islamic paradigm. If Hinduism (Hindu Dharma) can be conceptualised not as a religion but as an incommensurable civilizational ethos, a further claim can be made that Hinduism is itself a tolerant genuinely secular way of being and not a religion as such.

These secular incarnations of Hindutva has seen prominent effusion in the History debate where selective versions of history are presented as authentic and unchangeable. 'Historical Negationism' (as the term suggests) is understood as some form of altering historical record with the purpose of distortion, the term 'negationism' was coined by French historian Henry Rousso (Rousso, 1994) while examining the politics of memory in Vichy France. According to Rousso the term is not to be confused with academic and legitimate restructuring of History (Historical Revisionism). (Back and Solomos, 2000) Chetan Bhatt examines how archaeology helped reproduce historical facts in the polarising debate around Aryan origins with the discovery of the urban ruins of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro in 1920s in and around old towns in Northern India and Pakistan.

The results exhibit startling facts which provide conclusive evidence of a violent Aryan invasion of India. Interestingly proponents of Hindutva have consistently denied all theories of an Aryan invasion as 'colonial products' to eclipse the post-colonial status of a young nation-state. So if Hindus are descendants of Aryans and have Aryan blood in their veins (as claimed by the Purists), how can they account for the presence of these ancient ruins in Pakistan, an Islamic majority country? Keeping in mind that the partition of India produced the present territorial divisions along religious lines, one needs to nevertheless acknowledge that theoretically, both Hindus and Muslims have equal claim to this ancestral lineage. Accepting this fact of history will undeniably contradict that segmented version of history which Hindutva promulgates. This altercation with history calls for more grave scholarly debates which

is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. Let us for the moment resume the contemporary debate around reformulating textual (historical) narratives in academic institutions. An online report on Text book Politics of BJP in Rajasthan, published in 2018 (Scroll.in, 2018), revealed startling facts:

Not only do the new text books reinforce the Hindu majoritarian world view, they all but erase minority identities. Science is explained through stories from Indian mythology and every Maths text book from class 3 to 8 has a chapter on Vedic maths. The banned practice of Sati is described in glowing terms, as are government schemes and initiatives. Books of practically every subject seek to instil nationalism and an unquestioning respect for the armed forces....Minority identities - Muslims, Christians and others- are nearly missing from the text books....The Class 5 Hindi textbook contains a letter in which the cow declares herself a purveyor of 'strength, wisdom, longevity, health, happiness, prosperity and glory', enjoins children to serve and protect her, and signs off with 'yours, Kamdhenu Gaumata'. The Class 8 Hindi textbook includes a chapter on 'Village development with Cow protection'.
The report further exposed pressing facts on how Muslims are deliberately excluded from record of historical achievements by listing exclusively eminent Hindus in history text books.

The word Conspiracy in a class 3 Hindi text book is defined as 'an act or plan against government or rulers' (Scroll.in, 2018). A history book of class 7 goes one step ahead by completely reversing the outcome of the Battle of Haldighati which saw the defeat of Rana Pratap against Mughal emperor Akbar.

The Washington Post (2018) harps on how parties in power have always tried regularising historical narratives, citing Egyptian government's scrubbing references to the Arab Spring Uprising of 2011 and of Chinese administration's promotion of its socialist history. However the news report states that even though Congress Party in India did tamper with history when in power by glorifying the role of the Party in the freedom struggle, it nevertheless critiqued the controversy caused by the Emergency rule of 1970 and the wave of anti-Sikh sentiment that persisted throughout the 1980s. The BJP, on the other hand (The Washington Post, 2018), has incorporated Modi's governmental schemes like Demonetization, Digital India and Clean India Missions in all text books in an impulse to stagnate the flux and heterogeneity of historical narration.

Revelations of an investigative journalistic article (The Wire, 2020) explains categorically why the idea of 'Bharatavarsha' as an Indian Nation-State (Hindu Rashtra) existing in ancient texts is a complete whitewash of authentic historical documentation.

28

The article further posits probing questions on conspiracy theories that suggest that the Taj Mahal is actually 'Tejo Mahalaya', a once Hindu temple. Representation of the colonial past is frantically manipulated to magnify the role played by Hindu Nationalists in the anti-colonial struggle. Such fabrications of history to present an unchanging and homogeneous trajectory of the post-colonial Indian nation-state, is nothing but an orchestrated political move to erase all heterogeneity from a multicultural society. The Hindustan Times (2017), reports how BJP ruled states are re- writing history to give it a right-wing twist. Hindu rulers are shown as victors in battles while Mughals are represented as mass murderers. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi is glossed over and several political stalwarts like the country's first premier Jawaharlal Nehru and his role in Indian politics remains unacknowledged. On the other hand, RSS ideologues like Veer Savarkar finds a sympathetic portrayal in almost all history text books. (Jaffrelot, 2007), Christophe Jaffrelot explains how the status of RSS as a transnational organisation has facilitated its expanse overseas, particularly in the US (California) where it tried to pressurise the Board of Education to incorporate ideas about Aryan invasion and the Muslim atrocities committed in India. Hindu Nationalists from the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation (an affiliate of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh of America) submitted a disputed report of certain edits to be made in school textbooks. For organisations like Friends of South Asia (FOSA), these recommendations were a reflection of the Hindutva world view and struck a harmonious chord with the fundamentalist agenda of the Sangh Parivar in India and in the Hindu diaspora.

As the research provided by Jaffrelot suggests some of these recommendations were intended to delete or edit textual references to the complex caste system of India, the traditional practices of untouchability and the polytheistic matrix of Hinduism. In this context of educational reform and the historiographical intervention of the Hindutva, Jaffrelot cites another case in point (Jaffrelot, 2007), when Hindu Nationalists during the Janata Phase, 1977-9, wanted three history textbooks2 to be withdrawn from the curriculum on the accusation that they failed to condemn the Muslim invasion of India and misrepresented heroes like Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. It was under the aegis of Murli Manohar Joshi who acting as Minister of Human Resource Development and Sciences and technology (1998-2004) made extensive efforts at constructing an alternate tradition of history writing that could best fit the hindutva ideology. Jaffrelot elaborates how in an effort to reorient Education Joshi blamed the colonial rule for the destruction of the indigenous system through introduction of Western education and English language. A renewed reinforcement of gender stereotype was also detected in Joshi's directives of introducing courses

in home sciences and home industry exclusively for girls. Therefore, this political agenda of the Bharatiya Janata Party of interventionist policies in Education and intrusion into powerful discourses like that of history (through reform of curriculum), may not be a novelty after all. The question, however, is whether the efforts of BJP in instilling a sense of communal pride in Hindus through modifying national memory sustain a longer shelf life? Or let us hope that the attempts at mutilating history to alter the discursive pattern of cultural and intellectual tradition could just be a short lived euphoria, lasting a term or so. As prime witnesses to this large scale textual invasion, educated Indians must resist the state policies by creating alternate spaces of subversion and dissent.

Dennis Dworkin (Dworkin, 2009: 521) commenting on British cultural critic Paul Gilroy and his attempt to create alternate discursive spaces for 'black Britons', observes Gilroy's 'attention to structure and agency, focus on modes of dominance and resistance, privileging historicity and counter history'. Such counter hegemonic historiographies could invalidate dominant representations of essentialised identities. Dworkin estimates Gilroy's critique of contemporary Britain 'as an acclamation of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism at a time when they are threatened by essentialist notions of national identity and unbridgeable cultural difference.' Dworkin considers Gilroy's initiative of rethinking British history from a transnational perspective as a tool to overthrow binary oppositions underpinning ethnic absolutism. In the view of the above argument, it is crucial for us to revive an authentic Indian historical tradition that could engage in serious academic conversation through rewriting of subaltern histories and histories' of minorities, which may, in its turn, carve a counter hegemonic historical space to contain the hitherto undocumented voices of people. The present wave of 'Revivalist Hinduism' is both detrimental and oppositional to the fabric of non-hindu and secular cultural traditions that a culturally diverse Indian society has held through ages. If Cultural Historians can forge a dialogic relation with these suppressed and silenced narratives, our comprehensive history could no longer be framed along 'essentialist' and 'exclusivist' lines. One must also remember that History writing is subjective rather than objective and the subject position of the historian needs to be carefully evaluated so that readers as 'actors' can rightly engage from their respective subjectivities for a fair judgement of facts.

L'ETAT C'EST MOI: TOWARDS PATRIARCHALISM AND ETHNIC ABSOLUTISM:

Encyclopaedia Britannica (Britannica, updated 2019) defines 'Absolutism' as 'the political doctrine and practice of unlimited centralized authority and absolute sov-

ereignty, as vested specially in a monarch or dictator.' Britannica points out that though it originated in early modern Europe with leaders of new nation-states, it was king Louis XIV (1643-1715) of France who asserted his autocratic demeanour with the French phrase, 'L'etat c'est moi' (I am the State). Moreover Absolutism has also existed in other parts of the world, including Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler and in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin.

(Sassoon, 2016) Such Absolutism often requires its supreme leaders to personify and incarnate personal ideologies as state agenda. Many autocrat rulers in the Middle East including former Iraqian president Saddam Hussein and Muhammad Gaddafi, the infamous Libyan politician, have followed the obnoxious legacy of Hitler or Stalin in documenting their lives through biographies/autobiographies.

It would hardly be an exaggeration if one claims that the present BJP rule is an embodiment of the life of the Supreme leader (Narendra Modi) represented (often metaphorically) as synonymous to the progress of India Shining3 (an ordinary tea seller's rags to riches tale advertised and sold as the 'Great Indian Dream'). A recent CNN news report (2020) presented the subject of a nationwide debate in the US, following the death of a 46 year old black man (George Floyd) - the removal of contentious confederate monuments which remind African Americans of centuries of oppression and virulent racism.

It is intriguing that while Americans debate the irrationality or necessity of historical amnesia, a developing country like India sees a return to a fabled, nativist spectre of an imagined past.

Aljazeera reported (Aljazeera, 2018) the unveiling of a 182 metre statue, the world's tallest, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to honour Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the country's first home minister and one of the founding fathers which is speculated to be a deliberate political move to undermine Modi's chief political rivals, the Gandhi-Nehru family. The report particularly mentions the biased concerns of the Hindutva project at 'revising India's history to suit the Hindu nationalist agenda' which includes glorifying legacies of more 'Pro-Hindu' leaders like Patel over secular ones like Nehru or Gandhi. Another such controversial statue which is under construction in Mumbai is that of Maratha leader Shivaji Bhonsle, heralding a 'Neo Nationalistic spirit' for the posterity.

The rigorous harping on nationalist themes, the insistence on citizens to perform national rituals and exhorting the youth of the country to engage in more traditional (Hindu) forms of cultural practices rather than western, has produced a mass of confused, disoriented public whose political activism does not extend beyond 'hashtag

31

debates'. There has also been a drastic curb on free speech in the past few years with routine rounding up of activists and strict censoring of journalistic activities. Recasting national ethnicities in compartmentalized, monolithic categories for electoral gain and persistent repetition of national tropes, has on the contrary, garnered quite a popular appeal.

(Britannica, 2021) provides a brief political career graph of Narendra Modi, from his meteoric rise to administrative power when he won the 2014 elections, prior to which he served as CM of a prominent Indian state (Gujrat) to his present status of being twice elected on popular vote. One striking fact of his career is his membership of the pro-hindu Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) organisation as early as in 1970s when Modi also set up a unit of the RSS student's wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). This wing has been often involved in turbulent political activities on a number of University campuses in recent times making it evident that Modi's career is tainted by deep controversy. Particularly during the communal riots in Gujrat in 2002 when on the accusation of having condoned the violence, he was barred from entering the United States.

From his biographical record, it is easy to surmise why this altercation with history was choreographed by Modi at this contingent point; to revamp his political image would serve a cathartic end. If repetition of national codes is crucial in preventing the fragmentation of the nationalist myth, it is equally pertinent to reinvent and recast these national symbols in one's own personal image.

As an developing and emergent nation-state, India has enjoyed great visibility in the global landscape due to this 'brand furnishing' project of the PM in which as a National Icon he has inflated into a 'larger than life' character in this 'self-told story of the tribe'. It seems inevitable at this poignant moment that the myth of the Nation merges and superimposes itself with the myth of the Supreme Leader whose image reverberates with another mythical hero Lord Rama who accepted a life of hermitage by rejecting royalty. In an almost extraordinarily striking resemblance, Modi draws attention to himself as an ordinary man, an ascetic who has given up on a life of domestic bliss for a greater, transcendental goal. Indeed, 'Rama' is a culturally constructed category used by Hindu Supremacists and fundamentalists to thrive on 'difference', 'diversity' and 'alterity' much like many earlier forms of fascism.

In this context (Sharma and Gupta, 2006: 188), Wendy Brown while talking about devising a feminist critical theory of the bureaucratic state, highlights the gendered nature of the entity:

The masculinism of the state refers to those features of the state that signify, enact, sustain, and represent masculine power as a form of dominance. This dominance expresses itself as the power to describe and run the world and the power of access to women; it entails both a general claim to territory and claims to, about, and against specific 'others'.

Therefore, the discursive space of the state can be structured by the elements of masculinism to fit a certain heteronormative code so that the 'politicised subject' that is produced by it will be predominantly that of a 'Hindu Male'. (The Hindu, 2019) The Surrogacy regulation Bill, introduced in Rajya Sabha in 2019 by the Modi government which made commercial surrogacy illegal, is a case in point. This monitoring and disciplining of subjects with an intrusive power over their bodies and an accompanying somatophobia (According the bill the right to surrogacy is denied to homosexuals, single parents and live-in couples), is surely a reflection of the state's political control over subject's sexual lives. As I push this argument further I would like to draw attention to the underlying argument; how a powerful Hindu Male and an efficacious myth of Lord Rama intertwine to transform into a morphed image of each other and of the nation, empowered with the right to represent and construct subjects through a dominant hindutva historiography.

GLOBAL SOLUTIONS AGAINST HINDUIZATION OF HISTORY? THE POLITICS OF A COSMOPOLITAN COSMOS:

The two world wars and the nuclear holocaust reshaped the spatio-temporal terrain of a large number of countries. To add insult, the failure of Communism and the lessons of the Cold War remained a rude reminder of the fragility of Nationhood. The end of the Cold war ushered in an extraordinary era of liberalism where countries, even the young nation-states had to tune their political systems in accordance with capitalist or socialist choices.

There are many who blame the present crisis to a growing world capital which deepened the economic divide between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. On the other hand there are historians like Yuval Harari who consider technological disruption as a significant turning point in human history. If both global governance and post-national systems of dominion have failed to lead us out of this impasse, equally aggravating has been the contemporary upsurge of chauvinistic nationalisms which have opened up zones of exclusion in domestic societies. In my paper, I have argued against this aspect of fundamentalism as extremely perilous and damaging to the fabric of democratic thought in a civil society. The intrusion into academic disciplines and institutions, the tampering of historical narratives can amplify the hierarchy of cultures,

internally as well externally. In a multicultural ethos that characterises Indian society, the politics of dominating minorities and culturally appropriating the discursive pattern of identities has been alarmingly high recently. If cultural difference does not survive in multiculturalism, can average Indians aspire to global citizenship in a cosmopolitan post-nation? Terms like Cosmopolitanism and Multiculturalism have gained a lot of momentum over time, as societies are viewed more in their fluidity and hybridity than in their cartographic and structural fixities.

One good reason of this is perhaps the politics of war and increasing economic opportunities that accentuated mass displacement and mobility of population groups; new Diasporas have altered older configurations and one may finally be hopeful of a borderless and mobile world in the future.

Nevertheless, there is still a dilemmatic situation to confront in internal politics; the national agenda of consolidating an essentialist notion of Hindu identity which has frequently seen resistance at the local level of some states. One apt example is West Bengal where some form of communal harmony has ensured peace for a considerable period. Party (Trinamool translated as grass root) which has been in power since2011 has prioritised Secularism and its promotion as its top political goal. This politics of appeasing minorities has often put the state in occasional rifts with the centre as power struggle continues with each passing election. (Scroll.in, 2017) An online news source recollected how a Facebook post had scarred the communal rest in Basirhat in 2017 (Basirhat riots).

The news source specified how; 'The ground violence in turn sparked off a narrative war, as the riot was used to score political goals. English language television news and many on social media portrayed it as an event in which Hindus were under unprecedented attack.'

Domestic politics of this kind can temporarily disable the politics of Nationalism but may again lead us to some other complexity of political conflict. Vaccine Nationalism is a relatively new coinage that has come to disposal extensively in the midst of the raging pandemic. If one follows this trend, there is a supreme danger of countries waging another world war over the access to vaccines for its own nationals. Global politics and Nationalist politics feed into each other in more ways than one.

Debating Cosmopolitanism (Robbins, 2002: 33), Bruce Robbins harps on the complex nuances of the term, Whatever comes from America, it appears, is American Imperialism. Indeed, these days this is also true for cosmopolitan ideas that do not come from America… Cosmopolitanism is imperialism, American imperialism,

34

even when it is aimed against American imperialism. (Robbins, 2002: 34) He also warns nation-states of the dangers of cosmopolitanism if not rightly articulated and implemented;

Cosmopolitanism would appear to belong like Habermas's public sphere, to that intriguing and frustrating set of terms- it would be interesting to speculate on whether or not they are restricted to the tradition of Kant - that seen perpetually torn between an empirical dimension and a normative dimension. The trade-off is familiar. To the extent that it seems to float outside or above social life, a normative concept like Cosmopolitanism will always be vulnerable to charges like elitism and inefficacy. Robbins's mention of Immanuel Kant makes us wonder what place Kantian views on Global empathy may have, in the present crisis.

Immanuel Kant (Kant, 1775: 107), in his political proposition lays down certain preliminary articles that would ensure peace among warring nations, 'Standing Armies (miles perpetuus) Shall in Time be Totally Abolished', is one such. However, if you look at the practical application of such a principle in the light of the Kashmir affair where an excess of military violence was exchanged between India and Pakistan, one sees the necessity perhaps of a form of temporary security troop (not quite the standing army Kant mentions) to ensure civilian safety. But again, frequently, it is the civilian population under the radar of the military.

While we are in the middle of this debate, the situation in Myanmar, which is under a military coup, becomes representative of the kind of internal aggression that can arise from an intimate enemy. Home grown Nationalisms are to be averted if democracies need to last. Every human thought that aims at bettering the world (starting from Levinas) is progressive. Let me end with Kant's principles of Universal Hospitality (Kant, 1795: 118), which can be described as 'the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another. One may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but, so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one may not treat him with hostility'.

This is in keeping with Homi K. Bhabha's profound perseverance about 'transnational minorities' being the real 'empowering agents'. Cosmopolitan world view from this vantage point does not look so bleak and distant.

35

REFERENCES:

Anderson, B. (1983) Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso.

Arendt, H. (1951) The Origins of Totalitarianism. San Diego: Harcourt; Inc.

Balibar, E, and Wallerstein, I. (1988) Race, Nation, Class Ambiguous identities. London: Verso.

Bhatt, C. (2000) The lore of the Homeland Hindu Nationalism and indigenist neo-racism. In: L. Back and J. Solomos (Eds.). Theories of Race and Racism A Reader. London: Routledge.

Brah, A. (2000) Processes of Difference, Diversity, Differentiation. In: L. Back and J. Solomos (Eds.). Theories of Race and Racism A Reader. London: Routledge.

Britannica, D'Souza, S.M. (2021, Feb 12), Narendra Modi. [Online] Encyclopaedia Britannica. Available from: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Narendra-Modi

[Accessed March 12, 2021].

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2019, October 29), Absolutism. [Online] Encyclopaedia Britannica. Available from: https://www.britannica.com/topic/absolutism-political-system

[Accessed March 5, 2021].

Brown, W. (2006) Finding the Man in the State. In: A. Sharma and A. Gupta (Eds.). The Anthropology of the State A Reader. UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Daniyal, S. (2017) In-depth: How a Facebook post broke the decades - long communal peace of a West Bengal town. [Online] Scroll.in, 14 July.

Available from:

https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.scroll.in/article/843692/in-depth-how-a-facebook-post-broke-the-decades-long-communal-peace-of-a-west-bengal-town

[Accessed March 25, 2021].

Doshi, V. (2018) India's new textbooks are promoting the prime minister's favorite policies, critics allege. [Online] The Washington Post, 1 June. Available from:

https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/06/01/indias-new-textbooks-are-promoting-the-prime-ministers-favorite-policies-critics-allege/%3foutputType=amp

[Accessed March 1, 2021].

Dworkin, D. (2009) Paul Gilroy and the cultural politics of decline. Rethinking History, 13(4), 521-539.

36

Ebrahamji, A., Moshtaghian, A. and Johnson, L. (2020) Confederate Statues are coming down following George Floyd's death. Here's what we know. [Online] CNN, 01 July. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/06/09/us/confederate-statues-removed-george-floyd-trnd/index.html

[Accessed Feb 15, 2021].

Hall, S. et al,. (1978) Policing the Crisis MUGGING, THE STATE, AND THE LAW AND ORDER. 1st ed., London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

H.T. Correspondent (2017) Rewriting history: Akbar lost to Maharana Pratap; Mahatma, Nehru missing from texts. [Online] Hindustan Times, 25 July. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/rewriting-history-akbar-lost-to-maharana-pratap-no-mahatma-or-nehru-in-texts/story-N0xOT-7Pqq6XGEvAgFXnBvI_amp.html

[Accessed March 15, 2021].

Jaffrelot, C. (2007) Hindu Nationalism A Reader (eds.) Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Kant, I. (1795) Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay. (Translated by Mary Campbell Smith) 1st.ed. [Online] New York: The Macmillan Company. Release Date, 2016 [E Book # 50922; Project Gutenberg], 106-184. Available from: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/50922/50922-h/50922-h.htm#Page_117

[Accessed March 20, 2021].

Kasturi, M. and Gomes, M. (2020) To Say That an Indian Nation-State Existed in the Ancient Past Is Historical Manipulation. [Online] The Wire, 17 Aug. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.thewire.in/article/history/india-nation-state-ancient-past-history-manipulation/amp

[Accessed Feb 20, 2021].

Robbins, B. (2002) what's left of Cosmopolitanism? Radical Philosophy Archive, 1(116), 30-37.

https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/06/01/indias-new-textbooks-are-promoting-the-prime-ministers-favorite-policies-critics-allege/%3foutputType=amp

[Accessed March 1, 2021].

Dworkin, D. (2009) Paul Gilroy and the cultural politics of decline. Rethinking History, 13(4), 521-539.

Ebrahamji, A., Moshtaghian, A. and Johnson, L. (2020) Confederate Statues are coming down following George Floyd's death. Here's what we know. [Online] CNN, 01 July. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/06/09/us/confederate-statues-removed-george-floyd-trnd/index.html

[Accessed Feb 15, 2021].

Hall, S. et al,. (1978) Policing the Crisis MUGGING, THE STATE, AND THE LAW AND ORDER. 1st ed., London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

H.T. Correspondent (2017) Rewriting history: Akbar lost to Maharana Pratap; Mahatma, Nehru missing from texts. [Online] Hindustan Times, 25 July. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/rewriting-history-akbar-lost-to-maharana-pratap-no-mahatma-or-nehru-in-texts/story-N0xOT-7Pqq6XGEvAgFXnBvI_amp.html

[Accessed March 15, 2021].

Jaffrelot, C. (2007) Hindu Nationalism A Reader (eds.) Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Kant, I. (1795) Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay. (Translated by Mary Campbell Smith) 1st.ed. [Online] New York: The Macmillan Company. Release Date, 2016 [E Book # 50922; Project Gutenberg], 106-184. Available from: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/50922/50922-h/50922-h.htm#Page_117

[Accessed March 20, 2021].

Kasturi, M. and Gomes, M. (2020) To Say That an Indian Nation-State Existed in the Ancient Past Is Historical Manipulation. [Online] The Wire, 17 Aug. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.thewire.in/article/history/india-nation-state-ancient-past-history-manipulation/amp

[Accessed Feb 20, 2021].

Robbins, B. (2002) what's left of Cosmopolitanism? Radical Philosophy Archive, 1(116), 30-37.

Rousso, H. (1994) The Vichy Syndrome- History and Memory in France Since 1944. (Translated by Arthur Goldhammer) 2nd ed., USA: Harvard University Press.

Roy chowdhury, S. (2018) BJP's major achievement in Rajasthan: Rewriting school textbooks to reflect RSS worldview. [Online] Scroll.in, 14 Nov. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.scroll.in/article/901001/bjps-major-achievement-in-rajasthan-rewriting-schools-textbooks-in-the-rss-worldview

[Accessed Feb 15, 2021].

Saberin, Z. (2018) Modi unveils towering statue of India's independence leaders. [Online] Aljazeera, 31 Oct. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2018/10/31/modi-unveils-towering-statue-of-indias-independence-leader

[Accessed March 12, 2021].

Sassoon, J. (2016) Anatomy of Authoritarianism in the Arab Republics. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sharma, A, and Gupta, A. (eds.) (2006) The Anthropology of the State A Reader. UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Special Correspondent (2019) Parliament Proceedings: Surrogacy regulation Bill introduced in Rajya Sabha. [Online] The Hindu, 19 Nov. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thehindu.com/news/national/parliament-proceedings-surrogacy-regulation-bill-introduced-in-rajya-sabha/article30019418.ece/amp/

[Accessed Feb 20, 2021].

The Economic Times (2019) Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019: What is it and why is it seen as a problem. [Online]. 31 Dec. Available from: https://www.google.com/amp/s/m.economictimes.com/news/et-explains/citizenship-amendment-bill-what-does-it-do-and-why-is-it-seen-as-a-problem/amp_articleshow/72436995.cms

[Accessed 12 March, 2021].

Viswanathan, G. (1989) Masks of Conquest Literary Study and British Rule in India. UK: Oxford University Press.