Symbolic Encounters:

Identity, Performativity and Democratic

Subjectivity in Contemporary India

Sruthi Muraleedharan

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Department of Politics and International Studies

Faculty of Law and Social Sciences

SOAS, University of London

Abstract

This thesis focuses on symbolic politics as 'meaning-making' and a 'co-constitutive' form of representation. It seeks to analyze subject formation in the context of symbolic political mobilizations in contemporary India. By symbolic politics, I mean political rituals, cultural symbols, commemorative memorials and spectacular performances. Through deploying Bourdieusian idea of symbolic power and Butler's framework of performativity and subject formation, this thesis contributes to rethinking of the relationship between symbolic politics and subject formation. It critically engages two dominant frameworks for the study of the politics of symbolism and the nature of political subjectivities–elite manipulation, where the subjectivities of the participants are assumed to be contrived, and the dismissal of performative politics as not democratically substantial because of the passionate subjectivities involved.

I demonstrate this based on the study of three contemporary symbolic mobilizations – Modi's 2014 election campaign around the figure of *Vikaspurush,* Mayawati's construction of B.R. Ambedkar *Parivartan Sthal* and the Anna Hazare-Kejriwal led Anti-Corruption movement in India. By combining field-work based on interpretive and visual ethnography, this thesis makes the following three claims. First, it argues that people's participation in symbolic mobilization plays a crucial role in political subject formation as claim making subjects whose identities are constituted through their struggles for rights and recognition. Second, claim-making outside of institutional spaces, the negotiation between legal and cultural citizenship may signal the emergence of democratic subjectivities, even as non-democratic forms of political mobilization are also present. Third, the thesis challenges the contrast between symbolic and material politics. Symbolic politics by making spatial assertions activates time and space and thus has an equally significant material dimension to it.

This work illustrates that far from being inconsequential; the symbolic political field operates as a space wherein political subjectivities are constituted through the consolidation of citizen-subjects. However, the field of contention and mobilisation in symbolic politics could also signal a limitation in performative political action as it can also constitute co-opted subjects, limit democratic subjectivities and render some subjects invisible.

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List of Abbreviations

AAP   Aam Aadmi Party

AIIMS   All India Institute of Medical Sciences

AISA   All India Spinners Association

AM   Aligarh Muslim University

APL   Above Poverty Line

AVP   Ambedkar Village Plan

BAMSEF Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation

BHU   Benaras Hindu University

BJP   Bharatiya Janata Party

BPL   Below Poverty Line

BRT   Bus Rapid Transit

BSP   Bahujan Samaj Party

BVJA   Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Andolan

CAG   Comptroller and Auditor General

CAG   Citizens for Accountable Governance (NGO)

CEC   Chief Election Commission

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

CM   Chief Minister

CWG   Commonwealth Games

DAG   Dalit Action Group

DS4   Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti

DSK   Dalit Shakti Kendra

EC   Election Commission

FIR   First Information Report

GPP   Gujarat Parivartan Party

IAC   India Against Corruption

ICDS   Integrated Child Development Services

IIM   Indian Institute of Management

INC   Indian National Congress

IOA   Indian Olympic Association

IPC   Indian Penal Code

IT   Information Technology

JM   Jantantra Morcha

JYL   Jatav Youth League

LCD   Liquid Crystal Display

LM   Laghumati Morcha

LS   Lok Sabha

MLAs   Member of Legislative Assembly

MNS   Maharashtra Navnirman Samiti

MP   Member of Parliament

MRM   Muslim Rashtriya Manch

MSU   Maharaja Sayajirao University

NACDOR   National Confederation of Dalit Organisations

NBA   Narmada Bachao Andolan

NCPRI   National Campaign for People's Right to Information

NCT   National Capital Territory

NDA   National Democratic Alliance

NGO   Non-Government Organization

NRI   Non Resident Indian

OBC   Other Backward Classes

PCI	Italian Communist Party
PCRA	Protection of Civil Rights Act
PCRF	People's Cause Relief Foundation
PDS	Public Distribution System
PM	Prime Minister
PMARC	Peoples Media Advocacy Resource Centre
RPI	Republican Party of India
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh
RTI	Right to Information
RWA	Resident Welfare Associations
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCF	Scheduled Caste Federation
SEZ	Special Economic Zones
SP	Samajwadi Party
SSK	Samta Sainik Dal
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
YFE	Youth for Equality

Glossary

Aam Aadmi	Common Man
Aarti	Hindu religious ritual of worship
Acche din	Good days
*Adda (*Bengali)	ritual meeting and conversation among group (used as a verb
Akhandh Bharat	Integrated India
Amma (Tamil)	Mother (Popular reference for J.Jayalalitha)
Anganwadi	Courtyard Shelter
Ashram	Hermitage
Asmita	Pride
Aurat	Women
Bahishkrit	Outcaste
Bahujan	Majority
Bastis	Slum
Behenji	Sister (popular reference for Mayawati)
Beti Bachao	Save the girl child
Bharat	India
Bharatmata	Mother India
Bigul	Drum
Brahmans	Supreme Self (Highest caste in Vedic Hinduism)
Chai pe charch	Discussion over tea
Chai wallah	Tea vendor
Chanda	Contribution
Chappanese chattee (Gujarati)	56-inch chest

Charkha	Spinning wheel
Chaupal	Village square/meeting place
Chauraha	Intersection
Chotte Sardar	Junior Patel (Popular reference for Modi)
Chowk	Square
Chowkidar	Watchman
Dabba wallahs	Tiffin carriers
Dahan	Bonfire
Darshan	Sacred seeing
Deshbhakti	Patriotism
Dharna	Protest
Didi	Elder Sister (Popular reference for Mamta Banerjee)
Ganapati	Ganesh (deity)
Ganchi	OBC caste in Gujarat
Ganesh Chaturthi	Ganesh's Birthday
Ganga	River Ganges
Ganga Arti	Hindu ritual
Garba (Gujarati)	Womb
Garib Kalyan Melo (Gujarati)	Fair for the Welfare of the Poor
Gau rakshaks	Cow Vigilantes
Gayan	Music troupe
Ghat	Set of steps leading to the river
Ghoonghat	Veil
Ghoshna partr	Manifesto
Gram Panchayat	Village Assembly

Gram Sabha	Village Council
Harijan	Children of God
Hijra	Eunuch
Imambara(Urdu)	Shrine
Jal Satyagraha	Sit in protest in water
Jan	People
Jan Lokpal Bill	People's Ombudsman Bill
Jan sabhas	Public meetings
Jhadoo	Broom
Juggis	Slums
Kamal mehndi	Lotus design using henna
Kanya Kelaveni (Gujarati)	Girls' education
Khadhi	Hand-woven cotton cloth
Krishi Mahotsav	Farmer's Fest
Krishi rath	Farmer's Chariot
Kuposhan (Marathi)	Fast
Kurta	Indian ethnic long shirt
Loha	Iron
Mahamanav	Great man
Mahapanchayat	Large Village Assembly
Mahapurush	Great man
Mahasangam	Great Confluence
Mahila morcha	Women's Wing
Maidan	Ground/field
Mandir	Temple
Manusmriti	Hindu Code of Law by Manu

Manuwadi	Ethos according to the Manusmriti text
Manyavar	Excellency (popular reference to Kanshiram)
Marut (Gujarati)	Hyper Virile
Masjid	Mosque
Matdan	Voting
Matrishakti (Sanskrit)	Mother Power
Melas/Melo (Gujarati)	Village Fair
Modi sena	Modi's Army
Navaratri (Sanskrit)	Nine Nights (Hindu festival celebrated over nine days)
Nawabi (Urdu)	Islamic culture/etiquette
Nayak	Hero
Neta	Politician
Netaji	Leader (Popular reference for Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh)
Panna Pramukh	Page Chief
Paryatan	Tourism
Payjama	Ethnic Trousers
Pracharak	Propagator
Prajasewak	People's servant
Puja	Worship
Purush	Male
Quasba (Urdu)	Town
Ramjanmabhoomi	Ram's birth-site
Ramlila	Ram's Play
Raths	Chariot

Sabhas	Assembly
Sadbhavna	Goodwill
Saheb	Sir (Popular reference for Kanshiram)
Samadhi	Mausoleum
Sants	Saints
Sarv kaushal (Sanskrit)	All types of skill
Sarv vidya (Sanskrit)	All kinds of knowledge
Savarna	Upper castes
Sena	Army
Shala praveshutsav (Gujarati)	School enrolment drive
Shindhi (Marathi)	Name of a plant
Shobhayatra	Procession for Equality
Siddhi (Marathi)	accomplishment
Sthal	Site
Stree Shakti	Women power
Stupa (Sanskrit)	Mound (Buddhist architecture)
Surajya (Gujarati)	Good Governance
Swadeshi	Indigenous
Swarajya	Self rule
Tehzeeb(Urdu)	Culture
Topis	Headgear or caps
Trishul Diksha	Trident distribution
Utsav	Celebrations
Uttarayan (Gujarati)	Solitice (Hindu Festive Season in Gujarat)
Vadil (Gujarati)	Elder male/head of the family
Vedas	Scriptures

Viharas (Sanskrit)	Buddhist Monastery
Vikas	Development
Vikaspurush	Development Man
Yatra	Procession

1 Introduction: Mapping the Symbolic Terrain of Indian Democracy: A Sketch

In September 2012, a story appeared in *The Hindu*, an Indian newspaper, about the people displaced by the Omkareshwar Dam project (M.P. Singh, 2012). The villagers' crops had been ruined as a result of the water level in the dam being raised from 189 to 193 metres and they also feared flooding as they resided in low-lying villages. In protest, villagers launched a *jal satyagraha*[1] by immersing themselves in their flooded fields at Ghogalgaon village in the East Nimar region. After 16 days, the government agreed to their demands to reduce the water level and provide adequate land for land compensation and the villagers won the battle.[2]

This performance of resistance presents in concise form the encounter between the politics of symbolism and political subjectivities that I wish to explore in the thesis. It poses some important questions – why did the villagers choose this symbolic mode of protest? Was it experienced as empowering? How did the choice of performative resistance constitute political subjectivities? These questions lie at the heart of the thesis which asks: what is the nature of symbolic mobilisation in politics and of the political subjectivities that are constituted through such performative political action?

1.1 The Symbolic Political Triad

The questions raised above are discussed in the context of three recent symbolic mobilisations in India. By symbolic politics I mean the signifying function of political rituals, cultural symbols, commemorative memorials, statues and spectacular performances. The symbolic political triangle studied here consists of three case studies:

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[1] *Satyagraha* is a Gandhian form of non-violent civil resistance. *Jal Satyagraha* means civil resistance through immersion in water.

[2] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/jal-satyagraha-ends-on-victory-note/article3881157.ece

two based on identities of religion and caste-based assertions and one of social protest based on a civic identity assertion. All three case studies incorporate overlapping aspects of political rituals, politics of statues and spectacle politics.

In the early 2000s, the only exemplar of successful political dividends for the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) agenda of *surajya* (good governance) was the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi. The narrative of *vikas* (growth) in the state of Gujarat enabled Modi to recover from the trust deficit of the pogrom of 2002[3] and he ruled the state for three consecutive terms (2001–2014). In these fifteen years, he initiated a developmental model embedded in yearly political rituals and spectacular summits performing the growth story for Gujarat.

A substantial period of the BJP's political trajectory since its inception in 1980, as the political heir to the Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS),[4] was overtly laced with Hindu majoritarianism which deployed its attendant religious symbolism for political mobilisation. For instance, the demand for construction of a *Ram Mandir* (Ram Temple) at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, and its culmination in the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* (Babri Mosque) demonstrated the political success of the powerful symbolic campaign around the Hindu deity Ram and his alleged birthplace by the BJP and the *Sangh Parivar.*[5] In the early 2000s there was a departure from this trend as Hindutva politics and BJP's agenda transformed into an overt non-religious agenda with the narrative shifting to economic growth and development. On the pan-India level this transition played out in the party's India Shining Campaign for the general elections of 2004. The campaign failed and led to a severe downturn in the political fortunes of the Hindu

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[3] Gujarat pogrom - refers to targeted violence against Muslim minorities in the state of Gujarat in 2002 when Modi was the Chief Minister of the state. The state administration and the law and order machinery were condemned nationally and internationally for its ineffectiveness in dealing with the situation.
[4] The Jan Sangh was the political wing of the RSS until 1977. It merged into the Janta Dal and in 1980 owing to the split, remerged as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).
[5] *Sangh Parivar* (Family of Organisations) – refers to the set of organisations that believes in the Hindu right wing ideology with Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) as its ideologue. The most active organisations are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal, Rashtriya Swayam Sevika Samiti and Durga Vahini.

Nationalist Party until the resurgence of Modi in Gujarat. Based on his successful track record, Modi acquired the title of *Vikaspurush* (Development Man) for his role in transforming Gujarat into a successful model of good governance.

The first case study dissects the narrative and symbolism underlying Modi's image as *Vikaspurush* in the general election of 2014. It maps his two Lok Sabha[6] constituencies,[7] tracing his agenda of development in Vadodara (Gujarat) and in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) as Modi and the BJP sought to extend his Gujarat model to a pan-India level, staking his claim to become the next prime minister of India. The declining political fortunes of the incumbent government, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), under the leadership of the Indian National Congress (INC) (henceforth Congress) and the latter's decision to field a political novice, Rahul Gandhi, as their candidate did little to challenge Modi's track record. In the absence of a distinctive agenda and credible leadership by a national party such as Congress, the main political opponent to Modi turned out to be Arvind Kejriwal, from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The nascent political party[8] provided a strong alternative in both leadership and a substantial agenda to challenge Modi in Varanasi.

Besides the spectacular politics of development, this case also offers the opportunity to analyse the caste dynamics and Gujarati sub-nationalism involved in Modi's campaign for the world's tallest Patel statue. Vallabhbhai Patel was a nationalist leader belonging to the Congress party and the first deputy prime minister of independent India. He played an important role in ensuring a unified country and was

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[6] Lok Sabha (House of Representatives) is the lower house of India's bicameral parliament.

[7] According to the Representation of People Act of India, a candidate can contest from a maximum of two seats. Usually candidates use these provisions as a safety measure. "The rule of limiting the candidate to contesting from a maximum of two seats was introduced in 1996 through an amendment to the Representation of the People Act (RP Act) of 1951"(Nathan, 2014). Candidates are expected to give up one seat, if they win both. For example, after winning in both Vadodara and Varanasi in the 2014 general election, Modi gave up his seat in Vadodara. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-two-seat-solution/

[8] The AAP was only formed in 2012. After its unprecedented election victory at the Delhi Assembly elections, Arvind Kejriwal decided to contest at the national level in 2014. https://www.dailypioneer.com/columnists/oped/arvind-kejriwals-eyes-set-on-7-rcr.html.

known as the 'Iron Man of India'. In 2013, Modi commissioned the world's tallest statue to be built in Gujarat to commemorate Patel; it was to be known as the Statue of Unity to capitalise on the fact that the statesman belonged to Gujarat.[9]

The relationship between Hindu nationalism and overt religious symbolism has been analysed extensively in Indian politics. However, this enquiry aims to unearth the secular realm of development and growth projected by Modi and the BJP. Some of the questions explored are: what was the nature of the yearly developmental rituals held in Gujarat? Spatially, what effect did Modi's symbolic campaign have on the cities of Vadodara and Varanasi? What did Modi's Patel statue campaign signify for the politics of development?

In India's democratic tradition, the 1995 emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh (India's largest state) as a powerful political stakeholder under the leadership of Mayawati marked a moment of reckoning for Dalits. Mayawati's regime as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh is associated with the construction of the spectacularly grand *B.R. Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Sthal*[10] in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), in 2005. The second case study aims to unpack this commemorative memorial and the symbolism of statues in Dalit politics. The construction of the commemorative memorial changed the contours of Dalit symbolism. In Uttar Pradesh (UP), Dalit households have been building Ambedkar statues to demarcate and assert their claim on space at the local levels. The *Sthal* encompasses the politics of statues at the macro-level and by constructing the monumental memorial in the heart of the city, Mayawati made the lower caste symbolic assertion central to the life of Lucknow.

However, Mayawati was accused of being a megalomaniac leader indulging in wasteful expenditure by the opposition parties and the upper caste dominated media

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[9] https://www.ndtv.com/cheat-sheet/the-sardar-patel-statue-commissioned-by-narendra-modi-10-point-cheatsheet-539518

[10] A *sthal* is a commemorative memorial/site; B. R. Ambedkar campaigned for the rights of Dalits (traditionally seen as 'Untouchables') in India.

alike. In the dominant Brahmanical discourse and field of perception the memorial was identified as and considered symbolic of political corruption. Furthermore against the backdrop of the 2012 Assembly elections in the state, the Election Commission (EC) ordered statues of Mayawati and BSP's symbol – elephants – within the *Sthal* in Lucknow and Noida to be draped until the elections were over. The spectacular draping of these symbols and statues reinvigorated the debate around the construction of the memorial.

This analysis aims at exploring the Dalit perspective on Mayawati's symbolic interventions. It also examines the anti-Patel statue campaign in Gujarat from the Dalit perspective. It interrogates the demands made by the Dalit civil society groups to build a taller statue for Ambedkar than for Patel. Apart from highlighting the caste politics around the Patel vs. Ambedkar statues, an analysis of the shifts in the iconopraxis and the self-reflexivity in the Dalit movement across the two sites of UP and Gujarat is also attempted here.

The relationship between Dalit politics and symbolism has attracted limited research and analyses compared with Hindutva politics. While there has been scholarly engagement with the significance of Ambedkar statues and their importance in enhancing Dalit citizen assertion, most of the discussion around Dalit symbolism is focused on the material/symbolic binary. This enquiry aims to dismantle the binary approach to analyse the significance of the *Sthal* from the standpoint of the Dalit community. Some related questions that are explored are: how do Dalits experience the *Sthal*? Do Dalits regard construction of the *Sthal* and other statues of Ambedkar as a waste of money, as mainstream discourse claims and portrays? Spatially, how does the construction of the *Sthal* change the landscape of Lucknow? By changing its iconopraxis what does the anti-Patel statue campaign seek to demonstrate to the Brahmanical/nationalist gaze?

The third case of the thesis moves from religious and caste-based mobilisations to civic assertion through social protest against corruption wherein the assertion of civic identity locates the individual within a national political community. The anti-corruption protests of August, 2011 embedded in Gandhian symbolism brought large masses of people out on the streets in the capital city of New Delhi. The massive outrage was against the backdrop of corruption charges against the incumbent Congress-led UPA government and the political class at large. It was described as India's 'Second Independence Struggle' or the 'Tahrir Square' moment in the electronic media. The last time India had seen such a surge against corruption was under the leadership of Jayprakash Narayan (JP) in November 1973, which was against the Congress government under Mrs. Gandhi.

The coalition India Against Corruption (IAC) led by Arvind Kejriwal and Kisan Baburao Hazare (popularly called Anna Hazare) initiated the campaign with the demand for the passing of the Jan Lokpal Bill or an ombudsman to investigate political and bureaucratic corruption in India. Chants of *I am Anna* and *India is Anna* filled the *Ramlila Maidan[11]* for 13 days. The protests soon spread from Delhi to other major cities across India such as Mumbai and Bangalore, especially attracting the youth. The spectacle of Anna's fasting at the *Maidan*, sit-ins by people outside MPs' houses and other protests brought Delhi to a halt. This stalemate between the political class and Team Anna led to the emergence of a new political party, the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party), led by Arvind Kejriwal in 2012. The anti-political stance of the movement and the Gandhian influence informed its symbolism from the tricolour (the Indian flag) to the Gandhi cap adorning the *Maidan* and streets of Delhi. From Anna's ritualistic prayers and fastings to Kejriwal's performative actions, the anti-corruption movement was replete with spectacular performances. Also, the emergence of the AAP as a political

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[11] Refers to a huge ground, which was initially used to stage the Ramlila (plays about the life of Rama) but has subsequently been used for political rallies and protests.

force, despite being entrenched in neo-liberal aesthetics, altered the political culture of India's capital not just in its bureaucratic demeanour, but also undercutting the complacency of established national parties such as Congress and the BJP. The AAP's decision to contest the Delhi Assembly elections of 2013 provided a suitable opportunity to analyse the mobilisation both of the movement and the nascent party. Some of the questions explored are: what were the reasons for the supporters joining the anti-corruption protests? How did this public performance of protests impact New Delhi as the capital city? What was the role of the middle-class and the social media in the protest?

The thesis examines these three case studies of symbolic mobilisations based on persuasive public performances in the political domain, the subjectivities that they constitute and how they construct the 'political' by performative political action, and the possibilities that emerge for new or altered forms of individual subjectivities that have an impact on democratic political culture.

The Argument

This thesis argues that participation in symbolic mobilisations activates 'identification' and interrupts the fixed political subject through performative political action. This encounter therefore has the potential for the emergence of new or altered forms of individual subjectivities and constitution of a democratic political subject. However, the field of contention and mobilisation in symbolic politics could also signal a limitation in performative political action as it can also constitute co-opted subjects, limit democratic subjectivities and render some subjects invisible. The thesis makes three principal claims.

First, it argues that people's participation in symbolic mobilisation plays a crucial role in political subject formation, whether it is wearing Modi masks, protesting against defaced Ambedkar statues or protesting against corruption in the *Ramlila Maidan*. In

contrast to influential approaches to political symbols that perceive these mainly as instruments of elite manipulation, this thesis foregrounds political actors as claim-making subjects in the public sphere whose identities are constituted through these symbolic assertions and performative practices in their struggles for rights or recognition.

Second, it argues that claim-making *outside* of institutional spaces, and negotiations between legal and cultural citizenship may signal the emergence of new types of subjectivities, including democratic subjectivities, even when non-democratic forms of political mobilisation are also present. The political intersection of identity, symbols and performativity is usually assumed to be not democratically substantial because of its passionate subjectivities. However, this intersection needs to be further analysed for its interruption of the existing field of perception in political culture and emancipatory potential.

Finally, the politics of symbolism, by making *spatial assertions*, activates public space and thus makes an equally cogent material assertion. By re-signifying city spaces with embodied participation and selected meanings, symbolic mobilisations may constitute counter-spaces of collective political action that challenge established institutions, even as they are embedded in neo-liberal aesthetics.

1.2   The Symbolic Terrain: An Overview

The symbolic representations are important because they represent and constitute a collective, are public in nature and allow actors to communicate either *through* power or *to* power. Various stakeholders, from nation states to identitarian groups, have utilised symbolic representation and performative political action. The first set of literature which engages with the encounter between symbolism, performance and representation is most directly visible in the scholarship that discusses the nation

state and its investment in political rituals and nationalism, mostly in the works of Anderson (1991), Geertz (1980), Roy (2007) and Verdery (1999). The link between politics and spectacular performance of political rituals is paramount. Geertz's (1980) study of state power and rituals demonstrated that dramaturgy was an essential part of its exercise of power and embedded in the nature of the state. Ritual performances were crucial as "the state cult was not a cult of the state. It was an argument made over and over again in the insistent vocabulary of ritual" (p. 102).

Political rituals have the potential to generate *communitas* as argued by V. Turner (1969). Differentiating this social bond from community, he stresses how passages through these ritual performances have the potential to shift a subject's position. For instance, in the context of voting practices in India, Banerjee (2011) argues that standing in queues to vote has the potential to create *communitas* since it not only involves an in-between situation temporally but also a moment of a democratic citizen's assertion of the self, reflecting "uber democratic ideals" (p. 82). Turner establishes the co-constitutive nature of rituals and symbolic action, as well as symbols as vehicles of ritual. He defined "ritual as prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers" (V. Turner, 1967, p. 19). Extending Turner's framework of symbols, rituals and symbolic action along with Geertz's idea of a 'theatre state' (1980) for contemporary analysis contributes to dissecting the modern state's performance of political rituals in constituting a nation and its nationalist citizen subjects. For instance, Anderson (1991, p. 10) discusses how showing public reverence to a "tomb of an unknown soldier" signifies symbolically the "national imagining" of a political community.

Similarly, in the context of post-colonial imaginaries and subject creation spectacular political rituals have played an important role in binding notions of patriotism and loyalty through "external effects and public practices" (Roy, 2007, p. 14).

Roy argues that, specifically in the post-colonial context, it is crucial for the state to demonstrate that it is capable of embodying the nation through, for example, yearly rituals such as India's Republic Day celebrations. "Republic Day celebrations in India have ever since their inception been both a means of ideological-symbolic reproduction and a site or an arena for the performance, expression and practice of nationhood" (Roy, 2007, p. 102). The politics of nationalism during the pre-independence period also had the attendant symbolisms of Gandhi and the national flag (Amin, 1984; Jha, 2008; Lal, 2003; Nandy, 1983; Rao, 2009; Roy, 2006; Trivedi 2007). People symbolically construct their community, making it a resource and repository of meaning and referent of their identity. Leaders such as Gandhi, Ambedkar and Martin Luther King were symbolic of the hopes and anxieties of their respective groups. Gandhi symbolised India's anti-colonial struggle to the world. Kaviraj (2007, p.71) analyses the defining moment of Gandhi's trial in 1922 in the exchanges between the British colonial power and the leader of the Indian nationalist movement as "the elements of drama or theatre in the contest between the colonial state and the most celebrated rebel that in Gandhi they had faced". He describes Gandhi's use of communicative strategies as,

> a semiotic gesture. It is structured like a register, with discrete communicative forms – stretching from non-verbal forms like bodily gestures, the symbolism of dress, the use of food as language, to the verbal levels of words, which is subdivided into two elementary strata of the spoken and the written (p. 77)

Other scholars have also highlighted Gandhi's enactment of dissent through non-violence and his advocacy of androgyny and celibate sexuality as deeply unsettling to the colonial and nationalist realms of politics and body politics (Lal, 2003; Nandy, 1988).

The second set of scholarly analysis has focused on politics of identity and ethnic conflicts. Symbolic politics also contributes to and intervenes in identitarian assertions. Investment in symbolism contributes to cohesiveness amongst groups or communities based on religion, caste, ethnicity, class or sexuality. In the context of

identity-based symbolic mobilisation, Barth (1969) claims there exists a "field of communication and interaction" (p. 11) that characterises an ethnic group. For Cohen too, a community is symbolically constructed as a system of values and norms which provides a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members. "Community is just such a boundary-expressing symbol, but its meaning varies according to its members' unique orientation towards it" (1989, p. 15). Since individual perceptions may vary, the feeling of cohesiveness has to be kept alive through constant creative interventions; "In the face of this variability of meaning, the consciousness of community has to be kept alive through manipulation of its symbols" (1989, p. 15). Emphasising that symbols play a role in binding groups collectively and ensures stability, Parel (1969) argues that symbolism evokes dynamism and motivates action; "without symbols, community life becomes chaotic and community action difficult to sustain" (p. 180). In his discussion on the symbolic relevance of the cow in India, he highlights how different nationalist leaders such as Dayanand, Tilak and Gandhi constructed narratives appropriating the cow as a political symbol. From a being a Hindu nationalist symbol to a symbol of communal unity, it eventually contributed to dividing Hindus from Muslims while uniting the upper caste Hindus. Condensation symbols of community leaders, memorials and statues, while unifying group memory, can also play a divisive role. Socio-symbolic solidarity can unite one group while dividing it from others: "ethnic groups also use cultural symbols in order to create an identity that is opposed to the other, leading to conflict" (Brass 1991, p. 19). The demolition of *Babri Masjid* (Babri Mosque) as the site for Hindu assertion against Muslims and the erection of Ambedkar statues by Dalits against caste Hindu dominance demonstrate how symbols play an important role in condensing group memory, history and solidarity, and are equally capable of instigating divisive political action.

The members of a particular group are brought together by unifying them symbolically while differentiating them from the 'other'; "construction involves internal frontiers and the identification of an institutionalized 'other'" (Laclau, 2005, p. 117). According to him, *othering* of one section of the population leads to a group having a sense of their own cohesion. "one difference, without ceasing to be a *particular* difference, assumes the representation of an incommensurable totality" (p. 70). However, this totality or aggregation has the potential to undermine differences as "equivalence is precisely what subverts difference, so that all identity is constructed within this tension between the differential and the equivalential logics" (p. 70). In a similar vein, Marx (1998) argues that the agreement on a racially defined 'other' as a common enemy defined and encouraged white unity. Similarly, the BSP's building of a grand history around Ambedkar and Periyar, by installing their statues and constructing parks in their names against the 'Brahmanical other', marginalised the micro-histories of the sub-castes within Dalits and sought to create a unifying force or equivalence.

Through Bourdieu's (1991) conceptual frame of symbolic power one can understand how investment in symbols within identity politics plays a crucial role in making political interventions. According to him, the ability to change the world and the ways of world-making by which groups are produced or reproduced rests on symbolic power this in turn, "has to be based on the possession of symbolic capital" (1989, p. 28) implying that not everybody or every group has the same ability to influence the political field. "Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (p. 28). The location of group identities within the social hierarchy will determine their symbolic power and influence in the political field. Groups on the periphery of the power struggle utilise symbolic resources to mobilise against the state/dominant narrative and to intervene in the existing power dynamics. In this performance of opposition,

symbols provide a unifying bond and a sense of oneness with other deprived individuals.

While much of the literature on symbolic political action places it in contexts such as nationalism or ethnicity, by using the lens of performative identification, my work foregrounds politics of symbolism in itself as an analytical frame, together with aspects of symbolic participation i.e. the nature of political subjectivity it constitutes. This thesis aims at interrogating the encounter further for its potential in enhancing democratic political subjectivity. The thesis is anchored along two fundamental axes: symbolic politics and visual practices discussed in the next section.

1.3   Symbolic Terrain: Meaning and Practices

> It was Gandhi cap wearers in particular who were singled out for abuse by frustrated revenue officials and police who confiscated land and offered it for sale at absurdly low prices to those who were prepared to refrain from civil disobedience. (Tarlo, 1991, p. 140)

During the anti-colonial struggle, the appearance of a Gandhi *topi* (cap) wearer on the Indian streets had a destabilising impact on the colonisers since it signified non-violent protest against the empire. Gandhi's aim to introduce the *topi* was propelled by the idea of equality amongst the Indian masses, sartorially, politically and visually. However, as British suppression and prohibition increased, the *topi* emerged as a powerful symbol of rebellion and eventually evolved its own trajectory outside of the control of both Gandhi and the British.

I start the discussion with the example of the Gandhian *topi* because it demonstrates the complex dynamics involved with a political symbol, instigating political action along with interrupting the visual political culture. The materialist and rationalist approaches that are dominant in the study of politics have tended to discount symbolic politics and the impact it has on transforming political subjectivity and, more

generally, the political field. This work, however, aims to put the politics of symbolism and visual practices centre-stage in understanding the political.

1.3.1 Symbolic politics: getting meaning-making back into politics

Everyday experiences of politics also involve the world of signification. "Politics is not merely about material interests but also about contests over the symbolic world, over the management and appropriation of meanings" (Wedeen, 1999, p. 30). This work foregrounds symbols in a political cultural context as part of political rituals, commemorative memorials, statues and spectacles.

All symbols are signs but not all signs are symbols. Therefore, it is only through the process of interpretation that signs become symbols. First, by locating symbols in their "processual fate" (V. Turner, 1974b, p. 55),[12] my work analyses individual symbols as part of political rituals and also their potential outside of it. This is informed by an open-ended approach in contrast to the essentialist understanding of locating symbols based on artificial distinctions such as "traditions of meanings or tradition of masters" (Klatch, 1988, p. 138).[13] I focus on political rituals in the context of identitarian assertion by groups rather than by institutions of state. Aimed at social cohesion as well as questioning the status quo, symbols as part of political rituals can contribute to understanding what is politically significant to a political community and determines their social relations. Anthropology has subjected symbols to rigorous analysis by focusing on a specific social and cultural context. This is illustrated prominently by V. Turner (1967, p. 20) who elaborated on the role of rites and symbols in understanding social structures and the everyday:

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[12] According to Turner, "from the very outset I formulate symbols as social and cultural dynamic systems, shedding and gathering meaning over time and altering in form, I cannot regard them merely as 'terms' in a temporal logical or protological cognitive systems" (Turner, 1974b, p. 54). I follow Turner in analysing symbols in the political field as they evolve over time.

[13] Klatch highlights that the study of politics of symbolism is marked by the split between symbols being perceived as meanings or masters. "While the meanings tradition emphasizes the positive role symbols play in the integration of society, the masters tradition views symbols in a more sceptical way, stressing the use of political symbols in manipulation" (1988, p. 138).

> Symbols, too, are crucially involved in situations of societal change... For these reasons, the structure and properties of a ritual symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action.

According to Turner, symbols are open to "multiple variability" (1974b, p. 55) and can be part of the structure or anti-structure. He makes a distinction between symbols of structure and anti-structure. During phases of transition or threshold, new symbols emerge which challenge the existing social order and are anti-structural in nature. It is Turner's multi-vocal approach to symbols that allows and enables the analysis here to adopt a meaning-making and dynamic perspective towards socio-political contexts and processes.

My work traces individual symbols, from statues and caps to political rituals in political rallies and social protests. For instance, my discussion on AAP *topis* as a symbol of an insurgent activist citizen traces the political trajectory of the Gandhian cap coming full circle in Indian politics as a symbol now used against the Congress party itself. The inauguration of the Ambedkar *Sthal* by Buddhist monks was a powerful symbolic act by Mayawati against Hindu practices. The political ritual of inauguration has been overtly dominated by Hindu practices such as lighting lamps and deity worship performed by Hindu priests. In its symbolisms and architecture, the *Sthal* emerges as an anti-structure.

The next sets of symbols I pursue are statues and commemorative memorials. Statues are symbolic markers of historical and political times and are integral to the public collective life of a political community. The destruction of the Buddha statues by the Taliban in the Bamiyan valley of Afghanistan (2001)[14] or the pulling down of Saddam Hussein's statue in Bagdad's Firdous Square (2003) during the American invasion of Iraq[15] demonstrates the significance of statues/memorials for political orders. There is considerable scholarly attention given to public statutory and national

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[14] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/1326063/After-1700-years-Buddhas-fall-to-Taliban-dynamite.html.

[15] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/19/iraq.

identification. For instance, Mayo (1988) discusses war memorials as symbolic of political memory and honour while Khalili (2007) explores the transformations in Palestinian nationalism through the study of commemorative practices. On the other hand, emphasising and tracing rupture in political order through public statutory, Verdery (1999) in post-socialist European societies and Marshall (2010) in post-apartheid South Africa highlight how the dismantling/erecting of statues signifies not just shifting political landscapes, but also social and emotional healing for political communities. The analysis here goes beyond the axis of nationalism and race engaged thus far, to include caste-related public statutory in India. By focusing on statues and commemorative memorials as part of the Dalit symbolic repertoire, I draw attention to their assertion and their role in visualising anti-caste struggles against the dominant Brahmanical[16]/nationalist field of perception.

I employ a co-constitutive lens of representation through political symbols and signification in the political field. In mainstream political science the dominant approach to symbolic politics has been from a political communication perspective which perceived symbolic politics as a top-down mobilisation based on manipulation. In contrast, this thesis advances a constructivist understanding, wherein the symbolic encounter is embedded in the practice of meaning-making, building on the pioneering work of scholars such as Wedeen (1999, 2008), Hansen (1999, 2002) and Verdery (1999). In examining the co-constitutiveness of the symbolic universe, I employ a post-Geertzian understanding of culture, enabling an analysis of people's understanding of their symbols and motivation to political action. Rather than a top-down approach, a meaning-making approach allows for more fluidity as it emphasises practices and avoids reifying symbols and actions.

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[16] In the Indian caste system Brahmans (priests) are the highest in the caste hierarchy followed by Kshatriyas (administrators and warriors), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (untouchables/outcastes). The persistence of the caste-based social order has enabled the Indian political and cultural worldview to be dominated by the Brahmanical perspective, thus marginalising the lower castes' experiences.

1.3.2 Visual practices: visualising and reordering the political

"Most citizens most of the time are not decision makers, relating to politics with their voices, but *spectators* who relate to politics with their eyes" (Green, 2010, p. 4). Starting with the premise that the democratic political field is usually mapped discursively/vocally, the aim is to shift attention towards visual practices. Democratic life is constituted through performative claim-making and assertion in the symbolic political field. The symbolic universe is co-constituted by citizen-subjects as audience in the political field. By importing the notion of gaze, Green (2010) challenges the emphasis on voice/speech in democratic theory, making a case for the ocular model of popular empowerment by emphasising the role of the spectator. Extending and re-emphasising the importance of the ocular realm, I draw attention to symbolic intervention and political action by people, not just as spectators but also as equal participants in the creation of the visual field as they are not just consumers of symbols, but also are their producers.

> This complex field of visual reciprocity is not merely a by-product of social
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> reality but actively constitutive of it. Vision is as important as language in
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> mediating social relations, and it is not reducible to language, to the "sign",
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> or to discourse. (Mitchell, 1996, p. 82)

The discipline of politics needs to engage with the visual. Following the 'visual turn' in modern Indian studies inaugurated by the scholarship of Brosius (2005), Freitag (2014), Jain (2007), Pinney (2003), Ramaswamy (2003) and Roy (2007), this thesis foregrounds visual practices in the contemporary political culture of India. Emphasising the importance of "what do we make of what we see" (Eck, 1985, p. 14), I pursue the 'visual' as a means to further understand how democracy is performed and experienced every day, grounded in visual practices. The anthropological perspective on

understanding democracy with its 'multiple contestations' (Michelutti, 2007; Paley, 2002; Spencer, 2007) gives us the scope to consider the symbolic political field as one such field in the life of a political community.

Existing scholarship on mapping the visual in modern Indian studies is dominated by tracing nationalist and state-centric identification; "[s]o, patriotism or nationalism in India is an intensely ocular ideology and set of visual habits, grounded in the practice of seeing the nation, and being seen in turn adoring and worshipping the nation" (Ramaswamy, 2003, p. xxiii). In the post-colonial context, Roy (2002, p. 233) explores the "visual representation of Indianness" from the Nehruvian phase to the era of liberalisation by focusing on videos and films produced by both state and non-state actors to decipher the constitution of nationalist imagination and citizen-subjects. Pinney, in his incisive account of India's political struggle, makes a case for pursuing the visual as an arena to unpack "gaps between official forms of knowledge" (2003, p. 117) and the possibilities for new identities and narratives to emerge. Based on the study of chromolithographs, he argues that textual histories of the struggle for independence in India were preoccupied with Gandhi and Nehru; by contrast, the "popular visual representation" (2003, p. 144) celebrates radical practitioners such as Bhagat Singh.

Beyond this, visual practices have been employed to analyse identity-based assertions such as Hindutva mobilisations. The dominant analytical frame for Hindutva visual practices has been through the lens of *darshan*. Eck (1985) describes the Hindu way of ocular transaction through the concept of *darshan*[17] and Brosius (2005) applies it to analyse Hindutva inter-visuality leading up to the Ram temple campaign constituting communal subjects. In the absence of an alternative analytical frame for visual practices to analyse different ways of looking, the darshan framework has come to dominate the analysis. However, it has limited application beyond the Hindutva-related socio-political

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[17] Eck (1985, p.3) refers to the Hindu way of seeing as the "darshan effect" or the "visual perception of the sacred".

contexts as other identity-based forms of gaze and claim-making exist and are used outside the Hindutva sacred devotional parlance. For instance, the same analytical frame of *darshan* cannot be employed for Dalit mobilisations or even social protest; the politics of seeing differs with context. For instance, the Dalit perception of admiring the Ambedkar statue, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5, is not governed by a sacred or devotional gaze. I aim to trace varied forms of seeing/gaze across different identity-based mobilisations.

The visual practices involved in *seeing* the symbolic universe in a democracy also define the nature of subjectivity constituted through embodied participation and meaning-making to the worldview. I apply this lens to discern the visual practices of the symbolic mobilisations that are part of this study.

1.4   Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 discusses the methodology employed to conduct this research. I elaborate on how the eleven months of multi-sited immersion across New Delhi/Uttar Pradesh/Gujarat were negotiated by operationalising concepts of identity, performative practices and the symbolic habitus in the field. A combination of interpretive ethnography and visual research tools enabled me to deconstruct the local symbolic habitus of the three case studies. I also outline the dilemmas and ethical practices informing this study.

Chapter 3 outlines the analytical framework for the thesis. Contextualising the intersection between identity and symbolic mobilisation through the conceptual frames of performativity and symbolic habitus, this chapter lays the foundation for assessing the politics of symbolism and the nature of political subjectivities that this encounter may entail. The discussion focuses on two aspects of symbolic politics: symbolic

participation and symbolic representation. Defining these two anchors theoretically, I go on to outline my analyses of democratic political subjectivity.

The following three chapters (4, 5 and 6) discuss political performativity and the nature of political subjectivities in three specific case studies based on ethnographic fieldwork.

Chapter 4 discusses the symbolic mobilisation around Modi as the '*Vikaspurush*' (Development Man) in the context of the 2014 general elections of India. It analyses the symbolic field, the narrative around his agenda of Vikas (Development) and the imagery of Vikaspurush which contributed to an unprecedented victory for the BJP. It also explores the nature of spatial sites that the politics of 'Gujarat Model' activates in Vadodara and Varanasi. By juxtaposing the image of *'Marut' purush* (Hyper-Virile Man) with Vikaspursush it traces the symbolic habitus and the resultant subjectivities that it visualises. It also traces Modi's campaign for the tallest Patel statue and the underlying caste dynamics. The significance of this case study lies at the intersection of two crucial axes of mobilisation: the ethno-religious Hindu/Gujarati identity layered with a neo-liberal subject. I argue that the political symbolism of the Vikaspurush with its underlying politics of development, mobilises embodied political participation, but prevents transgressions, negotiations or challenges to a democratic subject formation, and thus constitutes an embodied 'infantile' subject.

Chapter 5 discusses the symbolic mobilisation around the commemorative memorial constructed by Mayawati in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) in 2005. Analysing the symbolic field of memorials and statues in the context of Dalit politics, it maps the performative essence of defiance of the dominant Brahmanical/nationalist field of perception through these symbolic interventions. I examine the nature of spatio-material assertion that these commemorative memorials may make in the spatio-political landscape of Lucknow. I also go on to probe the politics of statues within Dalit politics,

both in Lucknow and Gujarat (in the wake of the Patel statue controversy), and trace the inherent iconographic practices, highlighting both the continuities and shifts across these regions. The significance of this mobilisation lies in the constitution of Dalit political subjectivity and its intervention through iconopraxis at two levels – first, against the Hindu Brahmanical order and, second, the redefining of iconographic practices from within the community itself as in the case of Gujarat mobilisation. This chapter argues that the constitution of the Dalit political subject as an embodied 'visible' subject in conjunction with inbuilt discursive spaces for renegotiation within the community itself reflects the potential for democratic subject formation present in Dalit politics.

Chapter 6 discusses the symbolic mobilisation around the Anti-Corruption Movement that began in 2011, and the new political Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that was subsequently formed, and their impact on the nature of political subjectivities. It analyses the re-emergence of the *Ramlila Maidan* as a space of anti-systemic protest and its impact on the spatial political field of the capital city of New Delhi. The significance of this case lies on two crucial axes: the individual citizen-subject as the basic unit of identification as opposed to group/community identities, and the political agenda of the anti-corruption movement being a civic issue rather than an ethnic or sectarian one. This chapter argues that by revitalising apolitical and anti-political citizens through sustained political work the anti-corruption movement fostered civic citizen subjectivities. While operationalising the category of a 'common man' and a transgressive claim-making subject, nevertheless the movement promoted a 'neo-liberal' civic citizen.

Chapter 7 links the three case studies with the analytical frame to identify and highlight broad thematic continuities with respect to the politics of symbolism and the constitution of subjectivities. The discussion is divided along the three parameters of

symbolic representation, participation and democratic subjectivity. By linking the theory with the empirical case studies I suggest how these may contribute to our understanding of the encounter between symbolic politics and identity based assertions.

2   Studying the Symbolic Terrain: Methods and Sources

2.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines the research techniques and methods informing the study. Embedded in a post-positivist philosophy, I employed a combination of interpretive and visual ethnography to uncover the encounter between identitarian[18] affiliations, symbolic mobilisation and political subjectivity. This study aims to analyse and understand the relationship between performativity, representation and participation within a symbolic mobilisation in a local setting. The selection of the three case studies and the ethnographic enquiry were governed by the broad research questions outlined below:

- How does representation through symbols shape the politics of identity analysed through the conceptual frame of performativity in politics?

- In the spatial political field, what does the encounter between symbols and the political subject entail in a local symbolic habitus?

- Why do political subjects participate in symbolic mobilisations? What is the nature of this participation and how does it impact political action?

- Does symbolic mobilisation and participation build or elide aspects of democratic political subjectivity?

These questions were explored through ethnographic immersion and using photographs from the field sites.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section on *interpretive ethnography* outlines the theoretical and practical aspects of doing this. The second section explores the multi-sited fieldwork across the *symbolic terrain*. The third discusses

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[18] Following Brubaker and Cooper (2000), I use the term 'identitarian' rather than 'identity' as an alternative analytical concept to foreground agency and 'identification' exercised by the subjects rather than working within established liabilities of an 'identity' both culturally and analytically.

how the *visual* in ethnography contributes to this analysis, elaborating on visual practices and classification. The discursive and the visual are divided into two different sections as they are treated as two equally important tools to generate ethnographic knowledge. The last section discusses the ethical considerations informing the project.

This research consists of three case studies. Each case study, as discussed in Chapter 1, is a specific identity-based symbolic mobilisation; all are discussed in a comparative framework. Despite their agenda-based differences, they are bounded by similar symbolic repertoires. The first two are *ascriptive* identity-based assertions selected because, despite catering to opposing identities, both of their symbolic habitus entail a combination of political rituals and politics of statues within their ambit for mobilisation. Unlike the first two which are based on religious (Hindu) and caste (Dalit) based identity assertions the third explores social protest based on civic activism – a non-ascriptive identity. In its overlapping symbolism of political rituals, the third study seeks to demonstrate the relevance of symbolic politics across the political spectrum.

All three, apart from representing claim-making outside institutional corridors, also activated their respective cityscapes. The first two case studies are interesting cases in a comparative framework because they allow us to politically analyse the significance of an alternative symbolic universe to democratic claim-making. The discussion of both the Hindutva and the Dalit symbolisms (for instance, around the Patel statue campaign) displays the counter-hegemonic assertions through symbolic interventions, enabling me to highlight that symbolic contestations in the political field is an equally cogent mode of identity-based assertions.

The first case aims to unpack the majoritarian Hindu subjectivity embedded in Modi's developmental agenda and his claim to being a *Vikaspurush*. The second focuses on decoding marginalised Dalit subjectivity in the context of Mayawati's construction of the Ambedkar commemorative memorial and other statues of him. The third case

analysed is the anti-corruption crusade of 2011 which aims to deconstruct a civic-citizen subject. While all three cases activate performative practices, political action and participation in powerful symbolic settings, I explore to what extent these mobilisations are producing democratic political subjectivity. These cases placed in a comparative frame provide the scaffolding for this research anchored in interpretive ethnography.

2.2 Interpretive Ethnography

This research has relied on ethnographic methods combining immersion (participant observation) and interpretive "sensibility" (Schatz, 2009, p. 5). Ethnography is equated with participant observation implying "immersion in a community, a cohort, a locale, or a cluster of related subject positions is taken to be the *sine qua non* of the approach" (Schatz, 2009, p. 5). The ethnographer thus "participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 2). These observations and experiences are then recorded in field notes. In all, ethnography encompasses not just immersion but, along with participant observation, combines a number of activities such as semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis. However, it cannot be reduced to these methods as there are broader "epistemological commitments" (Schatz, 2009, p. 6) than just collection of data. Scholars (Kubik, 2009; Schatz, 2009) have argued that ethnography also involves sensitive perceptiveness that goes beyond direct contact "to glean the meanings that the people under study attribute to their social and political reality" (Schatz, 2009, p. 5). For instance, Scott's incisive work on peasant rebellion (1990) is illustrative of this ethnographic sensibility.

Why ethnography? First, ethnography as a mode of enquiry facilitates a reflexivity that is valuable for social research. The "hypothetico-deductive" method (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 21) informing positivism overlooks the fact that social reality is

multilayered, complex and dynamic. Ethnography embedded in reflexivity contributes to "the development of theory" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 23) while also situating the researcher in the social world s/he is studying. Second, following on from the above, broadly speaking ethnography falls within a hermeneutic conception of enquiry, emphasising therefore *understanding* and *interpretation* of the social world. The constructivist/interpretive approach in knowledge production is not just an alternative qualitative method but a political standpoint against the positivist worldview. Finally, my research employs a symbolic-cultural approach to politics (Wedeen, 1999, 2008) rather than an institutional-materialist approach. Studying performativity and symbolic mobilisation entails untangling collective participation and political action in local settings. Ethnography enables engagement with questions such as "how symbols are inscribed in activities that operate to produce observable political effects" (Wedeen, 2002, p. 714) and many others at the micro level. Ethnography as an interpretive exercise informs this research.[19]

For fieldwork, my challenge was to operationalise the theoretical/conceptual ideas of identity, performativity, symbolic habitus and subjectivity in the field. Rather than pursuing each of these theoretical concepts separately, the practice approach enabled me to interlink them through a unified lens. To deconstruct the nature and motivation for identification within a symbolic context it is necessary to have an open-ended understanding of identity and culture. Following Wedeen (2002) and Brubaker and Cooper (2000), I adopted a practice approach to identity[20] during fieldwork to disentangle "people's practices and systems of signification" (Wedeen, 2002, p. 723). This meant observing the community's everyday semiotic practices having three

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[19] Kubik (2009) highlights that ethnography informs both positivist and interpretive research agendas. He also opines that there is no assumed co-relation between ethnography and interpretation. However, their combination is useful to study culture and practices.

[20] According to Wedeen (2009), practices are human actions (as opposed to behaviour). "Practices are actions or deeds that are repeated over time. They are learned, reproduced, and subjected to risk through social interaction" (p. 87).

advantages. First, ethnography enabled me to capture the dual nature of these practices (the community's understanding of these practices and the ethnographer's interpretation of the same); for example, the Dalit practice of installing statues of Ambedkar in their villages or how the practice of applying henna evolved into being part of a political campaign. Second, to conceptualise identity as a performative[21] practice enabled the decoding of subject-formation through iterative practices within symbolic mobilisation. The performative essence of activists wearing AAP *topis* (caps), for example, was demonstrative of their politico-moralistic subjectivity. Finally, emphasising practices also enables possibilities for creative interpretation, disorder and subversion as highlighted by Butler (1993, 1997).

My research is based on a constructivist approach and challenges mainstream understanding of symbolic mobilisations in politics, thereby informing two fundamental decisions made before starting fieldwork. First, it challenges the instrumentalist idea of elite manipulation, implying the assumed binary between leaders/followers within a symbolic context is *not* made with reference to the three case studies in this project. Second, locating my work in a post-Geertzian perspective of understanding culture[22] and identity (as discussed above) allows the consideration of a symbolic universe with its own dynamism (bottom-up approach); this enabled the exploration of newer symbols and narratives emerging in a local symbolic habitus/intra-identity and how perceptions affect political outcomes and political identifications are established.

Fieldwork was conducted in three northern states of India, New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, over eleven months (September 2013–August 2014) and followed

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[21] According to Wedeen, performative implies "a theory of self formation in which the iterative character of speech and bodily practices constitute individuals as particular kinds of social beings or 'subjects'" (2009, p. 88).

[22] Geertz' understanding of culture, identity and symbols has been mostly rigid, as his 1980 study of Bali demonstrates, with not much scope for a constructivist perspective on agency and multiple meanings. I adopt a post-Geertzian perspective which is alert to creative agential assertion by people and groups and their identification with symbols and identity.

three specific symbolic mobilisations. *Immersion* involved observing respondents as they lived their *everyday* realities and understanding how they negotiate their symbolic habitus to draw "cultural inferences" (Spradley, 2016, p. 10). I also attended various activities ranging from political party-organised campaign programmes such as the AAP's *jan sabhas* (public meetings) and the BJP's *chai-pe-charchas* (discussions over tea)[23] to specific community-based events such as *Ambedkar Jayanti* (Ambedkar's birth anniversary) organised by Dalit groups and NGOs. I shadowed specific political activists of both the BJP and AAP during election campaigning, spending time with them in their respective party office spaces, and attending rallies, protests including volunteer meetings. For the Dalit case study, apart from the urban location in the city, there was an equally crucial rural component (see Chapter 5 for discussion). Participant observation meant spending three and a half months on each case site. Additional methods were combined to aid the process of immersion: semi-structured open-ended interviews and focus group interviews.

I engaged in both purposive and snowball sampling and conducted a total of 150 interviews across the three case studies. The sample was purposive because it was focused on interlocutors who were part of specific mobilisations. My respondents had particular caste and religious affiliations and were relatively convinced about a particular movement and their reasons for identification. The sample included upper caste Hindus (upper, middle and lower class), Muslims (lower class) and Dalits (middle and lower class) across the three case studies. Access to my respondents was enabled by institutional gatekeepers (see individual case studies for details). For each case study, 50 interviews were conducted, 25 of which were in-depth interviews lasting between 1-1½ hours. I conducted in-depth interviews for this project as this is the most effective

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[23] A tech-savvy BJP election campaign strategy for 2014 elections, the *chai-pe-charcha* (discussions over tea) involved Modi simultaneously talking to his supporters over a cup of tea (see Chapter 4 for further discussion).

manner to comprehend the social life of the respondent. It is a "meaning-making partnership" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 105) to understand the respondent's everyday experiences and then subjecting these conversations to critical analysis. The sample size for in-depth interviews was informed by the fact that ethnographic knowledge reaches saturation and responses tend to be repetitive after that point. In-depth interviews were conducted with all interlocutors in Delhi, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. The remaining 25 interviews for all three cases were of respondents whom I met at events/rallies; they were supporters/audiences who had come from outside to participate. The interviews were conducted with consent and all were recorded.

In rural and village-based group settings, I realised that the focus group approach would offer better access along with participant observation; "the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group" (Morgan, 1996, p. 2). It is important to highlight the reasons for choosing the focus group approach. First, for its dynamism (as this allows insights into the dynamics of identity-based assertions): group-based interviews are live and active situations involving a number of respondents which also helps to dissect intra-group equations. Second, and more crucially, these interviews can be sources of "knowledge-building processes" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 166). For instance, during my focus group interviews with Dalit respondents, the manner in which women respondents actively participated and responded to questions and sometimes disagreed with their male counterparts in a mixed group setting helped me to discern two types of power relations – the relationship between men and women within the community and also women's identification with and assertion of their caste identity.

The focus group approach differs slightly in its format from the standard interviewing process and hence requires planning to get several participants on board at

the specified time, to decide who the participants will be and how the researcher will interact with the group. I used this approach for respondents in a rural setting – in relation to Dalit villagers in UP and anti-Patel statue campaigners in Gujarat (the Dalit case study) and *anganwadi* (rural health workers) (the Modi case study). Each group consisted of 8-10 participants (three groups across three villages in the Dalit case study both in UP and Gujarat, and two groups of anganwadi workers). The composition of the groups was based on homogeneity or "segmented sample"[24] (Morgan, 1997, p. 35). Caste was the defining factor for the Dalit group whereas for the anganwadi workers it was their gender which determined their participation. In relation to the structure of the sessions, I followed what is described as the "funnel strategy" (Morgan, 1997, p. 41) for interviews; this is a balance between structured and less-structured approaches, thereby enabling the dynamism of group interaction to play out and to identify trends in perception. I moderated each session as by then there was a level of comfort and trust with my participants and, since the important questions were structured, I could observe and record responses, participant enthusiasm, body language and mood of the discussion. The focus groups were recorded and each session was followed by transcription and interpretation based on broader themes.

Being a multi-sited ethnography,[25] fieldwork involved "following the people" (Marcus, 1995, p. 106) across multiple sites. In all three case studies – anti-corruption protests (New Delhi and Pune), Dalit mobilisation (Lucknow and Ahmadabad) and the Modi campaign (Vadodara and Varanasi) – multi-sited immersion enabled me to understand the specific spatial habitus and comparisons which were crucial for this project. For instance, following the AAP, first in Delhi and later in Varanasi during the general election campaign, enabled me to analyse the shift in the symbolic narrative of

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[24] "The decision to control the group composition to match carefully chosen categories of participants is known as *segmentation*" (Morgan, 1997, p. 35).

[25] Multi-sited fieldwork: within this framework: "ethnography moves from its conventional single site location" to "multiple sites of observation and participation" (Marcus, 1995, p. 95).

Kejriwal and the AAP and also provided the context to probe further an alternate symbolic universe in relation to Modi's campaign. One critique and anxiety levelled against multi-sited ethnography, underscored by Marcus (1995), is that it is not 'deep enough' as it takes place for shorter periods across different sites. Being in multiple sites, on the contrary, allowed me to keep track of the varied spatial positionalities of my respondents and aided in comparative analysis. This was challenging as mobilisations evolved in multiple spatial locations and sometimes simultaneously.

2.3 Mapping the Symbolic Terrain: In the Field

I began in New Delhi, the nerve centre of the anti-corruption protests. The focus for this case study was to untangle the symbolic universe of the anti-corruption crusade that shook India in 2011. The anti-corruption mobilisation led by the India Against Corruption (IAC) coalition that activated the political capital of India had split by the time I started my fieldwork in August 2013 due to the ideological differences between the two prominent leaders of the movement, Anna Hazare and Arvind Kejriwal. The Anna Hazare faction (was against party politics) was now *Jantantra Morcha* (JM) and the Arvind Kejriwal faction (pro-party politics standpoint) had become a new political party, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Due to the split I decided to first establish contact with the AAP, since I was aware that many participants in the initial protests had joined Kejriwal's political initiative and the party had decided to contest the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections. I took the election campaign as an opportunity to get access to participants in the 2011 protests and to assess their motivations for participation, both in the IAC and the AAP.

The day started at the AAP office situated on Hanuman Road off Connaught Place (CP)[26] as it was the centre of all election-related planning and hence became my

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[26] The AAP headquarters was in Koshambi (Gaziabad) when they began as a new political party but the hub of all activities was the CP office because a) Kejriwal was contesting the New Delhi constituency and

source centre. After meeting some senior leaders and volunteers, I received permission to follow their Delhi Assembly election campaign for 2013. After attending a few volunteer meetings, I identified 20 respondents for in-depth interviews who fulfilled two essential criteria – they had participated in the 2011 protests and were first-timers in political activism. They were mostly young students (male and female), professionals (especially legal experts/advocates), businessman/small traders, auto-rickshaw drivers, NGO and human rights activists, retired bureaucrats, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and homemakers. The respondents included both campaign managers at different levels and volunteers[27] and belonged to a combination of urban middle and lower classes. I followed candidates across four constituencies – Shazia Ilmi, Munirka (South Delhi), Dharmesh Kohli, Sunder Nagri (North-East Delhi), Arvind Kejriwal, New Delhi (Central Delhi) and Hrishipal Pehalwan, Aya Nagar (South-West Delhi). The choice of these four constituencies is reflective of the socio-economic spatial distribution and composition of Delhi. The decision was informed by an attempt to engage with and go beyond the upwardly mobile and social media-active city dwellers associated with the 'middle class' tag given to the movement.

Anna's decision to hold the last phase of his fast to pass the *Jan Lokpal* Bill in Lok Sabha in his village in Ralegan Siddhi, Pune gave me the opportunity to gauge the rural support base for these protests. His village had been the base for his various campaigns ranging from saving the local environment by rainwater harvesting to national campaigns such as the Right to Information (RTI). Staying at Ralegan Siddhi[28] enabled me to interact with the villagers and supporters who came from nearby villages/states to express solidarity with Anna and the issue of anti-corruption. During

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b) because the location of this office was more central, all activities, meetings and press conferences were held here and it was also easier to co-ordinate.

[27] AAP, as a new political party in a post ideological phase, prefers to use the term *volunteers* for its members rather than the old classic style of referring to them as cadres or party members/workers.

[28] I stayed in Ralegan Siddhi village for a month. The Anna Hazare Trust and JM were instrumental in facilitating access in Ralegan Siddhi, Pune.

his nine days of fasting, the *Yadavbaba* temple compound was filled with Anna's supporters who included old Gandhian activists, rural peasants, small farmers and many women peasants. During interviews, I realised that many had made trips to *Ramlila Maidan* and New Delhi during the first phase of the protests in 2011. Attending Anna's fast allowed me to reach the supporters of the anti-corruption movement, in addition to the urban volunteers of AAP.

From January, 2014, I moved to Lucknow, the centre for Mayawati's memorial building project, the Dr.B.R. Ambedkar *Parivartan Sthal.* The Ambedkar Bhavan, situated just opposite the Uttar Pradesh Assembly compound at Hazratgunj, was my base. The Bhavan, a deliberating space, had a library, a small meeting room and a separate enclosure housing Ambedkar's statue and his ashes. As it was the centre for all non-party meetings and mobilisations, I got the opportunity to talk to many activists who were leading various civil society groups and NGOs, allowing me to meet both urban and rural (potential) respondents. In the course of attending many of these activists' meetings about ideological standpoints and debates, strategies to be pursued in the context of the general elections of 2014 and organising their local events, I met with activists from DAG[29] and PMARC[30] who became gatekeepers to my respondents. Both of these organizations were engaged in organising and intervening in the representation of Dalit interests in UP. It was a considered decision to not gain access through the official political party route, i.e. the BSP. Although party leaders and members were interviewed, the commemorative structure was built under Mayawati's political rule and the objective was to avoid the party-mediated responses to the construction of the *Sthal.*

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[29] The Dynamic Action Group (DAG) formed in 1981 was a collaboration of roughly 30 NGOs set up to raise Dalit concerns in the state of Uttar Pradesh from a common platform.

[30] The People's Media Advocacy and Resource Centre (PMARC) is a media initiative started by Arun Khote (a journalist/activist). He, with the help of other Dalit activists, journalists and academics, started this initiative to mainstream the issues of Dalit violence and atrocities in the media, both with the purpose of reporting/archiving human rights violations and consequently petitioning centre/state authorities.

I started by every day making trips to the *Sthal* in the district of Gomti Nagar. It took me two weeks to imbibe in the massive architectural structure alone. Then I gradually observed the staff and visitors, occasionally profiling and doing short interviews with a few of them. Daytime visitors were usually tourists which included both Dalit and non-Dalits in groups/families.[31] Surprisingly, unlike the official timings of the vast majority of tourist spots that shut by 5 p.m., the *Sthal* was open until 9 p.m., allowing me to record the change in the nature of visitors in the evenings. In the evenings, mobile eateries, ice-cream vendors and balloon sellers appeared along the streets of Gomti Nagar with the beautifully lit *Sthal* in the background and the vast majority of visitors were residents, usually college students, couples and families out to take a stroll, many of whom were non-Dalits. It was equally important to seek what the resident Dalits felt about the construction of the *Sthal*, especially those who were middle class. Through DAG and PMARC, I got access to the urban middle class respondents who were professionals, mostly teachers, lawyers or activists belonging to the *Jatav*[32] community. I also explored the inter-caste dynamics by doing 15 in-depth interviews with respondents from the *Balmiki*[33] caste (access was provided by the Adarshila NGO based in Lucknow).

As part of my three village rural sample, I decided to include two that were part of the Ambedkar Village Programme (AVP).[34] Residing in Khaprela village for almost

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[31] The distinction between the Dalit/non-Dalit identities of visitors was made based on a combination of interactions – interviews, conversations and small chats both inside and outside the premises. As an ethical practice, there were no direct questions asked to the respondents/visitors enquiring about their caste. However there were indirect questions asked along with many other feelers that enabled me to decipher the caste-based location of these visitors. Here I am using this distinction to make some general observations.

[32] *Jatavs* are Dalits and one of the caste groups belonging to the Scheduled Caste Category in Uttar Pradesh. Mayawati also belongs to this caste category and the majority of BSP supporters are Jatav. According to the traditional caste-based occupational structure they are tanners.

[33] *Balmikis* are also Dalits and a caste group that belongs to the Scheduled Caste category. In the caste hierarchy within Dalits itself, they are placed lower than the *Jatavs* and believe that this intra-caste hierarchy perpetuates discrimination within the community. Occupation-wise, they are expected to do menial jobs, including manual scavenging.

[34] The Ambedkar Village Programme was introduced by Mayawati in 2005 for targeted development of Dalit villages. For me, this criterion was important to assess both Mayawati's success in distributing

two months (March-April) with one of the activists from the Prayatna Foundation[35] gave me the opportunity to observe my interlocutors who were mostly peasants/daily labourers. Initially, I accompanied the activists in their daily rounds, which allowed me to become familiar to the villagers and led to gradual acceptance, after which I established direct contact with them. After only two individual in-depth interviews, I realised that my interviewees were quite hesitant and uncomfortable (they appeared distracted and took a long time to respond to questions). I then modified the questionnaire to accommodate a focus group setting; this successfully changed the dynamics and the villagers were much more forthcoming. The focus group interviews with ten participants each were conducted in three nearby villages: (AVP) Samesi and Balsinghkhedha (Jatav caste) (Lucknow District, Mohanlalganj Tehsil) and (non-AVP) Khaprela Village (Pasi/Rawat caste) (Zahirabad Tehsil, Barabanki District). I also did a second round of follow-up interviews in late July.

To scrutinise Modi's image as *Vikaspurush*, the symbolic mobilisation of the 2014 election campaign was timely. The important sites were his two Lok Sabha constituencies, Vadodara (Gujarat) and Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh). In April, Modi had filed his nomination from Vadodara to contest the 2014 general election. When I arrived there in late April, the rickshaw ride from the Vadodara railway station to Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU) made it very clear that one had arrived in Modi's state: even the visual presence of Congress was missing from the streets and all one could see were big Modi posters, saffron flags and huge BJP hoardings. After reaching MSU, I walked to the nearby BJP Vadodara office. Despite having previously established contact with the local party functionary, it took ten days to gain official permission to follow their campaign as they insisted on conducting background checks

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material benefits to Dalits and whether that has impact on identity-based assertion through symbolic means at all for them.

[35] Prayatna Foundation is an NGO active in Dalit empowerment in villages around Lucknow.

before providing access. Initially, spending time every day in the party office helped me to get to know the campaign managers of the overall team, youth and the women's wing. After identifying my respondents for in-depth interviews, I started following them in their respective campaigns. The male respondents included middle-aged upper/middle class Hindu males from in and around Sayyajigunj in west Vadodara. They were all long-time party members and were small traders, businessmen and banking professionals. The majority of women respondents from the party were homemakers.

Election campaign aside, it was important to assess the everyday experience of Modi's *Vikas* (Growth). The Gujarat model is known for its various annual mass re-distributive developmental drives introduced under Modi's Chief Ministership in 2002. During fieldwork, two of the drives – *Shala Pravesh Utsav* (school enrolment drive) in Behrampura and *Garib Kalyan Melo* (fair to empower the poor) in Chotta Udepur – were on-going and this gave me the opportunity to talk to the beneficiaries of these policies, mostly minorities and rural poor. Similarly, it was important to speak to women supporters of Modi, who claimed to have been benefitted as workers under his rule due to targeted empowerment programmes. I chose to focus on the *anganwadi*[36] workers, which was one of Modi's flagship programmes. Through the ICDS programme head of Vadodara city, I arranged considerable time to observe and interview them on their changed working conditions, their self-identity as health care workers and how Modi's government has changed women's lived experiences. The sample consisted of mostly young rural women who had completed only higher secondary school, were married,

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[36] *Anganwadi* literally means 'courtyard shelter'; they are rural health care centres set up by the Government of India in 1975. An initiative to combat rural child malnutrition and hunger, Anganwadi workers provide basic health care education and support under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The Modi government, under the 'Mission Mangalam' programme started schemes for rural women empowerment, also initiating some changes in the Anganwadi workers' working conditions. For details see https://www.narendramodi.in/cm-fetes-anganwadi-workers-calls-upon-women-to-make-gujarat-a-malnutrition-free-state-3882

but also trained as community workers. I used a combination of (three) in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews to accommodate their working schedule and time constraints.

Crucial to gauge the success of Modi's growth story, was to examine his minority support base for which Muslims and Dalit perspectives were to be accessed. The official Muslim voice was accessed through the BJP's *Laghumati Morcha* (Minority Wing) and the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM)[37] headed by Ghani Bhai Quereshi. The MRM's two-day conference on cow protection was an opportunity to establish contact with Muslim supporters from different cities and explore their views on the success of the Gujarat model. The Muslim respondents quoted here are thus male BJP functionaries, members and supporters. Many of the Muslim BJP supporters who were interviewed belonged to lower classes and were small traders, owned small shops or were auto-rickshaw drivers. In order to build a complete picture of the growth story, however, it was also imperative to analyse the other, unofficial, side.

The trail of anti-Patel statue campaigning brought me to Ahmadabad. It was during my fieldwork in Vadodara that I heard and read about the anti-Patel statue campaign in Ahmadabad. After initial groundwork, I first got in touch with the Navsarjan Trust, a human rights organisation which led the campaign.[38] They put me in touch with the groups co-organising the campaign, the Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK)[39] and Samata Sainik Dal (SSD). Conversations with leaders such as Martin Mackwan convinced me that it was a campaign worth pursuing on two fronts. First, it intervenes

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[37] The Muslim Rashtriya Munch (MRM) is also BJP's initiative for reaching out to Muslims through cultural interventions. It was started under the aegis of RSS leader Inderesh in 2002 after the Gujarat pogroms, and aimed to attract Muslim support as the party's official minority wing had been unsuccessful in doing so. For details see http://www.muslimrashtriyamanch.org/

[38] Navsarjan is a grassroots organisation working in the state of Gujarat against caste-based discrimination and the practice of untouchability against Dalits, as well as other human rights related activities. For further details see https://navsarjantrust.org/.

[39] An extension of the Navsarjan Trust, Dalit Shakti Kendra (Dalit Empowerment Centre) is primarily a vocational training centre for the youth of the Dalit community. For further details see https://dalitshaktikendra.org/.

in Dalit symbolism and the politics of statues by their demand for Ambedkar's statue to be the tallest in India. Second, the campaign was a cogent challenge by the Dalit community in the state to Modi's 'Gujarat model', despite the fact that the mainstream media did not cover it. Although it had not been part of my initial fieldwork plan, after due consideration I decided to follow the campaign and document it. These three civil society groups enabled my access to the participants in the massive anti-Patel statue campaigns that had started in December 2013. The sample consisted of Dalits of the *Rohith* caste[40] from the villages of Padra and Jaspur (Vadodara) and Bhat (Daskroi Taluka in Ahmadabad) which were strongholds of the campaign. I led focus group interviews both with the leadership and the participants.

But it was not just the Dalit story; I also got a sneak peek into the *unofficial* version of being a Muslim in Gujarat. The Muslim minority ghettos of Behrampura, Juhapura and Jamalpur were chosen as they represented the underbelly of the Gujarat model. For instance, apart from being Muslim-dominated spaces, Behrampura has the famous *kabadi* (scrap) market and Jamalpur is where the kites are manufactured for Gujarat's famous International Kite Festival. Kites are made by Muslim artisans but sold by Hindus; the contrast between the alleys of Jamalpur with its lack of development and the relatively gated Hindu-dominated localities reflected this deep-seated hierarchy. My analysis is based mainly on participant observations and short interviews; these were *not* facilitated by the BJP.

Varanasi was the last fieldwork site and Modi's second constituency for the general election of 2014. As a field, it was different on two counts. First, unlike Vadodara, Varanasi was a more contested terrain. The saffron flags were in competition

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[40] The Scheduled Caste (SC) community in Gujarat are referred to as *Rohiths*. Their caste status is similar to that of *Jatavs* in Uttar Pradesh.

with AAP's *topis,*[41] both on the campaign trail and visually. Second, the sample composition was different. My respondents for in-depth interviews were mostly middle and lower class Hindus and all were young first-time party activists, both men and women. This time, official access and permission to follow the campaign was easily obtained from the BJP Varanasi local headquarters. The bustling junction of Benaras Hindu University (BHU) was the nerve centre of all activities.[42] Campaigning aside, the alleys of Lanka and Kamaccha represented the syncretism underlying the Hindu heartland. As the sun set over the *ghats* (steps leading down to the river), they transformed into deliberative forums where *chai-pe-charchas* (discussions over a cup of tea) were in session deciding the fate of India. This was an opportunity not to be missed for focus group discussions with mostly middle aged/old Hindu lower class men.

My initial visits to the *bunker* (weaver) colony in Jaitapur (a Muslim ghetto), were quite unwelcoming and, because of the election, it was difficult to make a breakthrough. It was only gradually, and off the record, that some talked about the dying power loom industry, shortage of electricity and looming unemployment for their next generation, but there was reluctance to talk about their preferred party/candidate in the election. Gradually, visible Muslim support started emerging and spilled onto the streets for AAP rallies and *jan sabhas* closer to the voting day. My analysis of the Muslims in Varanasi is based more on participant observations and short interviews. I did follow up on the AAP campaign in a limited manner to sense the shift in their symbolic narrative and to investigate whether the presence of a strong alternate symbolic universe for the masses had translated into rejection of Modi's *Vikas* agenda.[43]

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[41] After his success in the Delhi Assembly election in 2014, Kejriwal decided to contest the Lok Sabha election of 2014 from Varanasi. In the absence of a credible contest from Congress led by Rahul Gandhi, BJP's strongest opponent was now the AAP.

[42] Staying at the BHU guesthouse facilitated not just following campaigns but meeting a wide range of people and supporters from across the political spectrum.

[43] As a case study, the anti-corruption protest was studied from August 2012 to December 2013. The relevance of the AAP for my study is only until it decided to contest the Delhi Assembly Election of 2013.

The recording of decisions, permissions and observations began before starting the official fieldwork. "An ethnographic record consists of field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artefacts, and anything else that documents the social situation under study" (Spradley, 2016, p. 63). I maintained three small notepads (condensed) and notebooks (elaborate) for each case study to record my written field notes. Most of my field notes were written using a combination of English and Hindi. During my fieldwork in Gujarat, some of my respondents mixed Hindi with Gujarati, so many translations and meanings were written in Hindi, for easy recollection later. I also drew small flowcharts/idea grids to make immediate theoretical links while making field notes for future reference. The small notepads were used for recording immediate observations in the field and included innumerable observations, contact details and flowcharts and the notebooks to further develop and make expansive observations after each field session. Sometimes, I ended up doing them weekly because of hectic campaign trailing or extended travelling. All my interviews were recorded with a small recorder which, because of its non-descript nature, did not make respondents uncomfortable. I also maintained a field journal, recording my experiences as a researcher, some confusions and fears, hiccups, awkward encounters, breakthroughs and dates of all the case study-related travelling and events. At the end of my fieldwork, I had 150 recordings of interviews in all, and field notes and expanded notes that had to be organised before I started to write. I first analysed my field notes and flowcharts and developed a broad thematic grid for classification. The broad themes for discussion in the chapters are based on these uniform idea grids. That was followed by the transcription of interviews and political speeches (translating some from Gujarati–Hindi–English).

2.4   En-route: 'Visual' in Ethnography

In my initial research design, I had not considered using a camera but as I started following my respondents for the first case study (the AAP in Delhi), I realised that there were moments during the time spent in the party office, interviewing and campaigning, which would be reflective of varied subjective positions which would be more effectively captured by an image and might be left unarticulated in a verbal interview. This made me contemplate methodologically the value and use of visual methods, in this case photos/images from the field, to examine the range of possibilities for ethnographic research and analysis. These first few photographs assumed new connotations for my approach and, unexpectedly, the tool of visual research became part of the project. The visual research methods applied here permeate the broad ethnographic outlook of the overall project. The following discussion outlines the reasons, theoretical framework, practical and ethical concerns when using visual research methods.

Visual ethnography as a method questions whether everything that an ethnographer wishes to study is verbal or exists in discourse.[44] "In ethnography images are as inevitable as sounds, smells, textures and tastes, words or any other aspect of culture and society" (Pink, 2006, p. 21). A reflexive approach to the visual in ethnography rather than the scientific-realist informs this study. The scientific-realist approach considers images as being subservient to the written word whereas the reflexive approach emphasises their potential to create new ethnographic knowledge (Pink, 2001). Locating the visual in the ethnography would mean considering a

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[44] Instead, the ethnographer tries to also pay attention to the visual/affective aspect of culture as part of her ethnography using visual tools. "Visual ethnography uses photography, motion pictures, hypermedia, the web, interactive CDs, CD-ROMs, and virtual reality as ways of capturing and expressing perceptions and social realities of people"(Given, 2008, p. 934).

photograph becoming a field text in itself (I refer only to photographs taken by me - as researcher/ethnographer- during the fieldwork).

The pertinent reason for using visual methods for my research was primarily dictated by the fact that it facilitated the uncovering of the habitus of the symbolic universe. Bourdieu's conceptual framework of the habitus is difficult to examine because "it is class-culture embodied" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 175) so dispositions within a symbolic and cultural field are often non-verbalised. Here I am referring to how photographs can be used as an effective tool for accessing the unarticulated and embodied experiences of individuals and groups in a symbolic mobilisation. These photos contribute to enhancing "ethnographic knowledge" (Pink, 2001, p. 17) and "represent those aspects of the experience that are visible" (p. 24). Bourdieu himself has elaborated on photographic practice and used photographs in his research on Algeria. For my project I decided to use visual methods with a collaborative approach as this assisted in "revealing or illuminating aspects of practice that are difficult otherwise to recognise or articulate" (Sweetman, 2009, p. 506).

Situating my fieldwork photographs reflects a subjective collaborative approach. The framing of an image is a power-laden exercise; "even when the production of the picture is entirely delivered over to the automatism of the camera, the taking of the picture is still a choice involving aesthetic and ethical values" (Bourdieu & Whiteside, 1996, p. 6). Thus, I felt that a collaborative approach[45] was the most effective manner of negotiating the various power hierarchies between researcher and subject, female researcher and male subjects and, class and caste equations. Collaboration was important "both on ethical grounds and as a way of recognizing the intersubjectivity that underlines any social encounter" (Pink, 2003, p. 190).All the images were produced collaboratively and with consent.

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[45] "A collaborative method assumes that researcher and informant are consciously working together to produce visual images" (Pink, 2001, p. 40).

Additionally, for the Dalit case study, I used the method of photographic survey[46] to illustrate the Ambedkar memorial and statues. This was a conscious decision based on two considerations. First, because of limited or near absence of Dalit architecture and memorials in mainstream visual culture in general and the discipline of politics in particular: "[r]esearchers may often find that the photographic dimension of the culture they are working in has been virtually undocumented" (Pink, 2001, p. 50). Second, and following on from this, the invisibility is because the Brahmanical mode of perception dominates visual practice. As argued by Bourdieu and Whiteside, visual practices are embedded in dominant group norms: "the group places this practice under the collective rule, so that the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to the whole group" (1996, p. 6). Dalit architectural culture therefore has been pushed to the periphery, making it imperative for this thesis to bring it into analytical focus.

From a reflexive approach, the link between the production of images and the technologies used to produce them is important. The choice of technology/equipment is crucial as it "will be part of the research context and an element of the ethnographer's identity" (Pink, 2001, p. 38). Therefore I used two different cameras – a semi-professional one for public events and a small digital camera for interview settings. I realised early on that a big (and thus inherently expensive) camera attracts undue attention and is intrusive/obstructive in one-to-one interview settings. Also, in a collaborative setting, one has to be attentive to the element of technology, class and access. The use of expensive devices had the potential to affect the social relationship and trust between me and my respondents, especially in the context of Dalit

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[46] I used photographic surveys from a reflexive ethnographic perspective. Representation of physical environment or events can be embedded within a reflexive framework if it is not depicted in a fixed manner but as "aspects of culture" (Pink, 2001, p. 38). This intention informs the use of the photographic survey approach in the thesis.

respondents, where it could be seen as flagging huge economic inequality despite the fact that my respondents did have access to a reasonable level of technology and made use of mobile phone cameras (they showed me photos of various events on their phones during the interviews). I felt it was essential to take into account the power hierarchies involved both at the caste and class levels in this ethnographic encounter. Being aware of the local visual practices was also equally important; for example, while Varanasi and Lucknow are camera-friendly field sites as they are tourist places, the same could not be said of the rural Dalit villages in UP where an outsider with a camera would be viewed as invasive.

Seeking permission was an important part of the planning process. During my first weeks, I had to negotiate official permissions with the institutional gatekeepers of all three case studies. This involved not just official permission to attend rallies and campaign events of both the BJP and AAP, but also the right to photograph their events and activists (along with individual permissions). I met with the local constituency-level party leadership of both political parties and got approval for the same before I started following their campaigns. Similarly, with regard to Dalit respondents, individual permission was sought.

2.4.1 'Framing' the Field

By applying a combination of the theoretical and practical guide offered by Pink (2001; 2003) and extending the interpretive approach for visual images formulated by Drew and Guillemin (2014), I evolved my own approach to analysing the images. By advancing the meaning-making and interpretive approach to visual images, Drew and Guillemin's framework provides an effective framework to analyse visual images. However, their approach was with reference to participant-generated images rather than researcher-produced images as is the case here. While drawing on their 'interpretive

framework's three stage-based approaches,[47] I adapted it considerably for the relevance of this project to go with collaborative image-making in the following three stages:

Stage 1: Collaborative Framing

Images were taken after interviews with the permission of the respondents for each of the case studies. Photographs were collaboratively produced to capture moments, events and occasions as part of the larger ethnographic project. Framing as a technique was used by focusing the camera to capture a moment of the everyday life of my respondents.[48] I use the term 'collaborate' to imply they were framed by working together with the informants.[49]

Stage 2: Classifying and Interpreting

The images taken were classified at the end of each day of fieldwork; they were labelled and grouped, making field notes with reference to significant images. At the end of each case study, the broad themes were identified and the images organised into specific files. This resulted in a significant number of photographs and so I introduced an additional round of screening. This involved a further process of making a distinction between ethnographic moments and eliminating images that reflected more of a spectacular outlook, especially with reference to images of public events which had the potential of being more photojournalistic and spectacular. Through subsequent drafts of the thesis I made further additions/deletions based not so much on the content of the image itself, but on how much it added to the meaning of the project.

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[47] "The 'interpretive engagement' framework comprises three stages of meaning-making; these are meaning-making through participant engagement (Stage 1), researcher-driven engagement (Stage 2), and re-contextualising (Stage 3)" (Drew & Guillemin, 2014, p. 53).

[48] "Ethnographic investigation assumes active looking, most obviously demonstrated in self conscious decisions about framing" (Harper, 2003, p. 260).

[49] "If photographs are produced 'collaboratively' they combine the intentions of both the ethnographer/photographer and informant and should represent the outcome of their negotiations" (Pink, 2001, p. 58).

Stage 3: Ethnographic Representation

The most difficult stage was that of ethnographic representation and navigating the debate around the hierarchy between the image and text. Most interdisciplinary attempts at including visual images in texts end up being a visual extension of written texts: for example, engagement with the images to analyse identity politics have been predominantly to do with the study of Hindutva politics, and in most of these cases 'images' have been 'an extension' to discourse. I attempt in this thesis, following Mitchell (1996), Pink (2001) and Pinney (2003) to show that images can have their own narrative and the potential to make visible hitherto hidden narratives. The point here is not to establish that the visual is a superior tool, but to consider it an additional ethnographic register, alongside the verbal. As pointed out by Mitchell, "pictures want neither to be levelled into a 'history of images' nor elevated into a 'history of art' but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities" (1996, p. 82). By using these images from my fieldwork, I aim to visualise certain ethnographic experiences and ideas which are sensory or affective, unarticulated but expressed. "While images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant mode of research and or representation, they should be regarded as an equally meaningful element of ethnographic work" (Pink, 2001, pp. 4–5). Following this perspective the images have been presented along with the text "to explore the relationship between visual and other (including verbal) knowledge" (p. 96).

The strategy pursued in the thesis therefore places images before text. There are also instances of deliberate non-captioning of images, informed by the reflexive understanding that the ethnographer's (my) representation is only one way of interpreting the ethnographic moment and the image and captioning has the potential to text-frame the image. The attempted practice is to make an analytical link between two equally important ethnographic materials – interviews and photographs.

2.5   Limitations

I was aware that interviews can be a rehearsed performance on the part of respondents: "[t]he subject often says what s/he wants to be heard and present themselves the way they want to be represented" (Jacoby, 2006, p. 162). Thus, triangulation between methods (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2004; Jick, 1979) was used as a technique to check validity and to overcome the limitations of each method of data collection used here – in-depth interviews, focus groups and photographs. Beyond the test of validity, which has a larger positivist connotation, triangulation also contributes to enhance the interpretive aspect by capturing "alternative and multiple perspectives on social realities" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 52). In addition to interviews, field observations and photographs, secondary sources such as newspaper reports were used to corroborate evidence.

2.6   Ethics: Ethnographic Encounter

Qualitative research raises ethical issues, especially in ethnographic fieldwork. The encounter between the researcher and the respondent is power-laden, and the power of representation unquestionably lies with the ethnographer whose interpretation is necessarily embedded in specific disciplinary contexts (Asad, 1973). Both Geertz (1973) and Schatz (2009) alert us to the fact that ethnographic sensibility is not just about respondents but also involves recognising the position, privilege and power of the researcher vis-à-vis the interlocutors. Self-reflexivity towards my own identity as a researcher would influence my interactions in the field. I sought to analyse my position along the lines of my religious, caste, class, gender and political positions.

2.6.1 Positionality and privilege: the 'insider' and the 'outsider'[50]

My positionality – middle-class, English-speaking, and Delhi-educated with an activist outlook – gave me an 'assumed insider' access to two groups, the BJP and the AAP. My Hindu religious and middle-class identity facilitated making inroads into these groups quite effortlessly.

<u>Assumed 'Insider'</u>

Doing fieldwork with BJP party workers and their activists made me realise how having a 'seemingly upper caste Hindu name', speaking 'good Hindi' and being a 'single middle-class woman from London' made me a comfortable insider within the Hindu nationalist group. After the organisational level scrutiny from both BJP headquarters in Vadodara and Varanasi, I had an uncomfortably smooth transition into being an 'insider'. Despite personally being hugely uncomfortable with their ideology, I was able to get, to an extent, an insider view of the Hindu Right.

Similarly with the AAP and JM, I had an easy access, as a 'middle-class Delhite doing research'. Meeting with a few leaders at the Connaught Place main office and activists was enough to get permission. Since the AAP was a young political party with a seemingly liberal ideology there was less scrutiny than from the BJP. Also, the AAP had women activists at many levels, so it offered a comfortable working space to navigate.

<u>Constant 'Outsider'</u>

Being a non-Dalit was a constant identity that I had to negotiate as I interacted with my research participants belonging to the Dalit caste for my second case study. Despite being alert to the caste dynamics at play in this encounter, I was caught off guard during one of the initial meetings in Ambedkar Bhawan in Lucknow. In the midst of a conversation, an activist confronted me explicitly with the question "*aap Dalit hai*

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[50] Insider/outsider terminology is used only for representative convenience.

kya?" [Are you a Dalit?] On hearing my response in the negative, he asked "*phir aap kya research karengi?"* [Then what research will you do?], implying that, since I am not one of them, I cannot understand them or their experiences enough to represent them. This was an upfront and timely reality check and caused me to take corrective measures. There were two overlapping power equations that needed to be balanced in this particular encounter – non-Dalit/Dalit and researcher/respondent – and in order to establish trust, it was essential to strike a balance between caste-based positionality and sensitivity.

2.6.2   The only woman with a camera: media enclosures

In the fieldwork context, when utilising visual images and technologies as part of the research project, gender plays an important role. The gendered power relations translated in two ways for me in the field – the skill to handle technology and defining access. The assumed masculine control over technology led to unwanted attention and advice by male camerapersons in the media enclosures of various public events organised by the BJP and AAP. Attending various political rallies and meetings involved getting permission to be in the media enclosures during these events. While there were many female journalists in the media enclosure as reporters and anchors, there were none as camerapersons; both print and television media had male camerapersons. As the only woman with a camera that, too, was not using a tripod, I often encountered questioning looks – who is she? I felt as if I was intruding on their terrain and invariably received patronising advice about my positioning of the camera – "*shot aise lo!"* [you should take the shot like this!]. Media enclosures are not only good spots for media persons; they are also policed spaces: journalists/camerapersons are not allowed to mingle with the crowd. However, being a female researcher, albeit with a camera, I was perceived as non-threatening by the security establishment. While attending Modi's rally

in Uttar Pradesh, after initially failing to negotiate with a junior police constable who was stopping me from moving among the crowd, a senior policeman told his colleague "*arre ladies hai. jaane do!*" [Let her go. She is a woman!]. Gendered assumptions in this situation helped me navigate through the audience in the rally and gave access to subjects to produce collaborative photographs of political rallies/events.

2.6.3 Academic representation of images: safety of subjects

Although I used collaborative photography to produce fieldwork images with research participants, I made the decision to not photograph Muslim neighbourhoods or Muslim respondents in Gujarat and Varanasi with the sole exception of one shot taken from the back in Varanasi which does not reveal the identity of the subjects. As Pink (2001, p. 135) writes: "When ethnographers use photographs to make academic points they should also consider the personal, social and political implications of the publication of these images for their subjects". This decision was informed by three considerations. First, safety concerns of my respondents who belong to the minority community and have been victims of state-sponsored persecution: images revealing their front profile have the potential to expose them. Second, the constant fear with which minorities live in Gujarat makes it difficult for them to collaborate in such activities. I felt the unease, fear and discomfort when I first visited the Muslim ghetto of Behrampura. After experiencing such violence, it is unfair to expect the community to trust outsiders. Although eventually I did manage to gain their trust and some agreed to be clicked, I finally decided not to use them. Finally, their visual absence is symptomatic of the actual absence of the Muslim community from the "system of schemes of perception" (Bourdieu and Whiteside, 1996, p. 6) in the state of Gujarat.

2.6.4 Researching the Right: the 'reflexivity of discomfort'[51]

My research involved detailed and lengthy interactions with the members and activists of the right wing party, the BJP, whose political ideology I oppose. I attended events and rallies whose content I disagree with and not confronting their various sexist, casteist and communal comments, activities and behaviours often pushed me into a zone of discomfort. More pronounced was the discomfort inherent in the situations when I accompanied the BJP activists in Muslim ghettos where I experienced and shared the fear, intrusiveness and majoritarian imposition, especially in Gujarat. Also, my 'insider position' within BJP made it difficult to negotiate situations of simultaneous interactions with other groups because of strict surveillance – the upcoming election made it risky to be seen with members of oppositional political parties or activists as that would lead to access being denied. I had to be very careful when scheduling my meetings/interviews in Vadodara and Ahmadabad with Dalit activists or accompanying the AAP in Varanasi. I was also concerned that I might not represent my respondents/research participants fairly and might perpetuate stereotypes. The discomfort of dealing with my own biases for this case study translated into the most difficult chapter to write.

This chapter therefore outlines the methodological and ethical dimensions underpinning the research. The next chapter elucidates the analytical framework guiding the complex dynamics of symbolic politics.

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[51] Hamdan's (2009) terminology to describe the complexities involved in occupying multiple subjectivities as a researcher. I use the term because it helps me to capture the dilemmas of researching and representing the Hindu right and the balancing of ethical research with my own subjectivity.

3 Political Performativity: Identity, Symbols and Democratic Subjectivity

Symbolic politics combined with performativity constitutes the nature of practical politics today. Performative political action comprises many aspects – symbolic formations, spectacular performance and wielding culture to stake claims. People's participation in symbolic mobilisations can be a crucial axis of political subject formation. Political actors emerge in the public sphere as claim-makers for their rights, recognition and identity. Symbolic assertion is representative of a contested public sphere, a site for agitation, claims and contestations, creating an emergent political field by advancing a political voice.

In recent times, from the Egyptian revolution to the Occupy Movement, most protest/social movements have demonstrated performative political action as a critical constitutive force. The Egyptian revolution in January 2011 popularly referred to as the "18 days of people's power",[52] brought political and socio-economic disgruntlement against the Mubarak regime onto the streets. The powerful image of demonstrators praying in front of army tanks and clashing with riot police in Tahrir Square displayed the common man's defiance against the coercive power of the regime. From Tahrir Square in Cairo to Zuccotti Park in New York, people occupied public spaces to assert their rights and make claims against injustice. Fighting against corporate power and financial inequality, demonstrators camped near New York's financial district in September 2011; one of their slogans read "Wall Street is our street"!

Similarly, in India many groups have taken to symbolic and performative protests, for example, the case of the tribal *Jal Satyagraha* that was held in Goglegaon in Khandwa district for seventeen days in Madhya Pradesh. In this instance, villagers

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[52]https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/01/egypt-revolution 160124191716737.html

immersed themselves in the chin-deep waters of their flooded fields to protest against the state government's decision to raise the water level of the Omkareshwar Dam. Their protest demanded that the water level of Omkareshwar Dam[53] should be returned to its original height. In another recent example, villagers went on an indefinite fast in protest against the Indian government's nuclear project at Kudankulam, fearing nuclear disaster in Tamil Nadu. A sea-based protest was organised by the fishermen with around 700 boats (Sudhakar, 2012). My study seeks to analyse this sort of performance in politics, its impact on political subjectivity, and the visual practices established through symbolic and spectacle creation, asking 'what is the nature of political subjectivities that get constituted through symbolic mobilisations?'

> In her study of political corpses, Verdery argues,

> They help us to see political transformation as more than a technical process—of introducing democratic procedures and methods of electioneering, of forming political parties and non-governmental organizations, and so on. The "something more" includes meanings, feelings, the sacred, ideas of morality, the non-rational…Through dead bodies, I hope to show how we might think about politics, both as strategies and manoeuvring and also as activity occurring within cultural systems. (Verdery, 1999, p. 25)

Verdery activates the role of symbolism in politics and, by focusing on '*something more*' in political analysis with her discussion around dead bodies, she links the past and the future in the post-socialist European context. Her incisive work mainstreams the deeply symbolic nature of politics. Following on these lines of political analysis, I aim to examine the politics of symbolism, co-constitutive meaning-making and their impact on subject formation. The political intersection of identity, symbols and performance is assumed to be democratically not substantial enough to withstand political scrutiny, due to its symbolisms and passionate subjectivities. The thesis aims to deconstruct this perspective. The social processes and practices that it may entail – making claims

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[53] An interesting photo essay on the plight of the protestors can be seen at http://www.newindianexpress.com/galleries/2012/sep/08/jal-satyagraha-in-narmada-1339.html

outside of institutional spaces, group-based collective bargaining and the negotiation between legal and cultural citizenship could signal democratic subjectivity. My work thus examines symbolic politics and embodied performative political action and the possibilities for a new or altered form of individual subjectivities, democratic community formations and their limits.

The analytical frame of the thesis outlined in this chapter is divided into three sections. The first charts two dominant types of *symbolic participation* – performative political action and spatial assertion. Contextualising this encounter, the second section takes up the issue of *symbolic representation*, focusing on its two main dimensions – the symbolic habitus and the types of political action it can activate. Finally, the third section explores the theoretical debates around what can be considered as a 'democratic' political subjectivity constituted in the context of symbolic mobilisations.

3.1 Symbolic Participation: Performative Identities and Spatial Claim-making

Participation in any symbolic mobilisation, at whatever moment or location can be seen as public presentation of the self. Isin points out that what is important is not only that "citizenship is a legal status but that it also involves practices of making citizens – social, political, cultural and symbolic" (2008, p. 2). During the 2011 anti-corruption protests in New Delhi, crowds occupied the *Ramlila Maidan*, alleys, streets and parks of housing localities and made claims on their political representatives. By activating the performative power of the *aam aadmi* (common man), these protests brought hitherto apolitical sections of Indian society in different parts of the city onto the streets and transformed the practice of political claim-making. This social protest is an example of the kind of performative political action, which I intend to analyse. Also it has political implications as members of a political community redefine their city. As an embodied practice, performance translates such participatory political activities into

agential spatial assertions. The following two sub-sections therefore weave in the theoretical framework to decipher performative political action and spatial claim-making.

3.1.1 Political performativity: identity, performance and symbolic power

> Political performativity comprises, in other words, the construction of images and spectacles, forms of speech, dress and public behaviour that promotes the identity of a movement or party, defines its members, and promotes its cause or worldview. (Hansen, 2004, p. 23)

Political performativity imagines political action beyond its status as spectacular and event-making. The representational dimension of symbolic public spectacles acts as a definitional frame, grounding political ideologies, images and symbols, framing the way people see or imagine themselves as political subjects. I use the term *performativity,* rather than *performance* to demonstrate that political action is, in a sense, beyond theatrics, notwithstanding the fact that dramas and staged performances have been integral to politics as Edelman (1988) points out.

The distinction between performance and performativity is of significance because it is important to delineate whether identitarian political participation in a symbolic mobilisation can be reduced to enactment. One of the schemas used for analysing social relations in the context of institutional settings, state and identity creation is the political performance framework elaborated by Rai (2015). Deploying 'performance' as the analytical tool she explores "whether a focus on performance allows us to ask different questions about political legitimacy, claim-making and representation" (p. 1181) in the context of Indian parliament. She emphasises that 'performativity' as the analytical lens does not account for ruptures, and applies performance instead to unpack the study of political institutions and dynamics of representation and its reception. For her, political performance involves enactment, in this case by MPs (Members of Parliament) and their mode of reaching out to a broader

audience involves theatrics and conscious gestures. However, the prism of performance is a limited frame for analysis and has the effect of abstracting an act out of its structural embeddedness.

In the context of identity politics, the conceptual frame of performativity is more constructive and productive because it contributes to uncovering different layers of identification. "In contrast to theatrical metaphors of performance, the idea of performativity here is that the actions performed are intrinsic to, not separate from, daily life" (Wedeen, 2009, p. 87). Hansen (2002), in his analysis of the *Shiv Sena*[54] and its highly visible investment in political spectacles, demonstrates that a co-constitutive lens contributes to analysing both aspects of positionality and agency inherent in performance, arguing that:

> the Sena's spectacles of public violence are neither an effect of the movement's intrinsic nature nor of the social environment out of which it grew. It is the very generative and performative core of its being. It is through the ritualized destruction of property, the attacks on the police, the hurling of stones, the shouting of slogans that sainiks are produced, their identities affirmed and stabilized. (Hansen, 2002, p. 65)

The focus only on ritualised performance tends to view communal behaviour as an aberration or a deviation. A Hindu self embedded in majoritarian nationalism can be accessed more substantially and effectively by the interpenetration of performance with performativity; this also enables the uncovering of embodied practices and political action in identity politics. As Wedeen perceptively argues, "performatives refers to a structural logic while performance refers to an event" (2008, p. 16). In this thesis, performativity is employed to analyse identitarian claim-making. Performative lens to analyse identitarian assertion enables us to situate the constitutive nature of performance and also explore the possibilities to account for representation of identity and subversive social change.

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[54] *Shiv Sena* (Army of Shivaji), is an extreme right wing regional political party of Maharashtra (Mumbai). Founded in 1966 by Bal Thackery, its ideology is a combination of regional chauvinism and Hindu nationalism. Members of the party are referred to as *Shiv Sainiks*.

Performativity is a conceptual tool emphasising the political and embodied aspect of performance coined by post-structuralist feminist theorist Butler. The term 'performative' was first conceptualised by Austin, according to whom an utterance is an intentional act in itself. He defines this as "performative sentence or performative utterance" (1962, p. 6). Within his conceptualisation, speech acts are more than just sentences, they are also actions. Butler (1993, 1997, 1999), in relation to gendered subject formation, extended his conceptual frame beyond its linguistic application:

> Gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. (1999, p. 25)

With reference to theories of subjectivity, identity and performance, a key theoretical point advanced by Butler above is that there is no performer with a pre-existing identity behind a performance (Salih & Butler, 2003). Consequently, gendered identity is something that one *does*, rather than something one *is*. She argues further that,

> gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. (Butler, 1999, p. 179)

Through repeated acts, she suggests, cultural and gendered norms of feminine and masculine identities are reinforced, normalised and performed. A repeated performance of gendered practices contributes to the constitution of a specific form of a subject.

Furthermore, performance theorists extend Butler's intervention interlinking performativity and social relations, Langellier (1999) and Conquergood (1991, 1998) highlight the notion of identitarian experience and the political import of convergence of performance with performativity.

> In performativity, narrator and listener(s) are themselves constituted… Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded: sex, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, religion, and so on. This is why personal narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities left out of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense. (Langellier, 1999, p. 129)

It follows that, the potential for subversion is always present because internalised hegemonic norms can be challenged by groups on the margins. "Subversive performativity can disrupt the very citations that hegemonic performativity enacts" (Madison, 2005, p. 165). Decoding the potentials of subversive subjectivities, Butler and Athanasiou (2013) dissect dispossession (outside the neo-liberal logic of possession) to highlight the spate of performative resistance that has materialised in people's protests against authoritarian regimes and neo-liberalism.

This offers a cue to explore and problematise the ways in which the habitus of symbolic identification becomes a site for performative political action. Political performativity situates individuals in symbolic frameworks that sometimes sustain and other times challenge existing narratives. In this thesis the analytical frame of performativity is deployed to examine identities of religion, caste and civic citizenry within symbolic mobilisations in India.

3.1.2 Spatial claims: city, counter-space and subjectivity

> We can also track how these multi-sited aggregations might serve not to reinvent a nostalgic communitarian politics of place, but rather to displace conventional conceptions of the "public sphere". (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 194)

Performative political actions utilise public spaces to make them-selves visible. Symbolic participation activates spatial location and hence investigation of the latter becomes immanent. The relationship between symbols and identitarian assertion is mediated by space as spatial practices weave physical spaces into concrete discourses of the social world. The use of physical spaces is shaped by political objectives and logic, hence the importance of space in explaining, criticising and justifying social practice. Spatial strategies are "meaningful itineraries for public displays of force, as use of emblematic monuments, locales, or buildings in dramatization of demands, [and] as struggle for control of crucial public spaces in validation of claims to political power"

(Tilly, 2000, p. 137). Spatial mappings are crucial to understanding social practices in contemporary politics, especially in the context of social construction of these spaces, boundaries and the types of subjectivities constituted in or inhabiting these spaces.

Drawing on Lefebvre (1999), this thesis examines how symbolic politics are spatially experienced, transformed and shape collective action. I employ his theory of spatial practice to understand the encounter between symbolic mobilisation and spatial transformation. Lefebvre (1991, 1996), in his two incisive works on spatial practices and cities, deconstructs the different layers of subjective spatial location. Spaces are not "neutral" (1991, p. 36) or predefined by geography, he argues, rather they have to be examined for the spatial practices that they constitute and hence his emphasis on "production of space" (1991). Lefebvre's most important theoretical contribution in understanding space is his formulation of "production of space" rather than focusing on "things in space" where he emphasises that in order to study space our focus should be on disentangling how it is produced rather than what lies within it (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 36–37).

The focus in the thesis is twofold. First, it explores the material nature of physical spaces as symbolic places: whenever a place becomes defining for a group it contributes to giving an identity to the specific group; in that context, that physical place can be considered as 'symbolic'. As D. Mitchell puts it, "Public space, meanwhile, is material. It constitutes an actual site, a place, a ground within and from which political activity flows" (1995, p. 117). The aim here is to demonstrate the scope provided by the spatial lens to analyse the construction of collective identities through spatial assertion whereby a portion of space is identified with certain values and meanings. Second, the thesis aims to explore the nature of the subjectivities that inhabit or are constituted within these symbolic places, as cityscapes are re-inscribed with new practices and values.

During the Arab revolution, Tahrir Square evolved as one such symbolic site. The Square emerged as a global symbol of protest and became infused with anti-authoritarian and revolutionary connotations. For 14 days it was the symbolic centre, as protesters refused to leave until the authoritarian and undemocratic President Hosni Mubarak abdicated his political position. "Withstanding repeated attacks by thugs and Mubarak supporters, they created what came to be called the 'Republic of Tahrir', a thriving micro-cosmos of a different vision of society" (Gunning, 2013, p. 2). In the centre of the city of Cairo the creation of this 'space' by the people's spatial assertion symbolised the movement and its objectives to the rest of the world. Similarly, the *Ramlila Maidan*, nerve centre of the anti-corruption crusade in 2011 was occupied by the people for 13 days to protest against the political corruption and unaccountability of the political classes, transforming the political ambience of New Delhi. Cities are redefined as "spaces of contention" (Tilly, 2000) when the spatial practices employed by symbolic mobilisations entangle politics and space to produce new or modified symbolic meanings for both the material space and the altered subjectivities it instantiates.

The city as a spatial location or the site of political activism is of symbolic and political significance. Lefebvre (1996) saw the city as a political space for social groups to claim their rights. For him, the logic of capitalism has reduced and suppressed the city as *oeuvre* (participation). The "right to the city" signifies the "constitution or reconstitution of a spatial-temporal unit" (p. 195) as people assemble collectively rather than as individualised subjects (notwithstanding the fact that contention and conflict persists).

> [T]he *right to the city* … in the most 'positive' of terms signifies the right of citizens and city dwellers, and of groups they (on the basis of social relations) constitute, to appear on all the networks of communication, information and exchange. (Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 194–195)

To disrupt the everyday intentionality in the city, it follows, is to engage in an act of being political (Lefebvre, 1996); the political force of the Occupy Wall Street movement or *Ramlila Maidan* signified disruption of the street and inheres visibility for the claim-making subject. Locating my conception of symbolic mobilisation within cities necessitates observing power relationships outside of institutional spaces or official bodies, for instance, in people's interaction with the collector's office, or in the form of protest to influence policy-making. I focus on the 'outside' or the 'unofficial politics' and the political action involved in claim-making in the streets and squares. Moving beyond the emphasis on conventional forms of political participation, this thesis aims to analyse how space is appropriated by groups or collectives for political action, expanding spaces for political participation and re-signifying cities.

Identity and spatial assertion exist in a mutually constitutive relationship. Geography and community are linked and so is public space and democracy. "Public space is a place within which a political movement can stake out the space that allows it to be seen" (D. Mitchell, 1995, p. 115). The Arendtian perspective, becomes important here, because her ideas of "spaces of appearances" (1958, p. 198) and "act in concert" (p. 179) complicate the relationship between public space and power. Both denote the expression of freedom, combined with space being imperative for claiming political freedoms. She highlights "the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things, but to make their appearance explicitly" (pp. 198–99). Emphasising on 'being seen' by members of the political community, these acts can be viewed as both subjectively and politically empowering. Communities therefore use varying spatial strategies to be visible and to challenge and reshape the representation of space in the city.

For instance, symbolic performances by identity groups have constructively utilised spatial strategies to gain cultural capital. Street performances by *hijras* (eunuchs)

are more than symbolic deconstructions of phallocentricism; they are aggressive claims on the heavily gendered nature of the public sphere (Lal, 2003). Similarly, Hindu nationalists have made popular the interpenetration of urban space through pilgrimage-styled *rath yatras* (chariot processions) to capitalise on their religious support base and demonstrate majoritarian dominance (Deshpande, 1998). On the other hand, Dalits have relied on installing Ambedkar statues on village land and squares to claim access to land and visibility to counter caste-based exclusion and discrimination (Jaoul, 2007). These spatial strategies, mapping localities and neighbourhoods, aim to capitalise on in-built intimacy and convert these into areas of political action and symbolic capital. Political subjects, through these spatial assertions, instantiate notions of participatory politics that have the potential to powerfully intervene in the neo-liberal imaginary of a passive 'consumer' subject. In this view, an act of performative citizenship displays freedom in its enactment and by 'appearing' disrupts the regimentation of this 'consumer citizen'[55] (Ong, 2006). By creatively interrupting administered ordered spaces, these spatial assertions by groups activate 'counter-spaces' (Lefebvre, 1991) which challenge the homogeneity of the city.

Lefebvre outlines counter-spaces as a powerful mediating spatial strategy, interrupting not just the established socio/spatial order, but also the field of perception. Subjects produce counter-spaces in opposition to statist allocation of an active space into an 'abstract space'.[56] These spaces emerge as alternate claim-making sites. In the case of symbolic mobilisations, they emerge as sites for collective claim-making or

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[55] Ong (2006) points to the intersection between citizenship practices and neo-liberalism, and how market rationalities define the domain of politics. The idea of a political citizen whose political rights have to be honoured by the state is reduced to a consumer citizen, who is further put under market rationalities and technologies of surveillance and control.

[56] According to Lefebvre, 'abstract spaces' signify spaces that reify alienation both for the subject and in themselves yet also maintain some specific social relations such as state-constituted spaces which are bounded by instrumental manipulation. "It concerns the silence of the 'users' of this space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 51).

political action, outside of institutionalised spaces, such as state institutions, and spilling

into the streets, parks and squares.

> We can see how a counter-space can insert itself into a spatial reality: against the Eye
> and the Gaze, against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of
> power, against the endless expansion of the private and of industrial profitability: and
> against specialised spaces and a narrow localization of function (Lefebvre, 1991, p.
> 382).

Through his conceptual framework of the counter-space, one can explain how *occupation*

as a spatial strategy contributes to the creation of new political subjectivities. Spatial

practices of occupying physical spaces disrupt the existing spatial and social hierarchy.

Lefebvre highlights the relationship between "political projects and the obstacles they

run into; that is to say, those forces that run counter to a strategy and occasionally

succeed in establishing a counter-space within a particular space" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.

367). Zuccotti Park in the United States can also be considered a counter-space: it was

occupied on 9th September 2011 by supporters of the Occupy Wall Street protest, which

questioned the existing global economic order and the socio-economic inequalities that

it perpetrates. Similarly, the occupation of the *Ramlila Maidan* by the supporters of the

anti-corruption movement in 2011 in India emerges as a counter-space against the state

and the political ruling class.

Spatial strategies in symbolic mobilisation constitute new subjective positions,

because it allows them to identify with a collective identity, make claims and re-signify

the place. According to Lefebvre, individuals or groups cannot constitute themselves

unless they produce *their space*; "trial by space" (1991, p. 416) is immanent. Explaining the

political significance of space, he highlights that space represents the contradictions in

the political arena, running in opposition to both the state and political parties which he

termed 'trial by space'.

> Ideas, representations or values which do not succeed in making their mark on space,
> and thus generate (or produce) an appropriate morphology, will lose all pith and

become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies. (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 416–417)

As I show in the next chapter, Modi's developmental politics agenda underwent 'trial by space' in his two constituencies of Vadodara and Varanasi.

3.2 Symbolic Representation: Identity, Habitus and Political Action

Performative actions have to ensure "equivalential logic" (Laclau, 2005, p. 70) to attain cohesiveness. Symbolic representation enables a link to be forged between identity and political action by working towards a uniform symbolic universe. Concerns of sameness/otherness between groups are forged through repertoires to establish a chain of equivalence. "The perpetuation of a threatened order can no longer rely on a purely differential logic; its success depends on the inscription of those differences within an equivalential chain" (p. 121). As Laclau argues, to bridge the difference between particularity and universalism the chain of equivalence is imperative; "It is because a *particular* demand is unfulfilled that with other unfulfilled demands a solidarity is established, so that without the active presence of the particularism of the link, there would be no equivalential chain" (2005, p. 120). In the political field, each group aims to create this chain of equivalence with its own repertoires to ensure cohesiveness.

However, sometimes the repertoire tends to alienate rather than create cohesiveness. For instance, despite fasting as a mode of political action being strongly embedded in the Gandhian mode of protest, Mohanty (2011) argues that Anna's fast during the anti-corruption protests was alienating for many sections of the Indian masses who were engaged at different levels of social movements and civil society mobilisations. The dominance of the right-wing and middle class aesthetics excluded many from its ambit. Thus the repertoire weaves in the 'particular' which motivates and appeals to few individuals, thereby instigating political action only amongst them and alienating the rest. The political field thus becomes a site of contest between multiple

repertoires constituting their respective dispositions and habitus. The following sub-sections discuss theoretically the two crucial grids of symbolic representation – the symbolic habitus and the nature of political action.

3.2.1   Political field: symbolic habitus

The equivalence established in the political field is materialised within the symbolic habitus. From a symbolic politics perspective the conceptual lens of the habitus enables the decoding of symbolic identification, social practices and performative participation. The performative presence in the public sphere through grand spectacles and repertoires should be analysed for the nature of embodiment, dispositions and the overall habitus it activates.

The habitus comprises shared symbols and their attendant dispositions. I employ *symbolic habitus* in a Bourdieusian sense to denote that, culturally, citizens and identity-based groups are constituted and structured by a symbolic universe which determines their dispositions, representations and respective symbolic capital. "The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). It can therefore be claimed that habitus not only allows the decipherment of possible patterns but also determines/conditions social practices.

> Because the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 55)

Dispositions within the habitus, according to Bourdieu, are not finite or bounded; there is scope for reshaping, orienting or challenging. For instance, performative acts of veiling/unveiling by Islamic women are significant shifts in the secular symbolic habitus (Mahmood, 2005; Secor, 2002; B. S. Turner, 2008).

Altered or creative use of symbols can be considered as a self-reflexive reinterpretation of the habitus or what Turner describes as "performative reflexivity",[57] implying a relative autonomy from the assumed determinism of the habitus. Applying Bourdieusian habitus to religious/race/caste identities allows the interrogation of their respective dispositions (symbols, bodily comportment and affiliations) and their varying complexities. The wearing of the headscarf is symbolic of Islamic faith and its visibility in a secular domain displays an assertion of faith. It also clearly demarcates spatial realms between the religious private and that of the secular public sphere. The performative act of veiling/unveiling is a powerful symbolic intervention demonstrating the complexity and reflexivity of dispositions within a secular habitus. The religious habitus of all faiths have their respective symbolic repertoires that rupture the secular dispositions. Göle (2002), interestingly, discusses the Kavakçi case in Turkey, wherein her decision to appear in Parliament wearing a headscarf was seen as a violation of the secular public sphere. "Kavakçı's Islamic covering challenged the unwritten laws of the Parliament and enraged the deputies as well as (secular) public opinion" (p. 178). But Kavakçi's act is also indicative of the possible reconfiguring of the religious habitus. In another context, the adoption of Buddhist symbolism by Dalits who have converted outside of Hinduism demonstrates the challenging of the religious/caste habitus. By adopting Buddhism, Tartakov (1990) highlights that *Mahars*[58] and others inherited the vast repertoire of Buddhist imagery to assert their non-identification with Hinduism and its attendant casteist social order.

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[57] Performative reflexivity, according to Turner, is "a condition in which a sociocultural group, or its most perceptive members acting representatively, turn, bend, or reflect back upon themselves, upon the relations, actions, symbols, meanings, and codes, roles, statuses, social structures, ethical and legal rules, and other socio cultural components which make up their public 'selves'" (1988, p. 24).
[58] *Mahars* are a Dalit community categorised as Scheduled Caste in Maharashtra, Mumbai, India. Following Ambedkar, a major section of the population converted to Buddhism.

The reflexivity within the existing symbolic habitus is explored for each of the three case studies in this thesis. The next section interrogates the degree of relative autonomy and self-reflexivity within a symbolic habitus in the political field.

3.2.2 Political field: elite manipulation or co-constitutive representation?

In existing scholarship, the relationship between politics and symbols is divided broadly between instrumentalists and constructivists. Instrumentalists perceive symbolic representation to be a top-down approach and manipulated, wherein the elites/leaders contrive to garner support for their agenda against the 'other' identity group. On the other hand, constructivists consider it to be a co-constitutive meaning-making process, with scope for enhanced subject formation. The instrumentalist perspective has some purchase but I use the constructivist approach to highlight its limitations.

It will be useful to begin the discussion with the instrumentalist perspective as represented by the scholarly works of Lasswell, Edelman, Brass and Kertzer. The instrumentalists perceive symbolic participation to be contrived and regard political subjects as passive participants and consumers guided by the political elites. They are thus seen to lack agency in shaping the symbolic habitus. This perspective is often based on two fundamental guiding principles: first, identity as an essentialist and a bounded category, with rigid symbols and identity markers. Second, politics is understood as *management of interests* translating into a clear distinction between elite leaders and mass followers, wherein the elites contrive to produce a consensus.

Political symbolism as a unit of analysis within politics was scientifically analysed by Lasswell (1932, 1950, 1971, 1977, 1986). Applying a psychoanalytical approach to politics, he opines that the "tripartite principle"[59] can be an "extended analysis of policies and practices, doctrines, myths and legends. It is particularly promising when

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[59]According to Lasswell (1932), psychoanalytically an individual's personality exists on three levels – id (impulse), super-ego (conscience) and ego (reason), and these divisions correspond to individual, institutional and occasional relationships.

applied to the problem of social dynamics" (1932, p. 525). A person's reaction pattern can be divided into "impulse, conscience and reason" and therefore the individual association with political institutions or cultural practices will be based on arousing these affective correlations. "The principle of tripartite division implies the principle of triple appeal as a method of political management" (p. 525). Especially in the context of political institutions and practices, the role of elite manipulations is paramount because, according to him, political symbols in actuality are alien to lived experiences of people and political movements are a result of the "displacement of private affects into public objects" (1986, p. 173). Consequently, the management of symbolism requires bifurcation of a symbolic universe into a matter of enlisting support or opposition. Thus, for the 'master-symbols' to come into existence in the political field, the role of elites becomes crucial because "this reinforcement and facilitation of the symbol involves the use of men of prestige in its advocacy, the assimilation of special economic and other group aims, and the invention of appeals to unconscious claims" (p. 189). Therefore, the role of the elite is to manipulate affect around a symbol so that its appeal reaches out to maximum number of members of the political community.

Similar to Lasswell's political management perspective, Edelman (1964, 1971, 1988) highlights symbolism in politics by referring to political spectacles and 'mass acquiescence' and the role of elites in circulating them. He discusses mass acquiescence by distinguishing between 'condensation symbols' for the masses and 'referential symbols' among the elites. In his view, political elites create symbolic meanings by employing their power which ultimately limits the range of political discourse, manipulates public debate and manufactures whatever consensus emerges (1964). His argument that political elites are in a position to privilege one meaning over another can be applied to right-wing politics in India, but is limited. Specific symbols have marked the symbolic field for different phases of Hindutva mobilisation. The shift in their

agenda, from the emphasis on the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya during the 1980s–1990s to the '*trishul diksha*' campaign (Farooqui, 2003)[60] in 2002 after the Gujarat pogrom, illustrate the point: the political elite brings into the political field those symbols and narratives which, according to them, would generate political mileage.

It is the theory of elite competition as the basic dynamic which precipitates ethnic conflict for Brass (1991). He argues that an instrumentalist rather than primordialist approach serves to better explain the rise of Muslim separatism in South Asia. He describes how the symbol of the cow, Muslim personal law[61] and the Urdu language were brought into mainstream political discourse by the Hindu and Muslim political elite for the self-definition of their respective groups and the rigid drawing of the boundaries for their communities. They became symbols of identity because,

> several elite groups, with the aid of the government, promoted them as such in their conflicts with each other. [For example,] [t]he cow was a symbol that could be used equally by orthodox Hindus defending traditional religious practices, by revivalist Hindu leaders who wished to promote a specifically Hindu form of Indian Nationalism. (Brass, 1991, pp. 78–79)

Muslim political elites utilised the anti-cow slaughter movements to demonstrate that Muslims were being oppressed by the Hindu majority. Brass argues that the elite groups within an ethnic group play an important role in determining linguistic and cultural narratives to motivate relatively excluded masses. With his later work (1997), one could classify him as a constructivist. Through a rich ethnographic account of five events, he challenges the primordialist explanation of Hindu-Muslim violence.

Shifting the focus from ethnic identity, Kertzer's incisive work on the Italian Communist Party (PCI) emphasizes political parties and their symbolism. Arguing

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[60] Post-Godhra Gujarat, distribution of *trishuls* (tridents) were undertaken by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Gujarat and gradually spread to other states as part of their larger majoritarian politics. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/Trishul-diksha-to-continue-in-Gujarat VHP/articleshow/44105680.cms

[61] Muslims in India are governed by their 'personal laws' according to the *Shariat* – The Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act 1939. This law outlines matters governing marriage, succession, inheritance and charities among the community.

against rational choice, he states that "political perceptions...are symbolically constructed" (1998, p. 8). Despite tracing the role of the PCI's symbolism, with the overemphasis on engineering from above, his analysis omits how people perceive, reinterpret or dismiss injunctions from above and discounts the possibility of the masses rejecting or accepting another symbolic universe.

The dominant frame of the instrumentalists discussed above foregrounds elite manipulation and political management of the audience represented in the context of a symbolic mobilisation. This assumed passivity of symbolic representation echoes Pitkin's formulation and approach to symbolic representation. Pitkin's classic work is one of the earliest theorisations of the link between symbolism and representation. She emphasises that symbolic representation is guided by an 'existential' logic.

> Since the connection between symbol and the referent seems arbitrary and exists where it is believed in, symbolic representation seems to rest on emotional, affective, irrational psychological responses rather than on rationally justifiable criteria. (Pitkin, 1972, p. 100)

Symbolic representation is considered irrational and discussed within the framework of 'standing for'.[62] She argues that, unlike descriptive representation, creating symbols is a matter of working on the minds of the people who are to accept it rather than on the symbol itself. Representation is reduced to a process of symbol-making, which is not "a process of rational persuasion, but of manipulating affective responses and forming habits" (1972, p. 101).

Pitkin's perspective underestimates the fact that representation is a two-way process involving the represented and that symbolic mobilisation creates the possibility for an identity to be constituted or enhanced. By contrast, Bourdieu and Laclau emphasise that the two-way nature of symbolic representation needs to be acknowledged to foreground the constituted nature of identities. "It is because the

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[62] In Pitkin's (1972) formulation, symbols 'stand for' as they are not actually there but yet claim to represent, differentiating from 'act for'.

representative exists, because he represents (symbolic action), that the group that is represented and symbolized exists and that in return it gives existence to its representative as the representative of a group" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 204). Pitkin had raised an important question with reference to symbolic representation: "it is equally important to ask when they have good reasons for accepting a leader" (1972, p. 111), but it was based on an unidirectional understanding of representation. Therefore to highlight the inherent limitation of this enquiry Laclau poses a counter question, further probing whether the "validity of reasons precede representation or are constituted through representation" (2005, p. 160). By raising the aspect of new identities being constituted through symbolic representation he highlights the significance of the audience. Laclau is able to assess symbolic encounters with constitutive agential powers; which also effectively intervenes in the dominant discourse through symbolic participation and political action (see section 3.3).

The constructivist perspective followed in this work can be credited with three important interventions. First, it operationalises the concept of identification rather than an essentialist understanding of 'identity'. This assumes that cultural assertions, whether through symbols or otherwise, are not fixed and top-down but more complex with potential avenues for bottom-up subversive assertions. Second, by adopting a meaning-making approach to symbols it dismantles the dichotomy between producers/consumers or elites/followers, thereby focusing on the co-constitutive nature of a symbolic habitus. Finally, the constructivist perspective also shifts the focus from the rational to the visceral and emotional in politics.

For instance, drawing on the Indian anti-colonial legacy, civil disobedience mobilised millions, comprised a vast repertoire of symbolic leadership and representations and yet it was bottom-up in its evolution. Gandhi became, literally and metaphorically, the symbol of the anti-imperialist crusader embedded in bodily

enactment. Symbolic performative acts of fasting and civil disobedience became impactful tactics used by Gandhi during the nationalist struggle and part of the commonsensical mode of anti-colonial protests among the masses. "The fast was terribly public and deeply private, both a spectacle of suffering and a disciplinary mechanism to vanquish desire" (Rao, 2009, p. 164). However, by using press reports from the early 1920s, Amin (1984) reconstructs the peasant perception of Gandhi at that time. Here, one can see the agency of people in defining their leader and having an autonomous existence outside of the control of elite manipulation. The political subjectivity of the participants in accepting a particular narrative is equally crucial because certain discourses are empowered or sanctioned in the public arena while others are not.

Constructivists Wedeen and Hansen challenge the idea that spectacular politics constitutes misled or duped subjectivities. This points to the limitations in the "framing" literature[63] (Benford & Snow, 2000). Highlighting the relevance of frames, they emphasise the "degree of resonance"[64] factor (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). Foregrounding performative politics, they both complicate compliance within a symbolic mobilisation and claim that it is a complex encounter with potential for subversion and transgression, thus giving more agential powers to the subjects. The everyday acts of transgression in the Syrian state under Asad's regime are highlighted by Wedeen. Asad, she claims, uses "[s]pectacles such as opening festivals, referendum celebrations, and state holiday rituals [which] are orchestrated and attendance is generally enforced by regime officials" to instil obedience in the Syrian people (Wedeen, 1999, p. 2). The ruled use varied forms of significations including films, jokes and plays

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[63] "Social movement scholars conceptualize signifying work or meaning constitution by employing the verb framing" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614)

[64] "The concept of resonance is relevant to the effectiveness or mobilizing potency of proffered framings, thereby attending to the question of why some framings seem to be effective or 'resonate' while others don't" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619).

to create "a transgressive counter culture that plays with the parameters of national membership" (p. 89).

Hansen (2002), analyses a series of violent public spectacles by *Shiv Sainiks* in Mumbai, India. He argues that by their actions they were able to assert plebeian subjectivity against the organised political order. Even more crucial is to understand the exercise of agency by communal subjects; by dismissing them as contrived, we are undermining both political practices that constitute these subjectivities and their experience of being self. Thus complicating the temporal and stable nature of subjectivity in the context of probing communal politics, he points out that "[o]ne needs to recognize that communal identities are not just effects of poisoning of the people by manipulators or criminals" (Hansen, 1999, p. 203). He implies thereby that Hindu communal subjects are the product of a particular majoritarian narrative that has been dispersed in the Indian public sphere historically since the nationalist struggle, along with the everyday encounters between Hindus and Muslims which are layered with mutual mistrust and misperceptions.

The constructivist perspective asserts that subjectivity is not passive compliance, but a complex and dynamic process involving participation based on *active identification*. In my three case studies, I draw on the constructivists' interpretation of subjectification as identification in the context of the symbolic mobilisations. More specifically, in these mobilisations, what we observe is subjects reclaiming and renewing their subjectivity, crucial to which is a bodily enactment within the public sphere which has implications for both cultural and political citizenship. Performative political action within identitarian politics has a potential for agential subject-formation. The next section analyses the extent to which this negotiation of the self through embodied participation and performance in symbolic mobilisation contributes to a 'democratic' political subjectivity.

3.3 Democratic Subjectivity, Performative Political Action and Symbolic Political Field

> The construction of a chain of equivalences out of a dispersion of fragmented demands and their unification around popular positions operating as empty signifiers, is not totalitarian but the very condition for the construction of a collective will which, in many cases, can be profoundly democratic (Laclau, 2005, p. 166).

The decisive moment described by Laclau, is demonstrated effectively in Wedeen's work on how the cult and spectacle both produce political power, yet also, paradoxically, invite transgressions. Performative political participation within a symbolic habitus (identity politics or social movements) raises vital questions for democratic theory. For instance, how does one account for the nature of subjectivity constituted through such participation? Can these identitarian assertions or claim-making be considered democratic? My intention here is to outline what can be described as 'democratic' political subjectivity.

For the purposes of this thesis, my account of democratic subjectivity applies Laclau's conceptualisation of 'identification' in subject-formation to analyse political action within symbolic mobilisation. It is based on two foundational principles that guide this research. First, a non-essentialist understanding of identity enables the factoring in of space for the emergence of new claims and assertions. Laclau's radical democratic theory involves the questioning and rupturing of the existing order; emphasising the importance of 'dislocation' within a social structure: "...rather it is merely a freedom of a structural fault which can only construct identity through acts of identification" (1990, p. 60). Second, the lens of 'identification' enables us to tease out democratic practices that lead to transition, sustenance and the renewal of political subjectivity.

Returning to the earlier discussion around Pitkin's uni-dimensional approach to symbolic representation, Laclau provides an alternative conception ascertaining the

importance of acts of political identification. While Pitkin's view collapses all symbolic mobilisations with fascistic tendencies, Laclau's conceptualisations of empty signifiers and chain of equivalence provide an empowering alternative. Detailed in his 1996 work, in the chapter on 'Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics' he explains that empty signifiers are the centre point around which the whole system revolves, leading to hegemonic stability or a unification that is overpoweringly dominant in the political field. Moreover, outlining the relevance of empty signifiers, he also identifies the two steps or phases in representation essential to symbolic representation, negating thereby passive subjectivity. The first movement (represented to representative) is established when the chain of equivalence enables identification. However this link cannot be autonomous: the empty signifier "is what *constitutes* that totality, thus adding a qualitatively new dimension" (2005, p. 162) leading to the second movement (representative to represented). Laclau's two-way approach to symbolic representation corresponds therefore to the struggles of subjects with the lack in existing structures forcing them to re-identify them-selves.

The potential for *breakdown of signification* occurs when hegemonic symbolic significations are challenged, allowing an alternative symbolic register to come into existence. Therefore, the contestation in the symbolic political field helps to discern shifts not only with reference to subjectification, but also overall democratic politics. Norval's approach to Laclau's theory of identification simplifies and breaks down the process into two phases: "[t]he first consists of the initial 'take up' of democratic subjectivity while the second emphasizes subsequent iterations of that 'take up', the repeated processes through which we reassert our identities as democratic subjects" (Norval, 2007, p. 15). The essential point being underscored here is sustaining democratic identification through reiteration.

Following Laclau, Hansen considers democracy as an exercise in political commensuration that provides equivalence between unlike persons, objects or qualities. For instance participation in symbolic performances by subalterns often is considered as counter-public assertion and therefore has potential for constituting democratic subjectivities. Hansen (1999, 2002) suggests that the extension of the language of democracy allowed the assertion of new and plebeian identities in the cases of the Hindu Right and the *Shiv Sena*. Both movements are illustrative of how the resultant subaltern subjectivities emerged as a counter to the older political culture and capitalised on the assertion of plebeian subordination combined with a strategy of political performance. Hansen (1999, p. 134) argues that multiple factors contributed to the emergence of the rise of the Hindu right wing forces including "majoritarian democracy", "populist governmentality" and the generation of "new identity claims"' as a by-product of democratic interventions.

The emergence of plebeian subjectivities may be considered as democratic to the extent that the assertion opened up claim-making to hitherto marginalised groups. Symbolic performative mobilisation thus brings hitherto depoliticised/apolitical groups into political engagement and activism thereby inculcating a potential for an empowered self with democratic consciousness. Performative action is representative of embodiment, a call to action reflecting political acts of identification, spatial assertion in non-institutionalised spaces along with presentation of self and claim-making. But, is this subaltern assertion enough to claim democratic subjectivity? According to the conception of the nature of subjectivity considered democratic as outlined so far, would the reiteration of violent and exclusive nationalism be considered problematic to a democratic conception of claim-making? For political analysis therefore, it is important to also make a distinction regarding the nature of political acts of identification, as both

democratic and undemocratic elements exist in a symbolic habitus complicating the nature of political subjectivity that is constituted.

Therefore, the conception of 'democratic' political subjectivity views forging of demands as only the first aspect of identification (the first step). The political expression, reiteration and fostering of democratic values is also equally crucial (second step) for a 'democratic' political subjectivity, a distinction not sufficiently made in the constructivist scholarship. This framework also enables us to analyse subject-formation within symbolic mobilisation as having scope for reassertion, re-articulation or transgression from within the existing power relations. This understanding of democratic subjectivity is used to analyse the three cases of symbolic mobilisation chosen for the study.

The following chapters analyse specific types of symbolic habitus and the nature of political subjectivity they constitute. The first case study in the next chapter scrutinises Modi's mobilisation as *Vikaspurush* during the election campaign of 2014.

4 Performing Development: Modi as Vikaspurush (Development Man)

4.1 Introduction

> "I bow before the people of Varanasi for having so much faith in me" (Modi, quoted in Rashid, 2014).

Modi said this in his thanksgiving speech, delivered from a makeshift stage at the *ghats*. He performed the grand *Ganga Arti*[65] at the famous *Dashashwamedh Ghat* in Varanasi after winning with a huge majority in the Indian general election of 2014 (Rukmini, 2014).[66] The prime minister-elect of a secular democracy expressing gratitude to the voters from a site of religious significance to the Hindu majority transformed a secular practice of oath-taking into an act of political ritual. At the culmination of a political campaign his gesture can be claimed to be symbolic action embedded in *ritual*.[67]

The success of the 'Modi wave' is credited to the aggressive media campaigning and corporate financing. Scholars such as Jaffrelot (2013, 2015a, 2015b), Roy and Chakravortty (2015) and Ravinder Kaur (2015) point out that the overly personalised campaign, mediatised imaging and slogans underscored that the electorate were massively influenced by the campaign. Notwithstanding mediated populism and the corporate backing, the 16th May 2014 mandate and the campaign should be examined for other equally cogent factors such as its symbolic habitus and the BJP's organisational foundations which ensured that support is translated into actual mandate.

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[65] An *aarti* is a spiritual Hindu ritual ceremony performed every evening on the banks of river Ganga. The prayer ceremony is performed with lit lamps and vocal chants from scriptures.

[66] On 16th May 2014, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition led by the BJP comfortably won 282 Lok Sabha (LS) seats without depending on any allies, a gain of 166 seats. After Rajiv Gandhi's win of 414 LS seats in 1984, this was the largest win by a single political party in a general election. It was also the first time that a party other than Congress had won a simple majority on its own; the 1997 Janata Party coalition was the first non-Congress political formation after the 1975–77 State of Emergency imposed under Indira Gandhi's leadership because of 'political instability'.

[67] Turner (1967) understood ritual as formal behaviour having reference to mystical beliefs and power wherein symbols reveal crucial social and religious values as well as playing a transformative role in impacting human attitudes and behaviour. I contextualise Modi's symbolism within Turner's conceptual framework of political rituals and pilgrimage in the construction of *communitas*.

The chapter argues that the political symbolism of Modi's *surajya* (good governance) is embedded in the traditional political rituals of pilgrimage or *yatra* (procession) politics. The *darshan* visual practices accompanying it intervene in constituting a sacralised political field of perception and ethno-religious subjectivity. Despite mobilising embodied political participation, the mobilisation prevents transgressions, negotiations or challenges to a democratic subject formation, constituting instead an embodied 'infantile' subject. The analysis is divided into four sections. The first section on *mapping spatial developmentalism* discusses Modi's politics of development and the construction of heterotopias of 'real spaces' in Vadodara and Varanasi. The next, on *developmental matrix*, analyses the symbolic habitus of Modi's campaign in defining a techno-sacred turf. The discussion around the nature of political subjectivities constituted through this mobilisation is taken up next. Finally, the section on 'Statue of Unity' discusses symbolic contestation around Modi's Patel statue campaign and the rupturing of Modi's *surajya* narrative by Dalit counter mobilisation for an Ambedkar statue in Gujarat.

Considerable scholarly research exists that investigates the relationship between Hindutva politics and its inherent symbolism in identity formation specifically concentrated around the *Ram Janmabhoomi* (Ram's birth-site) campaign and the political subjectivities that the campaign constituted. The Hindu nationalist project has been explored incisively by scholars such as (Basu et al., 1993; Corbridge, 2000; Gopal, 1993; Jaffrelot, 1996; Ludden, 2005; Pandey, 1993), these works, though focusing on the communal subject formation, considered symbolism as a secondary phenomenon. By locating symbolic mobilisation as an inherent aspect of being political, this work mainstreams symbolic politics and participation as a primary unit of analysis.

Building on them, but differing from instrumentalist approaches to communal self-formation, I follow Hansen (1999, 2002).The most influential analyses insightful for

this research were Davis' 1996 *Iconography of Rama's Chariot* and Kapur's 1993 *Deity to Crusader: the changing iconography of Ram.* My work extends the meaning-making approach adopted in these texts. Since the late 1990s, many scholars have analysed Hindu nationalism outside of political strategies and communal politics, exploring the ideology as a mediating discourse, having a logic of diffused performative practices (Fuller, 1992; Hansen, 1999, 2002; Raminder Kaur, 2003). Fuller's and Kaur's work, for instance, analyse *Ganesh Chaturthi* (Ganesha's Birthday) celebrations in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra respectively to demonstrate the circulation of Hindu nationalist discourses and inscribe meaning to the festival's practices. By analysing the performative essence of Hindutva politics in Modi's election campaign and its practices, my work extends the scholarship of this academic re-orientation. Most crucially, my work extends and contributes to the analysis of the post-liberalisation phase of Hindutva practices (Fernandes, 2006; Rajagopal, 2001) that combines performative political action with visual practices to analyse the new phase of Hindu nationalism.

On 26 May 2014, Narendra Modi became the prime minister of India. He is one of the rare chief ministers from the non-Congress party who have been re-elected twice in Gujarat. A Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) *pracharak,*[68] he joined the ranks of the BJP in 1985. In 1998 he was promoted to the post of general secretary of the state BJP until he became the chief minister of the state in 2002. After years of being a political pariah because of his government's complicity in the 2002 pogrom against the Muslim minorities in the state of Gujarat, the eventual makeover to *Vikaspurush* (Development Man) transformed him into BJP's candidate for the top post. There are two aspects to his electoral campaign.

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[68] The Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) is the ideological and cultural mentor of its political wing, the BJP. *Pracharak* means a member/propagator of the organisation responsible for disseminating its ideology among the masses. There are clear established norms between the RSS and the party; members of the organisation are not supposed to interfere with party organisation unless required and appointed to do so. Modi was the regional organiser for the RSS from 1978 to 1985, and was overseeing areas of Surat and Vadodara, when he was officially moved and inducted into the BJP.

First, the agenda: this was the first big campaign for the BJP after the unsuccessful India Shining campaign of 2004, where politics of development and growth was emphasised with the tagline of "*ache din aane wale hai*" (Good days are coming). The combination of neo-liberalism and Hindutva has been a tried and tested formula for the BJP. The 2004 India Shining election campaign of the BJP was of a similar format – corporate money, high technology, catchy buzzwords and 'feel good' slogans. In the realm of formal electoral politics, the India Shining campaign gave much visibility to the new middle class consumer-citizen. "It represents an important instance of the ways in which the everyday practices, representations and the discourses of the new middle class can shape the more traditional realm of democratic and electoral politics although with unpredictable consequences" (Fernandes, 2006, p. 192). The election results, however, demonstrated that the voters clearly rejected the agenda and the idea of a *shining* India because they saw a deep discrepancy with their lived experiences: "[a]s with many of the early overestimations of India's '200 million strong' middle class, the BJP's campaign in effect mistakenly cast the shine of the new Indian middle class dream as a national reality" (Fernandes, 2006, pp. 86–87).

The clear rejection of the economic dream bubble aside, it was also a mandate against the divisive and communal politics of the BJP. After the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, the general election of 2004 was the first test case with regard to going to people to seek votes. The misfit of 'India Shining' was combined with the backdrop of the state-sponsored attacks on the Muslim minorities in Gujarat. The 2004 people's mandate was applauded for the fact that they chose pluralism and democratic ethos and rejected divisive politics and the symbolism of a shining India. However, in 2014, the agenda of an all-inclusive '*sabka saath sabka vikas*' (together with all, development for all) and a floating signifier in Modi as the harbinger of hope and change had an appeal among the masses. At the level of political subjectivities, as the chapter will

demonstrate, the 2014 mandate reflected an acceptance of Moditva's everyday symbolism and practices deeply rooted in majoritarianism and neo-liberal aspirational politics.

> Narendra Modi claimed that he would replicate at the national level what he had achieved in Gujarat in terms of development (*vikas*), and began his campaign for the prime ministership soon after he won the state election for the third time in December 2012. (Jaffrelot, 2015a, p. 151)

Second, the specific nature of the 2014 campaign itself, which was personality driven. Jaffrelot's (2013) scholarship has argued that Modi's election campaigns have followed a certain pattern of high tech populism within Gujarat, and 2014 was an extension of the same strategies at the national level. I demonstrate, based on my fieldwork, that while there was some continuity, Modi had to significantly alter his agenda of *Vikas* for a pan-India audience, starting with his first decision to pick two Lok Sabha constituencies – Vadodara and Varanasi – to contest the elections. The analysis in this chapter uses the analytical frame of *yatra* politics and *darshan* visual practices to scrutinize Modi's *Vikaspurush* campaign. The next section maps the spatial dimension of Modi's politics of development across the two parliamentary constituencies.

4.2   Mapping Spatial Developmentalism: From Vadodara to Varanasi

This section analyses the spatial dimension of Modi's politics of development by reformulating Hindutva's spatial strategies of pilgrimage and *yatra p*olitics[69] (Davis, 1996; Deshpande, 1998; Jaffrelot, 2009); it argues that both sites unfold as ethno-religious heterotopias[70]. With respect to politics of development, these sites emerge as counter-

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[69] Jaffrelot (2009), applies Turner's anthropological analysis of pilgrimage to the analysis of Hindutva politics to argue that Hindu nationalism has used both the dimensions of 'communitas features' and 'territorial symbolism' as a spatial strategy for its communal agendas.
[70] Foucault defines heterotopias as "such spaces that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24).

sites of real spaces – with Gujarat becoming 'India's development hub' and Varanasi evolving as a 'heterotopia of compensation'[71] – a site to be made as perfect as Gujarat.

4.2.1 Developmental rituals: Vadodara, of spectacular summits and the *yatras*

> Bhayion aur behno…desh aazad hua toh hamein swarajya mila…itne saal ho gaye lekin yeh desh surajya ke liye taras raha hain…Desh ko surajya kahin nazar nahi aa raha hain....'[72]

> [Brothers and sisters, when the country became independent we got self-governance, but it has been so many years and we are still craving for good governance, the country cannot see any good governance around.]

In Modi's public meeting held at Pavi Jetpur, he described his 2014 election campaign as *'Surajya nu Andolan'* (Movement for Good Governance).[73] In the narrative above he compares *'surajya'* and *'swarajya'* (self-rule) to draw a parallel between the British colonial rule and Congress. He asserted that India achieved *swarajya* when the colonisers left, but good governance was yet to be attained and that would be possible only by getting rid of Congress. His contention was based on Congress's indictment in various corruption scandals in its last term in office, along with absence of successful policy making. On the other hand, Modi's claim to fame was the success of the Gujarat growth model, based on his idea of *Surajya* (good governance), which transformed the state of Gujarat into the most sought after state for investment. Therefore, the agenda of good governance dominated Modi's 2014 election campaign.

In the post-liberalisation era, the investment-friendly image of any federal state has become the symbolic reference point for claims to a growth-led economy. The most obvious example is Chandrababu Naidu, former chief minister of Andhra Pradesh. In the heydays of liberalisation Naidu became the representative face of new federal leadership in attracting foreign capital which played an important role in Hyderabad

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[71] According to Foucault, "Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation" (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 27).

[72] Field notes: Modi's speech, Vikas rally, 29th September 2013, Rohini, New Delhi.

[73] Field notes: Modi's speech in the public meeting, 26th April 2014, Pavi Jetpur, Gujarat.

evolving into an IT (Information Technology) hub both nationally and globally. It is this trend that is mainstreamed and magnified with Gujarat under the leadership of Modi. The most crucial turnaround for Gujarat as a safe haven for investments nationally took place during the controversy over the Tata plant in Nandigram (West Bengal).[74] Tata Motors was immediately provided with an alternative site in Sanand (Gujarat) to set up its Nano car manufacturing facility by the then Chief Minister Modi in 2008. "Praising Modi for speedy allocation of about 1,100 acres of centrally located land, Tata said the company had a great deal of urgency in having a new location and was driven by the reputation of the state" (PTI, 2008). Gujarat's investment-friendly reputation can be traced back to specific economic policies that were undertaken by Modi from 2001-2014. The neoliberal economic policies combined with Gujarati sub-nationalism enabled the state of Gujarat to establish itself as the developmental hub of India (Jaffrelot, 2015b; Sud, 2012, 2008).

The reputation building involved politically and culturally projecting Gujarat as a state which prioritised economic growth. After 2002, the symbolic universe of Gujarat's politics was '*Modi-fied*' on two axes – first, Modi's christening as *Vikaspurush* and second, the narrative of Gujarati *asmita* (pride) (Jaffrelot, 2013, 2015b, 2016; Sud, 2012). The enmeshing of ethno-religious identity with neo–liberal politics became the foundation for Modi's 'theatre state'[75] as the developmental agenda was implemented through yearly rituals. These statist political rituals involve practices and programmes of performing development through material and welfarist redistribution. Further, by evolving demarcated repertoires for different social classes, the bureaucratic rational machinery of the state under Modi's developmental politics is made visible and operational for the

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[74] The issue relates to the withdrawal of the land allotted to Tata Motors (for the Nano Car Plant in Singur) by the CPI (M) government in 2006 by the Supreme Court on the charges of illegal acquisition. Further details can be found at: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/Singur-land-acquisition-issue-timeline/article14599981.ece

[75] A term coined by Geertz (1980) to describe the nature of the state in Balinese Negara that relied on spectacular performances and rituals.

citizen-subject to *see*. They are the ritual idioms through which the relationship between the state and its subjects are forged symbolically, as the reliance on the spectacular defines the hierarchy of power of the state *seeing* and *being seen* by its subjects.

The spectacular rituals of the developmental state, ranging from the 'Vibrant Gujarat' summits to the various *yatras* and *melas* (fairs), accomplish two important objectives. First, they serve the purpose of the regeneration and dispersal of the idea of the success of the Gujarat Model. Second, they enabled the circulation of the narrative of a unified Gujarati community. The reiteration of yearly rituals by showcasing a preferred reading and vision of development ensured the constant presence of the Gujarat state apparatus's bureaucracy in the public sphere amongst the people, forging continuity in the encounter with the state structures, beyond elections. Furthermore, they diffused Modi in people's every day, making him and the state dominate the political visual field. The presence of the state machinery (all bureaucrats) for all state events across different levels – block, district or state with the presence of the Chief Minister made development an *active happening.*

> Instead of a fundamental shift from state-led development orientation to market-led liberalisation, Gujarat demonstrates thwarted developmentalism giving way to politicised liberalisation, with an embedded state providing continuity between the phases. (Sud, 2012, p. 10)

The embedded state outlined by Sud above is performed by organising large-scale spectacular public events to make the masses aware of different government programmes. For instance, the appeal of the Vibrant Gujarat summits, *Garib Kalyan Melo* (Fair for the Welfare of the Poor), *Krishi Mahotsav* (Farmers' Fest) and *Shala Praveshotsav* (Annual School Enrolment Drive) lies in their symbolism, spectacularity and visibility. It also merges sacralisation with ethno-religious values of Hindutva and Gujarati sub-nationalism with these developmental practices.

The Vibrant Gujarat summits, held biannually since 2003, aim to create a business-friendly atmosphere within the neoliberal framework which, it was hoped, would transcend the 'riot-prone' image of Gujarat after the 2002 pogrom. The six summits held so far have played an important role in creating Gujarat's transition from the *investor-friendly* to India's *developmental hub*. As advocated by the government itself, "the brand 'Vibrant Gujarat' [which] began as an 'investors' summit' has now evolved into an ideal platform for knowledge sharing, social and business transformation" (Investors' Ready Reckoner, 2015). Under this regime, the pattern for economic planning shifted to private capital and investment-led growth in an effort to showcase the state as the best and safest place to invest capital. "The largest Indian companies have all invested in Gujarat more than before under Modi and their CEOs have been all praise for him during the recent meetings of 'Vibrant Gujarat', an annual function he had initiated" (Jaffrelot, 2013, p. 81). This strategy was premised on a state-guaranteed package including good governance, benefits and concessions for investors in terms of a fiscal and infrastructural support base, combined with capitalising on the mercantilist ethos of Gujaratis.

However the practices and values underlying the buoyancy of Vibrant Gujarat summits are enmeshed in an innate Gujaratiness of mercantilist ethos and Hinduness. Nirankar, a middle-class financial advisor who deals in the share market, describes his experience with and explanation for the success of the Gujarat model: *"Jahan pe risk ka appetite zyada hoga vahan pe Gujarati zaroor hoga that is a fact hamare yahan risk ka appetite bahut zyada hai particular to Gujarati people"*[76] [Wherever there is an appetite for risk-taking, there you will surely find a Gujarati; that is a fact. Here, there is an appetite for risk-taking and it is particular to Gujarati people]. The state also adheres to the convention of following the Hindu calendar when planning major events. Both the hallmarks of the Gujarat

[76] Interview with Nikhil Nirankar, 8th June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.

model, the Vibrant Gujarat summit and the International Kite festival, are held during the *Uttarayan* season.[77] Sud (2012) also highlights that the marketing of the Vibrant Gujarat summit and other such events is premised on the mercantile Hindu traditions of religious blessings for wealth creation. Both events are marketed on a large scale and organised spectacularly, weaving in the local with the global, economically and culturally. In a similar vein, Mehta and Mehta (2013) draw attention to the mobilisation around the Narmada Dam project during the 1990s when special *garbas*[78] were written during the popular festival of *Navratri*[79] in support of the dam.

The Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as exclusive enclaves of neoliberal sites became the spatial location for this growth model, redefining visually the representative shift from Nehruvian townships to zones. The combination of sub-nationalism and Hindutva transformed Gujarat as a spatial site, representing what I term as Hindu-Gujarati exceptionalism. On one hand, these summits and events are part of performing the growth story for the elite, aspirational urban middle classes in Gujarat; on the other hand, one observes that schemes and programmes initiated for the rest of the masses have a different format altogether, although they are still defined by spectacularity.[80] For instance, Modi started the *Garib Kalyan Melo* in (2009), a yearly re-distribution fair wherein beneficiaries of various government schemes, including Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Above Poverty Line (APL) members, widows, students, farmers and tribal populations are given aids such as bicycles or LPG gas cylinders depending on the provisions of each government schemes/programme from a stage set up for these events in each identified locality (Narendra Modi, 2012). The intention is to remove

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[77] *Uttarayan*, a Sanskrit term, is considered an auspicious period in the Hindu calendar for good health and wealth creation.
[78] *Garba* (womb) is a folk dance form from Gujarat; it represents life.
[79] *Navaratri* (Nine Nights) is a Hindu festival.
[80] Field note: 3rd June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.

middle-men and check corruption by ensuring people get benefits directly and are updated on different government schemes.

However, observing two of the schemes (*Krushi Mahotsav* and *Shala Praveshotsav*) in action during the fieldwork deconstructs the narrative of Gujarat's vibrancy.[81] At the inauguration both events required the full state administration, from the chief minister to the district administration, to be present to deliver the incentives directly to the people. The *Krushi Mahotsav* was held in Chhota Udepur district inaugurated by Anandiben, the current chief minister of Gujarat.[82] Under this programme, a mobile exhibition, '*Krushi Rath*', which involves a van customised into a chariot format, visits every village.[83] Experts accompanying the *Rath* cater to issues concerning farming problems and also advise and assist farmers by distributing free kits and giving technology-related training. On the other hand, the *Shala Praveshotsav* was introduced to counter the problem of school drop-out rates among children; aimed at encouraging parents to send their children to primary school every year, it takes place for three days in June across localities and villages. Attending one of these *praveshoutsavs* events at a primary school in Behrampura, one observes that the administrative wing of the government and the political wing of the BJP party work together to build confidence among the people.[84] It is interesting to observe this public function at a lower middle class Muslim locality. Solanki, a member of the BJP, commented on the relevance of holding such events in areas like Behrampura:

> When we go to programmes like *praveshoutsav*, along with Indian IAS (Indian Administrative Service), IPS (Indian Police Service) officers and MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly), there is an atmosphere that gets created. The government gives gifts to small kids, school bags and books are given and some toys are also given.

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[81] Field note: 3rd June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[82] Field note: 3rd June 2014, Chota Udepur, Gujarat. Modi started the practice of organising the annual Mahotsav in 2005.
[83] Rath yatra: a strategy used by the BJP during their overtly religious Ayodhya campaign in 1990. In Hinduism, the term rath yatra stands for "processions with chariots that punctuate the life of all sacred places" (Jaffrelot, 2009, p. 11).
[84] Field note: 20th June 2014, Behrampura, Ahmadabad.

> Before, kids use to cry while coming to school but now they come with a smile. Most of the people in this area are lower middle class, so for them it is good; now more kids come to school, now the condition for education is much better than before.[85]

Solanki's explanation above highlights two aspects – the nature of governmental benevolence and correspondingly the nature of need-based subjectivities that are constituted through such redistributive schemes. While some parents appeared to be exhibiting both a feeling of awe and assurance and the children were excited at receiving gifts (new school bags, notebooks and toys), the school administration appeared to be alert and occupied in ensuring that the function went well and as planned. Conversing with the teachers in charge of organising this annual function, I detected a general lack of enthusiasm for the initiative. The audience consisted of a few parents and some senior students as spectators, *seeing* the state performing development.[86] The patronage-based redistributive model is not new to the country's existing overall developmental paradigm or to Gujarat. However, what is specific to the Gujarat model are the sacralised spectacular dimension-reiterating yearly rituals combined with *raths* (chariots), *yatras* and *utsavs* (celebrations).[87]

The spatial strategy adopted by the state for rural material redistribution also engulfs the secular state's bureaucratic realm of development. A quick glance at the Gujarat government's websites and various flagship programmes and policies targeting different social groups reveals a universe of *utsavs* and *melas*, Sanskritised naming practices combined with incorporating Hindutva spatial strategies of pilgrimage for their dissemination (Deshpande, 1998; Jaffrelot, 2009). For instance, through the *Krushi Raths* discussed above, they capitalise on *yatras* (processions) as a spatial strategy for developmental politics. Unlike the BJP strategy of exploiting the politics of pilgrimage for the communal agenda (i.e. the Ayodhya agitation), under Modi's Gujarat we see the

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[85] Interview with Arjunbhai Solanki, 20th June 2014, Behrampura, Ahmadabad.
[86] Field note: 20th June 2014, Behrampura, Ahmadabad.
[87] For instance, during the Narmada Dam mobilisation perform the *'Mahasangam'* [confluence] and a *puja* of the Saraswati and the Narmada rivers with some 1500 *sadhus* (saints) (Dasgupta, 2005).

reverse. Pilgrimage spatial strategies are employed with two objectives – first, making the material-need satisfaction performative for the masses as part of visualising the growth story. Second, capitalising on the urban lower classes and rural neighbourhoods and giving these groups an impression that they, too, are being taken care of by the state. Behrampura and Chhota Udepur are performing the 'dotted line effect' (Deshpande, 1998), of being those sites where the vibrancy of the neo-liberal economic growth has not reached. The rural and urban divide coincides with the class dynamics underlying BJP electorates. The discriminatory nature of the differing performance of developmental practices across urban and rural areas helps the state to bridge the gap between the social classes. The urban *vibrant* model ensures that the interests of "upper caste dominated middle class and the OBC dominant 'neo-middle' class" (Jaffrelot, 2015b) are fulfilled, whereas, the rural and semi-urban areas are pulled into the growth story through the *dotted line* approach mainly targeting Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims.

In Gujarat, I argue, Modi re-interprets the *yatra* spatial strategy so deeply entrenched in religious and communal politics for the secular realm of development. Moreover, these sites of authoritative state presence and yearly reiteration of developmental rituals also circumscribe spaces of claim-making, discursively and visually. Modi's idea of good governance is beyond contestation and hence makes an alternative narrative to the Gujarat model invisible in its discourse while also defining the citizen-subject that the state benefactor is *willing to see*. The Narmada Dam mobilisation[88] and the anti-Muslim pogrom in 2002 display these blind spots – the Gujarat model's refusal to acknowledge dissent and non-Hindus. The *surajy*a model

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[88] The Sardar Sarover Dam project on the Narmada River was claimed to be beneficial for Gujaratis on the grounds that it would provide water for drinking and irrigation purposes. However, there were issues of tribal displacement, environmental violations and funding as raised by the NBA (*Narmada Bachaco Andolan)* (Movement to save Narmada) led by social activist Medha Patker. It is also interesting to note that the foundation for this dam was laid by Sardar Patel, during his time as the deputy prime minister in the 1960s. https://indianexpress.com/article/research/a-short-history-of-the-sardar-sarovar-dam-on-river-narmada-4847807/

premises itself on the 'state *seeing* and *being seen* by the citizens', in the process reducing citizen-subjects to mere need-based consumers. The performative imperative of these developmental rituals gives the impression of an all-providing benevolent state, but activates the participation of people as sacralised spectators. Gujarat, spatially, discursively and symbolically, represented a heterotopia of sacralised developmental zone by reiterating the growth story and ensured unity between the social classes through spectacular ethno-religious rituals. Post-election Modi's model of development was the archetype for pan-India but its most immediate roadmap was for Varanasi.

4.2.2 Replicating the smart city: Varanasi – of sacred geography and the Gujarat model

> I hope God grants me the power to serve this city and the *tehzeeb* (culture). I hope it [Varanasi] attains the status of the spiritual capital of the world. (Modi, quoted in Ramachandran, 2014)

> When I took over as CM [chief minister] in 2001, the condition of Sabarmati was similar. Switch to 2014 and things are very different! We have brought water from the Narmada and now water flows through the Sabarmati. A world-class Sabarmati River Front was created, which has emerged as a popular recreation and cultural spot in Ahmadabad. This is what we intend to replicate in Varanasi. (Modi, quoted in Jishnu, 2014)

Varanasi, as Modi's second constituency, both in its turf and tasks was a different site to Vadodara. For Modi, besides making a comeback for the BJP into the electoral race of UP, it involved appropriating Varanasi to mirror the Gujarat model. Modi's agenda for Varanasi, aimed to transform the spiritual capital of India into a 'smart city'. After filing his nomination, Modi said he envisioned "the holy city as a 'World Heritage Site' that is able to draw both devotees and those who wish to understand and absorb India's culture" (Kumar, 2014). The Hindutva spatial strategy informing the economic design of the smart city was to exploit the cosmic and *darshan* practices deep-seated in Varanasi.

The BJP's separate manifesto for Varanasi (*Varanasi Ghoshna Patr*) clearly outlined the economic roadmap for revamping it into a smart city focusing on "revival and development of *sarv-vidya* (all kinds of knowledge); *sarv kaushal* (all types of skills); *paryatan* (tourism); improving weavers' lot and, roads and sewers in the city" (ENS, 2014b). The manifesto aimed to reach out to all interests and sections of the local population, including striking a balance between spiritual and economic needs. The responses from the people wove the satisfaction of material needs with one's divine duty. Most of my Hindu respondents raised issues of roads, electricity, tourism and cleaning the Ganga (River Ganges) as their main concerns.[89] Manisingh, a resident of Benares working in the BHU, who joined the BJP campaign in their IT cell pointed out:

> Employment needs to be created here: weavers need to be given facilities, the condition of electricity is very bad, tourism needs to be promoted and there is also a matter of faith…We don't refer to Ganga as just Ganga, we say Mother Ganga and so there are lots of rites associated with it – prayers, recitals, fasts and festivities… There are many aspects of faith here…Banaras [Varanasi] is at the height of filth, so the first thing that needs to be done is the cleaning of Mother Ganga – so livelihood, employment, tourism and cleaning of Mother Ganga.[90]

Varanasi is interruptive of ordinary time and everyday space as it combines sacred space and rituals with the politics of development. This time, the spatial location selected by Modi and the BJP was real and actual unlike the utopian spatial ideal in Ayodhya during the Ram Temple campaign. The cultural-temporal timelessness and pilgrimage politics combines in a concrete sense here. Highlighting the significance of Varanasi as the centre of Hindu tradition, Eck (1983, p. 6) wrote, "There are few cities in India as traditionally Hindu and as symbolic of the whole of Hindu culture as the city of Benaras [Varanasi]". Going beyond the religious and the cultural, the city also has implications for the kind of visual practices embedded in it. "Hindus, however, the city they see is not only the city that meets the eye; it is also the city that engages the

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[89] Field note: 3rd May 2014, Varanasi, UP.
[90] Interview with Drighvendu Manisingh, 6th May 2014, BJP office, Varanasi, UP.

religious imagination" (p. 22). By invoking Varanasi the sacralised Hindu subjects are being invited to a developmental cosmos and thus also constituting a sacred political subject. The riverfronts, and the practices of ritual bathing and cremation gave this site an exclusive Hindu claim based on "sacred sightseeing" (p. 20). Just before filing his nomination papers on 24 April 2014 Modi said, "First I thought the BJP sent me here, then I thought I am going to Kashi, but after I came here, I feel Maa Ganga has called me. I feel like a child who has returned to his mother's lap" (Modi, quoted by Ramachandran, 2014). The reverence to the Ganga as the mother and the goddess plays a unifying role amongst all Hindus; "the Ganges carries an immense cultural and religious meaning for Hindus of every region and every sectarian persuasion" (Eck, 1983, p. 214). Although capitalising on Varanasi as a Hindu cosmic land underscored the narrative around the smart city project, the road show (campaign parade) clearly exhibited the overt caste-based consolidation.

The stated developmental objective of transforming Varanasi into a high-tech smart city seemed to be completely sidelined as Modi's road show began, after the filling of the nomination papers, from BHU. The city was painted in the typical saffron hue, marigold garlands, party flags, Modi masks and caps. A spectacular pilgrimage journey, Modi garlanded statues of Congress leaders along the pre-decided route, appropriating them into his majoritarian discourse. The performativity and symbolism of this usurpation unmasked the veneer of political balance that the BJP was trying to project – that they were centrist, while continuing to be hardcore national chauvinist and targeting a social unity along caste lines. The statues of leaders who were chosen to be part of this rally were hard-line Hindu chauvinist leaders whose legacy Modi wanted to appropriate. The road show mainstreamed the historical opposition lineage on the Hindu right that challenged the dominance of the Nehru-Gandhi leadership in India's political historiography.

Starting from BHU, the first statue that Modi garlanded was of Madan Mohan Malviya, the founder of the university. Malviya, "the principal opponent of the Nehrus in the United Province" (Jaffrelot, 2003a, p. 54) belonged to an upper caste Brahmin family and was instrumental in the creation of an aggressive Hindu political identity during colonial rule. Malviya established BHU in 1915 in reaction to the establishment of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). He had initiated a campaign for a Hindu university to be set up with Hindi as its medium of instruction, against the backdrop of the campaign establishing Hindi as the national language. "Malviya was unequivocally committed to the promotion of the formula 'Hindi, Hindu, and Hindustan' and the assertion of Hindu culture" (Hansen, 1999, p. 76). He activated a Hindu political identity and played an active role in ultimately setting up with Lala Lajpat Rai the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915. From honouring an aggressive Hindutva nationalist in Malviya, the next two leaders in line to be garlanded evidently displayed BJP's perspective towards the Muslim 'other'.

Vallabhbhai Patel's statue has had multiple levels of signification; known as the *Sardar* (supremo), he played an important role in the national integration of the country and thereby earned the title of the 'Iron Man of India'. He worked to convince the princely states to be part of the Indian union and, without his negotiations it was entirely possible that the three states of Kashmir, Junagadh and Hyderabad would not have joined. Hyderabad's unification had a crucial dimension with regard to the Nizam's (the monarch of the princely state of Hyderabad) defeat and the climax of Patel's victory. "It was also the culmination of the process of history that brought Muslim rule over a Hindu majority to an end" (R. Gandhi, 1990, p. 485). Through the lens of Hindutva politics, Patel is revered for his role in ensuring an undivided India – the *Akhand Bharat* (Integrated India). As the deputy prime minister, Patel was a strong critic of Nehruvian socialistic developmental strategy on land redistribution, property rights

and planning. He supported individual rights, private property and "opposed the creation of the planning commission" (Jaffrelot, 2003a, p. 45). He is also representative of the Hindu-Gujarati exceptionalism that Modi capitalised on to galvanise the upper caste Patel community to support him. The implication of appropriating Patel for his ethno-religious and caste-oriented benefits will be taken up in detail (see section 4.5).

This was followed by the statue of Vivekananda, who was known for his interfaith awareness and dissipating Hinduism onto the world stage. His writings were influential in positing the spiritual superiority of Hinduism over all other faiths. "Vivekananda's philosophy and practice thus represented a step toward the transformation of Hinduism from a signifier of religious faith to one of nationalist ideology" (Hansen, 1999, p. 70). Besides according a superior position to Hinduism, his ideas of tolerance and cultural syncretism showed an upfront disdain to Islam. Tolerance and inclusiveness were portrayed as the essence of true Hinduism whereas Vivekananda perceived Islam to be "doctrinal and intolerant" (p. 70). Weaving in Vivekananda thus represents an abstraction and the dispersal of Hinduism as a spiritual and cultural faith rather than a majoritarian religion. This was similar to Modi's practice in Gujarat of making Gujarati-Hindu exceptionalism the standard norm while reducing the Islamic faith and its followers to second-class citizens. Finally, having symbolically co-opted the upper castes and signalling assimilation to Muslims, Ambedkar was next in line. It is imperative for Hindutva politics and the BJP to reach out to the Dalit constituency to ensure a Hindu unity against the Muslim 'other'. However, the discussion on the controversy around the Patel vs. Ambedkar statue politics in Gujarat (discussed in section 4.5) spells out the upper caste rigidity of the Hindu right. The performative act of garlanding statues symbolically represented a tightrope walk between Sanskritisation and social engineering for the BJP. Modi's developmental cosmos gains the strong Hindutva foundation of social engineering by this subtle

balance between caste and class pushing aside the politics of development. Moreover, all the statue of leaders chosen for appropriation, despite belonging to the Congress party of the post-Independence era, had challenged the Gandhi-Nehru legacy.

However, despite all the efforts by the BJP and Modi's show of strength through the carefully routed road show to capitalise on sacredness and pilgrimage politics, Varanasi, with its syncretism and its politics challenged the appropriation symbolically and politically. The emergence of political opposition in the AAP under the leadership of Kejriwal provided an alternative symbolic register and discourse for the masses. BHU, the hub of political mobilisation during the campaign, was transformed into a contested terrain; it was not only where Modi's mobilisation started but was equally vigorously utilised by the AAP to provide an alternate agenda of good governance and secularism. Visually, the saffron wave was challenged by the AAP rallies, *jan sabhas*, *jhadoos* and *topis* on the streets and alleys of Varanasi. Besides the field of perception, the visible Muslim minority presence in the AAP campaigns was demonstrative of this possible political option, an opportunity that was absent in Vadodara. The BJP agenda and their manifesto did try to target and attract the *bunkers* (weaver community) who are predominantly Muslim into their fold, but despite Modi's attempts, the Muslim population asserted their antipathy towards him electorally and symbolically in Varanasi as I discuss later. Varanasi as a sacred site was assumed to fit comfortably into the BJP's electoral plan; interestingly, existence of an oppositional symbolic mobilisation by the AAP made it a more contested site by challenging the rather circumscribed nature of Hinduism represented by the symbolic habitus of Modi and the BJP. Unlike in Vadodara, the AAP nurtured the syncreticism of Varanasi to enable political subjectivities on the margins to assert themselves.

The next section takes the discussion forward by analysing the symbolic habitus that defines Modi's election campaign.

4.3   Developmental matrix: Of *darshan,* it's all about seeing

Figure 4.1: Vijay Shankhnand Rally, Lucknow, UP[91]

Modi at Lucknow rally:

Mein Vikas ki rajniti ka paksh le raha hun…mein desh ke netaon aur rajnataon se keh raha hun ki votebank ki rajniti chodo aur vikas ki rajniti par aao…Uttar Pradesh ke logon se mein puchana chahta hun …kya aapko bijli mili? [The crowd answers with a resounding Nahi!] Netaji zara Gujarat jaake dekho 24 ganthe/365 din bijli milti hai!*[92]*

[I am taking the side of the politics of development. I am saying to all leaders and politicians that give up vote-bank politics and adopt the politics of development. I would like to ask the people of Uttar Pradesh, did you get electricity? [The crowd answers with a resounding no!] Netaji, please go and see Gujarat gets 24 hours/365 days electricity.]

At the Kalol rally:

Ki gaya trees varsh thi ekaj emne record vagadeli …Secularism…Garibi…aa tu badu chaliya…arey aa vakte emne nathi padti kiya...Modi toh rozgar ni vaat karu chu , hu karu chu; Modi paani pahunchadvani baat kare chu, hu karu chu.[93]

[For the past thirty years they have been playing the same record of secularism, poverty. It would no longer work now, Modi talks about employment, Modi talks about providing water.]

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[91] Image taken by the author 2nd March 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[92] Field notes: Modi's speech 2nd March 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[93] Field notes: Modi's speech, 23rd April 2014, Kalol, Gujarat.

Modi's rallies and *jan sabhas,* as the above narratives show, are all about the 'development talk' – roads, electricity and water. On the ground, the analysis of the campaign depicts a rather sacred turf, going beyond the spatial geographies of assertion as discussed in (see section 1.2). The campaign slogans of *'Acche Din aane wale hai'* [Good days are on their way] and *'Abki baar Modi Sarkaar'* [This time, Modi's government] did for Modi what the "Yes, we can" campaign did for Obama but the resonance of these slogans were felt more in the mediatised sphere. On the field, the ambience, rally names and stage set-up resembled a sacred war ritual.

Figure 4.2: Maha Shankhanad Rally, Lucknow, UP[94]

Modi's election rallies were like clarion calls before waging a war. Even the survey of their names reflect this – from *Hunkar* rally (loud war cry) (Bihar) and *Vijay Sankhanaad* (rally to announce victory) (Lucknow) to *Dilli Vijay* (rally to win over Delhi) (Delhi). The *Vijay Sankhanaad* rally at Lucknow resembled a war ritual being performed.[95] As Figure 4.1 shows, huge portraits of Modi were wrapped around the four pillars of the stage and Vajpayee in the background welcomed the audience to the

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[94] Image taken by the author, 2nd March 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[95] Field notes: 2nd March 2014, Vijay Sankhanaad Rally, Lucknow, UP.

rally. Modi's arrival on stage was preceded by the saffron-clad *sadhus* (saints) sitting in the audience chanting *'har har modi; ghar ghar modi'* accompanied by conch calls. The chant, which is a modification of *'har har mahadev; ghar ghar mahadev'*, equates Modi with the mythological warrior king, Mahadev. Figure 4.2 displays the 'Modi *sena'* (Modi's army) in the audience: a pantheon of Modi supporters, all young men, wearing *Modi sena* caps completed the call for an awakened political action. This ritual was performed and repeated at all big Modi rallies although some aspects were tweaked to fit into specific local contexts.[96] For instance, in Lucknow, the image of Atal Bihari Vajpayee was used as the backdrop on the stage to legitimise Modi's own position organisationally and also to capitalise on Vajpayee's upper caste position, legacy and statesmanship. This developmental cosmos of the pervasive *Vikaspurush* and the sacred war rituals was combined with tech-savvy *chai-pe-charchas* to achieve the definitive microcosm which is unpacked in the following section

4.3.1 'Marut[97] Purush: transition from a divisive to a decisive leader

Vikaspurush, as Modi is famously known in Gujarat, became the theme around which he organised his campaign for the 2014 general election, staking claim on the national scale. It is, however, important to unpack what this idea of a *Vikaspurush* entails and that involves disentangling the man (*purush*) from development (*vikas*) to understand what Modi signifies.

To begin with, an aggressive masculine leader who is unabashed and unapologetic about his religious identity, i.e. Hinduness, is what Modi embodies. His refusal to wear the skull cap during the *Sadhhavna* rally in 2011 (PTI, 2011a) or to apologise for the 2002 riots (TNN, 2014b) represented a *Marut* virility – the Gujarati term used by Jaffrelot (2008) to describe someone who refuses to atone for or regret his

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[96] Field notes: All the big rallies that I attended in Delhi, Lucknow and Gujarat had the same sequence and format similar to a war-like preparation.

[97] Gujarati term used by Jaffrelot (2008) to refer to somebody who refuses to atone for or regret his acts.

acts. Modi's outright defiance stands out in comparison to other political leaders who have taken political and moral responsibility for any political violence against minorities under their regime. For instance, Singh's apology to the Sikh community on behalf of the Congress party for the anti-Sikh riots held in Delhi in 1984 (Saroor, 2011). Even Advani, who belonged to the BJP, expressed remorse after the demolition of the Babri Masjid (PTI, 2005). Modi, on the other hand has always expressed an obdurate denial. This masculine arrogance combined with his assertion that "Yes, I am a Hindu Nationalist" ("Yes, I am", 2013) is what is definitive about Modi, and has no parallels in Indian politics. It is the transmission, circulation and reception of this 'Modi-masculinity'[98] which underscores the politics of *Vikaspurush*.

Accompanying this masculine virility is Modi's paternalistic protectionism exemplified in the reference to his *chappanese chhaati* (56 inch) chest, in his election speeches. Modi thus plays a 'fatherlike' protector of Gujarat against the government at the centre as Jaffrelot (2013) points out in his analysis of the Gujarat assembly level campaign in 2012. This translated into *seeing* the people as subjects in need of protection rather than considering them as citizens to whom the political leadership should be accountable. Even in the 2014 campaign, Modi used the analogy of the *chowkidar* (watchman) to claim:

> Bhayion aur Behno, mein UP ki janata ko bharosa dena chahta hoon…mein dilli mein ek chowkidar ke roop mein hoon…dilli ki tijori par..Desh ki tijori par mein kisi ka panja nahi padne donga.[99]
>
> [Brothers and sisters, I would like to assure the people of Uttar Pradesh, I would be like a watchman in Delhi. I would not allow anybody's claw on Delhi's vault; on India's vault.]

He also projects himself as an all-pervasive leader who will ensure safety and security for all his people under his leadership unlike, he claims, his contemporaries. In this vein,

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[98]Term formulated by Shrivastava (2015).
[99] Field notes: Modi's speech, 2nd March 2014, Lucknow, UP.

he juxtaposes Singh's Sikh identity with his Hindu masculinity and virility wherein Singh is portrayed as an effeminate, weak and ineffective leader. At his Vikas rally Modi said, "*Dilli mein pradhanmantri Sardar hai…lekin asardar nahi*"[100] [Delhi has a Sardar (Sikh) prime minister…but not an effective one].

> [S]ome idea of the newness (and peculiarity) of Modi's mediated image can be derived from the fact that his masculinity was, in fact, *counterpoised* to that of a political opponent, incumbent Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, whose ethnic identity as a Sikh positioned him in the ranks of the 'martial races'. (Srivastava, 2015, p. 333)

In a "traditionally non-martial culture", as Suhurd (2008) also highlights, Modi's hyper-masculinity creates an atmosphere of unease and is also reflected in his ideas of patriotism, nationalism and manliness in politics.

The identification that he generates is a personal one with his supporters who perceive Modi as a member of their family. This filial affiliation was reflected the most when many of my respondents shared their grief at Modi leaving Gujarat once he had won the election.[101] Ganesh, one of my respondents, a school attendant belonging to the lower class, described his sense of loss after the result had been announced. Although he was elated that Modi had won, he said, *"Hamare main karta-dharta the…aisa lag raha hain ki Gujarat anaath ho gaya hain"*[102] [He is our main doer…it feels as though Gujarat has been orphaned]. Ganesh's affinity and affection reflects the overall feeling that people in Gujarat have towards Modi along with his image as a 'full-time chief minister', sacrificing his life to public service. Such dedicated public life is perceived to be ascetic-like as there is appreciation for renunciation within the Hindu worldview. It also contributes to papering over his non-acknowledgement of his marriage officially. Unifying RSS *pracharak* style asceticism with nativism defined his leadership style in Gujarat.

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[100] Field notes: Modi's speech, 29th September 2013, Vikas rally, Rohini, New Delhi.
[101] Field notes: June 2014, Gujarat.
[102] Interview with Ganesh, 20th June 2014, Behrampura, Gujarat.

However, his journey to Delhi demanded a shift from the *pracharak* style to a *Brand Modi* outlook. The native *Gujaratiness* had to be adjusted to consolidate his image outside Gujarat. Therefore during the election campaign one of his approaches was to accompany the 'Modi *Kurta*' with changing headgear to reflect/acknowledge specific regional and ethnic contexts. The *kurta* (ethnic shirt), one of the essentials of his brand, should be deconstructed beyond the sartorial as it represents certain continuities of political culture besides a much needed repackaging of his image. Modi therefore draws on the Nehru-Gandhi legacy on two counts. One, on the idea of popularising a sartorial choice as a brand; much like the Nehru jacket there is a parallel in the Modi *kurta* as an international brand. Modi with his kurta was referred to as a fashion icon by international press including the New York Times (Friedman, 2014) and Time magazine (Jenkins, 2014). Even Obama claimed that he wanted to wear one when he raised a toast at the banquet hosted in his honour by President Mukherjee (PTI, 2015). Branding aside, even the choice of experimenting with headgear was popularised by Nehru who, "put into practice his favourite maxim 'unity in diversity', and wore a variety of things on his head…. To this end he generally retained his *sherwani pyjama*, adding some foreign appendage to his dress, and it was often the headwear of the other that he chose" (Tarlo, 1996, p. 125).

Figure 4.3: Garvi, Gujarat State Emporium, New Delhi[103]

On the election trail in Delhi, I encountered a poster which read '*Modi Kurta &*
Pyjama are available here' (Figure 4.3) that welcomed visitors to *Garvi*, the Gujarat
Emporium. Utilising the regional centre for distribution of these *kurtas* demonstrates
how the sartorial choice of Brand Modi outside of Gujarat was disseminated. The linear
correlation between Modi's ethnic identification with Gujarati sub-nationalism was
played out through the Gujarat Emporium. Second, drawing on Gandhi, *Garvi* the
Gujarat Emporium played a similar role to that of the All-India Spinners Association
[AISA] in spreading *khadi* and *swadeshi* politics during the nationalist struggle. In a
similar vein, the Gujarat emporium can be considered as an effective approach to
connect with non-Gujaratis. Garvi, the hub of Gujarati pride along with conveying the
narrative of the success of the Gujarat model was also propagating and circulating its
favourite chief minister's sartorial choice – the Modi kurta.

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[103] Image taken by the author, 15th January 2014, Baba Khadak Singh Marg, New Delhi.

This strategy forged by Modi reveals the precision that goes into creating his brand. Chauhan, the owner of Jade Blue and Modi's tailor, has been associated with him since he was a *pracharak* and has trademarked this style.[104] Chauhan described with much excitement Modi's transition from a humble party worker wearing white trousers with *khadi* tunics to the chief minister of Gujarat wearing cotton or silk *kurtas* with short sleeves. Elated by Modi's victory, Chauhan elaborated on the Modi kurta's reception amongst the youth, increase in production due to international demand and new plans for the next venture planned, the 'Modi Jacket'.

> I had registered this name around two and a half years back. Now it has been 5-6 years since the label was started. From that time I felt that the name carries some power! Now the 'Modi Jacket', the one Modi *sahib* wears will also be launched. Now there is both national and international demand; people buy it as a souvenir. In the beginning, I remember only those aged 40 years and above used to wear it, but now everyone wears it – especially after the election. We used to make only big sizes 45-46, but now we also produce 38-40 and their demand has also increased[105]

The popularity of Modi *kurtas* amongst the upwardly mobile middle classes and men across age groups reflects not only the neo-liberal subject's consumption satisfaction but also their appreciation and awe of, and assertive allegiance with the masculinity and leadership symbolised by Modi. "Modi-masculinity stands at the juncture of new consumerist aspirations, the politics of Indian traditions and gender, and the re-fashioning of masculine identities" (Srivastava, 2015, p. 333). His 'masks' and 'tattoos' were the other repertories worn by his supporters during *Navratri* as a prelude to the election in Gujarat. "It is interesting to note that these were completely based on individual initiatives, rather than political party led" (Banerji, 2013).

The hyper-masculine Hindutva '*Marut Purush*' aligns with 'Brand Modi', the flag bearer of the neo-liberal growth model exemplified by the Gujarat model. It instantiates the process of dismantling practices of development embedded in state planning and

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[104] Interview with Bipin Chauhan, 18th June 2014, Jade Blue store, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.
[105] Interview with Bipin Chauhan, 18th June 2014, Jade Blue store, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.

redistribution foregrounded by the Nehruvian model of development. 'Modi-masculinity' was the antithesis to the nature of political leadership previously associated with the 'Five-Year Plan Hero' (Srivastava, 2015). The Gujarat model's dictum under Modi – 'minimum government; maximum governance' – resonated well with the middle classes due to their upward eco-social mobility and consequent non-dependence on state services in favour of private enterprise. This shift therefore also informs the practice of doing politics, as matters of policy-making are reduced to management-inspired governance.

> aisa humko national level pe bhi dekhne ko milega aur neat and clean politics hoga aisa hamara khud ka manana hai. The success of the Vibrant Gujarat Summits also gave him the name of 'CEO of India' – CEO ki tarah Gujarat chalate hain…toh India ko bhi chala sakte hain.[106]
>
> [One would see that at the national level also; now there would be neat and clean politics. The success of the Vibrant Gujarat summits also gave him the name of 'CEO of India' – he ran Gujarat as a CEO, will be able to run India like that as well.]

The narrative above highlights that with corporate backing as the mainstay of the Gujarat model Modi has earned the title of 'CEO' of Gujarat. His mantra of 'minimum government' has meant that it is about competence and performance in matters of resource management and service provision by the state.

One of the reasons for the middle class and the subaltern support being extended to Modi has to do with the rising insecurity among the masses. Neo-liberal economics has placed larger populations in a constant state of precariousness and marginalisation. Therefore a leader who represents sternness in decision-making himself becomes a reason to be valued rather than the nature of that decision-making or the subject matter itself. "Decisionism is an outcome of a deep craving for firm decisions by the political authority in a situation where things are perceived to be adrift" (Pandian & Roy, 2014, p. 30). This becomes all the more crucial when the incumbent

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[106] Interview with Nikhil Nirankar, 8th June 2014, Baroda, Gujarat.

government is displaying lack of leadership and poor governance. The policy paralysis of the UPA government had to be countered by a more visible and proactive performance of development. Hence, as discussed in the case of Gujarat, one of the most effective courses of action by which Modi has ensured that the narrative of development and the success of the Gujarat model is kept alive is through constant reiteration practices which give the impression that things are moving and progress is believed to be considerable and in sight. The success of the Gujarat model and its possible applicability on a pan-India level impose faith in him and his decisionism against the policy paralysis of the then leadership at the centre led by the Congress party.

The faith in Modi's leadership was not restricted to matters of growth and governance, but also extended to his capacity to check internal discord such as 'riot control' and ensuring security. Viswanathan (2013) argues that, in Modi, the middle class sees a problem solver who engages with their day-to-day anxieties in relation to minorities, economy or security, thereby converting these masses into a loyal support bank. Modi therefore appears to people as somebody who is in control of a situation and achieved social mobility, a quality that they believe themselves to be lacking.

> This technique of mediation suggests that a more sophisticated style of politics is taking shape when Modi invites his supporters to identify with him by wearing the same shirt, masking their face with his, and suggesting that he is ubiquitous. (Jaffrelot, 2015a, p. 349)

Consequently, the *Modi kurta*, *Modi* masks and *chai wallah* gained smooth acceptance across the classes. As the masses felt a sense of connection, Modi achieved visibility which also enabled him to dominate the field of perception, contributing to his aura of omnipotence. A complex mixture of subalternity, decisionism and aspirational politics underscores Modi's support base. His omnipotence has also had its fall outs. Modi's leadership and management within the BJP and state government was one of

authoritarian decision-making based on a near absence of a second tier of leadership. The personalisation of the campaign around Modi led to the BJP's organisational structure being sidelined, a practice unknown to a party that is strictly organised around cadres. Moreover, the organisational hierarchy was ignored, with senior leaders such as L.K.Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Jaswant Singh not being involved with the election-related decision making within the party. The issues within the party aside, a problem with this type of authoritarian leadership is that it leads to acceptance of one-upmanship in terms of decision making in governance related matters as also translating into tacit consent; most evident in the case of Gujarat during the majoritarian violence against Muslim minorities in 2002.

The acceptance of Modi's leadership is thus representative of a majoritarian consensus in which the citizen-subject that is represented through his leadership is a despondent, insecure consumerist and sacralised subject, who is gratified by seeing their leader and seeing themselves in him.

4.3.2   *Chai-pe-charcha*: absence of charcha…only *darshan*

One of the themes besides the deep-seated ethno-religiousness dominating the campaign was the emphasis on Modi as a *chai wallah* (tea vendor) and his journey far from his humble background:

> BJP ka loktantra dekhiye ki mujh jaise pichdi jati mein paida hua, garibi mein pala, chai bechte bechte zindagi chalane wale ek naujawan ko BJP mein pradhan mantri padd ka ummidvar bana diya.[107]

> [Look at the democracy within the BJP that a person like me, who belongs to a lower caste, lived in poverty and somebody who lived by selling tea has been made a prime ministerial candidate by the BJP.]

> tumhare maathe garibi ek nayi jaat che; hamare maathe garibi ek parijaat hai…bhayion aur behno maari garibi jeeva jayo prayog na thi..hu garibi ma janmo chu…hu garibi ma jeevyu chu…railway na dabba ma cha vechta agand vadhiyo chu.[108]

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[107]Field notes: Modi's speech, 2nd March 2014, Lucknow rally, UP.
[108]Field notes: Modi's Jansabha, 24th April 2014, Pologround, Vadodara, Gujarat.

[For you poverty may be a new category; we have known poverty. Brothers and sisters, my poverty is not an experiment. I was born in poverty, I have lived through poverty, have moved ahead by selling tea in railway compartments.]

Modi positioned his struggles against the dynasticism of the political opposition led by Congress. As the two narratives above capture, by targeting the political eliteness of Rahul Gandhi, his main opponent in the elections, he wanted to demonstrate that both the BJP and Modi were a common man's party, an identification usually associated with the Congress party in its earlier days after independence. Even during the 2007 election campaign the account of Modi as a tea vendor appeared in the public sphere as pointed out by Jaffrelot (2008); however, it did not then evolve into a full blown campaign strategy of *'chai-pe-charcha'* as it did in 2014. In response to a classist snide remark made by Congress leader Aiyar (TNN, 2014a) an independent non-profit strategist group called Citizens for Accountable Governance (CAG) gave it a creative spin. Consequently, Modi used this image of a tea vendor to counter the aristocratic background and political legacy of the Congress party:

emne aa takleef ye; emne takleef a che…ki aatla varsho thi amaru rajvada chaleche…amara dadi pradhanmantri, amara dada pradhanmantri, hamara nana paradhanmantri…aane aa ek chaiwalon ..na na chaiwalon aamne parkhand kare[109]

[But the problem; they are distressed that for so many years our kingdom was running; our grandmother prime minister, our grandfather prime minister, our maternal grandfather prime minister, this is a tea vendor , no, no, we cannot face a tea vendor.]

This strategy falls in line with brand Modi's strategy of 'techno-populism' since 2007; for instance Jaffrelot (2015a) discusses his use of 3D technology in 2012 to make his hologram appear on stage to audiences across different sites simultaneously. The *charcha* formula combines his image of lower caste and class identity with technology-infused techniques in an effort to reach out to all sections of the masses.

Chai-pe-charchas were launched in February 2014 (PTI, 2014b) as part of the poll campaign and were organised around issues of good governance (IANS, 2014),

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[109]Field notes: Modi's Jansabha, 24th April 2014, Pologround, Vadodara Gujarat.

women's empowerment (Narendra Modi, 2014b) and agrarian crisis (Narendra Modi, 2014a) in collaboration with the volunteers of CAG. An impromptu tea stall with a pair of TVs set the stage for the *charcha*. The Gujarat chief minister used a combination of various mediums such as satellite, internet and mobile as part of the campaign to directly interact with people across 30 locations of the 1000 in total. People could also exchange their opinions about and suggestions for the BJP election campaign through video conferencing. It was seen as the most technology-driven strategy organised at the pan-India level by the BJP organisers as they could manage discussions across many states simultaneously.

Figure 4.4: *Chai-pe-charcha*, R.K.Puram, New Delhi[110]

> 'Issues' as tea leaves have been brewed; solutions have been added as sugar; this tea vendor is quite amazing; drink this delightful cup of tea! Whether we wish to be served or ruled; we will think it over today; with the tea stall in the corner.'[111]

Just as the first few lines of the theme song above, as Figure 4.4 depicts, a makeshift *NaMo Chai Chaupal* (meeting place) was set up in the middle of a market

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[110] Image taken by the author, 8th March 2014, Sector 3, R.K.Puram, New Delhi.
[111] The full Hindi version of the campaign song can be found at: (CAG India, n.d.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tf97Kw5t_Ic

square in two middle class housing localities in Sectors 3 and 4 in R.K. Puram.[112] Attending one of the *charchas* (discussion) organised on the occasion of Women's Day (8th March 2014), Modi addressed questions from different regional centres regarding women's education, security and economic well-being.[113] His responses were based within the broader theme of what he described as "women from homemaker to nationmaker".[114] The aim was to establish direct contact with the masses and to involve them as equal participants in his future vision for India. By organising these *charchas* on issues of some specific importance – good governance, women's empowerment and agrarian crises – Modi also reached out to the three sections of voters across the rural and urban divide – upper/middle classes, women and farmers respectively.

> Discussion over a cup of tea; no expenses, no leaflet; it's the moment to do something. Let's discuss over a cup of tea. Along with a sip of tea with NaMo, we will discuss India's well-being. It's the turn of the masses; our brother has come to hear.[115]

The rest of the verses from the theme song above highlight that by replacing the traditional mode of campaigning such as distributing pamphlets, the use of technology aimed to create an accessible and accountable leader in Modi. He referred to these tea-stalls as 'footpath parliaments' as he aimed at transforming them into spatio-discursive spaces. The use of television sets made him ubiquitous; much like holograms, these sessions were telecast simultaneously across different locations.

This circulation, however, interrupted the temporal and spatial dynamics of a usual campaign. "Television yokes together different temporalities in one communicative event" (Rajagopal, 2001, pp. 4–5). Employing television and *darshan* iconography has been the mainstay of Hindutva mobilisation since the Ayodhya movement (Brosius, 2005; Ludden, 2005; Rajagopal, 2001). However, the paradigm

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[112] Field notes: 8th March 2014, R.K. Puram, New Delhi.
[113] Field notes: 8th March 2014, R.K. Puram, New Delhi.
[114] Field notes: Modi's introductory speech in the *Chai pe Charcha* session on Women's Empowerment.
[115] The full Hindi version of the theme song can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tf97Kw5t_Ic

shift in this campaign is that this time it is for an actual leader in Modi and not the mythical character of Ram'. While on one hand, television as a medium gives a break from the interactions that individuals have to deal with in everyday encounters and provides a space devoid of the liabilities of such social relations, "[o]n the other hand, it evokes feelings of closeness and reciprocity to unknown participants who may exist only in imagination" (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 5). This tendency is experienced effectively in the case of campaign strategies such as *chai-pe-charcha* in drawing participation from supporters. There was thus reasonable participation in two corresponding venues in R.K. Puram Sectors 3 and 4, which I attended in order to gauge the attendance and the nature of participation.[116]

In general, expecting people in middle class localities to come out for an event such as this is unusual, especially in New Delhi. However, it should be acknowledged here that the upper and middle classes are BJP's support base and in a government housing locality their presence is almost guaranteed. The local BJP supporters and office-bearers aside, there were a considerable number of non-party affiliated people in the crowd.[117] They had come to attend the *charcha* sessions mostly to see and hear Modi, although the free tea was certainly not unwelcome! In Sector 3, a group of residents waited patiently for the programme to commence, which was disrupted due to a technical snag. After about ten minutes of waiting, Prakash, a middle class government employee said to me "*Modiji ko dekhne aur sunanne ke liye aaye hai, wait karenge*" [I have come to see and hear Modiji, I will wait].[118] There were curious spectators as well, who did not continuously sit through the session but were interested to know what was going on and dispersed after a while. Hence a campaign like this certainly gave the BJP and Modi visibility on the city streets and market squares.

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[116] Field notes: 8th March 2014, R.K.Puram, New Delhi.
[117] Field notes: 8th March 2014, R.K.Puram, New Delhi.
[118] Field notes: conversation with Prakash, *chai-pe-charcha* session, 8th March 2014, Sector 3, R.K. Puram, New Delhi.

However, due to technical problems many sessions of *charchas* were disrupted – 'Farmers come with cups of woes, return dejected after no 'interaction' with Modi' ran one article headline in the *Indian Express* on 21 March 2014. These technical glitches reproduced the "liminal character of the technology" (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 25); although momentarily these settings spatially and socially constitute an affinity among the participants, it also demonstrates that for the masses, the medium of technology is only an additional way of *seeing* their leader; these failures disappoint them but do not affect their affiliation or identification with their leader. Much along the lines of Prakash's response, they are satisfied enough in just being recipients of what Modi has to say. Despite the theme of the campaign strategy emphasising *charcha* and an exercise in participatory democracy, the strictly controlled agenda and absence of discussion or space for vexing counter questions did not bother the participants, embodying thus, one could claim, non-discursive and non-critical political subjects.

The drawback of campaigns such as *chai-pe-charcha* is when the fundamental ideas informing vibrant discussion are lacking. The value of tea stalls lies in mutual dialogic exchange and participation – an organic discussion hub. As one observes, in an actual tea stall the active give and take of views is the essence of it as an *adda* (place of socialisation). There are passive participants, too, who do not contribute vocally to the conversation, but nod in approval or disapproval. Tea stalls become spatial discursive enclosures and social equalisers – a place for ordinary people from different socio-economic backgrounds to make sense of their everyday and being political, whether in the village or in the city. For a tea stall at the Varanasi *ghats*, for instance, it is part of the everyday, to have a *chai-pe-charcha*. However, here *chai-pe-charchas* ended up being monologues with Modi expressing his opinion on pre-decided themes. Even when questions were allowed, they were mostly pre-approved. However, when one observes

the fervour of a *charcha* carried over to an actual tea shop or in small groups in the market square, one can see the success of the *chai-pe-charcha* campaign strategy.

The practices of tea drinking and tea stalls are part of everyday socio-political life and have been utilised for various political agendas in the past. Bhadra (2005) traced the historical practices of tea drinking and also pointed out that it was equally embedded in social rituals and a referent of social refinement during the British Raj, along with being part of social opposition.[119] The Americans used the Boston Tea Party of 1773 to launch their War of Independence. Similarly, Gandhi in his chapter on 'Key to health' (1948) highlighted the ill-effects of tea and during the nationalist struggle there were strong instructions by him to not to drink tea. It is within this already existent socio-political milieu that the *'chai-pe-charcha' 'chai-wala'* and the *'namo chai'* need to be located. However, the practice of tea drinking in India is deep-seated in caste and class dynamics and hence cannot be easily passed off as a universal drink. "The habit grew differently according to the distinct caste and class positions of tea drinkers" (Bhadra, 2005, p.17). The caste and class positionality defines not only the choice between alternative options (such as coffee) but also what type of tea is preferred and who can afford that choice. For instance, Narayan (2014b) points out how older people of the upper caste in Bhojpur were the only people that could afford tea with milk and sugar. Going by the homogenising tendency in Modi's agenda, the campaign too conveniently overlooked this socio-economic embeddedness associated with tea and the practice of tea drinking. Overall, though the campaign made Modi visible enabled by mediatised intervention, ultimately these make-shift tea stalls turned out to be non-discursive spaces, the absence of a real dialogic *charcha* or interaction reducing even this exercise to an extension of *darshan* politics in constituting passive subjects.

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[119] Bhadra (2005) highlights that during the height of the campaign against oppression of plantation labourers in 1880s, renowned doctor Sunadri Mohan Das and nationalist leader Krishna Kumar Mitra gave up drinking tea in an act of protest.

Therefore the overall symbolic habitus of the campaign created uncritical passive supporters. The next section further interrogates the nature of these political subjects across different sections of supporters in Modi's two constituencies.

4.4 Political Subjectivity: Modi's Management of Hindutva Idioms and Parochial Ties

The election campaign of 2014 epitomised CEO Modi's approach to *Surajya* – project management of voter mobilisation. The strategy adopted balanced the traditional RSS organisational structure of targeting voters along with the event management approach provided by Prashant Kishore and his non-profit organisation, CAG. Modi's dependence on the RSS and adoption of the *page pramukh* (head of one electoral roll) strategy was instrumental in exploiting primordial ties based on caste, regional and religious affiliations. As discussed in previous sections, the visibility of Modi and the developmental *cosmos* combined with visual practices of *darshan* was strongly backed up by the organisational machinery of both the RSS and the BJP to ensure Hindu consolidation and successfully translate support into actual votes. The limitations of 'mediatised populism' therefore become more evident here; my own fieldwork with various campaign groups of BJP both in Vadodara and Varanasi depicted that while the social media campaign might have provided more visibility and data analysis, it was the traditional methods based on organisational campaigning and Hindutva symbolism that ensured Modi's victory.

RSS's organisational network, Narayan (2014a) argues, provided a systematic mechanism of feedback on Modi's rallies to electoral polling booth level management, running parallel to the BJP's. Many of the campaign strategies were replicated; for instance, the tried and tested *page pramukh* strategy was first used effectively in the

Gujarat assembly election, and had ensured Modi's victory three times, said Dalal,[120] the BJP leader from Vadodara. As a means of voter mobilisation, Dalal added that each *pramukh* was entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that voters on the 'page' of the electoral roll were engaged effectively at least a month before voting. It was also their responsibility to ensure that they came out and voted on the date of polling. This strategy was forcefully spearheaded by RSS in Varanasi (Jha, 2014; Narayan, 2014a). In the field therefore, the campaign group used a combination of traditional knowledge with modern techniques. The RSS *pracharaks,* BJP party workers, were accompanied by the CAG tech-savvy volunteers known as the 'Blue Brigade'. CAG worked in tandem with the BJP and the RSS during the campaign across different states. The CAG officially introduced the project management approach to Indian elections in Modi's campaign, thereby extending the marketing and business strategy to political campaigning; this technique at the state level was successfully employed by the AAP in its electoral debut in 2013. "The CAG's job in the Modi campaign encompassed analytics, social media, technology and campaign management" (Sruthijith KK, 2014). They were also responsible for two innovative campaigns the *chai-pe-charcha* and the Run for Unity (see section 4.5) campaigns, thus reiterating my point that the basic framework for mobilisation on the ground was the traditional organisational campaigning based on caste and class dynamics.

For instance, the ensemble of people who were chosen to be Modi's nominators, both in Vadodara and Varanasi, represented the caste and class dynamics that the BJP had aimed to consolidate. In Vadodara, all the proposers were party loyalists and represented a balanced combination of classes from the royal Rajmata Shubhangini Raje Gaekwad to the lowest, Kiran Mahida, a tea vendor; Varanasi also followed in a similar vein combined with the cultural backdrop of the holy city. Madan

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[120] Interview with Ghanshyam Dalal, 16th June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.

Mohan Malviya's grandson, Giridhar Malaviya a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court, proposed Modi's candidature. He was accompanied by Padma Vibhushan Chandu Lal Mishra, a noted classical singer from Varanasi, boatman Virbhadra Nishad and Asok who represented the dominant weaver community. Literally, all four proposers were also representing the four dominant cultural aspects of Varanasi – the Ganga, Literacy, music and *bunkars* (the dominant weaving industry) with the caste/religious identity embedded in it. Following the campaign, both in Vadodara and Varanasi, gave a sense of how *Moditva* was being operationalised.

> It has also emerged as the much-publicised contentious field upon which the interplay of collective desires, aspirations, and perceived obstacles to those takes place. Along with that, the idea of the possibility of change and a better future promised by Modi inspired a younger generation that was largely not interested or alienated from the world of politics (Ravinder Kaur, 2015, p. 324).

The idea of 'good times' had become part of the normal discourse for people, especially the aspirational youth, who believed in the idea of Modi's *vikas*.[121] Therefore, despite the absence of any effective oppositional force in Vadodara, the nature of campaign was very effective because of a huge youth contingent. The base of the campaigning comprised of committed BJP activists and workers. The real story was Varanasi because it was a more contested site than Vadodara. The first-timers, not just the youth, took to campaigning and politics because of Modi, across class, caste and professional backgrounds. Manisingh, an assistant professor at BHU who was in charge of the IT cell during the campaign at the BJP office in Varanasi, describes the composition of the 'war room' as the IT cell was known:

> Most of the volunteers who are working are here and joined because of Modiji; they are so spirited for Modiji and against corruption. Here the IT cell is being led by somebody from BHU IT. The rest of them are from different backgrounds – advocates, university teachers, professors, RTI activists and some NRIs as well have come to extend support.

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[121] Field note: 10th April 2014: many of my young respondents, who were first timers from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) were mostly in active campaigning because of Modi.

Some people from the south and Delhi have also come. All of them are volunteers and have so much angst that in today's context they can only see Modiji.[122]

Manisingh's account shows the range of middle class professionals who were actively involved at different stages of campaign management in Varanasi. He himself was a first timer, as he said:

I myself joined because of Modiji; until now I was also just a sympathiser. I have never worked as an active member, but now looking at the condition of the country, I decided. If Modiji was not the candidate, I doubt whether I would have taken up campaigning.[123]

Varanasi was an interesting site, because the supporters I was following had come from other states to campaign for the first time. Besides assessing the receptivity of the campaign amongst the people, I could also observe how these first-time political activists were learning and improvising as they went, from pamphlet distribution to interacting with groups of people along the *ghats* or parks, about Modi and his *vikas* agenda.[124] One, Joshi, software engineer who came down from Mumbai to campaign in Varanasi, told me:

As a person I have always been apolitical…Although I would always cast my vote, I never actively tried to understand what the political system is…I sit on the internet a lot so was reading about what has been happening…I felt that if I was in Varanasi I could contribute in a more holistic manner so I decided to volunteer and got in touch through the BJP website…If Modi was not the candidate I would not have come. I don't know much about the BJP as a party but I am here for Modi.[125]

Joshi became a BJP volunteer by just giving a missed call on the mobile number mentioned in the BJP website. From the many young men volunteers from Andhra and Gurgaon to the young women who were part of the campaign teams, all displayed similar traits, being non-political or anti-politics until Modi's candidature.[126]

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122 Interview with Drighvendu Manisingh, 6th May 2014, BJP office, Varanasi, UP.
123 Interview with Drighvendu Manisingh, 6th May 2014, BJP office, Varanasi, UP.
124 Field note: 5th May 2014, Varanasi, UP.
125 Interview with Chetan Joshi, 4th May 2014, BJP office, Varanasi, UP.
126 Field note: May 2014, Varanasi, UP.

> Mere saath team mein youngsters zyada hain ,yeh alag baat hai ki voh itna politically judi hui nahi hain aur inn cheezon ke bare mein unko zyada andaza nahi hai …lekin unme ek utsah hai aur dikhta hain Modiji ke liye.[127]

> [I have more youngsters in my team; it's a different matter that they are not so politically involved and don't know many of the aspects, but their motivation for Modiji is very evident.]

Sulekha, the leader of the women's wing, highlights above, the lack of political knowledge amongst the young girls who became volunteers and were part of her campaign team. But it was not just limited to youngsters who became more politically active. In general, the female support base for Modi has been strong and extremely visible.

4.4.1   'Vadil'[128] – the paterfamilias

The gendered nature of political participation for women reflects the affinity to the idea of Modi's resolute masculinity, both with regard to developmental politics and political mobilisation. In Hindutva politics gender roles are constituted within hegemonic notions of femininity and motherhood. The conceptual frame of "*Matrishakti*" (R. Kapur & Cossman, 1993, p. 100) becomes the overarching lens to assess women's participation. *Matrishakti* (maternal power) within Hindutva politics is based on essentialist gender-based roles for women that emphasise their role as mothers and caregivers. Even their perception as beneficiaries of developmental programmes or as political participation is within the same framework. In addition to analysing the gendered nature of the mobilisation, it is also necessary to analyse the relations between men and women in this case (Chhachhi, 1989; Srivastava, 2015). *Vikaspurush's* success story is therefore based on the complementary feminine identity that enhances a particularised masculine identity.

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[127] Interview with Sulekha, 5th May 2014, BJP office, Varanasi, UP.
[128] I owe this term of reference to one of my respondents. During her interview she referred to Modi as *'ghar ke vadil'* – the head of the family through the conversation. I am using this term to describe the overall nature of affinity that women supporters have towards Modi.

"*Gujarat ka nagrik agar PM bane toh Gujarat ke Nagrik ko samarthan dena chahiye; pehle matdan behno phir rasoi*"[129] [If a Gujarati citizen is staking claim to become the PM then its citizens should support him; sisters vote first, then kitchen]. The appeal to vote made to women supporters during the *Mahila Morcha* (women's wing) meeting outlines the linear correlation between Modi and Gujarati *asmita.* The emphasis on *'matdan'* (vote) is crucial with reference to women subjects as a constituency here because the stress is on the 'duty to vote'; it does not invoke the other aspect of rights claiming as equal women citizens. Modi, as the representative of Gujarati pride, and women supporters as custodians and repositories of sub-national Gujarati culture were expected to perform the role of ensuring that he won in Vadodara (by voting), and hence preserve the honour of the state. Women supporters experience an acknowledgement of the worth of their political franchise in the service of their state, its honour and its leader. They are called upon to perform their role as a 'Gujarati voter' and set aside their home-maker role to perform this function for the larger benefit of the state/nation, but the expectation being that the gendered role will be reverted back to once the state/nation has sufficiently capitalised their 'mandate'.

> Narendra Bhai ek sher che; apna bhai ek sher che; aapna bhai apna raksha karen che. Apna mukhyamantri aapna behno ki raksha karuchu ki nahi? Karu chu [women in the audience respond][130]

> [Narendra Bhai is a lion, our brother is a lion; our brother protects us. Our chief minister protects his sisters, doesn't he? Yes! [women in the audience respond].

The enthused response from the crowd as well as representing the genuine adulation for their chief minister who respects women also reveals a particular kind of women's subjectivity which believes the role of an ideal man in a household to be that of protecting 'his' women. The same analogy is extended to Modi and the role he plays

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[129]Field notes: Vadodara Mayor, Bharat Dangar, during the women's meeting, 20th April 2014, Sayyajiganj, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[130] Field notes: Vidyaben, president, BJP Mahila Morcha, during the meeting, 20th April 2014, Sayyajiganj, Vadodara, Gujarat.

as the 'patriarch' of the Gujarati family, safeguarding the interests of women as if they were his mothers, sisters and daughters. The narrative of masculine protection/security is extended to the pan-India level as we shift from Gujarat to Lucknow.

> mein bharat ki saari mahilaon ko kahungi aapka sabse bada samman agar desh mein koi rakh sakta hai toh voh Narendra Modi hai..aap unko apna ashirwad dijiye…agar desh ko bachana hai toh Narendra Modi ko PM banana hai aur usme koi kasar nahi chodna hai'
>
> [I would like to say to all the women of India that if there is anyone who can ensure your respect in this country that is Narendra Modi. You should give him your blessings. If the country has to be saved then Narendra Modi should be made the PM and no stone should be left unturned to achieve this.]

Bharti's[131] call for women's support above is embedded in Hindutva's conception of nationalism which symbolically identifies the nation as the *Bharat Mata* (Motherland), but invariably denigrates the feminine while reinforcing the masculine (Bachetta, 2004). Furthermore, the narrative of 'saving the country' again calls on women's role to play their part in protecting the interests of the nation.

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[131] Uma Bharti: a female renunciant (sadhvi) and is prominent member of the Sangh Parivar. Bharti came to prominence during the Ayodhya mobilisation with her fiery speeches and was present during the demolition of the Babri mosque along with prominent BJP leaders such as Murli Manohar Joshi and L.K.Advani in 1991. She has been the Minister for Drinking Water and Sanitation since 2014.

Figure 4.5: BJP women supporters at Lucknow rally, UP[132]

sabhi ladies ke haath mein Kamal lagane ka…hamare BJP ka Kamal ka jo nishaan hain..toh Modiji ne kaha bhai haath uthega toh panja dikhega ..toh panja nahi dikhna chahiye kamal hi dikhna chahiye..lekin ab haath mein kamal lagaye kaise ..toh Mehndi se shaadi mein jaise karte hai Kamal haath mein bana do …toh jab tak mehndi rahegi tab tak kamal bhi rahega ..toh idea unka bahut badhiya tha aur usme bhi Ladies samne se aa kar bol rahi thi ki apne ko kamal lagao..itna response tha.[133]

[To have the lotus imprinted on every palm; our BJP's symbol is the lotus. Modiji said when we raise our hands, the palm is shown, but the palm should not been seen; only the lotus should be seen. But now the question was how to get the lotus on our hands. So this is how it is done at weddings; you draw the lotus by using henna and so as long as there is henna the lotus will stay. This idea of his was very good; the response was such that ladies would come up by themselves and get the lotus drawn on their hands.]

Figure 4.5 displays middle class women supporters of BJP with *kamal mehendi*. A clever BJP strategy to visualise its symbol, the *kamal* (lotus), by applying the ceremonially auspicious *mehndi* (henna) was popular among women supporters. BJP capitalises on female solidarities that are embedded in familial and ritualistic networks and re-contextualised and abstracted the henna ceremony for political action from its entrenchment in Hindu/Islamic marriage rituals. The bride's henna ceremony is an integral part of the marriage ritual which symbolises notions of patriarchal purity, social

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[132]Image taken by the author, 2nd March 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[133] Interview with Jaishreeben, 5th June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.

hierarchy and rites of passage. However, the sacred dimension of the *mehendi* ritual has been de-contextualised both from its gendered and Hindu ritualistic frame due to commercialisation of religious rituals leading to its sacredness being dispersed into the secular realm. Furthermore, the hegemonic electronic media representations in popular films and drama series of such sacred rituals have led to them being reduced to practices of leisure, auspiciousness and enjoyment, bereft of any religious connotations. Stretching the practice to the political realm, the BJP employed an embodied campaign strategy, which used the henna cone to write 'NaMo' and draw the BJP lotus symbol on women's palms. Apart from giving more visibility to the lotus it was a strong counter to the rival Congress party's symbol, the palm.

> toh sabke haath mein hamne Kamal Mehndi rakhi thi, jaise Narendra Modi sahib ki shaadi hai aur humein tayyari mein jana hai , hum aise prachar karte the ki apke ghar mein shaadi ho toh hap kaise tayyari karte ho…vaise hi Narendra bhai bhale hi shaadi nai kiye …lekin aap aisa maan lena ki yeh tareek hai..Modi sahib ki shaadi hai toh apka jaana hai aur uss din Kamal ka batan dabana hai[134]

> [So we embedded the lotus by using henna on every hand, as if it was Narendra Modi Saheb's wedding and we had to do the preparations. We used to campaign as though if there is a wedding at your home, then how would you do all the arrangements…in the same way even though Narendra Bhai is not married ...but you think that this is the date. Its Modi sahib's wedding and you have to go and press the button for the lotus.]

The sheer excitement with which women activists would engage in this campaign action reflected their affection for Modi as a 'member of their family' – as if they were preparing for the wedding of their 'brother'.[135] It is interesting to note that Modi's 'official' unmarried status is tacitly accepted and appreciated as Sonalben's narrative above highlights "*Narendra bhai bhale hi shaadi nai kiye*" [even though Narendra Bhai is not married]. The fact that Modi never acknowledges his marriage or his wife in the public realm is left unquestioned and disregarded as a matter of concern.

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[134] Interview with Sonal, member of Mahila Morcha, 10th June 2014, Chhota Udepur, Gujarat.
[135] Field notes: 15th April 2014, attending one of the henna sessions during the campaign, Vadodara, Gujarat.

The *kamal mehndi* campaign reached out to Hindu women across classes and castes. During the fieldwork in both Vadodara and Varanasi, while following the women's wing in their campaign, I observed that the women who agreed to have the lotus hennaed on their hands were all Hindus, both lower and upper caste. As far as class connotations were concerned, lower class women viewed the practice as part of a socio-cultural ritual, whereas for upper class women it was like a tattoo to flaunt.[136] The campaign thus resonated strongly with Hindu women supporters. The ceremonial enactment of rituals is a familiar Hindutva strategy through which the distinctions between the public and the private, the political and the religious are erased. Sarkar and Bhutalia (1995) argue that Hindutva strategy involves presenting their cause as something that Hindu women should identify with across caste or community. An assessment made in the context of women's participation during the Ayodhya campaign can be extended to the case of the Modi campaign wherein women are situated within the intersection of Hindu rituals, political role and agency. The *kamal mehndi* campaign can be situated within the same framework of mobilising women through the analogy of family-oriented marriage rituals.

Whether at his rallies or campaigns, women supporters were the backbone of the Modi wave; many were in the audience just to see and hear him and were determined to make Modi the next prime minister. Most of them were not members of the BJP, but had decided to support or volunteer for him because they believed that Modi could deliver, especially in matters of women's safety.[137] Many were housewives and had organised themselves in groups, coming from as far away as Gandhinagar. Savitriben elaborated on her reason for coming to the rally: *"Narendra Modi ko sunane ke liye aaye hai…party ke member toh nahi hai lekin Modi ke liye aaye hai…Modi Sahab ko PM*

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[136] Field notes: 15th April 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[137] Field notes: 23rd April 2014, Kalol rally, Gujarat.

banana ke liye"[138] [We have come to hear Narendra Modi; we are not members of the party but have come for Modi, to make Modi Sahib the PM]. The female support base identified with Modi on the ground of developmental benefits that have trickled down to them, enhancement of women's security and his personality. As voters, many of the respondents claimed what they appreciated most about Modi's governance was his success in developmental programmes, both in terms of overall growth and the starting of specific policies and programmes such as a women's helpline, *Kanya Kelavani* (Girl's Education), *Anganwadi* programmes that targeted women and above all a 'safe' environment for women in the state of Gujarat.

> If I say with regard to Baroda, the *Navaratri* festival is Baroda's identity. Then women roam around until late at night, until 3 or 4. It is safe. That is why they are able to roam around. Second is the *Ganapati* festival; in that, too, women with their families can go and see the *Ganapati*, so our Gujarat and Baroda is safe for our women. Also, there are small jobs made available for women, which have also been taken up by women. And since it is safe, the family also feels that since you are safe you can go out and work.[139]

Yameniben's account above highlights the immense sense of security that women feel in Gujarat; many of them further emphasise that the sense of security comes from the fact that the Modi government has ensured that the law and order system is effective and accountable.[140] However, Gujarat's hallmark of safety, protection and mobility for women should be further probed for the nature of 'paternalistic protection' that it entails. During fieldwork in Gujarat, both in Vadodara and Ahmadabad, I observed during the daytime a lot of young girls who dominate the streets with their Kinetic Honda scooters and at night out with their families. In general, there is a considerable female presence in the public sphere. My own experience in the field made this 'safe' space easier to navigate.[141] However, the point of concern is the idea of this safety is entrenched in the patriarchal narrative of protecting 'our women'.

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[138] Field notes: One of the women supporters who had come to attend Modi's Kalol Rally, Gujarat.
[139] Interview with Yaminiben, 9th June 2014, Baroda, Gujarat.
[140] Field notes: 23rd April 2014, Kallol Rally, Gujarat.
[141] Field notes: 2nd April 2014, Gujarat.

At night, most of them would be usually accompanied by a male. Furthermore there is an aspect of familial consent that underlies 'allowing' women to work or enter the public sphere, hence the emphasis given to parental permission and obedience that determines any female mobility, whether economic or social. The visibility of women in the public sphere is entrenched in filial benevolence conferred on those obedient women who toe the line according to patriarchal norms.

> mahila suraksha sabse pehli baat, beti bachao, berozgari door hui hai, Narmada ka paani saurashtr tak milne laga hai, brashtachar kam hua hai aur sarkar ka kaam systematic ho gaya hai.[142]

> [The first important thing is safety of women, save the girl child, unemployment has reduced, Narmada's water is now available until Saurashtra, corruption has reduced and government's work has become more systematic.]

At the Kallol rally, on being asked to list what, according to them, would be the highlights of Modi's chief ministership in Gujarat they claimed the above ranging from issues of girl child protection to checking corruption. Modi is thus perceived by women voters as somebody who is capable of effectively taking care of their interests and also under whose leadership the institutional structures would be made to take care of them. Most of them identify directly with his personality and leadership skills.

> Jab se Modi sarkar aayi hai tabse kaam thoda badne laga hai..hamein ek role model bana diya hai aur ek nai pehchan de di hai..ek uniform diya hai, award bhi diya hai..hamari izzat bani, society mein samman diya hai aur kaam karne ka ek utsah aata hai aur sakhi mandal mein hum regularly meeting bhi karte hai[143]

> [Since Modi's government has come, work has increased; we have been given role models and we have a new identity, we have new uniforms, new awards... also, we have been given some honour. We get more respect from society and there is more motivation to work and we regularly organise our Sakhimandal meetings as well.]

Echoing the voice of all the others in her group, Jituben summed up in her narrative above how Modi's intervention has contributed to enhancing their status, profession and everyday life as *anganwadi* workers. It was interesting to note that of the

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[142] Field note: women respondents' list of Modi's achievement at Kalol rally.
[143] Interview with Jituben, 9th June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.

thirty *anganwadi* workers in this meeting, there were only two Muslim women.[144] The respondents expressed a sense of self-worth with the visibility that the adoption of a new uniform sari brought, as all of them were enthused about being referred to as 'madam' and having an identity of their own.[145] Along with government initiatives such as *sakhi mandals,*[146] they all claimed that they have learnt to talk to other women and also in public spaces about health and nutrition, open bank accounts and manage their own savings. Modi is considered in high regard, because he is seen as honouring and respecting *anganwadi* workers for their selfless work, as the *Mata Yashoda* award was instituted by him, to be given annually to the best *anganwadi* worker.

However, an *anganwadi* worker draped in the uniformed sari signified *Matrishakti* juxtaposed with development. The identity enhancer award, *Mata Yashoda*, exhibits the Hindutva choice of female symbols, to set as the standard to be aimed for by all women. *Yashoda* is the foster mother of Krishna according to ancient Hindu texts and thus signifies women as the epitome of love and sacrifice and as natural caregivers –the sub-text being, of course, that *anganwadi* workers should take care of all children just as *Yashoda* did of Krishna. The programme 'call to women to make Gujarat a malnutrition free state' wherein women are trained to better manage child nutrition, household resources and food provisioning, absolves men of all these responsibilities whether within the household or the larger community. Celebrating and honouring women as mothers and caregivers is the most potent way of policing women's roles, even if they are out in the public sphere.

The flagship development programmes for women in Gujarat have been anchored in their role as 'homemakers'. *Beti Bachao* (Save the Girl Child)*, Kanya Kelavani*

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[144] Field note: 11th June 2014, focus group interview/interaction with *anganwadi* workers, Vadodara, Gujarat

[145] Field note: 11th June 2014, focus group interview/interaction with *anganwadi* workers, Vadodara, Gujarat.

[146] *Sakhi mandals* is a Gujarat government initiative for women belonging to the BPL category and helps them to have financial savings and also helps in micro-financing small-scale business initiatives.

(Educating the girl child), *Sakhi Mandal Yojana* (rural women's credit scheme) and the *anganwadi* schemes – the emphasis is on their traditional role in intra-family/intra-community preservation. While each one targets core issues such as protecting girl children, girls' education, financial savings, health and nutrition, they are couched in the gendered and patronising understanding of the role of Hindu women in the society. So even when the nutritional intake of young girls becomes part of the ICDS programme, the focus on young girls is mainly because of their gendered role as 'future mothers'. This patriarchal lens denies the value and well-being of female children outside of these prescribed roles. The spectacular performative aspect of these schemes resonates with the nature of developmental *yatras* and *utsavs*. The two aspects of motherhood and honour are deeply problematic gendered roles because they perform the purpose of elevating women to a higher status of 'sacrifice' and godly footing. Just as the presence of men in uniform such as the police represents that the state is there to ensure the safety and security of its citizens, an *anganwadi* worker wearing a uniform sari signified circulating Modi's growth story.

Moreover, many of the young girls and women who participated in the Modi campaign as activists for the first time in Varanasi felt empowered as they were out of their homes, outside of domestic roles and doing political work were mostly lower middle and middle class in composition; this was also the case in Vadodara and Ahmadabad. But as Basu (1998) argues, women's activism within Hindutva politics does not change or challenge patriarchal hierarchy either at home or outside. In this vein, women's participation and visibility in the Modi campaign seems to reproduce filial and feminine subjectivity without disturbing hierarchies.

4.4.2 Turning a blind eye: invisible Muslims

> "Netaji aapke ek saal mein 250 dange hue hai…Gujarat mein das saal mein ek bhi danga nahi hua .kahin curfew nahi laga hain…aap hamari tulna kar rahein ho?!"[147]

> [Netaji, under your one year rule there have been 250 riots; for the past ten years there has been no rioting in Gujarat, there has been no curfew…are you trying to compare yourself to us?!]

Thus Modi compared the situations in Gujarat and in UP at the election rally against the incumbent Samajwadi Party (SP) rule, and juxtaposed his politics of development as that of securing material and physical security for Muslims. In tandem with the BJP's critique of the mainstream understanding of secularism as 'appeasement of minorities' and 'vote bank' politics, Modi struck at the opposition in UP. Gujarat, as a laboratory of Hindutva politics (Anand, 2016; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012; Shani, 2007; Spodek, 2010; Sud, 2012) and *yatra* politics, has been perpetrating fear and insecurity against the Muslim minorities in the state. "Politically, 2002 was a landmark for the Hindu Right's twin projects of nation as well as state building" (Sud, 2012, p. 176). The discourse of security underscored in Modi's narrative above, works as a two-edged dictum: protecting the Hindu self against the Muslim 'other' was the dominant interpretation for the majority Gujarati Hindus while, for the Muslim minorities, it translates into the hyper-masculine protection extended to them under Modi's gaze of surveillance and segregation. After the 2002 pogrom, the symbolic violence of *yatras* such as the Sadbhavana rally and the Gujarati-Hindu exceptionalism of Vibrant Gujarat resulted in making and normalising the Muslim minorities invisible as citizen subjects.

A visit to Muslim ghettos in Juhapura, Behrampura, Jamalpur and Yakutpura revealed spatial segregation, marginalisation and dehumanisation.[148] "Political action including political violence is a multifaceted phenomenon and imaginative practices are one of the many contributing dynamics" (Anand, 2016, p. 153). It is these practices that

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[147] Field note: Modi's rally speech in Lucknow, 2nd March 2014, UP.
[148] Field notes: 2nd July 2014, Vadodara and Ahmadabad, Gujarat.

have dispersed and become normalised in the forms of spatial segregation and vegetarianism (Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012) which results in Muslim subjects and their way of life disappearing from Modi's 'Developmental Blueprint'. Urban planning and spatial segregation has accomplished ghettoisation, effectively rendering Muslim subjects invisible spatially and economically: "not only did violence create an alibi for enhanced ghettoization, it thus also provided opportunities to remove Muslims as economic competition, in addition to rendering them socially vulnerable" (Rajagopal, 2011a, p. 81). These Muslim ghettos are then, 'blind spots' in the mapping of Modi's developmental success stories. Spatially and visually these pockets clearly stand out from the 'Vibrant Gujarat' model. Vadodara and Ahmadabad with their broad roads, BRTs, IIM and gated communities are starkly different from these ghettos – which are more like areas under constant construction – with clusters of small houses and *jhuggis* (slums), small shops and open drains. The sheer absence of Muslim life in the rest of the city demonstrates that the idea of Modi's *surajya* is based on turning a blind eye or '*not seeing*' the non-Hindus.

The Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) was set up by the BJP after the 2002 pogroms to win over the Muslims within the state under the auspices of the RSS leader Sudarshan (Dahat, 2014). For electoral gains and to demonstrate the success of the developmental story, Modi and the BJP went back to the fundamental cultural organisational base of the RSS and the MRM to garner Muslim votes, this despite having a minority wing Laghumati Morcha (LM) for Muslim representation within the party's organisational structure. Gani Bhai Qureshi,[149] explaining the relevance of the organisation, explained that since the Muslims were not coming out in support of the BJP in Gujarat, the RSS thought of this parallel cultural organisation. Qureshi, a Muslim himself, has been involved with the right wing groups since Jan Sangh said:

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[149] Interview with Gani Bhai Qureshi, MRM, 11th June 2014, Yakutpura, Vadodara, Gujarat.

It has been ten years since MRM started off. The BJP party has a cell that deals with the minorities but there isn't much work done with the Muslims by them, which is why Sudershanji and Indresh Kumarji thought since Muslims won't come in BJP's name, perhaps they will come under the banner of the Manch.[150]

Ganibhai's narrative itself displays the politics of fear and marginalisation that Gujarati-Hindu exceptionalism confers on Muslim subjects and forces them to defy any assimilation, refusing outright to affiliate with the BJP. Conversations with a few Muslim supporters who were part of the BJP's minorities' forums such as the MRM and the LM in Vadodara and Ahmadabad seemed to suggest a rather pragmatic decision to extend support given the lack of a viable political alternative in Congress as far as Gujarat was concerned. Also, it should be noted that although I encountered few Modi supporters among the Muslim community through the official party channels, their visible absence from rallies or campaigns that I covered in Vadodara and Ahmadabad as part of the fieldwork revealed the cynicism and despondency that the community feels overall, despite a few of them acknowledging that some development had benefitted them.[151] As I will discuss later, the presence of a viable alternative in the AAP clearly enhanced Muslim assertion and visibility in Varanasi.

All the Muslim responses through official channels in Vadodara mostly elaborated upon construction of roads, electricity connections and water supplies being initiated by the government in 'their' areas, but they did not discount the Godhra rioting and violence and their after effects.[152] These responses could also be read as re-negotiating or getting by the everyday as opposed to holding on to past experiences, wherein day-to-day survival and satisfaction of basic material needs become the priority. However, the spatial analysis of the votes polled for the BJP in Vadodra and Varanasi revealed that overall the community as a whole preferred to assert their will against them and vote for an alternative political force, whichever was available. In Gujarat

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[150] Interview with Gani Bhai Qureshi, MRM, 11th June 2014, Yakutpura, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[151] Field note: 14th June 2014, Vadodara and Ahmadabad, Gujarat.
[152] Field note: 20th June 2014, Vadodara and Ahmadabad, Gujarat.

then, it implied extending support for Congress as Susewind and Dhattiwala demonstrate in their analysis of spatial distribution of Muslim votes: "the relevance of Muslims' electoral choices as well as the strength of 'vote bank' politics and thus an almost uniform rejection of the BJP and strong support of the Congress by Muslims across the state" (2014, p. 103).

Alternatively, the existence of another more acceptable symbolic repertoire provided by the AAP in Varanasi enabled an open and visible assertion by the Muslims of UP, even though the BJP tried to reach out through the MRM here as well. The strategy adopted by the BJP was quite different in Varanasi; it involved neutralising Modi's image as someone who presided over large-scale violence against Muslims by emphasising an inclusive growth story of prosperity for Muslims in Gujarat. Ganibhai led a team of around 40 Muslims for seven days to campaign for Modi.[153]

> Banaras mein poori team ko leke gaya tha sab Musalman…dekha ki Banaras ke andar Muslim samaj mein jana hai toh Kutch se, Qureshi, Dharam guru aur pathan log sabko leke gaya..hamne campaign kiya rasoolpura, badi bazaar aur madanpura mein kiya aur bhi bahut se elake the…aur Modiji aur Gujrat ke bare mein jo galat fehmi thi woh hamne door karin.

> [We had taken a whole team of Muslims as we had gone to the Muslim community in Benaras, they were from Kutch, Qureshis, religious leaders and Pathans – everybody was taken along. We campaigned in Rasoolpura, Badi Bazar and Madanpura and many other areas and whatever misgivings they had regarding Modiji and Gujarat we tried to remove them.]

The mission to change mindsets in Varanasi was based on Modi's effective role in 'riot control', he continued:

> quami fasad hua hai hamara 2002 mein hamara inkar nahi hain…lekin uske baad Gujarat ke andar koi danga nahi hai, koi fasad nahi hai…aaj tak koi bhi bande ko curfew dekhne ko nahi mila hai…pehle kya tha koi bhi mehman ko aana hota tha woh pehle phone karta tha ki mahual kaisa hai aapke wahan ..aaj aadmi ko phone karne ka nahi , poochna nahi…aadmi aata hai aur chala jata hain…yeh mahual aaj ka hai.[154]

> [We are not denying the communal riots of 2002 but after that there has not been any strife inside Gujarat – no riots, nobody has seen a curfew since then. Earlier, if a guest had to come he would phone and check to find out what the situation was here, but

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[153] Interview with Gani Bhai Qureshi, MRM, 11th June 2014, Yakutpura, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[154] Interview with Ghani Bhai Qureshi, MRM, 11th June 2014. Yakutpura, Vadodara, Gujarat.

today nobody has to make a call to find out. They come and they go, that is the situation now.]

However, this security discourse did not win much support in UP for two reasons. First, the political culture of the state is relatively more democratic and secular discursively and culturally, as a political community in itself, as opposed to Gujarat; hence the politics of fear was not a determining factor for the Muslim community. Second, despite the Hinduness of Varanasi as a political site, as discussed earlier, its syncretism was capitalised by the AAP mobilisation both in its agenda and symbolism. Ghani Bhai also acknowledged the response by Muslims in Varanasi that MRM was not exactly welcome and the people were not convinced, *"logon ke response mein rosh tha ki 'aap paise leke aye ho'; 'aap bikey hue musalman ho!'"*[155] [Some people were agitated, "you have taken money and come'; 'you are a sold out Muslim'!].

Figure 4.6: AAP supporters outside the Benaras Hindu University (BHU), UP[156]

One of the striking aspects of the AAP election campaigning on the streets of Varanasi was, as Figure 4.6 displays, the appearance of AAP *topis* worn by its Muslim supporters, replacing the Muslim skull caps. Interestingly, the AAP *topis'* slogan *'mein*

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[155] Interview with Ghani Bhai Qureshi, MRM, 11th June 2014, Yakutpura, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[156] Image taken by the author, May 2014, Varanasi, UP.

hoon aam aadmi' (I am a common man) was also customised in Urdu script, having earlier been limited to Hindi and English.[157] The decision by Muslims in Varanasi to put their weight behind a secular alternative in the AAP translated into their visible participation in the election campaigning after few weeks it was started, thereby illustrating two aspects: first, an overt and forceful Muslim assertion against Modi and the BJP and second, the emergence of the AAP as a non-sectarian political force and a challenge to the Modi wave.

> Indeed, the strong rejection of Modi and the BJP by Muslims in Varanasi (an estimated loss of 0.49 votes for each additional Muslim voter) led them almost exclusively to support the AAP, while SP, BSP and Congress fared much less well (Susewind & Dhattiwala, 2014, p. 105)

The Muslim subjects situated in Modi's developmental cosmos with its attendant inherent symbolic violence seem to be negotiating and asserting themselves in the interests of their community and everyday existence both in Vadodara and Varanasi. Despite the symbolic dominance and power of the Hindutva forces under Modi and their concerted effort at invisibilisation, it is being contested democratically and symbolically by the Muslim citizen-subject.

4.5   Statue of 'Patel' Unity – Of Contestations, Interlude and Resurrection

> Sardar Patel nu je adhura kaam che pura karvanu muaka...varsho pachi Gujarat na haat ma aavi gayo che Sardar Patel na sapana sakaar karvanu ek su avsar aavi gayo che[158]

> [This is an opportunity to complete the unfinished work of Sardar Patel. After so many years Gujarat has got this opportunity to achieve Sardar Patel's dream. We have got an opportunity.]

Modi modelled himself as the *chotte sardar'* (junior supremo). If Patel was Gujarat's *sardar* (supremo), Chimanbhai Patel[159] modelled himself as his junior *chotte sardar*; and now "Narendra Modi has adopted this mantel" (Sud, 2012, p. 42). One item on Modi's agenda when he staked claim to the office of the prime minister was to

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[157] Field note: 5th May 2014, Varanasi, UP.
[158] Field note: Modi's speech, 23rd April 2014, Kalol rally, Gujarat.
[159] Chimanbhai Patel was the fifth Chief Minister of Gujarat.

redress the past injustices meted out to the other son of Gujarat, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. He was of the view that the political history of the country had denied political space and acknowledgement to the contributions of Patel. Hence, weaving in the hurt sentiments of Gujarati *asmita*, Modi was "convinced that official history had been unfair to Gujarat which had produced both Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi" (Visvanathan, 2013).

> He belongs to Gujarat, that is why. The first man in India who got all the princes together, which is why he is called the Iron Man of India. He told all the kingdoms that it can't continue like this. One country, unity in diversity, as it's said in Gujarat. He never thought of the partition of India/Pakistan, strength in integrated India, which Narendra Bhai will show to the rest of the world. Now America has called on him, Narendrabhai has that impact![160]

Drawing a linear correlation between Patel and Modi, one of the BJP party members, Dalal, explained the reason for building Patel's statue in the narrative above. Modi lauds Patel for using a coercive strategy against the princes of the princely states at the time of independence to materialise the idea of an *Akhandh Bharat* (Integrated India).

> Sardar Patel brought the nation together. But gradually his memories are fading away. To reinvigorate his memory and as a fitting tribute to the Iron Man of India, we are building this statue, which will be double in height than the Statue of Liberty in New York ("Tallest statue order", 2013)

The mobilisation for achieving a consensus around the statue building was aimed at bridging the rural urban divide and predisposed to realise a Hindu unity. Six months before he was elected prime minister in May, "Modi launched the project to build the bronze-and-iron statue – which aims to be twice the height of the Statue of Liberty at 182 metres".[161] *Yatra* politics in two different formats were launched targeting different sections of the Gujarati population – a 'run' for the urban cosmopolitan crowd and a '*Loha* (Iron) campaign' for the rural masses. Modi started his election campaign

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[160] Interview with Ghanshyam Dalal, 16th June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[161] For further details see, http://www.statueofunity.in/about-sardar-vallabhbhai-patel.html

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with the 'Run for Unity' inaugurated in Vadodara, on 16th December 2013, with the BJP

organising simultaneous runs in other parts of the country (Desai, 2013).

> Patel is the Iron Man, he was to become the prime minister of India, and it was his
> dream of an integrated India otherwise Congress would have divided it. Like in
> America people go to see the Statue of Liberty, why can't we have a Statue of Unity
> here?! The main point is to boost tourism; his vision is to develop the infrastructure of
> India.[162]

Jitenbhai, an upper middle class Hindu and an ardent supporter of Modi,

elaborated on his support for Patel's statue and why he participated in the Run for

Unity in the above narrative. He echoed the sentiments of most of the middle class

Gujaratis who perceived the campaign to be about Gujarati pride and the Patel statue as

serving the aesthetic and touristic interests of the state. The 'Run for Unity' was

followed by launching the *Loha* (iron) collection campaign. As part of this campaign,

people were urged to collect from farmers small pieces of iron which would eventually

be used to build the proposed Patel statue. A strategy akin to the collection of bricks

during the Ayodhya campaign,[163] people from different organisations across the state

and volunteers collectively contributed to collect iron.

"This run is being organised with a determination to unite the people, unite the

villages and unite the nation," Mr. Modi said, claiming it was all about 'patriotism'"

(Modi, quoted by Desai, 2013). Patel signified in his leadership a 'unifying force' and

hence the BJP campaign narrative aimed at building unity across regions and social

classes on a pan-India level. However, as one interrogates the caste politics in Gujarat

and the overarching Hindu unity that BJP aims to engineer, it appears that there is more

to this 'unification' than just unifying the nation. Besides being a staunch nationalist,

Patel also believed in the Hindu unity, similar to Gandhi, and opposed separate

electorates for the lower castes. According to him, they were part and parcel of Hindu

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[162] Interview with Jitenbhai, on 16th June 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.
[163]During the Ayodhya campaign to build the Ram Temple, "[t]he bricks were wrapped in saffron cloth, worshipped for several days, consecrated by *pujar is* and village elders and carried in processions throughout the country to the radial spot at Ayodhya" (Chandhoke, 2000).

unity and hence compatible with the BJP's agenda. Also, as a national leader belonging to the dominant Patel caste, he wielded much power amongst the community. In Gujarat, the second largest and particularly influential caste group are the *Patidars* (Shani, 2007). They became politically dominant in Ahmadabad and well entrenched in the Congress party under the leadership of Vallabhai Patel (Hardiman, 1981). The politics of unification as expressed through the Patel statue outlines the underlying caste dynamics within Gujarat.

Modi's lower caste status ruptures the linear correlation between *Sardar* to *Chotte Sardar*; he belongs to the *Ganchi[164]* caste (Sud, 2012; Visvanathan, 2013). Modi's lower caste status makes him an outsider to the political corridors of Gandhinagar. His meteoric rise within the party did not go well with the Patel community within the BJP leadership, leading to open rebellions by this dominant section under the leadership of Keshubhai Patel.[165] "Within the BJP, *savarnas* [upper castes] especially the Saurashtra Patels under Keshubhai, have been unhappy at being upstaged in the leadership stakes by the OBC Modi" (Sud, 2012, p. 37). The Patels are divided into two main groups, Leva Patel and Kadva Patel, the former being considered higher in the status hierarchy (Kohli, 1990; Shani, 2007); "Keshubhai Patel represented the Patidar lobby, particularly leva patidar from Saurashtra" (Shah, 1998, p. 260). In 2007, Modi faced open public revolts from the Patidar-dominated farmers' wing of the Sangh Parivar, from his own party's men because the Keshubhai Patel camp refused to cooperate during the campaigning for the Assembly elections (Sud, 2012). The final jolt came before the Assembly elections of 2012, when the Leva sub-sect section of Patels under the leadership of Keshubhai Patel walked out of the BJP to form a new political party, the Gujarat Parivartan Party (GPP). The after effects of this break-up, in the name of

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[164] *Ganchi* is a Gujarati caste belonging to the Other Backward Caste (OBC) category.
[165] Keshubhai Patel was the Chief Minister of Gujarat twice (1995 and 1998) from the BJP. After Modi's victory he resigned from the BJP to form his own political party in 2012.

injustice to Patidars led by Keshubhai, and had the potential to alienate both the Leva and Kedva Patels. When Modi laid the foundation for the Patel statue, the support of both Patel groups had been won over and ensured. Thus, the pitch for a Patel statue project also influenced the balance of the caste hierarchy and pacification of the Patel community within the internal dynamics of Gujarat politics. By 2013, at the time of Modi's nomination for prime ministerial candidature, this internal rebellion had started to fizzle out in the interest of Gujarati *asmita*.

However, on the actual election campaign trail in Vadodara, the mobilisation around the 'Patel Statue' disappeared from the symbolic political field as a counter-mobilisation by the Dalits demanded that Ambedkar's statue in Gujarat be not only taller than Patel's but also the tallest statue in the world.[166] Barely days after a mammoth 'Run for Unity', some 3000 Dalits planned to take to the streets across Gujarat demanding a similar statue for Ambedkar. The rally was to be held at Badharka, a village 10 km from Dholka on 25th December 2013; the day Ambedkar burnt the *Manusmriti* (Hindu code of laws by Manu) in 1927.

The details of this particular Dalit mobilisation and the nature of symbolic contestation that it initiated with the demand for the Ambedkar statue will be taken up in the next chapter. But the important dimensions this demand brought to the mainstream discourse was the visibility of contestation based on caste in Gujarat. The caste coalition that the BJP was trying to engineer and unify around the Patel statue began to experience roadblocks on two levels with this parallel mobilisation: first, fissures started appearing not just in the attempt to constitute a 'Hindu unity' but also in Modi's narrative around the politics of *Surajya* and the Gujarat model. Second, the symbolic contestation that thus ensued between the two statues is not about parallel statue-building competitions, but the two leaders' political and ideological standpoints

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[166] Field notes: 10th April 2014, Gujarat.

on the question of caste. The Constituent Assembly debates between Ambedkar and Patel reveal the crucial reason behind the significance of these leaders to their respective communities.

Ambedkar's proposal for separate electorates for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) as the chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution was rejected by Hindu traditionalist leaders including Munshi, Das, Prasad and Patel (Jaffrelot, 2003a). "For Patel it is up to the scheduled castes to regain the trust of the upper castes. The problem is psychological: the scheduled castes must erase their inferiority complex" (p. 95). The symbolic contestation by the Dalits was to counter the symbolic violence that Patel's statue and his politics signified which was based on upper caste arrogance and paternalistic assimilation. The Gujarati-Hindu upper caste exceptionalism had ensured that the history of relationship between the upper and lower castes within Gujarati civil society was violent and conservative, especially with regard to any redistributive policies like reservation of quotas "The riots in Ahmadabad in 1985 erupted over the decision of the Gujarat government to increase the quotas reserved for backward castes in educational institutions and government jobs" (Shani, 2007, p. 57). The practices of untouchability are dispersed spatially on a routine level. Furthermore, a recent study conducted by the Navsarjan Trust in Gujarat (2007-2010) revealed widespread practices of untouchability in rural Gujarat.[167] Highlighting this discrimination and marginalisation of Dalits within Gujarat, a memorandum by members of the community across the state, titled '*Ek Awaaz, Ek Morcha*' (One Voice, One Front) expressing their anguish against the state government was also recently submitted to the state's chief secretary (Sharma, 2014). The memorandum contained the thumbprints of over a thousand Dalits, fracturing the success of the Gujarat model.

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[167]   The   Navsarjan   Report   can   be   found   at: http://navsarjan.org/Documents/Untouchability_Report_FINAL_Complete.pdf

As the Dalit mobilisation around their demand for Ambedkar's statue became assertive, visible and successful, the consensus building and campaigning around Patel's statue became invisible. The impact of Dalit mobilisation forced the BJP and Modi to withdraw the symbol of 'upper caste pacification' in the fear that such an open and powerful contestation would reveal the caste equations which had been thus far concealed under the narrative of Gujarati pride and assertion. The assertion by the Dalits, through Ambedkar statue campaign, ruptured the Gujarati-Hindu-upper caste exceptionalism visually, discursively and politically during the entire campaign. The discourse around the Patel statue re-emerged in the symbolic political field only after Modi became prime minister. The so-called 'Statue of Unity' was allocated Rs. 200 crore, from the Union budget (M.P. Singh, 2014). This case will be further analysed in the next chapter.

4.6 Conclusion

Modi's political success challenged the political system based on dynastic politics represented by the Congress party. His rise was symbolic of social and political mobility, aspirational politics and decisionism against the backdrop of the weak and corrupt incumbent government led by Congress. However, the symbolism of Modi's *Vikaspurush* campaign as discussed here constituted a sacralised political field of perception. It activated a spatial assertion embedded in ethno-religious tradition in both Gujarat and Varanasi. The instrumentalist and non-discursive nature of the mobilisation not only constituted passive subjects but also invisibilised those who were not part of this Gujarati-Hindu exceptionalism. Also, Modi's campaign for the tallest Patel statue brought to the fore the inherent caste dynamics underlying his politics of development. While mobilising embodied political participation, it prevents transgressions,

negotiations or challenges to the majoritarian self, thus constituting an embodied 'infantile' subject.

5 Performing Defiance: B.R. Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Sthal and Statues

Figure 5.1: *Haathi Deergha* (Elephant Gallery), Parivartan Sthal, Lucknow, UP[168]
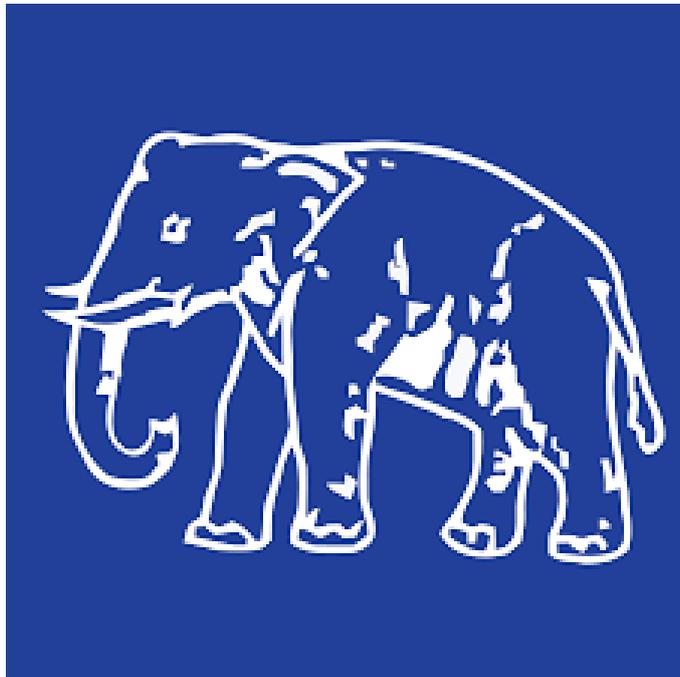
Figure 5.2: The Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) party symbol[169]

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[168]This image was taken by the author in March 2014, Lucknow, UP.

5.1   Introduction

At the Parivartan Sthal, a row of sixty elephants known as the *Haathi Deergha* welcomes visitors to this massive memorial at the heart of Lucknow city (see Figure 5.1). In the context of the UP state assembly elections in 2012, the visibility of these elephants in the public sphere was interpreted as 'BSP's elephants' causing the Election Commission (EC) to issue an order to cover Mayawati's statues and her political party's - the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) symbol – the elephant, both in Lucknow and Noida (A. Khan, 2012). What becomes vital here is to account for the caste Hindu response to the *appearance* of Dalit symbols in the public sphere.

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Quraishi is reported to have justified the order thus:

> All statues of the CM and the elephants installed on government expenditure would be covered. This is standard procedure while the model code of conduct is in force in order not to disturb the level playing field (Quraishi, quoted in Naim, 2012).

The mainstream political parties in UP, such as the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress, celebrated the EC's decision for ensuring a fair competition between all political parties. It is interesting to note the BSP's response to the EC's order:

> Warning of adverse popular reaction, Mishra came out with counter-questions. One of them was whether the EC would consider covering statues of elephants from various temples, President House, North and South Block and even the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair when elections in Delhi are held. He also wanted to know if all lotus flowers (BJP's symbol) would be plucked from lakes in poll-bound states and cycles (Samajwadi Party's symbol) barred from the roads (Mishra, quoted in Naim, 2012)

Mishra's (BSP's General Secretary) counter questions outline the entrenched casteist bias exposed by the EC's decision against the BSP, a Dalit political party. The EC's decision signified the 'manuwadi gaze'[170] through which the Indian political and

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[169] Image source: BSP's official website http://www.bspindia.org/

[170] I use 'manuwadi gaze' to imply the caste Hindus' field of perception which is embedded in a Brahmanical belief system. *Manuwadi* literally translates into proponent of the ethos of *Manusmriti* which is considered the divine code of law defining the Hindu self. The text not only codifies the caste-based occupational hierarchy but addresses all facets of life. Governed by the norms of purity and pollution,

bureaucratic structure perceived Mayawati's intervention in the dominant Brahmanical/nationalist political field.

The official response of the BSP highlights the fact that the BSP's election symbol and the *Haathi Deergha* (Elephant Gallery) in the *Parivartan Sthal* are different in their iconopraxis. Mayawati argued that the "[s]tatues of elephant [*sic*] were installed as per the Indian culture and not because of being the BSP symbol. These statues have been installed to welcome the visitors" ("Mayawati attacks EC", 2012). The BSP pointed out that the elephant's trunk in the party symbol is lowered whereas in the *Sthal* elephants' trunks were in the welcome posture and so the argument of a 'level playing field' should not arise. "This is not fair and against natural justice", claimed Mishra (ENS, 2012). The BSP's explanation and the images of the two contrasting postures of the elephants (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2) lays bare the anxiety and the perplexity of the dominant Brahminical/nationalist order at encountering Dalit symbolic repertoire and thus *seeing BSP's elephants where none exist*.

The EC's performative act of covering these elephants with plastic sheets and the ever present narrative of corruption around the construction of these memorial demonstrates what Mayawati's intervention through memorial building projects and mainstreaming of Dalit symbols entails visually. She was accused of merely investing in the symbolism of statues and memorial building rather than ensuring material benefits for Dalits by building schools, universities, hospitals and roads. Her investment in symbolism within Dalit politics is perceived as a case of "misplaced symbolism" (EPW Editorial, 2009, p.7). The EPW editorial sums it up as a case of material priorities of the Dalits being side-lined as a result of ostentatious spending on memorial construction. Her critics say that this, combined with Mayawati's attempt to place her own statue within the pantheon of Dalit leaders, takes this symbolism too far.

these codes prescribed separate and discriminatory practices between the caste Hindus and Dalits outlining human interactions and eating habits as well as their perceptions/ways of looking.

Contrary to the mainstream analysis, this chapter argues that the intersection between Dalit politics and symbolism, rather than being a case of misplaced priorities, redefines the habitus of a Dalit subject by transgressing the *manuwadi* field of perception and enabling Dalits to assert themselves by *being seen* discursively, spatially and visually. Symbolic intervention therefore constitutes a defiant embodied *visible* Dalit citizen subject. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section on *spatio-material* assertion discusses the construction of the B.R. Ambedkar *Parivartan Sthal* by Mayawati and the resultant spatial assertion by Dalits. Through this anti-Brahmanical counter-space the *sthal* also transforms the politico-symbolic field of the city of Lucknow. The second, *Statues of Dis-order*, analyses the politics of statues with reference to Ambedkar and Mayawati statues and the circulation of the normative, temporal and symbolic values that they manifest. Shifting the focus of Dalit symbolic politics from UP to Gujarat, the third section on symbolic contestation analyses the anti-Patel statue campaign in the context of Modi's general election campaign of 2014. It traces the powerful Dalit mobilisation around building the tallest statue of Ambedkar instead of Patel in Gujarat. The discussion maps the altered practices of iconography and symbolism emerging within the Dalit community.

This work intends to contribute to the study of the politics of symbolism and performativity in Dalit political subject formation. The dominant literature on Dalit politics in relation to UP can be divided into two broad categories. The first maps the political evolution of the anti-caste movement and the role of Ambedkar (Keer, 1971; Omvedt, 1994, 1995, 2004; Zelliot, 1969, 1996) while the second studies the rise of the BSP as the political party of the lower castes (Chandra, 2004; Jaffrelot, 2003a, 2005a, 2005b; Pai, 2002, 2013). These scholarships effectively trace the emergence of Dalit party politics; however their engagement with Dalit subject formation and its inherent symbolism has been limited. This thesis aims to mainstream the performative essence,

extending the work of Kumar (2006), Lynch (1969) and Rao (2009), thereby pursuing the performative politics of Dalit assertion through the perspective of a "roaring revolution" (Kumar, 2006) rather than a "silent revolution" (Jaffrelot, 2003a). It aims to analyse how performative defiance of Brahmanical Hinduism and the practices of untouchability has been integral to Dalit politics since long before political Independence from the British and thereby instrumental in constituting an assertive Dalit subject (Kumar, 2006; Lynch, 1969). For instance, Lynch discussed the role of the Jatav Youth League (JYL) in the 1930s in organising a defiant act against the Poona Pact[171] in Agra where the main attraction in the protest was a model of a wolf signifying the pact.

> The Poona Pact was like a Brahmin wolf that had run wild and was devouring the SC. The wolf was publicly burned, and the heat of the Jatav anger was not lost to the eyes of the Agra upper castes who saw themselves symbolically consumed in the flames of long smouldering resentment. (Lynch, 1969, p. 88)

Applying the Dalit performative defiant lens to the analysis of the politics of statues and memorial building project, this analysis aims to bridge the gap between the political and cultural analysis of Dalit politics, which has also been the thrust of Ambedkar's politics. Extending the existing scholarship on Dalit symbolism, visual practices and imagery by Jain (2014), Jaoul (2006), Loynd (2009), Lynch (1969) and Tartakov (1990, 2012) my work contributes to understanding Dalit counter publics (Ciotti, 2010; Narayan, 2011; Rege, 2008) and the politics of visual imagery in Dalit politics.

At the outset, this study deviates from the dominant frame of analysis employed in relation to symbolism in Dalit politics. The two prominent binaries that dominate

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[171] The Poona Pact refers to an agreement reached between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1932 on the issue of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes in provincial legislatures in British India. Gandhi objected to this allocation on the grounds of this decision leading to divisions of Hindus and went on fast to death in Yerwada Jail in Poona. Ambedkar, however, argued for separate political representation for the depressed classes. Finally an agreement was reached and a consensus on the number of seats arrived at between leaders of caste Hindus and Depressed Classes.

analysis of Dalit symbolism are those of dignity/class and symbolic/material. First, for

instance, Jaoul argues:

> While symbolic politics has played a significant part in democratization, today this seems a convenient motive for the Dalit middle-class leadership to push issues of class under the carpet and to talk exclusively about issues of dignity. (Jaoul, 2006, p. 122)

The dichotomy between class and dignity is based on the assumption that these are two

distinct aspects of a Dalit identity. However, as Ambedkar argues, this dichotomy

between class and dignity does not exist for a Dalit. In *Annihilation of Caste* (1990 [1936])

he writes that the first thing to be urged against this view is that the caste system is not

just about division of labour based on occupational status hierarchies; it is also division

of labourers based on caste-based hierarchies. "Caste was classlike, but also a form of

embodiment; stigma carried upon the body was the perverse legacy of the Hindu

juridical order" (Rao, 2009, p. 134). Rao (2009) further elaborates on Ambedkar's

understanding of the caste structure as an embodied experience for a labourer:

> Unlike workers in western nations who could become visible as labour, Dalit structural negativity arose from their extraneous position in a system of symbolic labor. They could creatively make this visible only in the political arena: the emancipation of the minority subject was culturally specific, even if it resembled the trajectory of proletarian conscientization. (p. 137)

Hence, based on the above, analysis of caste, class and questions of dignity are more

complex and entangled in Dalit identity than in that of the labourer in the western

context, located outside the caste structure. Therefore issues of dignity and class cannot

be abstracted for a Dalit. Following on from this, the distinction between symbolic and

material therefore also becomes artificial because the structural violence inherent in the

caste system ensures that Dalits are excluded from access to or control of means of

production. "Ambedkar theorized caste as a doubled structure of symbolic and material

dispossession" (p. 129). Therefore the Dalit embodied both repugnance and

exploitation.

Of the many incidents of everyday atrocities and violence committed against the Dalits in India, the 1996 massacre of 21 Dalits in Bathani Tola (Bihar) stands out.[172] In this case, the *Ranvir Sena* murdered Dalit landless labourers because they were being more assertive against the upper-caste landlords. The *sena* is an upper caste (*Bhumiar*) militia supported by the Rajputs in Bihar, who often engage in mass killings of Dalits with impunity. I highlight this massacre to point out that if the nature of upper-caste Brahmanical discrimination, exclusion and violence is re-signified on Dalit bodies both symbolically and materially at the same time, then to expect Dalit assertion to make a distinction between the two is unwarranted. Thus, for Dalit politics this dyad does not hold forth as Rao (p. 188) also emphatically argued: "there was thus no easy distinction between the symbolic and the real in the Dalit politics". The question that needs to be raised is why should Dalit politics have to choose between the two binaries to assert their Dalit self and citizenship? For instance, evoking Ambedkar's name for government policies illustrates that his symbolism and legacy has produced materially consequential benefits for Dalit politics.

Dalit political assertion has had three phases in UP. The first was the formation of the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) during the late colonial period (Duncan, 1979), followed by the establishment of the Ambedkarite Republican Party of India (RPI) in 1956 which had brief success before it was absorbed by the Congress party (Lynch, 1969). The formation of the BSP constituted the third phase in the 1980s (Pai, 2002). BSP's core political ideology lies in challenging entrenched *manuwadi* practices and activating the political category of the *bahujan* (majority). Through the conceptual political group of *bahujan*, Narayan (2011) explains that Kanshi Ram, the founder of BSP, was trying to arouse the desire of the oppressed group to transform existing social norms and to take control of the political scenario. The symbolic and the performative

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[172] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/For-residents-of-Bathani-it-is-a-horror-they-cannot-forget/article12967259.ece

relevance of the term *bahujan* were based on the concept of opposing Brahmanism. Narayan (2011) also points out that the main aim was to counter the self-assumed inheritance by the upper castes as original inhibitors of India and consequently their dominance and superiority. The path to attain equality that was visualised by Dalit ideologues was through the right to representation and the right to hold public offices of the state.

> In UP, at least sixty-six castes constitute the texture of (SCs) Dalit Community. Chamar, Pasi, Dhobi, Bhangis, Khatik, Kories and the like, are numerically as well as politically, the major groups. Tatawa, Rangrej, Nai, Dhanuks, and many other small lower castes also come under the Dalit section of society in UP. (Narayan, 2011, p. xviii)

Emerging from a lower middle-class trade union organisation of government employees, the Backward and Minority Classes and Employees Federation (BAMCEF), in 1976 led by Kanshi Ram it became the starting point for a subaltern political imagination (Jaffrelot, 2003a; Pai, 2002). The trade union's extension set up in 1981 was called the DS4 *(Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti)* and was more aggressive in its approach. Eventually the DS4 and its activities was subsumed with the formation of the BSP in 1984, with the objective of emancipation of the marginalised by seizing political power through democratic representation. The performative impact of the BSP slogan *'Tilak Taraju aur talvar isko maro joote char'*[173] targeted symbolically and discursively the symbolic power of the caste Hindus and challenged their political dominance by the counter power of the lower caste majority. Their slogan is a symbolic retort to the caste Hindus' ritual purity which uses the slippers/shoes to show Dalits 'their place' in the caste hierarchy and to humiliate them. In the 1990s, Mayawati coined the slogan *'jo zameen sarkari hai, woh zameen hamari hai'* (The land that belongs to the government

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[173] "The tilak [emblem of the sectarian affiliation of the Hindus which is applied to the forehead and symbolises the Brahmin], the balance [symbol of the merchant castes] and the sword[(the symbol of the warrior castes], hit them with your shoes [symbol of the Chamars, the principal Scheduled Caste of North of India, who are leatherworkers])" (Jaffrelot, 2003a, p. 397).

belongs to us) to define the spatio-political Dalit challenge to practices of untouchability and ghettoisation inherent in the Hindu caste order.

Tracing the BSP's politics under Mayawati thus begins with her strategy of installing statues, renaming public spaces and glorifying the leaders of the Dalit struggle. This project was implemented in all the four terms of the BSP rule in UP under the chief ministership of Mayawati (1995, 1997, 2002-3, 2007-12). Ambedkar statues were set up across the state as part of government intervention as noted by Jaffrelot (2003a) and Pai (2002).

> It is commonplace to find statues of Dalit heroes at various public squares *(chauraha)* of UP—be it small *qasbas*, townships or big cities like Lucknow, Noida and Allahabad. It is estimated that there are some 20,000 statues of Ambedkar in the state, not to speak of local Dalit heroes. (Narayan, 2011, p. 112)

The spectacular culmination of this symbolic intervention was the construction of the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar *Samajik Parivartan Sthal* in Lucknow. The following section discusses the spatio-material assertion made by these commemorative structures and the resultant Dalit subjectivity that is constituted through this symbolic intervention.

5.2   Spatio-material Dalit Assertion

This section analyses specifically the memorial building project initiated by Mayawati which led to the construction of the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar *Samajik Parivartan Sthal* and *Parivartan chowk* in Lucknow. It argues that the *sthal* and the *chowk* emerge as anti-Brahmanical counter-spaces[174] and, by disrupting the *manuwadi* sanitised gaze, make a spatio-material Dalit assertion. It extends the scholarship on the *sthal* and spatial assertion done by Jain (2014), Jaoul (2006) and Loynd (2009) along with the additional lens of the practices of iconography involved (Tartakov, 1990, 2012). It also aims to analyse the visual practices involved therein and highlight the limitation of the use of the dominant framework of sacred seeing (*darshan*) (Eck, 1985) to Dalit politics. This

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[174] Using Lefebvre's conceptualisation of counter–space.

work contributes to the analysis of the commemorative structure as not just a grand architectural structure but as a spatio-material historical marker of caste struggle in India.

The Hindu caste order has ensured that Dalits remain, as Guru (2004) describes it, '*bahishkrit*' (outcaste, ostracised, ghettoised and socially boycotted), rendering both Dalit subjects and their worldview *invisible* to the political field of perception both socially and spatially. By building these commemorative memorials Mayawati *forces non-Dalits to see* the stigmatised invisible citizen-subjects and their worldviews. Writing on untouchability, Ambedkar says:

> It is not a case of social separation, a mere stoppage of social intercourse for a temporary period. It is a case of territorial segregation and of a *cordon sanitaire* putting the impure people inside a barbed wire into a sort of cage. Every Hindu village has a ghetto. The Hindus live in the village and the Untouchables in the ghetto. (Ambedkar, 1990, p. 266)

The norms of purity/pollution inherent in the Hindu caste system not only have an impact in defining social interaction, but also ensure permanent ostracism. Guru (2009) incisively describes the humiliation underlying the practice of purity and pollution; in India it involves the rejection of the untouchable to be complete, suggesting a concentrated expression of repulsion. It not only makes the untouchable invisible, but unimaginable. The ideology of purity/pollution removes a vast section of people from social interaction, both in terms of time and space. The caste system and the ideology of purity and pollution produces a kind of total rejection which seeks to push a person or the entire social group in question beyond the civilisational framework, rendering them completely unseeable, unapproachable and untouchable. As Rege argued, "space and spatial strategies of appropriation, deployment and control have been of crucial significance in maintaining hierarchical relations of caste" (2008, p. 17).

Mayawati's project of building the *Parivartan sthal* and *chowk* challenged this pollution line entrenched in Hindu caste and political order. These structures in the

middle of the city of Lucknow have altered the imputed meaning of the city and also, more crucially, exhibit the spatio-cultural assertion and claim making by the Dalits, while also attempting to invert the code of social interaction across time and space.

Figure 5.3: Parivartan Sthal, Lucknow[175]

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[175] Image taken by the author, 4th March 2014, Lucknow, UP.

Figure 5.4: Parivartan Chowk, Lucknow[176]

5.2.1 Disrupting the *manuwadi* sanitised vision: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Samajik Parivartan Prateek Sthal, chowk and statues

Figures 5.3 and 5.4 exhibit the lateral rather than vertical extent of these structures.[177] Besides their inherent anti-Brahmanical foundations, they are also representative of extending the Dalit political agenda of spatial assertion on public land. The Ambedkar *sthal* was inaugurated in 2005, spread over 123 acres in Gomti Nagar in Lucknow; "the inauguration involved Mayawati and six Buddhist monks performing ceremonies according to Buddhist tradition" (Loynd, 2009, p. 474). By following Buddhist practices at the inauguration, Mayawati was effecting rejection of Hinduism, following Ambedkarite politics. As Jain opines, "the sensibility here is necessarily cosmopolitan because it refuses to be Hindu, conjoining the BSP's anti-Hindu cultural imperative" (Jain, 2014, p. 53). Against the backdrop of Hindu social order, the claim

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[176] Image taken by the author, 4th April 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[177] Field notes: 4th February 2014, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.

on land cogently depicts assertion by countering the binary of purity/pollution that defined the expulsion and marginalisation of Dalits from access to land, resources and personhood (Jain, 2014; Loynd, 2009; Narayan, 2011).

By building this expansive memorial on public land, Mayawati activates Dalit assertion materially, symbolically and discursively. As Jain noted, "the seeming archaism of this form of the claim to territory speaks back, in part, to the archaism of the spatialized modes of caste exclusion that have continued into the present" (2014, p. 155). Mayawati, by enabling this spatial assertion on public land, also extends Babasaheb's (as Ambedkar was popularly called) rationale; "Ambedkar derived the concept of public access from the definition of a public utility" (Rao, 2009, p. 85). The earlier forms of Dalit activism and spatial outreach focused on access to common water tanks and temple entry by making the claim that these spaces are 'public spaces' with equal access for everyone, including Dalits. Geetha and Rajadurai (1998) highlight that various public spaces became points of contention as people, through caste associations, sought equal access to schools, temples and water. "The Dalit demand for public access was efficacious because it created equivalence between different practices of caste segregation and across sites of exclusion" (Rao, 2009, p. 87). Beyond the material, Mayawati, through these memorial projects, mainstreams the anti-caste struggle: the narratives below describe the sense of empowerment this engendered:

> Mayawati has provided representation to the 'Backward' leaders….jaise Samata Mulak chowk mein Periyar ki murti hai….isliye prateek bahut zaroori hai…Dalit history koi hai hi nahi…symbols used here are anti-Brahmanical…yeh Brahmanwad ke khilaaf sanskritik andolan ka center hai…agar vahin paison ko mandir mein lagate toh koi criticism nahi hota.[178]

> [Mayawati has provided representation to the Backward leaders…for example, there is Periyar's statue at Samata mulak chowk…hence, symbols are very important…there is hardly any Dalit history…the symbols used here are anti- Brahmanical…this is the centre for cultural revolution against Brahmanism…if the same money had been used for building a temple there would have been no criticism.]

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[178] Field notes: Meeting with Rajkumar, Associate Professor, Dyal Singh College, Delhi University, 6th February 2014, New Delhi.

> An inspiration centre and a place for social transformation…every person who enters, irrespective of their social background, feels mesmerised because of its hugeness, beautiful construction and its substantial content….Up to now the community has been forced to live in ghettos…it is like reclaiming the public space and instils a sense of empowerment and collectivity.[179]

Described as a spectacular centre of "cultural revolution"[180] and anti-Brahmanical counter space, the *Sthal* greets its visitors with the welcoming elephants. The elephant has multiple interpretations in Indian society, within both Hinduism and Buddhism. The posture of the elephants that we see inside the *Sthal*, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is different from that of the elephant symbol of the BSP. It is this ambiguity and multiple interpretations that make them a matter of political controversy. Ambedkar chose the elephant as the symbol of the RPI because of its "physical and mental strength, as well as responsibility and earthiness within Buddhism" (Choskyi, 1988). He went on to say that the elephants symbolise mental strength, meaning that the initial years of practicing Buddhism are associated with a grey elephant which, when brought under control, is represented by a white elephant. Narayan (2011) points out that the third meaning which the elephant symbol carries is associated with the acquisition of Ambedkar's political legacy by the BSP.

However, returning to the initial discussion, the frenzy that visibility of elephants can create for caste Hindus becomes more evident when seen in the historical context of Lynch's (1969, p. 186) analysis of Ambedkar Jayanti in Agra:

> The main symbol of protest was Ambedkar's bust mounted on a whitewashed and decorated elephant, resembling the deity Indra's elephant, Airavat, an auspicious steed meant in Hindu tradition only for kings, deities and holy men. In the Ambedkar Jayanti procession, Airavat is appropriated and re-contextualised into a democratic, secular socialistic India.

The result of this appropriation was that "stones and insults were apt to be indiscriminately thrown at the bust" (p. 188) by the caste Hindus. What *Airavat* (Indra's

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[179] Interview with activist Ram Kumar, Dynamic Action Group (DAG), 4th March 2014, DAG office, Lucknow.
[180] Term of reference used by Ram Kumar, 4th March 2014, DAG office, Lucknow.

white elephant) represented and withstood in those days is what the *Haathi Deergha* experienced in 2012 – through the *manuwadi* gaze the revulsion and fear of socio-political transgression by a party of untouchables translated into *seeing the BSP's elephant where none existed.*

Dalit spatial assertion is usually associated with two main sites, the Ambedkar funeral pyre (*samadhi)* at the Ambedkar Memorial Shrine in Bombay and the *Diksha Bhumi* (the site of mass conversions) in Nagpur. Both these sites commemorate the alternative route that Ambedkar charted for the Dalit community by converting to Buddhism: "Dalit conversion marked a new temporal order outside Hindu history and cultural hegemony" (Rao, 2009, p. 184). His conversion also produced a distinctive Dalit culture inspired by the Buddhist cultural repertoire. Therefore, architecturally, by opting out of Hindu temple art, these sites visually deconstruct caste and the inherent hierarchy.

> The temple not only represents caste, it enacts it. As a set of handsomely proportioned and elegantly articulated architectural forms, the temple rationalizes and, thus legitimizes, the supposed symmetries, reciprocities, and interconnections of *varna* and *jati*. (Tartakov, 2012, p. 37)

However these spatial sites, as is the case with Dalit political subjects, have been spaces for *only Dalits* and *they alone know of them.* Brahmanical/nationalist spatial segregation has ensured that these sites remain segregated and on the margins. Mayawati's intervention has led these commemorations to be mainstreamed outside of the caste Hindu spatial ghettoisation and patronage and so caste Hindus have to encounter Dalits outside of their volition, time, space and sanitised city surroundings. Buddhist influence is pursued here as well, in adoption of practices such as performing certain rituals and the architectural patterns throughout the construction of the *parivartan sthal* and *chowk*.[181] The construction of the *sthal* outlines the Dalit challenge to

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[181] Field notes: 8th February 2014, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.

the dominant Brahmanical/nationalist field of perception in three significant ways. First, by adopting a Buddhist architectural pattern and confronting the norms of *darshan* ingrained in the Brahmanical temple architecture. Second, by tracing and installing the statues of anti-caste leaders and social reformers, it makes the history of anti-caste struggle visible. Finally, it powerfully targets "structure of feelings"[182] in re-signifying the city of Lucknow.

Figure 5.5: Parivartan Sthal, Lucknow, UP.[183]

Figure 5.5 shows a *stupa,* one of the many such Buddhist motifs adorning the landscape of the *sthal*. The Buddhist architecture rejecting the graded inequality of temples is the first aspect that the *manuwadi* gaze encounters in the memorial. The adoption of *stupas* (domes with rounded roofs) and *viharas* (gathering spaces) display the deliberate intention of opting out of the fold of Hinduism, ritualistic order and temple

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[182] Rao (2009) uses the conceptual tool of "structure of feeling" to analyse the overlap between sacred and civic. According to her, the important aspect of the two temple *satyagrahas* (1928-35) was the conflation of sacred and civic space by caste Hindus wherein the sacredness of the temple was extended to ensure the non-access of water tanks to the Dalits. "This constituted a 'structure of feeling', if you will, that enabled touching property to be redefined as touching persons identified with the property" (p. 87).
[183] Image taken by the author, 10th February 2014, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.

art. "In many ways all non-narrative temples art is a display of hierarchy before it is anything else" (Tartakov, 2012, p. 3). The political potential of this choice lies in the fact that "as the locus of Brahmanical authority, the temple was a symbol of Dalits' exclusion from religious worship and the most potent site of Dalits' denigration by caste Hindus" (Rao, 2009, p. 88). Abdicating temple architecture and adopting construction based on Buddhist formations reflects the intention from within the community to redefine its identity outside of the Hindu fold.

> If the traditional Buddhist forms allow the community to signal its identification with that of tradition and to legitimize itself through this prestigious connection, the creation of new imagery allows it to explore its interests and destiny as a modern Indian community struggling for its place in the contemporary world. (Tartakov, 2012, pp. 184–85)

Tartakov's analysis above points to the inherent critical thinking that the community engages in to redefine itself outside of, not just assimilationist tendencies within Hinduism, but also their informed civic political subjectivity. For instance, if we deconstruct the nature of the interaction that takes place within these structures, the distinction between sacred and circumspect becomes more profound. *Viharas* are different in structure to the sanctum sanctorum in temples; they are more open gathering spaces and contain commemorative imagery rather than deities. As a *human space,* people coming to the *sthal* do not make vows since they are memorials, as opposed to a divine space predefined by ritualistic purity. As they walked around, nearly all the Dalit visitors felt and expressed a sense of awe, pride and assertion.[184] Thus the architectural choice is significant in constituting a rational civic political subject in opposition to a sacralised devotional subject.

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[184] Field notes: 20th January 2014, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.

Figure 5.6: Parivartan Sthal, Lucknow[185]

Figure 5.6 displays the statues of Dalit leaders placed in a semi-circular formation inside the *sthal*. The leaders of anti-caste struggle and political mobilisation from pre-Independence to the present are the second encounter for the *manuwadi* gaze. The statues are of leaders who spearheaded the struggle against caste-based oppression and marginalisation and worked towards social transformation. It is also interesting to note that the pantheon brings together leaders from across the north and south of India, mapping the anti-caste struggle from throughout the country.

> inn mahapurushon ki ladai kisi vyakti se nahi thi…unki ladai samajik parivartan ki thi...jisme jaat path oonch- neech ka koi sthan nahi tha, manav-manav ek saman ho...insaniyat ke adhaar par sabko aage badhne ka mauka mile.*[186]*

> [These great men's fight was not aimed at targeting any individual; their fight was to bring in social transformation wherein there was no place for caste-based discriminations. Each human being is equal…everyone has the right to move ahead on the grounds of humanity.]

The statues installed in the interiors of the *Parivartan Sthal* range from Dalit icons who thought about society's social order and aimed to transform it during different epochs

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[185] Image taken by the author April 2014, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.
[186] Interview with Khushilal Maurya, BSP Leader of Opposition, UP Assembly, 18th June 2014, Vidhan Sabha, Lucknow, UP.

in history such as Gautam Buddha, Sant Kabir, Sant Ravidas, Sant Guru Ghasi Das, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Savitri Phule, Shri Narayana Guru, Shahuji Maharaj, Birsa Munda, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Manyawar Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. The choice of these icons demonstrates Mayawati's intension to mainstream the struggles of social reformers who challenged hierarchies based on caste, practices of untouchability and the discrimination embedded within ritualistic Hinduism. The overarching agenda at the entrance states the objectives informing the construction of the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar *Samajik Parivartan Sthal* – to recognise, honour and commemorate the struggle for social transformation led by the *sants* (saints) and *mahapurush* (great people) born into the community. I take up the discussion around Ambedkar and Mayawati's statues specifically in the next section, but it is crucial to note here the intent of this visualisation – by recording Dalit history and the anti caste-struggle, this commemorative memorial as a material structure also temporally and spatially establishes the constancy of caste and the struggle against it, a part of the everyday experience of being a Dalit.

> itihaas se kuch seekha jata hai…agar itihas hi nahi hoga toh kya seekenge…itihas kaun banata hain..ya kaun batata hai…padh kar batane vale toh bahut kam hai…poora itihas toh Dalit pratik hi batata hai…Babasaheb ne toh bahut kuch kiya hai…toh jo babasaheb ki pratimayein hongi…toh ek chotha bacha bhi poochega ki kaun the…samvidhan ke nirmata hain…apne hi desh mein daliton ke liye kuch kiya tha...itihas manobal badhata hai…aaga jaane ka raasta dikhata hai…itihas se seekhte hai…prateekon se seekhte hai.[187]

> [One learns from history…if there is no history how can one learn…who writes history…or who imparts history?…There are not many who can read…most of history is depicted by Dalit symbols…Babasaheb has contributed so much …so if there is a statue of Babasaheb…then even a small child will ask who he was…He wrote the constitution…did some things for the betterment of Dalits of our country…History increases morale…shows the way forward…history teaches…symbols teach.]

Pushpa's narrative above highlights the relevance of these memorials to the Dalit community in documenting their history. Interestingly, for somebody who belongs to the Balmiki caste, her acknowledgement of the relevance of these symbolic

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[187] Interview with activist Pushpa Balmiki on 18th July 2014, Adharshila Office, Lucknow, UP.

interventions for the entire Dalit community draws attention to the equivalential role that these memorials play, irrespective of the internal power dynamics and hierarchy that may exist between the sub castes within the Dalit community or the political affiliations that they may or may have not towards the BSP as a political party.

The continuum that Mayawati's memorial project takes forward is the practice of spatial assertion at the village level. Dalit communities erect Ambedkar statues in squares or households to counter the *pollution line* in the villages. The pollution line ensured that, whether in cities or villages, Dalits are marginalised, pushed to the outskirts and ghettoised into enclaves. But by setting up Ambedkar busts and claiming control over public land, they make a strong spatial assertion. *"Shaadi, baraat, meeting ke liye hai babasheb ki jagah"*[188] [Babasaheb's place is meant for marriage purposes, processions and meetings] claimed Pyarelal, an agricultural labourer from the village of Khaprela in Barabanki. Most of my respondents have articulated this space around Babasaheb's statue, no matter how big or small as 'their space' – for marriage processions, holding meetings and gatherings and as their arena for socialisation and civic engagement.[189] Further to spatial assertion and control over public land, it can be attributed as democratic claim making by Dalit citizen-subjects. Jaoul (2006) demonstrated through his incisive work that for Dalit villagers, whose experiences of everyday life is reflective of violation of rights and dignity, erecting a statue of a Dalit statesman holding the constitution translates into an experience of 'emancipated citizenship' and the faith that law will be enforced to enhance and protect their lot.

The village-micro-level spatial strategy adopted by the community at the village level is extended by Mayawati to the city macro-level but with much added grandeur. As pointed out earlier, she has employed state political power to pursue the Dalit political

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[188] Field note: One of the respondents in the focus group interview on 8th April 2014, Khaprela Village in Barabanki, UP.
[189] Field notes: 20th March 2014, Lucknow, UP.

agenda of spatial claim-making, reflecting the bottom-up approach that exists within the Dalit movement wherein the political leadership advances a blueprint for assertion that is already present among the Dalit public. I argue, based on my fieldwork, that from the rural Dalit villages in Barabanki to the middle and lower/middle class Dalits in the cities of Lucknow and Delhi, that their identification with these memorials is that of pride and assertion. A few middle-class Dalits who raised issues of corruption and wasting money in relation to the memorials did so mostly due to their growing disaffection with the BSP and Mayawati, rather than symbolism per se.[190] I claim this based on their celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti: the same set of respondents enthusiastically participated in organising the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations in Delhi and Lucknow.[191] Omvedt wrote that "the earlier Dalit middle class fought against casteism, but were often concerned with personal survival to do much. The new generation is now coming into their own and discovering a new pride in being Dalit" (2004, p. 27). Therefore, the symbolic habitus seems more autonomous and democratic within the Dalit community: the civil society groups and NGOs have their own creative space to determine the representation of their identity, as does the BSP, their political party representative.

The continuum of identification among the rural poor and urban educated Dalits in relation to the worth of memorials and statues as being self-empowering demonstrates a disjuncture between the dominant narrative and the voices from within the community. The media's standard narratives of corruption, wasted money and misuse of public funds needs to be further probed. These voices echo the *savarna* (upper-caste) unrest and can be considered as one of the most potent means by which caste antagonism against the memorials in particular, and the statues in general, is constantly circulated. This is not to deny the fact that there are internal differences and

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[190] Field notes: 10th April 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[191] Field notes: 15th April 2014, New Delhi.

opinions that are critical of Mayawati's intervention within the Dalit community,[192] but

for the savarna media to speak on behalf of Dalits reveals their discomfort because

these memorials interrupt not just their *sanitised gaze* and *mind* but also the unquestioned

and self-assumed claim and access that caste Hindus have had over state, land and

public resources.

> The fact that Mayawati got the memorial built with certain objectives are paying
> dividends in multiple ways. It's a conspiracy to mingle it with corruption and to let
> down through the means of corruption. If corruption has to be discussed, then why
> only in the context of Mayawati and the Dalits? Then you should talk holistically and
> also decide who is doing it in percentage terms and for how long, and then you will
> realise that Dalits hardly feature.[193]

Consequently, the inherent bias against the BSP and the anxiety of caste Hindus

translates into politics of accusation despite the fact that most of the national political

establishments are up to their ears in corruption. As Teltumbde (2010b) argues,

whatever she is accused of by the elitist media is nothing new in its essentials. Caste

Hindus' domination of media houses as proprietors and editors of newspapers has

meant that the media has been a source for perpetuating caste-based stereotypes and a

complete blackout of Dalit assertion. The structural violence of Dalit exclusion from

the composition of the media demonstrates institutionalisation of caste-based

discrimination. "The vast majority of journalists and editors who are in the mainstream

media are not Dalits" (Jeffrey, 2001, p. 226). The *manuwadi* gaze then prefers to tell

stories that satisfy their caste-based privileges and prefers to depict Dalits as only

victims. Dalit subjects can only be victims of violence or beneficiaries of state patronage

through reservations; Dalit contestations, assertions and victories are blind spots

(Jeffrey, 2001; Loynd, 2008; Vardarajan, 2006). Hence, Mayawati's powerful Dalit spatial

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[192] Field notes: 24th April 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[193] Interview with Arun Khote, 10th May 2014, PMARC office, Gomti Nagar Lucknow. UP. He is the head of the PMARC, which plays a primary role in collecting news on issues of caste-based atrocities and violence. These are collated as the tendency for these incidents to be given only marginal space in mainstream media (both print and television) is obvious due to the inherent bias of the media houses. All national commissions utilise the information provided by the PMARC in order to deal with issues of Dalit human rights violations and to make legal interventions.

assertion through the *Sthal* or political victories of the BSP is trivialised to wasteful aggrandisement whereas the voices from within the Dalit community say otherwise. As Sehdev, an agricultural labourer said, *"Paise ki barbadi kaisi hui…jab banaya hai toh barbadi kaisi hui…bahut kharab lagta hai"*[194] [How is it a waste of money? If it has been built, then how is it a waste? It feels very bad]. On the other hand, a middle class Dalit student, Bhasker, justified the *Sthal* as contributing to development by revenue collection along with the political assertion therein:

> jo log kehte hai ki paise pheke gaye hai woh galat hai…bahar se log aate hai , paryatak aate hai hai Lucknow mein usko dekhne ko…itna saara paise aata hai sarkar ko..Behenji ne ek imaarat banwai hai rajnaitik taur pe aur woh zinda rahega

> [People who claim that money has been wasted are wrong. People come from outside of Lucknow to see it and there is so much money that comes to the government. *Behenji* got the *Sthal* built and politically it will continue to be alive.]

Bhasker's response above on the political significance of the *Sthal* underscores that, irrespective of Mayawati's or the BSP's political fortunes, the political purpose for which it was envisioned continues to be gratified within the community.

Applying the lens of 'structure of feeling' (Rao, 2009) to the analysis here implies that Mayawati's commemorative *sthal* and *chowk* intervene and strike at the core of *manuwadi* politics – the pollution line – by finally destabilising the entrenched overlap between sacred and civic. In addition to interrupting the Brahmanical gaze and their perception that it permeates, these memorials also tamper with the essence of interaction that takes place between a public space/material structure and the type of bodies – in the form of visitors – that it aims to encompass or attract. My fieldwork in the confines of the *Sthal* demonstrates that its features, from the entry prices to the open expanse of the complex, target a particular kind of body – the labouring and stigmatised Dalit-Bahujan body – who can withstand wide shadeless spaces, take direct heat unhindered and can afford only a meagre sum to *see* their space. The demeanour of

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[194] Interview with Sehdev, 15th July 2014, Samesi, Nagram district, Lucknow, UP.

the architecture exhibits how Dalit bodies have always been treated according to the caste codes whose regulation of time and space for the twice-born only allowed Dalit bodies to be visible during the scorching heat of the afternoon because at other times their shadows could be polluting for the upper castes.

Asked "How does it feel to be here?," the identification and affective response of one of the visitors to the *Sthal*, a railway employee from Punjab who had come to Lucknow for a rally organised by their trade union, evidently brought out a moment of a strong identitarian assertion of awe, respect and pride:

> Bahut acha laga yahan pe aake.mein SC hoon! kisi ne hamare liye kabhi aisa nahi kiya, Mayawati ne yeh bahut acha kaam kiya hai...koi galat nahi kiya itna paisa lagake..!'[195]

> [It felt very nice coming here...I am a SC! Nobody has done anything like this for us; Mayawati has done a very good thing. She has not done anything wrong by putting in so much money.]

His response represents what can be described as 'performative meaning-making';[196] it reiterates and re-circulates the Dalit caste based assertion with every Dalit visitor. By having a place of their own that represents their history, leaders and struggles and which is accessible to them on their own terms; these memorials are changing the nature of access, participation and spatial claim making on mainstream public land for Dalits. Furthermore, by daring to *see*, the Dalit gaze is looking back at power and refusing to be invisible.

The spatial strategy adopted by Mayawati also effectively transformed the *Sthal* into a tourist attraction. The spectacularness and the grandeur of the memorial have re-signified the spatial landscape of Lucknow. It has gone beyond being only a Dalit space and has been transformed into a place of leisure for *'everyone'*. Non-Dalit bodies visit it as a tourist site, a space for recreation and relaxation. Furthermore, because of its

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[195] Anonymous respondent, 10th March 2014, Parivartan Sthal, Gomtinagar, Lucknow, UP.
[196] Freitag (2014, p. 433) modifies Pinney's formulation of performative productivity to imply that "actors involved perform certain contributions for the meaning of the whole".

grandeur and white marble, it is now being used as a backdrop for commercial and regional cinema by filmmakers. Non-Dalits are now seeing and experiencing it both physically and visually through electronic media and hence it is becoming a part of *savarna* entertainment package as well. By mainstreaming it, Mayawati has brought caste dynamics into the symbolic political field; by getting caste Hindus to *visit for leisure* she has turned the binary of 'purity-pollution' on its head.

I therefore contest the argument made by Loynd (2009, p. 479) that the *sthal* institutionalises identity politics and hence is an exclusionary site. She argues:

> Its low public exposure in the mainstream press, along with its forbidding high gates, suggest that the Kendra is not designed to be particularly inviting to the broader, non-Dalit, public – it is not a centre designed to influence the upper castes. In other words, it represents and caters to a specific sector of the population to the exclusion of others.

On the contrary, I argue that the success of the Dalit symbolic and spatial strategy has been that, despite it being a symbol of powerful identitarian assertion and exclusive in terms of targeting Dalits by all means just as *manuwadi* spaces are upper-caste centred, it has been able to extend beyond its caste-based enclosure/abstraction by forcing the upper caste/upper/middle classes to acknowledge its existence on Dalit terms. Altering the terms of intimate interaction, as both Dalit and non-Dalit bodies come to inhabit the same space and time, is the most potent threat to the pollution line both physically and psychologically. As well as altering the dynamics of the interaction inside the *Sthal*, these monuments are also redefining the visual-scape of Lucknow city.

> It is symbolic of assertion...Lucknow ke busy sadkon ke beecho – beech…it is representative of Bahujan history…symbolic ko representation mil raha hain.[197]
>
> [It is symbolic of assertion…just in the centre of very busy roads of Lucknow…it is representative of *Bahujan* history…the symbolic is getting representation here.]

By building the memorial at the centre of Lucknow, Mayawati transformed the sensibility of the city by infusing a new *'Bahujan'* meaning and socio-political

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[197] Field notes: Meeting with Rajkumar, Associate Professor, Dyal Singh College, Delhi University, 6th February 2014, New Delhi.

imagination as the narrative above by a middle-class Dalit city dweller explains. Lucknow is dominated by "monumental buildings such as *imambaras* (shrines) and palaces [which] were remarkably consistent in vision, motifs and exuberance, if eclectic, in their references and inspiration" (Freitag, 2014, p. 431). This visual repertoire of the *nawabi* (Islamic) culture that has dominated the landscape of the Lucknow city has been redefined with Mayawati's memorial project. Besides imputing new social meaning to space, the memorial also translates into Dalits' space as it symbolically transgresses the pollution line, conferring on the invisible Dalit subjects their 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996). The practice of the caste system ensures that Dalits are imperceptible by all networks of social interaction and exchange, but through the memorial, the untouchables' history, worldview and embodied experience becomes part of Lucknow; as they are networked into the centre they are not only made visible but also seen as claim making subjects on the state's land and resources.

By visiting the *Sthal* and making their own Ambedkar statues Dalits are asserting their presence and transgressing the *manuwadi* gaze spatially, temporally and visually.

5.2.2 Inverting the pollution line: re-naming and redistributive justice

Dalit *bastis* (slums) are spatial caste enclaves carved out on the basis of the pollution line. They are situated on the outskirts of cities and villages and invisible to the networks of social interaction. Spatial exclusion of these sorts perpetuate socio-economic cleavages because of their proscription from modes of exchange and this, combined with practices of untouchability, leads to Dalit exclusion from resourceful economic opportunities. Mayawati's spatial strategy not only involves building *sthals* and *chowks* but also influences policy making to ensure economic redistribution.

One way of influencing people's consciousness and (re)claiming history is by renaming streets, buildings and institutions as they constitute an everyday collective

experience. Recognising that spatial segregation "only reinforces the overlap between the pollution line and the poverty line" (Guru, 2004, p. 760), her strategy was to name or rename districts, parks, educational institutions and development policy programmes after Dalit leaders and social reformers. Mayawati started with a series of name changes: "Agra University was re-named Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar University. New districts were carved out and renamed after Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Mahamayana, the mother of Buddha" (Jaffrelot, 2003a, p. 415).

Mayawati inverted the Dalit *bastis* (spaces of ghettoisation) into spatial enclaves for extending material benefits and transformed them through welfare programmes. BSP leader Maurya pointed out,

> esi samman deneke tehat bahut saare jila banwaye gaye…ek toh mahapurushon ko sammaan mila aur dusra azadi se lekar abhi tak jo vikas se achut the ab mukhyadhara mein aa gaye...vishwavidyalayon ki bhi sthapana hui…jan jan tak hamare mahapurushon ka naam bhi pahucha aur doosri aur vikas aur shiksha ke kshetra mein anootha udaharan diya behen Mayawati ne.[198]

> [Through this process of naming...many new districts were created…on one hand great people were honoured and on the other hand since Independence the Dalits, who were left out of development, have been brought into the mainstream…New universities were also set up…the names of our great people also reached out to the masses, setting new examples in the field of development and education.]

Spatial claim making led to transforming Dalit subjects into citizen benefactors of state-led economic development and redistribution; the symbolic and the performative overlaps when such strategies are adopted. The most effective illustration of this intent can be seen in the focused implementation of the Ambedkar Village Plan (AVP). The AVP was initiated by the Mulayam Singh government in 1991 (Jaffrelot, 2003a; Pai, 2002) but from 1995 onwards Mayawati infused more energy with focused implementation; "the AVP came to symbolize the changed relationship between the Dalit and the state" (Pai, 2002, p. 199). There was particular attention to infrastructure building and other social parameters which included roads, hand-pumps, houses and

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[198] Interview with Khushilal Maurya, BSP Leader of Opposition, UP Assembly, 18th June 2014, Vidhan Sabha, Lucknow, UP.

pensions for widows and the elderly. Bhasker, a student at the intermediate level, recounted the developments that were implemented once Balsinghkheda was declared an Ambedkar village:

> badlav toh bahut hua...RCC bani hai, pakki road, bijli aur naliya…Ambedkar gauv hain kyunki…esa nahi hai ki abhi kaam nahi ho raha hain...abhi lekin repairing ka kaam hota hai...kuch bigadta hai hain toh sudharenge hi.[199]
>
> [There have been lots of changes…new roads, houses, electricity and drains...because it is an Ambedkar village…It is not that work is not happening now…but now it is mostly repairs…if something goes wrong, then of course they will at least repair it.]

It started by first targeting villages that had 50% SC population and gradually was phased out to villages with 25-30% SC population (Jaffrelot, 2003a). Most of the villages that came under the scheme benefitted materially in relation to getting access to basic resources. In the two villages of Samesi and Balsinghkhedha in Nagram district, which came under the AVP, villagers expressed their satisfaction when asked about the work done during Mayawati's era and felt a sense of pride and ownership associating her rule as that of their 'own'.[200] These spatial interventions have also established the primacy of the state as the main arbiter, since it has claim over public land. However, villagers from non-AVP zones, such as Barabanki, felt dejected at not being included in the programme. Despite that, it is interesting to note that non-inclusion did not translate into withdrawal of their support for the BSP or Mayawati; in fact, the identification grew stronger as they also felt empowered by having their own bust of Ambedkar within their villages and so with the *Sthal*.[201] Therefore, based on my fieldwork, I argue that Mayawati's intervention unsettled the binary between the material and the symbolic, both in relation to material spatial assertion and economic redistribution. Jaoul's (2006) assessment that, because concerns of dignity are considered more immediate, the material question is postponed is based on the artificial

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[199] Respondent in focus group interview, 20th July 2014, Balsinghkedha, Nagram, UP.
[200] Field notes: 24th March 2014, Samesi and Balsinghkheda, UP.
[201] Field notes: 15th July 2014, Barabanki, UP.

dichotomy between the symbolic and material. As I have discussed and demonstrated, this split does not exist for the Dalit subject. Even their identification and expression of material needs/satisfaction is because of their symbolic affiliation with both Ambedkar and Mayawati.

By being so central to the city's visual landscape *every 'body'* experiences the encounter with this structure visually, materially and discursively. As an anti-Brahmanical counter space, the *Sthal* emanates alternative social meaning by rejecting temple architecture with its hierarchy, makes a materialist spatial claim for Dalits on public land and forges Dalit subjects and their history to be part of Lucknow's *oeuvre*. Just as a Dalit body in their everyday encounters caste, so does now every *non- Dalit body*; caste antagonism and the resultant anxiety continues to be activated through this symbolic register. Mayawati's spatial strategies have contributed to making the Dalit-citizen subject and their worldview visible.

The next section discusses the symbolic *habitus* of the politics of statues in Dalit politics. What does the *appearance* of statues of Dalit leaders in the Brahmanical field of perception imply? Do they disrupt the religio-sacred space?

5.3   Statues of Dis 'order'

This section discusses the symbolic *habitus* of Dalit politics which is epitomised by the politics of statues. The acts of symbolic violence by caste Hindus against Dalit icons – either Ambedkar's or Mayawati's statues are usually carried out by either damaging them or garlanding them with slippers/shoes (Tripathi, 2012), demonstrating the normative order that these statues aim to unsettle and transgress.

> Because political order has something to do with both landscape and history, changing the political order no matter where, often means changing the bronzed human beings who both stabilize the landscape and temporally freeze certain values. (Verdery, 1999, p. 7)

Verdery brings attention to the role of statues and its impact in changing or influencing political order. She argues that a shift in the political order often translates into altering those statues that entrench certain political and social norms. In this vein, therefore, the appearance of statues of Dalit leaders in the public sphere aims to impact the existing political order, landscape and history. Applying Verdery's and Tartakov's perspectives on statues and practices of iconography respectively, I argue that the *appearance* of these civic statues in the symbolic political field, unlike the religious deities, challenges the symbolic power exhibited by caste Hindus and their unquestioned appropriation of space with roadside Hindu temples. The discussion, while extending Jaoul's and Lynch's work on the analysis of Ambedkar statues, also contributes by analysing Mayawati's statue's impact on Brahmanical patriarchy. By disturbing the Brahmanical/nationalist/patriarchal vision, statues of Dalit leaders visualise secular and civic norms of equality and justice and, most crucially, the Dalit citizen-subject's gaze.

Figure 5.7: Barabanki, Uttar Pradesh[202]

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[202]Image taken by the author, 12th March 2014, Lucknow, UP.

5.3.1 Ambedkar statues: of *Mahar*[203] 'Manu'[204], Dalit assertion and the defiant gaze

Figure 5.7 displays the ownership, affection and identification that my respondents had towards *their* Babaseheb's statue – built by them, with their own money.[205] Long before Mayawati started erecting Ambedkar's statues as part of her political and ideological strategy after gaining political power, the Dalit community themselves were organising, collecting *chanda* (voluntary contributions) and building their own Ambedkar statues to assert themselves.

> iss desh ka yeh bhi ek sachh hai..Mahatma Gandhi ke jitney bhi prateek hai voh 95% pratimaye sarkar ne lagaye hai...lekin Gandhiji ke pratimayon se badhkar kam se kam sau guna pratimaye iss desh mein Dr. Ambedkar ki lagi hai…aur unki murtiyon mein se lagbhag 95% murtiyan samaj ne lagvaye hain…Dalit varg ne lagayi hai...[206]

> [It's a truth of our country; of all the statues of Mahatma Gandhi, around 95% have been built by the government. But, compared to Gandhiji's statue, there are around 100% more statues of Dr. Ambedkar; and of them more than 95% of those statues have been set up by the community. The Dalit community has built them.]

Dalit subjects' agency and collective assertion thus is not bound by political leadership, alerting to the existence of a critical community who are deeply aware of their positionality and the need for constant struggle to assert it independently. For instance, Gautam recounted their struggle in the village to erect a taller than normal statue of Babaseheb:

> hamari babsaheb ki murti hain…6 foot ki...lekin adha hi banwa rahe the...poori biradari khadi ho gayi…jail jane ko tayyar ho gayee thi..chaar din ka sangharsh chala tha…hamari logon ki bhavna rahi hai ki hum Babasaheb ki murat hum lagvayenge…hum logon ke naam pe koi zameen nahi hai…humne zameen li…murat lagai taki samajik zameen pe apne chamar ka bhi hak ho…lagaya hai ek utsah ke liye ki

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[203] The *Mahars* are a Scheduled Caste community in Maharashtra (Mumbai). They are mostly Ambedkarite and had converted to Buddhism following him.

[204] Manu is the author of Manu-Smiriti, the Hindu code of law. I use it here in relation to appointing Ambedkar as the chairperson of the committee to draft the Indian Constitution. It exposes the irony of the process since a Dalit was framing the code of law for an Independent India based on the principles of equality for all, thus striking a large blow to the inequalities Manu institutionalised through the graded hierarchy of the caste system.

[205] Field notes: June-July 2014, UP.

[206] Interview with Arun Khote, 10th May 2014, PMARC office, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.

Babasaheb ki murat Samesi mein hain…itne bade majre main honi hi chahiye...unhone itna bada samvidhan likha hai toh kya hum itni badi murat nahi laga sakte?![207]

[We have a six foot tall statue of Babasaheb…But they [upper caste villagers/bureaucrats] were only allowing three feet tall…The whole community stood up …were even ready to go to jail… We struggled for four days…it was our wish that we would have a Babasaheb statue built…There is no land in our name… but we got the land and built the statute so that we *Chamars* also have a claim on public land…Also, for the enthusiasm that there is a Ambedkar statue in Samesi…Should be there in a big town like this?…He has written such a big constitution, can't we make a big statue for him?!]

His narrative captures two dimensions of Dalit assertion. First, a *Chamar* spatial assertion[208] – that they were denied permission by the upper caste villagers and the administrative bureaucratic structure, stories of struggle that were repeated during my fieldwork in all three Dalit rural villages.[209] Second, they were all beaming with pride because they had succeeded in building a tall statue for the author of India's constitution. As one of them commented, *"unhi ki vajah se khatiya mein baithe hai, varna zameen pe hote"*[210] [It is because of him that we are sitting on the cot otherwise we would be on the ground]. Babasaheb is perceived as a statesman, man of action and a reflective thinker, different from idol worship based on blind faith. The respect and the identification that the community has towards Ambedkar are because he played a crucial role in constituting a non-Hindu Dalit political identity and hence is rightly perceived as their political representative. This understanding informs both the nature of iconographic practices adopted by the community and the type of critical and reflexive subjectivity that is constituted with the first influential Dalit political leader in India's history.

The iconographic practices display uniformity in the style and the normative order that is aimed at establishing Ambedkar as a man and not as a deity. "The name Ambedkar was a fetish object circulating through diverse arenas and accruing signifying

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[207]Interview with Naumi Lal Gautam on 19th July 2014, Samesi village, Nagram, UP.
[208] *Chamar* is a Dalit caste classified as Scheduled Castes in UP. According to the Hindu caste-based division of labour, they are engaged in tanning activities and also denied access to land.
[209] Field notes: June-July 2014, UP.
[210] Focus group interview respondent, 19th July 2014, Samesi, UP.

power, as was his iconic representation" (Rao, 2009, p. 188). Through the Dalit gaze, Ambedkar is seen as 'one amongst them', a highly educated and enlightened scholar from within their community and the father of the Constitution. Two aspects of this depiction should be paid attention to; first, at the level of identity and second, the message underlying this depiction. Ambedkar statues follow a standardised form of representation because his identity as a learned man is always embedded with his caste; as Zelliot describes "alongside the stereotype of the Mahar" (1992, p. 57). To challenge caste-based stereotyping, his identity as an educated member of the community could be only reinforced through clothes and mannerisms. Ambedkar's political life elucidates that despite his educational achievements and socio-economic mobility, he was never seen beyond his caste identity of being a *Mahar*.

While Gandhi's saint-peasant garb reinforced the identity he sought with the Indian masses, Ambedkar's western dress and his independent critical temperament underlined the new identity he sought for the *Mahar* (Zelliot, 1992, p. 61). Scholars who have analysed the politics of Ambedkar's statue in UP such as Lynch, Jaoul, Pai and Tartakov outline the uniformity in the iconographic depiction.

> Ambedkar is presented as a man in a blue business suit, white shirt and red tie, with a fountain pen in his pocket and a book in one hand. He is bare headed, his dark hair neatly combed down, and wears a pair of black rimmed spectacles, standing in a square *'samabhanga'* or no bends position. (Tartakov, 2012, p. 21)

In the context of India's traditional imagery this figure makes three points: that he is learned, belongs to the city and has no godly connotations. "The blue suit indicated a rational message of salvation from caste hierarchy" (Lynch, 2012, p. 185), therefore it represented a source of enlightenment and civic identity for the community.

It is interesting to note that Ambedkar's suit also symbolised a challenge to the established nationalist leaders. The western and modernist outlook that Ambedkar symbolised in his attire set him apart from the existing western-educated, elite and

upper-caste Nationalist leaders – Gandhi's loincloth or Nehru's *sherwani* (knee-length coat). Ilaiah, for instance, invokes this westernised image of Ambedkar and claims that "[u]nlike Gandhi and Nehru, Ambedkar wore a suit throughout his life without facing any problem from his community. Gandhi had to struggle a lot to de-westernise himself," (Ilaiah, 2003) thus claiming that the Dalit community did not place any pressure on him based on any rigid ideas around 'authentic' Indian culture. In fact, on the contrary for Dalit politics, western exchange has enabled, claimed Ilaiah to confront the Brahmanical code of culture regarding food, knowledge and dress. However, Ambedkar's modernist outlook did not create uncritical acceptance of his attire and demeanour within the movement. For instance, Teltumbde (1997), discussing the post-Ambedkar dynamics within the Dalit movement, highlights that this western image contributed to "petty bourgeois-ize the entire Dalit movement" thereby leading to a crisis in leadership after his death. Gaikwad, the next mass-based frontrunner to succeed Ambedkar was more of a *kurta*-clad activist, rustic and not university educated and hence considered less suitable by the broader community to take up the leadership: "This mould was based on the contemporary middle class cultural norms that Ambedkar displayed in his attire and general demeanour" (Teltumbde, 1997). Despite these fallouts, Ambedkar's attire was symbolic of his enlightened rise in opposition to presumed privileges of the Nationalist leadership of those times.

Just as much as with his blue suit, there are multiple interpretations of the book in his hand and the posture. The book is interpreted as the Constitution, signifying rejection of orthodox texts such as the *manusmriti*, *vedas* (scriptures) or the *shastras*. The practices of caste hierarchy and untouchability implied that Dalits could not hear, see or touch these Hindu religious texts. By privileging the secular Constitution over the sacred texts, Ambedkar thus laid the foundation for delineating the sacred from civic. In some statues, the book is identified as *Bharat* (India); more generally, it is agreed to

emphasise the role of education and civic identity provided by the Constitution in creating a subversive and critical community.

> Ambedkar emerged as a powerful symbol in the campaign to link Dalits with education. Even during the colonial period, many Dalit communities started moving ahead by acquiring education through the numerous Ambedkar libraries and Ambedkar trusts set up in Dalit colonies across India (Narayan, 2011, p. 78).

Ambedkar's posture in the statues is that of usually standing with one leg slightly advanced as if walking, his arm raised and index finger pointing upwards, generally understood across the range of signification, from oratory to teaching (Lynch, 1969; Rao, 2009; Tartakov, 2012). Babasaheb and the varied interpretations of him by sections of the Dalit community depict the diverse ways his contributions are perceived and keep the hope of empowerment alive. Guru (2008) identifies at least three images of Ambedkar that the Dalit community endorses: 'Maha Manav' (a great man), messiah, and a modernist. The modernist image of Ambedkar in particular is over-determined in the cultural landscape and the community articulates this image through iconography, narratives and folk culture. The modernist depiction is cogent on two levels: first, from within the Dalit community, norms of rationality and equality are deeply valued and, second, it underscores defiance of the Hindu social order. Ambedkar's modernist outlook was a powerful opposition to the assimilation aimed for by Gandhi: Dalit political subjectivity within the Gandhian framework infantilised and de-politicised the lower castes by referring to them as *Harijans* (Children of God).[211] Ambedkar articulated a separate political identity for the Dalits, transgressing the fold of Hinduism and negating its social order of caste.

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[211] Gandhi rechristened the Untouchable castes as *Harijans* or children of god, just after the signing the Poona Pact. He believed it was a more indigenous term ans less dehumanizing than being called Untouchables or *Bhangis*. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement found Gandhi's coinage unacceptable and consider it an effort to side step the issue of the caste system. https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/labelling-dalits-%E2%80%98harijans%E2%80%99-how-we-remain-ignorant-and-insensitive-dalit-identity-35486

The Constitution in his hand, therefore, is of immense significance symbolically and discursively. Unlike religious tenets, it represented the resolve to an equal democratic political community. Most importantly, post independence, Ambedkar an *untouchable*, as head of the drafting committee played an important role in constituting an equalised political community and gradually came to be referred to as the 'New Manu'. For the Dalit gaze it meant that Ambedkar is not just their enlightened leader but also the father of Indian Constitution. He gave "Dalits a new identity as a citizen with equal rights as well as the means of a new and powerful praxis, the universal franchise within a democratic political system" (Lynch, 2012, p. 185). As one of my respondents noted, the "Brahmanical order believes in hierarchy and is anti-development and anti-equality whereas Ambedkar believed in *samata, samanta aur bandhutva*[212] (parity, equality and brotherhood)".

Ambedkar was rechristened as the 'New Manu' as he was appointed chair of the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution. This possibly was the most ironic title in the political history of India as he was dubbed after Manu, the author of the *Manusmriti*; "this was rather piquant given that in 1927 Ambedkar had set fire to this very text during the Mahad Satyagraha" (Jaffrelot, 2005a, p. 106). The performative impact of Ambedkar as the 'New Manu' implied a challenge to the *manuwadi* social order and to the triumvirate Gandhi-Nehru-Patel led nationalist politics and their upper-caste worldview. His strategy was to deconstruct graded inequality and to evolve a politico-ideological counter offensive to create an alternative Untouchable tradition and identity. Ambedkar was of the opinion that "the real cleavage among Hindus was not between Brahmins and Non-Brahmins, but between 'touchables' and 'untouchables'" (Jaffrelot, 2005a, p. 53). Omvedt points out that Ambedkar followed

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[212]Interview with activist Ram Kumar, 4th March 2014, DAG office, Lucknow, UP.

the tradition propounded by Phule and Periyar in creating an alternate standpoint. Their thought represents:

> the effort to construct an alternative identity of the people, based on non-north Indian and low caste perspectives, critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu caste society but also of its claim to antiquity and to being the major Indian tradition. (Omvedt, 2000, p. 132)

The caste lines were clearly drawn between Ambedkar and the rest of the Nationalist leaders and exposed overtly on the issues of the Communal Award and the Hindu Code Bill. Ambedkar was the only political leader seen by Gandhi as a political and ideological opponent and so he adopted the strategy of fasting in 1932 to protest the introduction of separate electorates for Dalits in provincial legislatures under the Communal Award proposed by the British in that year. Gandhi objected to the provisions on the premise that it would divide 'Hindu society'. Gandhi's understanding of unity was underscored by upper-caste patronage and assimilationist stand towards the Untouchables. Ambedkar, however, perceived these provisions as a means to enhance the lot of the Untouchables and supported them but, faced with Gandhi's protest fast, reluctantly agreed to the Poona Pact which removed the clauses that Gandhi opposed.

Similarly, he ideologically opposed Nehru, despite both sharing a modern secularist worldview, Ambedkar felt defeated in the context of the Hindu Code Bill[213] and tendered his resignation from the cabinet. Nehru entrusted a committee headed by Ambedkar to draft a new Hindu code to reform the personal laws. Ambedkar's opposition to the final version of the Hindu Code Bill should be seen not just as political opposition but an expression of his commitment to annihilate regressive caste-based norms and also to institutionalise equality between men and women in personal laws. In his draft the committee had suggested some significant changes concerning

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[213] The British had initiated the process of reforming the Hindu personal laws but were unable to institutionalise them; the process was then taken up by the post-Independence government led by Nehru. The Hindu Code Bill refers to several laws introduced to reform the Hindu personal law.

categorisation of the 'Hindu' category, practices of marriage and divorce, issue of property and inheritance. By allowing divorce and inheritance rights to daughters and widows, Ambedkar was seen as destabilising the foundations of the Hindu family. The draft was opposed by many lawmakers, including the obvious conservatives from the Hindu Mahasabha to even Congress liberals such as Rajendra Prasad.[214] Beyond thwarting caste, his proposals were also aimed at ensuring gender parity. "Ambedkar considered that he had not been supported enough by the Prime Minister and he rendered his resignation from his government on September 27" (Keer, 1971, pp. 435–436). He also disagreed with Nehru on Kashmir: " he thought the territory should have gone to Pakistan" (Jaffrelot, 2005a, p. 117). Hence, Ambedkar's political vision was based on certain norms of equality and justice.

> *Ambedkar ki murtiyon ke saath ek vaicharik soch bhi aati hai* [There is an ideological thinking that comes along with Ambedkar's statue]…like a moral code of conduct to be followed in one's personal life whereas when it is 'godly' following then it involves hierarchy and patriarchy.[215]

The political choice by Dalits to erect busts or statues of Ambedkar is informed by his political vision and the normative norms that he stood for. Naresh's account above demonstrates self-reflexivity, critical questioning and sometimes transgressing outside of the Hindu way of life. Ambedkar was a floating signifier associated with a diverse range of social practices and political demands that brought them all into a unified domain of action and visibility. In Dalit politics, Tartakov argues, "the Ambedkar statues indicate the presence of people who have chosen to transform their lives through his teachings" (Tartakov, 2012, p. 85). Babasaheb is a signifier of moral conduct and behaviour for the villagers as people try and abide by the moral codes that were laid down by him. The underlying motive involves not just thwarting the

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[214] In a letter to Patel, Prasad had written, "new concepts and ideas are not only foreign to Hindu laws but are susceptible to divide every family" (Jaffrelot, 2003b).
[215] Interview with Naresh, 15th July 2014, Saemsi, Nagram district.

oppression inherent in Brahmanism but transgressing hierarchies of all kinds, from patriarchy to inter-community divisions.[216]

This is most evidently visible in the case of Dalit women and their position both within the family and in the community. During fieldwork, especially in rural UP, it was obvious that Dalit women's sense of identification with Ambedkar and his thoughts and the feelings of pride and ownership of his statue are quite strong.[217] Contrary to women's role in Hinduism wherein their participation, both in the private and public realm, is ritualistically defined by religio-social norms which translate their demeanour to be submissive and bounded by patriarchal control, Dalit women are more assertive of their identity and aware of the ideas that Ambedkar inheres. During fieldwork in one of the villages, the women of the community took me to 'their Babasaheb's statue', a visible empowerment and assertion because of their belief in his views on gender equality.[218]

> swachkar samuday jo daliton mein bhi ati-Dalit; pat-Dalit sthithi mein hai…unchi jatiyon ne toh brahamnvaadi varna vyavastha ke tehat hannan kiya hi lekin upjati vibhajan bhi mayane rakhta hai…jo Dalit jatiyaan mein SC caste thi unhone bhi oonch-neech aur bhed bhav ki bhavana rakhte hai…woh bhi bahishkrit samaj ke saath khana peena, baithana, rishta karna pasand nahi karte …Babsahab toh poore Dalit samaj ke muktidata hai[219]
>
> [The community of sweepers (*Balmikis*) are the ultra-Dalits among the Dalits…The upper castes have made use of the Brahmanical caste order to abuse [us] but inter-caste divisions also play a role…even within Dalit castes the SC castes have maintained discriminations. They also would prefer not to eat, drink, sit or make alliances with the outcastes…Babasaheb was the liberator for the whole community.]

Pushpa Balmiki's narrative above explains Ambedkar's symbolism playing an equivalential logic among the sub-sects of *Jatavs*, *Pasis* and *Bhangis* within the larger Dalit community. Heterogeneity, hierarchy and differing political influences exist between the different sub-castes. Dalit identity is thus rife with contestation; in fact, the dominant

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[216] Field notes: 18th March 2014, Barabanki, UP.
[217] Field notes: 20th March 2014, Barabanki, UP.
[218] Field notes: 20th March 2014, Barabanki, UP.
[219] Interview with activist Pushpa Balmiki on 18th July 2014, Adharshila Office, Lucknow.

Dalit identity of *Chamars* and *Jatavs* cuts both ways. Smaller groups amongst the SCs such as *Jogi* (monkey and bear circus owners), *Nat* (street circus performers), *Rangrej* (people who dye clothes), *Manihar* (bangle sellers), *Valmiki* and *Hela* (sweepers), *Pasi* (pig rearers), *Dhanuk* (vegetable growers), *Dhobi* (washerman), *Kori* (weavers) and *Kanjar* (people who weave mats) do not always identify with the dominant group. The power dynamics between the sub-castes causes them to align with different political parties, not always supporting the BSP. "Balmikis and Pasis instead vote for other parties, partly to distinguish themselves from the Chamars, whose hegemony they fear, – the former for the BJP, the latter for the party of Ram Vilas Paswan" (Jaffrelot, 2003a, p. 454). But despite these inter-community imbalances, Babasaheb consolidates the divisions within the community as a unifying icon. The most evident manner in which both the fact that Babasaheb stands for a normative order and a unifying icon is displayed on 14th April each year when *jayanti* (anniversary) celebrations of his birth are held.

Figure 5.8: Parliament Street, New Delhi[220]

Figure 5.8 displays the playing of a *bigul* (drum) in Parliament Street on 14th April in New Delhi to welcome the crowds who have come to celebrate *their*

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[220] Image taken by the author, 14th April 2014, Parliament Street, New Delhi.

Babasaheb. Talking to Khushilal, a gazetted officer beating the *bigul* at the *jayanti* celebrations in Delhi one could hear, see and feel the pride and assertion as he drummed while chanting slogans.

> Babasaheb ki khushi mein bajaya jata hai…Babasaheb ki awaz sab jagah sunai de…jaise jang ke liye elan kiya jaata hai …vaise hi Babasaheb ka jo janam hai usko sachet karne ke liye aur agah karne ke liye ki …hum shikshit ho, sangathit bane aur sangharsh ke liye…jo bigul baj raha hai…yahan pe khade hua logon ko bata rahe hai ki aaj hum kitne sampan hue hai voh Babasaheb ke nirdesh se.[221]
>
> [It is played to celebrate Babasaheb…It should be heard everywhere like during the beginning of a war, like a war cry…similarly to announce, alert and make people conscious of Babasaheb's birth…We should educate ourselves, organise and struggle, ourselves...This drum beating is to tell the people who have assembled here that we have prospered because of Babasaheb's directions.]

Many of the participants who came were lower and middle class government employees and young university students who explained their reason for coming and identifying with Babasaheb was based on his motto of *Educate, Agitate and Organise.*[222] Lynch, in his study of the Ambedkar *jayanti* in Agra noted that "the Ambedkar Fair replaced the Kans Fair[223] and has been celebrated on 14th April ever since" (Lynch, 2012, p. 14). The assumption of a new enlightened political identity by Dalits in Agra signified the substitution, thus rejecting the caste hierarchy and celebrations dictated by Hindu mythology. The mass presence at the *jayanti* on the New Delhi streets implied that his ideas have enabled and empowered them as political subjects and continues to inspire them as a community to fight for their self-respect and assert their identity through political action.

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[221] Interview with Khushilal, gazetted officer, Ambedkar Jayanti Celebrations, 14th April 2014, Parliament Street, New Delhi.
[222] Field notes: 14th April 2014, Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations, Parliament Street, New Delhi.
[223] Lynch, in his incisive work on the origins of the Kans Fair, has highlighted its Brahmanical embedded nature based on the Hindu mythological story around Krishna and his uncle, Kans.

Figure 5.9: Sansad Marg, New Delhi[224]

Figure 5.9 displays the symbolic-spatial assertion by the celebrations; Sansad *Marg* (road) leads to the Parliament and it was Ambedkar who included political recognition of the Untouchables as equal citizens of the political community with an equal right of representation in Parliament in the Indian Constitution. The street is transformed into a Dalit counter public,[225] replete with symbolism of Babasaheb in all shapes and sizes. On 14th April, Dalits from all class dispositions congregate to celebrate Babasaheb. At the *jayanti* Indu, a young college student, described her experience of being part of the celebrations: "[t]here is no other community which gives their ideal respect with so much intensity. Where in the world would you see so many people gather to pay respect to a great man as on 14th April?"[226]

The repertoire ranged from posters of Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders, calendars, framed photos of all Dalit icons, *Jai Bhim* (Hail Bhim) key chains, caps, badges and statues of Buddha. There were long queues to collect Ambedkar calendars,

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[224] Image taken by the author, 14th April 2014, Parliament Street, New Delhi.
[225] Fraser's understanding of a subaltern counter public.
[226] Interview with Indu, Delhi University student, 14th April 2014, Sansad Marg, New Delhi.

published by various groups, which trace Dalit history and icons in visually appealing ways; "each of these calendars is a documentation of history in that while marking the days, each day is represented as a day in the history of Dalit doing" (Rege, 2008, p. 16). Also prominent were book stalls set up by small publishing houses and non-governmental organisations such as the National Confederation of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR) highlighting the community's emphasis on education. The bookstalls aimed to disseminate Dalit literature, biographies of Dalit icons and pamphlets propagating the lives and teachings of Buddha, Ambedkar, Ravidas, Kabir, Jotiba Phule, Savitri Phule and Periyar. The books and pamphlets are reasonably priced to make them accessible and extend their reach which "helps create a Dalit socio-political and socio-economic awakening and awareness amongst them" (Narayan, 2011, p. 11). Most of the stalls were managed by trade union groups from the public sector – demonstrating the continuing dependence of Dalits on the public sector for jobs and economic security. This also shows that caste-based unionisation is an effective coalition in bargaining and negotiating with government institutional structures which are still deeply enmeshed in caste-based discrimination in relation to appointments and promotions of Dalits in the public sector.

On display were also Buddhist repertoires symbolising the politics of conversion adopted by Ambedkar and which inspired many to reject Hinduism. By converting to Buddhism, people were asserting their Dalit identity. Omvedt (1994, 1995, 2004) writes that with conversion to Buddhism Ambedkar achieved what Phule and Periyar for all their resistance to Hinduism had failed to achieve – the constitution of an alternate non-Hindu identity. Conversion was used as a tool for social emancipation. Ambedkar "gives up reforming Hinduism" (Jaffrelot, 2005a, p. 121) and implicitly shifted the debate away from faith towards other issues – social, economic and religious – concerning Hinduism and religion in general. The strength of his politics was visible on

the streets after his death: "Ambedkar died on December 6, 1956, the funeral procession was the biggest Bombay had ever seen and the cremation was the occasion for a new wave of mass conversions numbering some 100,000 people" (Jaffrelot, 2005a, p. 136). The alternate repertoire of Buddhism and people buying all kinds of artefacts shows that the community does believe in the alternate path he proposed: "B.R. Ambedkar's definitive and moving final gesture, his public conversion out of Hinduism together with almost half a million people, became the symbolic core of a liberated Dalit identity" (Rao, 2009, p. 118).

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur showed his rejection of the existing Hindu order with its inherent caste hierarchy. However, Jaffrelot (2003) highlights that Ambedkar's conversion could be considered a pseudo-remedy. He is supposed to have said to Gandhi that he would choose only the least harmful way for the country thus implying that conversion to Buddhism could be seen as falling within the fold of Hinduism. Ambedkar's adoption of Buddhism, from this perspective, was hardly anti-structural and this probably explains the ambiguity regarding Buddhism among Dalit masses. While the symbolism of Buddhism dominates the Dalit public sphere, conversion is not an option for many, although, for some, it is a complex and creative mixture of practices of Hinduism and Buddhism.[227]

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[227] Field notes: 7th July 2014, UP: When visiting many Dalit localities, one would encounter a strange combination of photos either outside or inside homes. For instance, one house had the following sequence of pictures: – the goddess Lakshmi (a Hindu deity), Ambedkar and Buddha.

Figure 5.10: Sansad Marg, New Delhi[228]

Figure 5.10 demonstrates the celebration of one's identity and the inherent *expressivity* at the *jayanti*; what is made visible here is not just the wearing of symbolic attire (blue turbans) and the production and consumption of merchandise, posters and other symbolic objects, but the performance by the body, the visible presence, by being in that space. The *gayan* (singing troupe) party's performance to a packed audience at the All India Dalit *Mahapanchayat* organisation's stall, began with the unveiling of the copy of originally written constitution brought in by the Valmiki association, the *Akhil Bharatiya Valmiki Dharam Samaj,* and put on display amidst chants of *'Babasaheb Ambedkar Amar Rahein!* (Long Live Ambedkar!); '*Dalit Shakti Zindabad'*! (Hail Dalit Power!). One of the recitals was as follows:

> Babasaheb ka yeh tha sapna; apna mission padhai ho; Dalit kaum ke tan pe hamesha suit, boot aur tie ho! Suit boot aur tie aksar sahib log lagate hai; Esi roop mein Bhimrao bhi aksar sabko nazar bhi aate hai! Esi roop mein dekhe kaum bhi; behan ho ya bhai! Dalit kaum ke tan pe hamesha suit, boot aur tie ho!

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[228] Image taken by the author, 14th April 2014, Parliament Street, New Delhi.

[Babasaheb's dream was that our mission should be education. The Dalit community should always wear a suit, boots and a tie. Suits, boots and ties are usually worn by sahibs; Bhimrao is also usually seen in this form. The community should also be seen in this form, sister or brother. The Dalit community should always wear a suit, boots and tie.]

Echoing the sentiments that Babasaheb envisioned for the Dalit community, "[t]he printed booklet and music perform considerable ideological labour in sustaining the heterotopias" (Rege, 2008, p. 17). They bring together and visualise embodied practices and the *affective intensity* of the Dalit subjects. Non-Dalit spectators gaze at posters inquisitively, wanting to know what is going on and then pass by; the Dalit gaze, however, is mostly introspective, engaging and proud.[229] A day of massive participation by young and old alike, 14th April celebrates Babasaheb's teachings, values and emancipatory struggles across the country. Rege (2008) argues that mass gatherings on significant Ambedkarite dates are the days when Dalit history is remembered and reinterpreted. These annual gatherings can be considered as counter publics of Dalit assertion which map the interconnections between the symbolic and the expressive aspect of the Dalit self. The complete absence of this assertion in the print or electronic media outlines the nature of *manuwadi* media; by its invisibilisation the *savarna* media assumes that the power of Dalit assertion can be discounted. Ambedkar *jayanti*, at the heart of the capital city, is an annual civic celebration, a counter-public which publicly represents, enacts and celebrates Ambedkar. I define it as civic because, besides its non-religious significance, it is also the commemoration of the Constitution drafted by him.

Ambedkar statues, therefore, manifest an assertive Dalit subject follower of his thoughts and one appreciative of his contribution to a civic culture of equality and justice signified by the Constitution.

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[229] Field notes: 14th April 2014, Ambedkar Jayanti, Parliament Street, New Delhi.

Figure 5.11: Parivartan Sthal, Lucknow[230]

5.3.2 Mayawati's statue: *Behenji's* non-conformist defiant gaze

Figure 5.11 exhibits the iconography of the 'infamous' Mayawati statue located inside the *Sthal*. It should be noted that when this statue was put up, a) she was (and is) still alive, b) in the statue depiction she is carrying a handbag and wears slippers.[231] By building her own statue, she has redefined and challenged the Brahmanical male gaze, practices of iconography and Dalit women's assertion in the political landscape of India.

> Mayawati ne mahilaon ke liye galat soch rakhne walon ko dikhaya…iss se pehle kisi Dalit ki beti ne kisi purush ka antim sanskar nahi kiya tha…parantu Mayawati ne Kanshi Ram ka antim sanskaar kiya …line tod kar kaam kiya Behenji ne.[232]
>
> [Mayawati has demonstrated to people with a conservative outlook regarding women… Until now a Dalit's daughter had never performed the last rites of a man…but Mayawati performed the last rites of Kanshi Ram…*Behenji* broke the stereotype.]

The crucial part of the narrative above is that "*line tod ke kaam kiya behenji ne*" [Behenji broke the stereotype]: from lighting Kanshi Ram's pyre ("Mayawati to embrace

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[230] Image taken by the author, 13th March 2014, Lucknow, UP.
[231] Field notes: April 2014, Parivartan Sthal, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow, UP.
[232] Interview with activist Pushpa Balmiki, 18th July 2014, Adharshila Office, Lucknow, UP.

Buddhism", 2006) to constructing her own statues, Mayawati, a woman Dalit leader is a vital threat because of her *performative non-conformist* essence to the Brahmanical/nationalist male gaze. "Mayawati, unlike Ambedkar, is an entirely homespun Dalit, without the benefit of the latter's education in the US and his deliberately more modulated and cultivated speech and appearance" (Nigam, 2010, p. 255).

> Thus while advocating conformity all the detailing of norms for women in the Brahmanical texts are a powerful admission of the power of non-conformist women, or all women who have the power to non-conform, to break the entire structure of Hindu orthodoxy (Chakravarti, 1993, p. 580).

As Chakravarti, points out, the greatest threat to Brahmanical patriarchy is a non-conformist woman; viewed through that lens, Mayawati is definitely a threat as a Dalit, Ambedkarite, successful political strategist, efficient administer and single woman without male 'protection'.

Mayawati, *Dalit ki Beti* (daughter of a Dalit), by becoming the first chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India, unsettled the dominant caste equations of the state. Furthermore, by constructing her own statue in the *Sthal* along with all the other Dalit leaders she made her non-conformity visible, discomforting not just the Brahmanical/nationalist political dynamics but also their field of perception. The title of '*Behenji*' (sister) is used to address Mayawati and situate a 'single' woman leader within the patriarchal political system. Similarly, '*Didi*' (elder sister) is used for Mamata Banerjee, (chief minister of Kolkata and another single female politician). On the other hand, '*Amma*' (mother) is famously used for J. Jayalalithaa, the former chief minister of Tamil Nadu. These names of reference for single female political leaders in India demonstrate that it is difficult for patriarchal power structures to comprehend, locate and define women who are not bounded by patriarchal/male anchors. Mayawati refuses to be *tamed* – from using her first name without any surname (which reflects one's caste

position in Indian society) to her defiance of political conventions to perpetuate a Dalit-Bahujan political agenda. She has been subversive and defiant both visually and discursively. Performing excess, for instance in relation to her birthday celebrations or sartorial choices, may be considered as her symbolic assertion and retort at the same time; "by her very appearance ridiculing that attempt much like Ambedkar's Western suit did"(Nigam, 2010, p. 255).

Rege argued from an Ambedkerite theoretical legacy to point out that, "Brahmanical patriarchy fashions sameness, intersections, discreteness, and interdependent differences along a gradation of ascending reverence and descending contempt" (2013, p. 20). Therefore the caste and gender antagonism gets combined in the constant circulation of contempt with narratives from 'megalomaniac Mayawati' to 'charges of corruption' as she disturbs Brahmanical patriarchy.[233] By engraving herself, Mayawati uses practices of iconography to visually disturb the socio-political Brahmanical hierarchies. It is imperative to acknowledge that historically the representation of women leaders in iconographic history has been mostly due to male benevolence/patronage of women activists/political leaders who *fit* the patriarchal stereotypes, for example, Rani Lakshmi Bai or Indira Gandhi.[234] It would be rare that the mainstream patriarchal iconographic practices/gaze would give/allow space for a female political leader who is Dalit. Through her own statues, Mayawati disrupts the visual landscape on two axes.

First, the statues of Mayawati are tailored for the Brahmanical male gaze and not for the sexualised male gaze as she wears a *shalwar kameez* (as opposed to the traditional

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[233] Chakravarti (1993) explains that the Brahmanical social order survives through the caste and gender hierarchy. It is the basis for suppression of upper caste women by ensuring effective sexual control to maintain caste purity.
[234] Both these women were leaders in their own right. However, their acceptance and praise comes from a particular gendered lens that the patriarchal worldview appreciates. Lakshmi Bai was a warrior who fought to save her son's kingdom and is lauded because she fought 'bravely like a man'. Again Mrs Gandhi, on the other hand, despite all her skills is known for her leadership skills, because she was considered 'more like a man'.

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sari), slippers and carries a handbag. This targets the caste Hindu dominated political parties and their gaze which only sees her as 'the *Chamar* woman'.[235] Often the upper-castes' technique of disrespecting Ambedkar takes the form of hanging slippers on his statue, a symbolic violence embedded in caste hierarchy.[236] By adorning her own statue with two leather items – the handbag and the slippers – she transforms caste humiliation into pride and reverses the narrative into the positive aspirational mobility and potential of her caste identity. Despite this, and the power that her political party wields, they have yet to gain social equality with and respect from the upper castes.

> Perhaps she knows only too well that the manufacture of handbags, footwear and other leather goods has given Chamars (like herself and Kanshi Ram) economic means – leather has been one of India's major exports since the mid-nineteenth century and has often meant substantial economic gains for the community – but even after a century and a half that has not been enough to give them social equality. (Jain, 2014, p. 150)

By visualising caste pride and mobility, as also in the context of the Ambedkar memorial project, she activates both the rise of Dalits as a community, their assertion and symbolically contests the caste Hindu repertoire.

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[235] Bose's account of the mob attack by Samajwadi Party (SP) party workers on BSP workers and Mayawati, after she made a claim to forming the government. During the attack, the mob – which included other legislators – shouted to 'drag the chamar woman out from her hole' (Bose, 2008, p. 98). This incident highlights the fact that Mayawati could never rise above her caste identity, just like Ambedkar. They were never given the credence of being a worthy political opponent by the upper caste-dominated Indian political party system.

[236] In India the production of leather goods and the politics of caste are interlinked in complex ways. The majority of tanning activity is sanctioned to the lowest castes of Dalits because it is considered a polluting activity. Also, according to caste practices, while Dalits could *make* slippers (shoes) for other castes, they did not have the right to *wear* them; they were expected to go barefoot.

Figure 5.12: Parivartan Sthal, Lucknow[237]

Figure 5.12 shows the two life-size statues of Mayawati and Kanshi Ram which welcomes everyone at the entrance of the *sthal*. By placing herself next to Kanshi Ram she depicts her commitment to the Dalit agenda and the role that she sees herself performing in pursuing it further.

Her second disruption of the visual landscape is that by establishing statues of women leaders amongst the pantheon of male Dalit icons Mayawati makes a pivotal space for the representation of women leaders who are part of political struggles. She acknowledges them and makes them visible as agents of change in their own right, outside of patriarchal benevolence. Guided by this intention, Savitri Phule's statue[238] is part of the pantheon, to begin with, followed by Mayawati's statue being the second Dalit woman leader. Thus, Mayawati gives visibility to all flag bearers of the anti-caste struggle, male and female, within the *Sthal*. Placing herself besides Kanshi Ram not only

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[237] Image taken by the author in 13th March 2014, Lucknow, India
[238] Savitri Phule was a social reformer who fought against caste and gender based discrimination during the colonial period. She was instrumental in setting up the first school for girls in Pune (Maharashtra), at a time when both caste oppression and gender discrimination made it difficult for girls to attain education.

reflects the political camaraderie that existed between *Saheb* (as he was called) and *Behenji*, but also disturbs the existing Brahmanical patriarchal lens of viewing all such relationships as between mentor and protégés.

Finally, the most hard-hitting rupture caused by Mayawati's statues has been that of disturbing temporalities; she is still alive and arranged their construction herself, despite the fact that the practice of making statues is done usually posthumously. By interrupting time her statues are also challenging the practices of statue building. Thus the mainstream ire, unrest or agitation is all against the transgression of power at multiple levels by a Dalit woman chief minister. The recourse adopted by the *manuvadi* political parties and media is to label her as a 'megalomaniac', 'opulent leader of the outcastes' and '*transfer rani*'[239] and accuse her with an array of corruption charges.

Bose (2008) argues that Mayawati's appeal amongst the Dalits is symbolic and emotional. I argue, however, based on my fieldwork in both rural and urban areas that Mayawati symbolises political power for her community; that the Dalit masses acknowledge and identify with her beyond symbolic resonance – as an able administrator and a political strategist.[240] She has made the political constituency of the Dalit community stake political claims on their own terms; "[t]he fact that unlike other past scheduled caste leaders, Mayawati no longer depends on the patronage of upper caste leaders and parties, provides a special appeal that even Ambedkar did not possess" (Bose, 2008, p. 6). Furthermore, the balancing of issues of dignity and economic interests defined by the Ambedkarite vision explains the continued mass support that both she and the BSP garner. Asked about the relevance of Mayawati and her regime one of my respondents replied:

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[239] Mayawati, during her regime, besides keeping the bureaucracy on its toes, often transferred and relocated IAS officers quite frequently, hence the name. Yet she is not the only one to do this; it is an established pattern in the Indian government structure.
[240] Field notes: Many of my respondents, across classes, lauded Mayawati as an effective administrator. 26th April 2014, Lucknow, UP.

hamesha haathi pe jayega hamara vote..chahe voh jeete na jeete ...chamar hain chamar hi ko dein..Behenji ko phir se aana chahiye…unke shasankaal mein shasan toh tight hota hai'[241]

[Our vote will be for the elephant always, whether it wins or does not win. We are Chamars and will give to a Chamar; Behenji should come again. Under her regime, governance is tight].

Her core Dalit community persists because by renegotiating the boundaries of *what can be said in the public domain* she created a space for the narrative of Dalit resistance against caste Hindu humiliation.[242] Humiliation has a particular vocabulary which decides the depth and intensity of the practices of Untouchability. In fact, the language of humiliation introduces a certain economy of scale that bears on the impact the tormentor intends to produce. "The words that carry and communicate humiliation can achieve a huge impact with less investment" (Guru, 2009, pp. 17–18). The strict institutional implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 allowed her to legally counter the violent narrative agenda of the dominant upper caste.

The earlier legislation which aimed to cover the aspect of atrocities as opposed to offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Protection of Civil Rights Act (PCRA) was found inadequate to deal with the atrocities, gross violation of dignity and offences against the SCs and STs. There were some marked improvements in the effective implementation of the 1989 Act. The constant gaze of state law and order machinery under Mayawati ensured a check on upper caste brazenness and that translated into a sense of fearlessness for the Dalit citizen subjects. At a subjective level this could be considered as a power to counter/reject humiliation. As argued by Guru (2009), two conditions provide a formative context for the definition of humiliation: first, an element of comparison generates within a person the capacity of self-reflexivity

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[241] Interview with Chanda, 50 years old and a focus group respondent, 20th July 2014, Balsinghkedha, Nagram, UP.

[242] Field notes: 5th July 2014, Samesi, UP.

necessary for gaining insight into oneself and others and, second, the emergence and articulation of the language of rights make the assertion against humiliation possible. Thus, Dalits felt a sense of empowerment and assertion under Mayawati's rule to claim their constitutional rights as citizens against the state machinery:

> Behanji ke sarkar mein niyam kanoon ache the, log nidar hoke nikalte the …abhi darr ke mar log nahi nikalte…ab log bolte hai…Behenji ki sarkar nahi hain jo aap log pehle ki tarah soch rahe ho...ab koi nahi darta…Behanji jab thi tab hamara saashan tha…usme adhikari bhi darte the...ab har yojanao se SC walon ko peeche chodh diya gaya hai.[243]
>
> [During *Behenji's* government, law and order was effective; people would venture out fearlessly...Now people don't, out of fear...People [upper castes] say that it is not *Behenji's* government any more that you all are thinking of...We [upper castes] don't fear it now…It was our [lower caste] rule under *Behenji*…Even the authorities were scared…Now, the SCs have even been left out of various policies.]

During interviews/focus groups many respondents, as the narrative above shows, affirmed that the system of law and order and the administrative establishment had become attentive and alert to their interests.[244] A general sense of improved law and order situation was even felt by non-Dalits. "What the middle class intelligentsia in Lucknow do concede, however, is that the law and order situation has shown a definite improvement after Mayawati took over" (Bose, 2008, p. 8). Hence the 'Iron Lady' tag is not a misnomer if one looks at her success in securing effective checks against caste-based violence and humiliation. "Developing an insight into humiliation is an epistemological act while communicating it to the tormentor is political" (Guru, 2009, p. 217). By drawing a line for upper caste behaviour in UP, Mayawati's rise to power led to churning of a sociological character, as she mainstreamed the aspects of Dalit dignity and selfhood in the public sphere.

Mayawati also challenged the untouchability exercised in the political realm and capitalised on the *Bahujan* identity beyond the existence of a Dalit subject as a mere vote-bank category in UP. She reinvented the rules of the political game through

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[243] Chandravati, 45 years old, focus group respondent, 20th July 2014 in Balsinghkedha, Nagram, UP.
[244] Field notes: especially during interviews in the villages, Barabanki and Samesi, 15th July 2014, UP.

coalitions and alliances; the BSP unsettles the caste equations as the political party of the Untouchables. The ideological shift from *Bahujan samaj to Sarvajan samaj*[245] has been criticised by political analysts and labelled political opportunism. The two-fold political strategy of forming coalitions and giving tickets in elections to upper caste Hindus has led scholars to argue that the BSP is "no longer a Dalit party" (Jaffrelot, 1998, p. 35). However, the ideological strategy of targeting *Brahmins* and *Banias* is a blueprint that reverses the established trend of mainstream political parties such as Congress and the BJP trying to win over the Dalit vote banks. The tactic of targeting caste Hindus, *'Brahman jodo'* (Add Brahman) and *'Brahman Samitis'* (Brahman Committees), hits at the Hindu social order and political parties like the BJP whose social base depends on these alliances. In 2005, the BSP under the leadership of Mayawati organised *Brahman jodo sammelans* (meetings) and *Brahman Maha rallies* across UP. Around 60 such *sammelans* were held in 2005, and many more were proposed throughout the state (Verma, 2005). Targeting the caste groups rather than going into coalitions with upper caste mainstream political parties, she is making the 10% of the population (caste Hindus) take part in the political patronage system on the terms set by the *Bahujans* (the non-caste Hindu majority); the performative essence of Mayawati's ideological and political strategy and intent to mainstream the majority.

Mayawati's statue thus visualises an assertive Dalit female body which disrupts the Brahmanical patriarchal perspective of *seeing a Dalit woman*. As a Dalit woman political leader she embodies defiance of political, social and patriarchal conventions and norms. It is this assertion and the defiant gaze that she instils amongst young Dalit women as she deals with upper-caste men and their worldview every day and this is most evident in the visible presence, participation and identification of thousands of women with her as their leader and the BSP as their political party.

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[245] Electoral strategy adopted by Mayawati in 2007 to expand the ambit of ticket distribution to include upper castes such as *Banias* and *Thakurs* and not just limit it to core Dalit members.

The *appearance* of statues of Dalit leaders such as Ambedkar and Mayawati is disruptive of the religio-sacred turf and values of caste Hindu representation, both in the nature of icons and spatial assertion. The normative order that Dalit statues inhere signifies norms of challenging graded inequality, transgression of the pollution line and assertion of a defiant self. The next section shifts the discussion of Dalit politics and symbolic mobilisation from UP to Gujarat to map the anti-Patel statue campaign spearheaded by Dalit groups and the impact of this symbolic contestation on Modi's Patel statue campaign in the general election of 2014, Dalit symbolic politics and the resultant Dalit citizen subjectivity.

Figure 5.13: Dalit Shakti Kendra, Ahmedabad, Gujarat[246]

Figure 5.13 displays the statue that I encountered on my visit to the Dalit Shakti Kendra in Ahmadabad, kept within the compound after the Shobhyatra event. It

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[246] Image taken by the author, 16th June 2014, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.

captures the shift in the iconopraxis deployed so far in the style of Ambedkar statues. The pose – he is sitting and writing the Constitution – deviates from the standing pose discussed in the earlier section. The 12 foot statue with the new posture was made by Reena Badalbhai, a young Dalit girl, in Botad for the campaign which demanded that if the tallest statue is constructed in Gujarat, then it had to be one of Ambedkar (S. Khan, 2013).

The following section maps the symbolic mobilisation around the anti-Patel statue campaign led by Dalit civil society groups in Gujarat. By targeting the *manuwadi* nationalist gaze the mobilisation reinforces the symbolic significance of Ambedkar and the Constitution to reclaim visibility for Dalit citizen-subjects in the visual landscape of Modi's *Surajya* and also, in the process, denting the symbolic power of Hindutva forces led by the BJP.

5.4 Symbolic Contestation: Ambedkar vs. Patel Statue – Beyond 'Dalit' Iconopraxis in Gujarat

> A statue of Ambedkar stands in a Dalit locality of Padra in Vadodara—robbed of its pride of place in the town square. It was 17 years ago, say locals that the civic body allowed its erection at a prominent spot but dominant caste groups scuttled the move by installing a Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in its place. (Gaikwad, 2014)

Reading the above story during my fieldwork in Vadodara confirmed that the symbolic contest between the statues of Ambedkar and Patel and the attendant spatial assertion by the respective castes have been part of the Gujarati socio-political milieu and have a much longer history than Modi's election campaign of 2014.[247] He proposed to build the world's tallest statue of Patel, the details of which were discussed in the previous chapter. The emphasis in this chapter is to map the anti-Patel statue campaign. The Dalit counter-mobilisation demanded that Ambedkar's statue deserved to be the tallest statue rather than Patel's (Bhan, 2014).

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[247] Field notes: 20th April 2014, Vadodara, Gujarat.

There are two interesting aspects of the Dalit demand for Ambedkar's tallest statue in Gujarat. First, this movement aimed to change the Dalit iconopraxis of Ambedkar's statue and reworking of the Ambedkarite calendar. Gujarat mobilisation, as opposed to the earlier discussion based on Dalit symbolism in UP, becomes a stimulating contrast because of the fundamental transition that this movement activates and extends. The repertoire of iconography aside, it is also reflective of critical self-reflexivity amongst Dalit citizen-subjects of the *Rohith* caste in the Dalit villages of Padra, Jaspur and Bhat in Gujarat. Second, the campaign bursts the myth of Modi's 'Gujarat model' bubble and the symbolic violence inherent in it for those who are outside the purview of Gujarati-Hindu exceptionalism, both in relation to Hindu caste unity and the socio-economic progress it projects. The campaign highlights the everyday practices of Untouchability and marginalisation experienced by Dalit citizen-subjects in Gujarat.

On enquiring with one of the organizers of the anti-Patel statue campaign on the motivations behind the mobilisation, Macwan responded by saying the following:

> The reason I raised was how are you going to get 2500 crores for the Patel statue? This has not been debated in the Assembly; this has not been in the budget; so I wanted a debate on it. The issue I raised was that Ambedkar's statue should be one foot taller than the Patel statue because he was a tall man. Historically, if you look at the contribution, both were great, but looking at what he suffered – and he gave the Constitution to the country, he civilised the country, so why not his statue? Give reasons? If you have sufficient reasons for Sardar Patel, then also give sufficient reasons why Ambedkar does not deserve this honour? We don't want Ambedkar's statue to be the tallest in the world but we want it to be the tallest in India.[248]

His narrative above highlights that apart from the caste dynamics that exists between Patels and Dalits in Gujarat as discussed in the previous chapter – the background for symbolic contestation; there is also an equally crucial aspect which the campaign targets – the *manuwadi* nationalist gaze.

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[248] Interview with Martin Macwan, 16th June 2014, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.

The campaign demanding Ambedkar's statue is not led by any political party; Gujarat lacks a political party that is representative of Dalit interests like the BSP is in UP. Dalit concerns have been furthered by civil society groups who have taken on the task of, for instance, checking practices of social discrimination and exploitation in the absence of a political party that represents the Dalit agenda. Also, opposition parties (such as Congress) in Gujarat are less of a viable option in the face of the BJP's political domination in the state. This campaign was led by three main civil society groups in Gujarat, Dalit Shakti Kendra (DSK), Navsarjan and the Samata Sainik Dal (SSD), and the main motive was to reclaim Ambedkar as a nationalist leader to counter the bracketing of him as a 'Dalit leader' only. Its aim was to dismantle the *manuvadi* nationalist gaze which acknowledges only upper caste Hindu leaders (e.g. Gandhi, Nehru and Patel) as the flag bearers of nationalism. The political landscape of national politics is also visually saturated with state-sponsored rather than community-driven statues of the triumvirate.

Indian nationalism was, from its early days, by the very nature of its historical development an upper caste and class phenomenon, taking forward the interests and aspirations of its members (Gaikwad, 1998). Ambedkar's rise as a leader from the lower caste disrupted the dominant control by the upper caste and elites as he contested and struggled against these narratives and worldviews. Locating him in the midst of Gandhi and Nehru, Omvedt (2004) argues that they could sacrifice for the nation because of the privileged caste and class background they came from and foregrounds Ambedkar's life experiences based on caste discrimination which defined his politics against Untouchability and Brahmanism. By raising the contradictions of the Hindu social order, Ambedkar challenged and contested the existing nationalist discourse.

Guru (1998) argues that Ambedkar's refusal to be part of the national movement led by Congress was based on the dichotomy between the political and the

social, wherein the former only was concerned with the political. "There were two parallel trends in Ambedkar's political attitude, his growing opposition to Congress and his rejection of patriotism as an ideology" (Jaffrelot, 2005a, p. 94). His opposition was based on his understanding of freedom to be of more substantive value, not just getting rid of foreign rule. His argument was that in the absence of any comprehensive critique of the caste system and Hinduism the political is bound to suggest that the local/indigenous tyrants are preferable on "patriotic grounds" (Guru, 1998, p. 157). Moreover, the nature of the nationalist mobilisation had a biased Hindu religio-cultural repertoire which excluded the minorities – both the Dalits and Muslims. It was the entrenched casteist ghettoisation in the nationalist discourse that Ambedkar signified, and which was being challenged by the present campaign. Ambedkar, as the representative and the spokesperson for the Dalit community, as discussed in the previous sections, defined the dominant iconographic practices for his statues. It is the third perspective of seeing him as a national statesman that is highlighted through this mobilisation.

Congress had to first deal with Babasaheb as the representative of the Dalits and then gradually with a visionary statesman. From institutionalising affirmative action for the backward castes to intervening in different aspects of developmental policy (for instance, labour rights or laws in general), Ambedkar contributed immensely in furthering rights for every section of Indian society, not just for Dalits.

> Babasaheb is a National leader, then why are we calling him a Dalit? Look at his entire life's work! He was the first man who got the legislation that women should get maternity leave on paid wages; was it made only for 'Dalit' women? As a Labour Minister he brought in the Provident Fund and the Gratuity Act and he resigned as the Law minister because the Hindu Code Bill with his revisions that aimed to guarantee equal rights to property and inheritance for women could not be passed. He never took up only the caste issue.[249]

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[249] Interview with Martin Macwan, 16th June 2014, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.

The attempt of the campaign, as the above narrative claims, was to focus on expanding the understanding of nationalism to include the contribution of nation building based on the principles of equality and justice which Ambedkar enshrined in the Constitution, going beyond the leadership of the Nationalist movement. For him, nationalism did not stop at freedom from colonial rule but entailed a larger vision based on building an inclusive and equal national community devoid of caste hierarchies and social discrimination. His stature was more of a national statesman. Despite Ambedkar's contribution in writing the constitution which guarantees *citizenship rights to all, not just to Dalits*, he has been always perceived as a Dalit leader. The mobilisation aimed to rupture the casteist prism mentally, spatially and visually.

> It is because of Babasaheb's Constitution that India is known in the world. But his identity is that of a 'Dalit' leader and even the community believes that he is 'our' leader… The government also erects Ambedkar statues in Dalit localities…the rest of the statues of other leaders are put up in public spaces but Ambedkar's statue is always in the middle of a Dalit locality..That is why there is a thinking among the non-Dalits that he is 'yours'…So in order to change this perspective …Babasaheb is the leader of the country, leader of the nation…people of the nation should pay respect to him.[250]

The intent expressed above by one of the activists from SSD translates into the shift in Ambedker's statue posture discussed in the beginning of the section. The focus was to capture that both Patel and Ambedkar are national leaders and have contributed to the nation, but considering Ambedkar's contribution in writing the Constitution he has an equal, if not superior, claim to be commemorated. The campaign targeted non-Dalits as much as it reached out to Dalits.[251]

The significance of this mobilisation was also to challenge the temporal ghettoisation by the nationalist calendar and also to expand the Ambedkarite calendar.[252] For non-Dalits the most important date for Dalit celebrations is 14th April (Ambedkar

[250] Interview with Dineshbhai, activist with the SSD, 21st June 2014, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.
[251] Field notes: 26th January 2014, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.
[252] The Ambedkarite calendar refers to those published annually by several Dalit groups which are visually distinct in style and include establishing the historical lineage to also documenting history (Rege, 2008, p. 16).

Jayanti) mostly because it is a civic holiday. The other two important dates – 6th December (at Chaityabhoomi[253]) and 14th October (at Nagpur[254]) are only commemorated by Dalits. For non-Dalits these dates are a cause of inconvenience and obstruction (that too only if they live in one of those two places) but otherwise invisible. "The usual middle class 'common sense' reading of the Ambedkarite gatherings is that these events are irrational/emotional and cause civic problems related to traffic and hygiene" (Rege, 2008, p. 16). The campaign aimed to educate and expand the calendar for the non-Dalit mainstream and to signify Ambedkar's vision which was for everyone, emphasising his historical battles to extend rights and equality to all. It was an effort to educate everyone (Dalits and non-Dalits) equally about Ambedkar, the National leader who ensured equality for all through the Constitution.

The campaign chose three alternate dates which were historically relevant. *Sobhayatra* (March for Equality) was launched at the Ambedkar *Jayanti* on 14th April 2013 with the slogan *'Samanta na Sangharsh ni Sobhayatra'* (March to celebrate struggle for equality). The *yatra* was designed on the lines of an Independence Day parade with large numbers of youth, women and children participating. Organised to celebrate the struggle for equality in Ahmadabad,[255] it used floats of Ambedkar's statue to highlight the other struggles that he waged and the contribution of all other Dalit reformers. It also crucially raised the issue of the rampant persistence of untouchability in Gujarat; "[d]uring the programme, 100,000 balloons symbolizing freedom from manual scavenging, were released in the skies to draw the attention that Gujarat, a 'progressive' state, has 64,000 manual scavengers out of a total of 7.5 lakh in the country" ("Unique Shobhayatra" 2013). This was followed by the celebration of *'Manusmriti Dahan Din'*

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[253] Chaiytyabhoomi at Nagpur has the memorial of Dr. Ambedkar and 6th December is observed as his Death Anniversary.

[254] Deekshabhoomi is where Ambedkar converted to Buddhism at Nagpur, Maharashtra on 14th October 1956.

[255] More information regarding the march can be found on the Navsarjan official website at: https,//navsarjantrust.org/?s=shobhayatra

(Commemorating burning of Manusmriti) on 25th December 2013, at Badarkha village, Dholka Taluka. Ambedkar, during the *Mahasangharsh* of Mahad *satyagraha,* publicly burnt the *Manusmriti* on 25th December 1927, symbolically releasing the community from the shackles of the oppressive caste structure and its norms thus symbolising enlightenment for the community.

> Babasaheb's burning of the *Manusmriti* led to some light…The youth of the community are now studying, doing good jobs. That is why he is symbolic of light. That is why at Badarkha we built a candle that was five feet tall and distributed one lakh boxes of matches…We distributed boxes of matches because they would be used at least for a month…and for that one month Babaseheb's thoughts will be with them.[256]

As part of the campaign "nearly one lakh Dalit families from across 3500 villages lit lamps at home at 9pm" (Paul & Chavadal, 2013). The final addition to the calendar took place in 2014 when 26th January was celebrated as commemorating the adoption of the Indian Constitution written by Dr. Ambedkar; the initial event was organised in the village of Bhat, Daskroi District, Ahmadabad. According to Macwan, the movement's leader:

> On January 26, a 183-metre banner will be unfurled. It will give the message of Ambedkar's contribution to the nation through the Constitution that abolished untouchability, child labour, bonded labour while giving right to liberty, equality along with reservations for Dalits, OBC, women and minorities. The tricolour banner carrying the message — '*Bharat desh ni sauthi unchi pratima, adhunik Bharat na gadhvaiya, Ambedkar ni, ej emnu sachu samman'* (India's tallest statue, Gadhvaya of modern India, Ambedkar's, is his true honour) (Macwan, quoted in Parmar, 2014).

> For the first time in the community, in a thousand villages throughout Gujarat, Dalits have in their villages, at various points in the public space, hoisted the National Flag. It was a realisation for us and the community that on 26th January we became a republic and Babasaheb made a big contribution to that. But still none of the officials, politicians or social leader acknowledges Babasaheb's name on this day, despite the fact that when we look back historically Babasaheb has contributed a lot. And because of him we have experienced real freedom, because the Constitution that he wrote got implemented.[257]

All three events organised by the movement had massive participation and support from both Dalits and non-Dalits. By re-indexing and re-interpreting the Dalit calendar,

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[256] Interview with Dineshbhai, activist with the Samata Dal, 21st June 2014, Ahmadabad, Gujarat.
[257] Interview with Jayesh, activist with the Samata Dal, 21st June 2014, Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

the self-reflexivity of the Dalit citizen subjects becomes evident and that the Dalit public sphere is organic in its nature.

The spatial strategy of *yatra* and use of floats were distinct in this mobilisation apart from the new posture for the statue of Ambedkar. *Shobha yatra* entailed the transgression of non-Dalit spaces and claim making on the streets and alleys of Ahmadabad visually and discursively. Non-Dalit spectators would have experienced '*seeing and moving on'* but for the Dalit self it was twofold: to disperse their way of seeing Ambedkar as a Nationalist Dalit leader and, most crucially in the context of anti-Patel statue mobilisation, to assert their visibility as Untouchable citizen-subjects of Gujarat.

By mainstreaming Ambedkar, the Constitution and the prevalence of Untouchability, this campaign visualised an alternative regressive Gujarat and the fissures that exist in Modi's growth story embedded in Gujarati-Hindu exceptionalism. The symbolic power and control of the media by the *manuwadi* forces ensured that the anti-Patel counter-mobilisation was not shown on any news channels; in fact, there was a complete media blackout. The fear and anxiety around even a demand for an Ambedkar statue led to the agenda of the Patel statue being relegated to the backburner during Modi's election campaign. As discussed in the previous section, the normative order that an Ambedkar statue represents and fixes demonstrates the power of Dalit symbolism and assertion, forcing the BJP to revert back from its campaign for a Patel statue. The mobilisation also displayed the more constructivist and autonomous character of Dalit mobilisation.

5.5 Conclusion

Dalit politics, by intervening in the symbolic political field, converts social caste consciousness into a political consciousness, unsettles the established social order and deepens democracy. The Dalit self is not just able to *reclaim* their sense of history, space

and identity but also *defy* the dominant mainstream – the Brahmanical/nationalist order. It also highlights that symbolic mobilisation within the community has an autonomous existence outside of the instrumentality of a political party, depicted in the existence of statue politics before the BSP came to power and also in the absence of one, in the case of Gujarat. The community emerged as a self-reflexive critical mass that, with their symbolic interventions, evolved as assertive transgressive Dalit citizen-subjects gazing back at the *manuwadi* social order.

Mayawati's *Sthal* and *chowks* give the world a history and an iconography of the anti-caste struggle in India. By doing this, she not only makes visible the history of struggles waged against the caste system but also requires the Indian political order and the world to acknowledge 'caste', the power configuration therein which has hitherto been invisible. By initiating a memorial structure of this kind Mayawati challenged the symbolic violence of the Brahamanical/nationalist perception which not only rejects questioning of the upper caste dominance by leaders like Ambedkar but also the Gandhian understanding of the Dalit political subject – as an adjunct to the Hindu social order. By setting it in stone, the aim is to make the Brahmanical/nationalist history acknowledge both the practices of Untouchability and the attendant repugnance of the Dalit political subject in the dominant political discourse. Caste is no longer an abstraction; it has a real materialistic form as well as symbolic composition now.

6 Performing Dissent: The Anti-Corruption Crusade

6.1 Introduction

> Aaj dilli ke har aam aadmi ne mukhyamantri aur mantri ki shapath li hai…aaj aam admi ki jeet hui hai![258]
>
> [Today every common man has taken the oath of the chief minister and a minister…it's the victory of the common man today.]

At the swearing-in ceremony as chief minister of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal proclaimed the victory of the common man from the *Ramlila Maidan* on 28th December 2013. Under Kejriwal's leadership the Aam Aadmi Party's (henceforth AAP) taking over the political mantle of New Delhi signified the symbolic full circle of what had started off as a movement against corruption at the same venue in 2011 and the ultimate assertion of the people's victory. However, the anti-corruption crusade has been referred to as a 'mediatised event' in the mainstream discourse because of the middle class embeddedness both in its nature of leadership and participation: "[f]or the electronic media, this story was tailor-made – a fixed location, colourful crowds, a 74-year-old Gandhian-type figure on fast, and a campaign against something as generic as 'corruption' that had universal appeal" (EPW Editorial, 2011).

This chapter analyses the anti-corruption mobilisation from outside the prism of the 'visual trap' (Rajagopal, 2011b), arguing on the contrary that the anti-corruption movement with its symbolisms intervened in the 'sanitised' political field and culture of New Delhi, disrupting it discursively, spatially and visually. The movement, by invigorating hitherto apolitical and anti-political citizen-subjects into sustained political activism transgressed the neoliberal disciplining gaze while also visualising the neo-liberal civic citizen. The discussion is divided into three sections. The first examines the nature of the spatial assertion that this mobilisation activated, creating counter-spaces of

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[258] Field notes: Kejriwal's swearing-in ceremony speech, 28th December 2013, *Ramlila Maidan*, New Delhi.

dissent and violating the neoliberal and state-authorised spatial segregation. The second section takes up the symbolic habitus that traces the transition of the anti-political phase of the movement under the India Against Corruption (IAC) campaign to the formation of the anti-political establishment party – the AAP. Finally, the discussion on political subjectivity in the third section elucidates the constitution of a neo-liberal civic citizen.

Contextualising my discussion through the conceptual framework of the new middle class (Fernandes, 2006) and anti-political establishment parties (Abedi, 2004) leads to what I describe as the emergence of a neo-liberal civic citizen. While the assertion of the "people" (Menon & Nigam, 2011b) cannot be denied and it activates "citizens making claims on the state through the assertion of ownership right" (Roy, 2014, p. 53), I argue that this insurgent citizen subject assertion and activism is the predefined nature of a politics embedded in post-liberalisation and the resultant nature of the new consumer citizen. Extending the analysis of the anti-corruption movement by Menon and Nigam (2011a) and of the AAP by Roy (2014), the chapter aims to add to the scholarship by analysing the nature of political subjectivity that this mobilisation constitutes.

> Discourses on the corruption of political elites and criminalization of politics in particular form a significant thread in the construction of such class based anxieties. These attitudes are not isolated examples but are also manifested in middle class community based activism. (Fernandes, 2006, p. 185)

As argued by Fernandes above, the construction of the new consumer citizen rests on a perceived corruption of the Indian elite. She argues that when these consumer citizens transform into the new common man, they convert themselves into victims of ineffective governance and unions. In this articulation and representation both the government and the unions embody the corrupt 'other'. This also translates into a narrative of the entire political system being inefficient and corrupt. This explains the large support amongst the middle class professionals (Sitapati, 2011) and corporate

houses (Ravinder Kaur, 2012) (see section 6.4.1). This stated embeddedness of the new middle class, however, does not efface the transgressive and reconstituted citizenship that this mobilisation inheres. Hence, claiming that the movement was a media creation takes away from the impact it has had on re-constituting new political subjectivities in two ways: first, the non-sectarian based mobilisation activated a neo-liberal civic subject identity contesting the neoliberal regimentation of a 'consumer citizen-subject' (Ong, 2006) by speaking back to the power of the state and the political class. Second, the movement led to the emergence of an anti-political establishment party in the AAP which disconcerted the complacency and symbolic capital of the existing political parties such the Congress and the BJP by the performative essence of the *aam aadmi* (common man).[259]

The Anna Hazare movement grew up against the backdrop of the alleged 2G spectrum scam[260] and the corruption in the Commonwealth Games (CWG)[261] which triggered public outrage. This was arguably the most powerful political mobilisation on the issue of corruption in mainstream politics that the country had witnessed since the Jay Prakash (JP) movement in 1974.[262] As highlighted by Gupta (1995), one of the crucial ingredients of discourses of citizenship in a populist democracy such as India has been that public sector employees are considered accountable to 'the people'. Hence the movement was directed at making the bureaucratic and political establishment

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[259] The Indian party system has been dominated by two national parties, Congress and the BJP. Unlike other states where regional parties have electorally challenged the might of these two parties, New Delhi's politics has historically been focused on the electoral contest between these two.

[260] In the 2G Spectrum scam the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by the Congress party was accused of under charging mobile companies for the frequency allocation licences which were used to create 2G spectrum subscriptions for mobile phones. The Supreme Court judgments in 2012 held that the telecom minister, A. Raja, wielded the ultimate authority over allocations and cancelled the licences.

[261] India had hosted the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. However, it was marred by allegations of corruption and financial irregularities. The organising committee chaired by Suresh Kalmadi was accused of and charged with favouring a Swiss company when buying equipment, leading to expansive budgeting and cheating the government.

[262] In 1974, Jay Prakash Narayan spearheaded a people's movement against the authoritarian Congress regime, gaining momentum from the Navnirman movement in Gujarat and the student unrest in Bihar, both of which raised issues of corruption and price rises. This movement is considered to be the first powerful mobilisation against corruption in independent India.

accountable to the people. The movement's demand was for the passage of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill (People's Ombudsman Bill)[263] as a strong anti-corruption instrument and brought into focus the indispensability of an ombudsman, an area of legislation that Parliament had resisted for decades. The movement began as a coalition of non-government organisations (NGOs) and independent activists united under the India Against Corruption (IAC) banner which, when negotiations with the incumbent Congress government failed, branched into a new political party, the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man Party) in 2012.

A coalition of civil society groups, IAC, had been active in initiating the campaign against corruption since 2010. It gained momentum in 2011 when Hazare went on an indefinite hunger strike in *Jantar Mantar*, demanding a joint committee of civil society members to draft a strong anti-corruption bill and the introduction of a stronger version of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill. His protest soon attracted support in New Delhi and spread to other cities as well. Anna called off his fast on 9th April 2011 after receiving an assurance from the government that their version would be introduced in the parliament. This was followed by an indefinite fast by Baba Ramdev, a self-styled godman[264] with a popular mass base, at the *Ramlila Maidan* on 4th June 2011, whose key demand was to recover black money[265] stashed up in foreign countries by India's elites such as politicians, industrialists and actors. The enormous pressure by various civil society groups led to police action and the forcible removal of Ramdev and his supporters. To protest the police action against Ramdev, Hazare gave 15th August as the deadline for parliament to pass the *Jan Lokpal* Bill, and threatened another hunger strike.

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[263] The *Jan Lokpal* Bill: was the civil society version of the Anti-Corruption Bill to appoint a *Jan Lokpal* (ombudsman) to investigate corruption cases. It differs significantly from the government's version of the *Lokpal* Bill in its functions and composition. Most importantly, the *Jan Lokpal* includes within its ambit the sitting prime minister, judges and all government officials whereas the government's version only brings in the PM after he/she leaves office, does not include the judges and leaves out lower-level government employees.
[264] A type of charismatic guru.
[265] That is, money earned on the black market.

The fact that the government's approved version of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill excluded the office of the prime minister and higher judiciary as outside the purview of the bill deepened the rift between the government and Team Anna. However, Hazare was arrested on 16th August 2011 before his threatened next fast. This pre-emptive coercive action by the Congress led Central government changed the course of the political culture of New Delhi in a phenomenal manner as it triggered massive dissent on the streets of Delhi.

6.2 'Sanitised' Delhi to an Aam Aadmi's Dilli

The following section links the aspect of spatial assertion with corporeal experiences as people, by occupying spaces whether parks, squares or streets, make themselves heard and seen. Political subjects as interfering bodies use their bodies as instruments of political agenda, affecting their sociality and 'making an appearance' (Arendt, 1958) and, most crucially, enabling and constraining the structural environment. By creating counter-spaces of civic activism and counter-publics of alternative discursive articulation of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill as opposed to the government's version, the movement activated the spatial dimension of the city. By performing the *aam aadmi* on the street they disrupted and unsubscribed to the neo-liberal regimentation and the state's spatial regulations. In protesting, they risked physical assaults and arrests and thereby constituted an insurgent citizen subject with a confrontationist gaze.

Political power is central to the demeanour of the city of New Delhi and the underlying statist bureaucratic ambience and routine defines it. Its field of perception casts an 'official statist' or 'political capital' outlook wherein the visual field is saturated with historical monuments and government buildings. The monumental legacy of the Mughals coexists with that of the British architect, Lutyens. "A Republic needs a

symbol of pride; and Lutyens' New Delhi makes precisely that statement, establishes precisely that symbol for the Republic of India" (Buch, 2003, p. 29). It is not just the architectural landscape that is visualised through the Red Fort, Raisina Hill and the Rajpath – they reverberate as centres of political and bureaucratic power. It is this idea of dominant power that continues to inspire Delhi's politicians and bureaucrats and disperses as the aura of the city. Political assertion or claim making is confined to party headquarters, parliament or stretched a bit further to *Jantar Mantar*; the rest of New Delhi is spatially cordoned off and 'sanitised' of any political activism. It is this sanitised perception and decorum which was churned up by the anti-corruption movement and the formation of the AAP; politically, discursively and visually, this field is unsettled.

The anti-corruption movement redefined the 'symbolic geography' (Tilly, 2000) of the city of Delhi and the resultant civic community activism. Delhi is spatially demarcated on the basis of economic activities, partition patterns and occupational affinities with a visible lack of social cohesion and an overarching civic identity. Compared to Mumbai and Calcutta (Kolkata), New Delhi has been described as an 'unloved city' by Dupont, Tarlo, & Vidal (2000); they argued that no equivalent loyalty and affection is found amongst the inhabitants of New Delhi who are either mostly indifferent or actively dislike the city in which they live. It is both this apathy and interweaving of different social classes across dispersed spatial locations that the movement tends to galvanise.

6.2.1 The 'counter-space' and the politics of visibility: *Ramlila Maidan*, streets and alleys

The mobilisation of the IAC followed by that of the AAP was able to make effective inroads into mapping both aspects of the city – the spatial geography and an identity based on civic entitlement and duties. The spatial practices used by the

movement entangled politics with space, hence the 'city' is redefined as the site of contention itself. The most striking factor of the anti-corruption movement was the visibility of the people coming out on the streets. Huge masses of people occupied grounds and parks or marched through the alleys and streets making claims against their political representatives. During the anti-corruption movement, protesters claimed urban spaces as sites of resistance starting from the moment when Anna was jailed by state authorities, as protesters gathered outside Tihar jail to various sit–ins that were eventually organised outside offices and homes of members of parliament and the then chief minister of New Delhi, Sheila Dikshit's, residence thus reclaiming their 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996).

Applying Lefebvre's conceptual triadic analysis of space to public squares such as the *Ramlila* and *Azad maidans* can contribute in understanding how representation of public squares can be subverted by people; occupying the *maidan* continuously in opposition to the coercive apparatus of the state administration. The struggle for rights brings out the dialectics between abstract and differentiated space. The *Ramlila Maidan* emerged as a powerful counter-space for the creation of a new community of citizen subjects, becoming a site for spontaneous mobilisation, public deliberation and politicisation of the masses aimed at transformation of the political community.

Figure 6.1: Delhi Police Advertisement[266]

Figure 6.1 exhibits the anti-systemic potential of counter-spaces such as *Ramlila Maidan* and *Jantar Mantar*, which becomes evident with this recent Delhi Police advertisement issued on 7th February 2014. Its significance lies in the appeal made by state agencies such as the Delhi police to control and manage popular protest in the present context of post-anti- corruption mobilisation. The advertisement told the protesters that if they were more than 50,000 in number they would need to seek permission to organise a *dharna* (protest) at *Ramlila Maidan* (Delhi Police Advert, 2014b); a second advertisement stated that gatherings of no more than 5000 were allowed in *Jantar Mantar* (Delhi Police Advert, 2014a). The notification issued by the Delhi Police is worth mentioning and highlighting here because they reflect that these protests sites were making the political establishment weary of mass protests and spontaneous sit-ins

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266 Source: Delhi Police, (7 February 2014) *Indian Express* retrieved from epaper.indianexpress.com/225534/Indian-Express/07-Febuary-2014#page/2/1

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by the general public. Reinstating these spaces with counter-systemic potential has thus been one of the spatial dynamics that first, the anti-corruption movement and then the AAP, activated.

The *Ramlila Maidan* was a crucial site for political opposition and mobilisations until the 1980s. It began with state-led gatherings, as in the backdrop of victory against Pakistan, to its complete antithesis in the 1970s during the state of emergency when it emerged as the 'site of opposition', first led by Jay Prakash Narayan and later by the political leaders who launched the Janata Party. However, over time protestors were forced to move to first the Boat Club and then to *Jantar Mantar* as the state-authorised space for protests. Though the *Maidan* continued to be used by political parties of all persuasions for their respective rallies, for many people in Delhi it was mostly an alien space in their 'everyday' existence. However, the launching of Anna's fast in 2011 from the *Ramlila Maidan* transformed the 'impersonal urban space' into the centre of all activity and interaction, a counter-space[267] of spontaneous masses as opposed to 'mobilised' supporters of specific political parties. Replacing the *Jantar Mantar* as the lexicon for a state-authorised space for protests and demonstrations on a large scale, *Ramlila Maidan* re-emerged as Delhi's Tahrir/Tiananmen Square as people occupied the ground for 12 days and vowed to make India free of political corruption. By occupying the *Maidan*, the protesters created a physical and political space for reasserting the power of the people against corruption: "for 12 days, a city in which protests were consigned to a museumised space, *Jantar Mantar*, was reclaimed for protest by a crashing tide of humanity so huge, so peaceful and nonviolent, that it simply took back the city" (Menon & Nigam, 2011a, p. 17). The *Maidan* was also home to a giant poster of the wall

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[267] Counter-spaces, Lefebvre implies, are necessarily spaces of concrete personal relations, because they are in part a protest against the abstraction imposed by authorities as part of their arsenal of social control. As a counter-space, it "insert[ed] itself into spatial reality...against power and the arrogance of power" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 382).

of democracy – an anti-corruption petition for visitors to sign. Atop a makeshift stage, Anna declared it to be India's second freedom struggle:

> Azadi ki doosri ladai shuru ho gayi; abhi yeh doosri kranti ki shuruat hai ...yeh ground mein baithe logon ko tai karna hai ..jab tak *Jan Lokpal* Bill nahi ayega…tab tak ground ko nahi chodenge..*Lokpal* bill lakar hi rahenge![268]

> [The second freedom struggle has started; it is time to start the new revolution…People sitting on this ground have to decide…that until the *Jan Lokpal* Bill is passed…we will not leave the ground…We will ensure that the *Lokpal* bill is passed!]

Another aspect of this movement was that not only the state-assigned spaces of protests such as *Jantar Mantar* or *Ramlila Maidan* became part of everyday discourse and political participation; by violating the everyday intentionality it also led to the peripheral alleys and streets becoming centres of protests. "That 'democratic' element caught the imagination of a vast number of common people who were not only present in Delhi's *Ramlila Maidan* but also thronged solidarity rallies in big and small towns all over India" (Mohanty, 2011, p. 17). Seeing this widespread support and participation, Kejriwal appealed to the people from the stage at the *Maidan* to put pressure on and hold their respective elected representatives accountable by organising sit-ins and *dharnas*:

> aap sab se nivedan hai ki apne apne sansadon ko pakadiye: hamne unko vote dalke chuna hai; Aapne apne elake mein apne sansado ke ghar ke bahar dharna kijiye; aur unse kahen ki voh publicly bataye ki voh sarkar ke *Lokpal* bill ke saath hai yah *Jan Lokpal* bill ke saath hai; Sarkar ke saath hai yah Anna Hazare ke saath hai?[269]

> [Ask everyone to hold their elected representatives accountable. We have all voted them to power; demonstrate in front of your elected representatives in your respective localities and make them publically answer whether they are in support of the government's *Lokpal* Bill or the *Jan Lokpal* Bill. Are they with the government or with Anna Hazare?]

The citizens responded to this call by bringing the city under siege (TNS, 2011). Many offices and houses of elected representatives were targeted; for instance, people protested opposite the residence of the then Chief Minister Mrs. Sheila Dikshit, Finance

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[268] Source: video recording of Anna Hazare's speech at *Ramlila Maidan* on 19th August 2011 provided to the author by his organisation.
[269] Source: video recording of Arvind Kejriwal's speech at *Ramlila Maidan* on 26th August 2011 provided to the author by his organisation.

Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Human Resource Development Minister Kapil Sibal and some MPs to pressurise the government to pass the *Jan Lokpal* Bill. They shouted slogans against the chief minister and also mentioned the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on the CWG. These spaces represent sites of political power and their occupation by 'the common people' was a potent symbolic intervention and assertion.

Figure 6.2: *Ramlila Maidan*, New Delhi[270]

Figure 6.2 portrays the presence of the common man at the *Ramlila Maiden* in full strength for Kejriwal's swearing-in ceremony on 28th December 2013. People from all walks of life came to witness the ceremony as they saw Kejriwal's victory as their own – that of the *Aam Aadmi*. The energy on the field was incredible as crowds poured in and the metro lines leading to the *Maidan* were overcrowded with slogans of *'aam aadmi zindabad!'* (Long live the common man!) and *'Inquilab zindabad!'* (Long live the

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[270] Image taken by the author, 28th December 2013, *Ramlila Maidan*, New Delhi.

revolution!) filling the air.[271] In terms of spatial assertion, the ceremony was not just a statist procedural ritual, it signified a heterotopia of an alternative political culture in terms of the political subjectivies it constituted; it visibilised the common man and simultaneously initiated an oppositional culture of doing politics. It challenged the symbolic power of the dominant political parties such as Congress and the BJP along with the bureaucratic arrogance and red-tapeism. It is crucial here to point out the emergence of the AAP as an anti-establishment party; challenging the old classical political party format, set into motion the techno-managerial mode of doing politics, analysed in the next section. Rather than being celebrated as AAP's win, the moment was hailed more as a victory of people's power; the *Maidan* as a site signified people's assertion.

Huge numbers of people, men, women, youth and children, had come to see the leader who had emerged from amongst them take oath as the chief minister of the NCT. It was evident that it was a 'victory for the common man' because anybody could sit anywhere in the sitting arena; there were no distinctions made or VIP areas demarcated. At the outset, this was startling because Delhi's political culture is so inherently defined by bureaucratic protocols and hierarchy that it was unimaginable that an official event of such administrative and political importance could be conducted without reserved seats for VIPs, passes/tickets and barricading. People were mostly enjoying their moment of new-found empowerment and felt a sense of entitlement now that a 'common man' was in control and had the power to bring about change.

The crowd stood by patiently as they waited for their leader to arrive on the stage and speak to them. *Aam aadmi topis* and the tricolour adorned the ground. A tumultuous welcome greeted Kejriwal when he arrived on stage and people saw him on the giant LCD screens set up alongside. Everyone patiently observed the official

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[271] Field notes: Observations from *Ramlila Maidan*, 28th December 2013, New Delhi.

swearing-in and waited for his speech. The mood in the ground was of triumph and people cheered in excitement, hope and a sense of pride. Kejriwal expressed his faith in the people's power and asserted if they all worked together then change was possible.[272] When articulating his reason for joining politics and forming a political party he made it clear that it was the need of the hour to bring about systemic changes and 'clean' the system.

> Annaji ne kaha tha ki rajniti kichad hai…lekin hamko laga jab tak rajniti nahi badlegi tab tak kuch nahi badlega…kichad mein ghusna padega aur kichad ki safai karni padegi..rajniti ko saaf karna padega…aur aaj ka din uss journey mein ek etihasik din hain [273]

> [Anna said that politics is murky…Still, we thought that unless and until politics changes nothing will change …We will have to enter the murk and clean the dirt…There is a need to clean politics ...and today is an historic day in that journey.]

Kejriwal also made the people in the audience take an oath in the spirit of the political movement and the agenda of anti-corruption that he had come to represent. He led the oath as the audience repeated after him, "*Main Kasam khata hun ki apni zindagi mein na kabhi rishwat longa aur na kabhi rishwat doonga*" [I pledge that in my lifetime I will neither take bribe nor will I ever give bribe].[274] It was a dynamic and energetic moment as one could observe the compelling commitment with which people participated in the pledge reflected an insurgent citizen subject who believed in the potential of a new political culture. *Maidan* had been transformed into a counter-space of people's power, a spatial embodiment of people's struggle and politics of becoming.

6.2.2   Discursive counter public – of *jan lokpal* and *sabhas*

The *Maidan* was also emblematic of an alternative counter public as it defied the dominant discourses and aimed to create new social relations based on horizontality, egalitarianism and collectivism. It became a space to organise as *jan* (the people) and to

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[272] Field notes: observations from *Ramlila Maidan*, 28th December 2013, New Delhi.
[273] Field notes: Kejriwal's swearing-in speech, *Ramlila Maidan*, 28th December 2013, New Delhi.
[274] Field notes: observations from *Ramlila Maidan*, 28th December 2013, New Delhi.

discuss and debate their perspectives and opinions on the Bill. Different versions of the Bill were being discussed amongst the participants; people's opinions as to how they envisioned the *Lokpal* which represented the people's version would shape up were being garnered through opinion polls using multiple media platforms. Efforts were also made by Team Anna to promote dialogue and discussion amongst various groups. Kejriwal gave a standing invite to people, political parties and other civil society groups such as the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI) to come and debate in front of the people and the media so that there was nuanced debate regarding various versions of the Bill. Consequently, different versions were proposed by various civil society groups. One such was drafted by the NCPRI led by Aruna Roy (Mittal, 2011), "another by the Lok Satta Party leader from Andhra Pradesh, Jayaprakash Narayan and yet another by the former chief election commissioner, T. N. Sheshan" (Mohanty, 2011, p. 18). These alternative versions were not only representative of the internal dynamics within different civil society groups but also the involvement of different groups of people in this discursive and deliberative process. The critical engagement that this exercise invigorated represented the self-reflexive nature of the movement.

As a discursive counter public it employed different discursive practices to vent political critique. One of the ways was to adopt political parody, impersonations and satire in a performative manner. For instance, activists like Kiran Bedi, an eminent member of Team Anna, and known as a committed, honest and upright officer, with her '*ghoonghat* act'[275] decided to vent her ire on an MP who had come to *Ramlila Maidan*. "Ask him what he is going to do," she told the crowd. "They [MPs] say one thing inside [parliament] and another thing outside". And then, raising her pitch, she exclaimed: "They [the MPs] wear masks!" Then Bedi, ever the comedian, to the great amusement

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[275]Source: the description and translation is based on a NDTV Hindi news channel item (NDTV, 2011). (http://www.ndtv.com/video/news/news/video-story-209298).

of the crowd proceeded to pull a scarf from the neck of a young activist on stage, wrapped her head with it like a *ghoonghat* (veil) and proceeded to mock MPs and their hierocracy in public life. "This is how they behave," she stated, "one thing with a mask and another without a mask". While these theatrics were hugely criticised (TNN, 2011) and raised not a few eyebrows, performative actions such as the '*ghoonghat* act' should be understood in the context of activist performances, political parody and political critique. This technique was being used as a strategy in a manner which was not just mere entertainment but also an affective and humorous way to make a point – in this case, the deceptive nature of the political class. For instance, famous comedian Jaspal Bhatti presented a mocking version of the government's *Lokpal* Bill, joining Team Anna for a 15-minute fast under a banner saying 'government-approved fast', thereby sarcastically highlighting the highhandedness of the government in dealing with public protests. "It is really surprising that you do not need permission to give or take bribe but to protest against corruption, you need government's approval. The politicians don't bother to take any sanctions while doing scams of crores of rupees", (Bhatti, quoted in Chandel, 2011). Humour is used to underline the irony of the political leadership and the government's coercive interventions.

Also as an alternative discursive counter public, the *Maidan* enabled constituting non-sectarian subjectivities for the *jan* (people) – a universal identity in opposition to identification based on caste, religion or gender. Evident in one of the announcements made by Kejriwal from the stage at the *Maidan* on the festive occasions of *Ramzan* (Ramadaan for Muslims) and *Janmashtami* (Lord Krishna's birth anniversary for Hindus) he stressed that we should fight as 'Indians' rather than as Hindus and Muslims.

> …sathiyon kal ek bahut bada din hai: musalman bhaiyon ka roza hai aur hinduon ki Janmashtami; kal shaam mein hum Roza iftaar karenge aur raat ko Janmashtami ka vrat kholenge; Hindu Muslim Sikh Isayi aapas mein hai bhai bhai: humein yeh bach ke rehna

hai hamari sarkaron ne aur humari partyon ne angrzo se divide and rule policy seekha hai…humein ek mutthi ki tarah dharm aur jati se upar uth kar rehna hai[276]

[Friends, tomorrow is a very important day; as it's Roza [Ramadan] for Muslims and Janmashtami (the birth of Krishna) for Hindus. Tomorrow, in the evening, we will have the Roza iftaar (breaking of the fast) and at night break the Janmashtami fast. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are brothers; we should be cautious since our governments and political parties have learnt the policy of divide and rule from the foreigners. We should rise above religion and caste like a fist.]

It was the inclusive 'Indian' identity rather than a divisive one which explained the use of nationalistic slogans and the tricolour dominating the semiotic field. The distinctive politics of the symbolic habitus will be discussed in detail in the next station, but here the emphasis is on the galvanisation of the Indian citizen subject.

The spatial strategies followed by the AAP during the election campaign for the Delhi Assembly in December 2013 also capitalised on the spatial geographies of the city by using two techniques of *yatra* politics; '*Jhadoo chalao Baiman Bhagao Yatra*' (Sweep the broom, chase the corrupt!) combined with dialogic engagement through *jan sabhas* (public meetings). The AAP organised a ten-day rally with the intention to reach out to every citizen of Delhi and, with its slogan *Jhadoo Chalo Baiman Bhagao*' (AAP, 2013b), sought support for 'cleansing' the political system. The campaign gave visibility to the new political party and Kejriwal and also gave the opportunity for people to interact with him directly. While following Kejriwal in his constituency, in one of the middle-class government employees' residential areas in Sarojini Nagar the support and appeal that the new party had garnered was visible. People came out to the locality parks and playgrounds in large numbers to express their support; others did so from their balconies by either waving or holding brooms to symbolise the 'clean sweep'.[277] At the end of each local area *yatra*, Kejriwal addressed *jan sabhas*, where people could come and express their concerns. The response from the people was effectively powerful as they attended in large numbers and expressed their issues and problems ranging from water,

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[276] Source: video recordings of Arvind Kejriwal's speech from *Ramlila Maidan*, 28th August 2012 provided to the author by his organisation.
[277] Field note: following the Yatra in December 2013, New Delhi.

electricity and roads to corruption at different levels of government establishments. These *jan sabhas* organised by the AAP at different wards, localities and parks were the other counter-spaces created during the Delhi election campaigning. Thus, with regard to the spatial strategies, one could observe continuity, as both the movement, and now the party, activated citizens' involvement and embodied presence through spatial interventions across the city.

These counter-spaces ruptured the everyday use of these spaces from mundane activities to spaces for civic political conversations. They became sites that injected political and civic activism into masses. At one of Shazia Ilmi's *jan sabhas*, in her constituency of R.K. Puram, the sheer presence of local people in the public meeting reflected two things: first, the engaged participation demonstrated the vacuum people experienced in the absence of a dialogic process between citizens and local level administrative bodies. Second, that people therefore utilised these *sabhas* as an opportunity to raise their issues of concern with a prospective representative, an exercise which they took seriously. Consequently, the colony's park was transformed into a discursive counter public with the residents of this lower-middle class colony, with sometimes the whole family in attendance. A large visible presence of women in these *sabhas* represented the party's appeal amongst them. As will be discussed later, women were the strongest support base garnered by the movement. After listening to the AAP's agenda lay out by Ilmi, residents raised concerns which affected them on an everyday basis and questions related to blueprints for implementation.[278] It was evident that people felt a sense of being taken seriously as they were being asked and listened to rather than being treated as mute spectators.

There are two observations that should be highlighted. First, the nature of the demands made by the people mainly addressed service delivery expected from the

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[278] Field note: following Shazia Ilmi, R. K.Puram 12th September 2013, New Delhi.

government, reflecting a neoliberal consumer citizen. There was hardly any discussion, for instance, around the provisions of the *Lokpal* Bill, despite the sharing of narratives of individual experiences of corruption. Second, few *jan sabhas* that I attended while shadowing candidates were mostly organised in collaboration with the Resident Welfare Associations (RWA). The collaboration exhibited that consumer citizens preferred this organisational format to negotiate state and consumer services and it aligned well with their anti-political stance. Their partnership was an overlap of both class and political orientations. Despite the nexus, both the movement and the party disrupted the neoliberal subject formation of regimented and spatially segregated existence and, by constituting counter-spaces and public in opposition to state power, the movement activated spatial assertion by neo-liberal civic citizens.

6.3   The Anti-Corruption Matrix of *Deshbhakti* [279]and Self-Righteous Citizen Subjects

This section examines the symbolic habitus of the anti-corruption movement and the AAP. The protest by Team Anna which included Kejriwal, Bhushan and Bedi[280] had, in themselves, embodied a sense of virtue and moral resoluteness as opposed to the political class which was universally assumed to be corrupt – and by doing so created an 'other' in the political class. The performative essence of this protest politics juxtaposed a patriotic and a self-righteous citizen subject against the political class and the state establishment; "first and most common are anti-*neta* [anti-politician] performances, i.e., the self-presentation as the diametrical opposite of the establishment Indian neta or politician" (Roy, 2014, p. 50). The movement had a strong anti-

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[279] *Deshbhakti* means patriotism.
[280] Team Anna refers to activists who were part of the core committee during the first phase of the agitation. It consisted of prominent members such as Arvind Kejriwal IRS(Indian Revenue Services), Kiran Bedi (retired Indian Police Services), Shanti Bhushan (senior advocate and former law minister), Santosh Hegde (former Solicitor General of India), Prashant Bhushan (lawyer) and Manish Sisodia (former journalist). They were also quite active in different public forums.

establishment tone which subsequently led to the evolution of a new political party in the political landscape of Delhi. Tracing the transition from the IAC to the AAP, I argue that the repertoire of this symbolic mobilisation, couched in practices of vigilante patriotism and middle-class aesthetics of cleanliness, constitutes an insurgent civic citizen with anti-political ethics.

6.3.1 Ideological in-betweens: from being anti-political to the political 'sweep'

Figure 6.3: Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra[281]

Figure 6.3 displays the tricolour adorning the protest site at Ralegan Siddhi (2013) where the last phase of the movement was held to ensure that the *Lokpal* Bill would be passed in the Rajya Sabha.[282] The quintessential patriotic slogans of '*Bharat Mata ki Jai*' (Hail Mother India) and '*Inquilab Zindabad* (Long Live the Revolution) reverberated around the area. The movement brought everyone together under the tricolour, symbolically making the national flag the representational site of various discourses and people from all political dispositions. It visualised the field with an affective resonance of patriotic fervour and devout nationalism. It was also emblematic

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[281] Image taken by the author, 9th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.
[282] The upper house of the Indian parliament.

of how people, after the verdict on the national flag in 2002,[283] had come to use the flag outside of the 'official' in the public domain and as representative of their nationalistic commitment:

> The immediate outcome of this re-codification was to end the state's monopoly on displays of the national flag and to thereby reconfigure the flag as an ordinary rather than an extraordinary sign, something that anybody could display in place on any day of the year. (Roy, 2006, p. 519)

This mobilisation could be perceived as one of the first instances when the tricolour was made part of the visual field so strikingly and claimed by the masses all over the country. The tricolour has since become part of everyday politics and a symbol of people's claim making against the state, in effect making the citizen subject visible, as when many flag-waving youth congregated in defiance of Section 144[284] during the Anna protests. The journey of the tricolour has been mapped through different phases of Indian nationalist struggles from being a state-bound symbol post-Independence to a more liberalised existence in the present times (Jha, 2008; Pai, 2009; Roy, 2006).

The embracing of the national flag within the present context is a newer phase in the evolution and assertion of the tricolour as a state-authorised symbol. Its usurpation by a people's movement draws attention to the agential aspect of meaning making involved with the tricolour as it reverses the gaze of how the symbol of the flag is perceived; the nation also gets constituted when the flag is owned by the people and can be used by them to express their commitment or disaffection towards the nation. Underscoring the reverse process of identification, Jha (2008) argued that the unfurling of the national flag brings hitherto marginalised and invisible subjects to the attention of

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[283] Redefining the relationship between the national flag and the people, in the judgment passed by the Shenoy Committee on 26th January 2002 with reference to the case between the Indian state and Navin Jindal, Indian citizens could now fly their flag whenever they wished thereby relaxing the Flag Code (Roy, 2006). See https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1332036/.

[284] Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1973, empowers a magistrate to prohibit an assembly of more than four people in an area, according to the Indian Penal Code.

the nation. In this vein, the seizing of the tricolour stands in for both visibilising the common man and also showing patriotic allegiance.

Practices of patriotism such as waving the national flag also leads to questioning the nature and the limit of this performative political action and the ideological political field therein. Menon and Nigam (2011a) argue that it is not necessary to always identify the presence of the national flag as associated with nationalism; it could also be seen here as the national flag displacing other kinds of sectarian flags. According to them:

> the national flag was *in place* of sectarian party flags. The national flag was standing in to signify a space in which all interests could come together on this one issue, perhaps only momentarily, but it was a moment worth focusing on. (p. 18)

Although I agree with Menon and Nigam's claim that the national flag brings people from different political dispositions under one platform, this is not the only thing it does; it also reflects the anti-politics and anti- political class stance that the movement exhibits.

> Aaj tak humne koi jhanda nahi banvaya; hamare andolan aur party ka koi jhanda nahi hai, hum sab rashtriya jhande ki neeche aate hai…kyunki hum sab ko deshbhakti ki bhavna jodti hai![285]
>
> [Until today we have not had a flag; we don't have a separate flag for ourselves – neither the movement nor the party. We all come under the national flag…because the feeling of nationalism holds us all together.]

Hitashi's response above to my enquiry regarding the absence of a separate flag for the AAP highlights the affective patriotic sentiment associated with the tricolour. However, underlying this unity is a constant tendency to 'neo-nationalism' (Arunima, 2012) and the national flag, as discussed above, circumscribed the visual semiotic field under the leadership of Anna, as no flag of any political party was *allowed* in the protest site. Vigilante patriotism against the corrupt state and the political class translated into legitimising an anti-political party stance as the only way to 'save' the nation. On the other hand, it constituted a self-sacrificing political subject as the ideal citizenry with no

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[285] Interview with Hitashi, 24th Janaury'2014, at Pariavartan office, Sundarnagari, New Delhi.

space for critique. Many participants of the movement, whom I met later as AAP volunteers during the fieldwork in Delhi, Mumbai and Ralegan, considered politics to be a 'dirty' affair which explained their anti-political activity; thus, while the reclaiming of the national flag by the masses was libratory, the underlying logic was pre-defined by vigilante patriotism.

6.3.2 'Gandhian' Anna: anti-political and religio-moralistic standpoint

> sahi azadi abhi tak nahi mili, vahi loot, vahi gundagardi, vahi bhrashtachar…gore gaye aur kale aa gaye…bhrashtachar mukt bharat nirman karna zaroori hai isliye azadi ki dusri ladai.[286]

> [Actual independence is yet to come. Same loot, same hooliganism, same corruption…The whites have gone and the browns have come…It is important to make India corruption free and so the need for a second struggle of Independence.]

Anna referred to his fight against corruption as the 'second freedom struggle' and started his anti-corruption agitation by undertaking an eleven day fast at the *Maidan* on 19th August 2011 (Thawani, 2010) which capitalised on the collective social memory. His acts of defiance were powerful; he was arrested by the Delhi police on 16th August 2011 at his residence to prevent him from holding his protest at JP Park in New Delhi, initially refused to leave Tihar jail (PTI, 2011c) and later asked his supporters to occupy the *Maidan* until the *Lokpal* was passed. On being released from Tihar, Anna went to pay obeisance to Gandhi at Rajghat and the *Amar Jawan Jyoti*[287] at the India Gate after which he headed to the *Ramlila Maidan* (PTI, 2011d).

Anna became the transnational symbolic figure of the anti-corruption movement in India.[288] As the face of the movement, he positioned himself as the embodiment of Gandhi and adopted his strategy of nonviolent protests. Kisan Babarao Hazare, fondly addressed as 'Anna' is a social activist. He was awarded the Padma

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[286] Interview with Anna Hazare at Jantantra Morcha's two-day meeting of volunteers, 6th October, 2013, New Delhi.

[287] Memorial to the unidentified dead of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War.

[288] For instance: "It's hard to imagine this diminutive, celibate octogenarian being the dynamo behind an entire popular movement. But in India, Anna Hazare cut a Gandhian pose that transfixed the world's largest democracy and put its sitting government's feet to the fire" (Tharoor, 2011).

Bhushan in 1992 for his contribution in rural development for transforming Ralegan Siddhi, his drought-prone village, into an ideal model village by adopting a successful water harvesting, conservation and management method. Before getting involved with the IAC in 2010, Anna was already campaigning against corruption under the banner of *Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Andolan* (BVJA), the people's movement against corruption set up in Maharashtra in 1991. His sustained efforts led to the resignation of six corrupt ministers and many officers of the Maharashtra state cabinet and officials. He was also part of the Right to Information (RTI) campaign for which again he fasted (implemented by the state government of Maharashtra with effect from 2002) which became the draft base for the National Right to Information Act 2005. Anna had a history of leading campaigns concerned with issues of decentralisation of power and corruption at state level.

Often hailed as the Gandhi of contemporary times, Anna always had a huge picture of Gandhi as part of his backdrop and dressed like him. "He was Gandhism personified and appeared as another great fighter" (Visvanathan, 2012, p. 107). As well as following the Gandhian ideology of considering villages as the central unit of economic and social development, he also brought in a discourse of spirituality and morality by stressing character-building and honesty in mainstream politics and the public sphere. *"Gandhiji ka rasta hi sahi raasta hai...par uske liye charitra sahi hona chaiya"*[289] [Gandhi's way is the correct pathway…but for that character has to be right]. Anna has consistently used Gandhian methods of civil disobedience, fasting and mass mobilisations for all his campaigns. "The old man was not just an iconic figure but a spiritual warrior of a different kind. As he explained later fasting comes easily to those who are celibate. He made it sound almost like a simple dietary regime" (Visvanathan, 2012, p. 105).

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[289] Interview with Anna Hazare on 6th October 2013, New Delhi.

In the initial days, it was only natural that when Anna, a Gandhian, appeared in *Ramlila Maidan* with the image of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) in the backdrop and flanked by two self-styled godmen in saffron, Baba Ramdev and Sri Sri Ravishankar, doubts were cast about the ideological orientation of Team Anna and the possibility of a right-wing connection with groups like the RSS as the symbolic repertoire resembled that of the Hindu right. Furthermore, ideological neutrality had been the hallmark of the anti-corruption movements that India had seen thus far: both the JP Movement and VP Singh's[290] mobilisation had 'anti-corruption' as their overarching agenda and hence both the movements achieved a sizeable base and logistical support for the right-wing groups RSS, *Jana Sangh* and, eventually, the BJP.

Baba Ramdev[291] was part of the initial IAC coalition which involved other activists along with Team Anna. The first agenda that they initiated was to lodge an FIR (First Information Report) against Suresh Kalmadi, the president of Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the chairman of Indian Olympic Association 2010 in relation to the CWG scam. Baba Ramdev, Anna Hazare, Swami Agnivesh, Kiran Bedi, Arvind Kejriwal, the Archbishop of Delhi, Vincent M Concessao, Maulana Mehmood Madani and others attended a meeting at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, and sought to register a public complaint at Parliament Street in connection with CWG scam (Thawani, 2010). Both Ramdev and his supporters from the Bharat Swabhiman Trust also participated in the rally at Parliament Street. Kejriwal's initial reason for getting Ramdev on board was to capitalise on his mass support base as the other members of the group had very limited public outreach.

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[290] VP Singh was the seventh prime minister of India (1989-90). Previously, as finance minister in Rajiv Gandhi's cabinet (1984-87), he was feared by the industrial class as he unleashed what is known as *raid raj* to check financial irregularities which led to many of them being jailed, etc. He therefore had launched a massive fight against corruption. https://countercurrents.org/2016/11/29/remembering-v-p-singhs-fight-against-corruption/

[291] Ramdev was born Rama Krishna Yadav and popularly called Baba Ramdev, is a yoga guru, owns Patanjali Ayurvedic Ltd and actively pursues political issues.

However, for Team Anna, Ramdev's association with the RSS and his own specific agenda on anti-corruption along with issues of who would be the central figure of leadership in the movement soon led to differences. Ramdev's close allegiance with the right-wing group RSS led to increasing critique of the mobilisation and the allegation that the movement was a proxy for the BJP. Also, there was a realisation that Ramdev was largely concerned with the recovering the black money issue and not so much about the *Jan Lokpal* Bill. Kejriwal could foresee that the agenda could be diluted and mobilisation could get divisive. By December 2010, Ramdev started to feel sidelined as the drafting of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill progressed and distanced himself from the January rally planned for 2011. While both Anna and Ramdev were conspicuous by their absence in the meeting regarding the rally, Anna sent a letter of support expressing his solidarity while Ramdev did not. Thus, the internal dynamics between the IAC and Team Anna gradually led to the mainstreaming of Anna and escape from an overt right wing takeover.

Furthermore, by replacing the *Bharat Mata* backdrop with that of Gandhi's imagery, the overt right wing assimilation was averted successfully (IANS, 2011).The symbolic shift achieved two performative functions: first, it signified an ideological clarity on the part of Team Anna that they were centrist in their approach rather than on the right of the political spectrum despite the fact that many sympathisers of the anti-corruption movement were right wing conservatives. In fact, during fieldwork I encountered many supporters whose political activism went back to the anti-reservation protests or were members of the Youth for Equality (YFE)[292] organisation. However, redefining the symbolic habitus reflected self-reflexivity and being receptive to audiences' discomfort with the use of an image that had been appropriated by the

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[292] In opposition to the government's OBC Reservation Policy in 2006, group of youth including students and professionals formed the Youth for Equality (YFE) platform. It is an organisation that is against the policy of affirmative action for the lower castes and classes.

Hindu Right. Bringing Gandhi into the visual field implied a concerted effort to dissociate from the right wing and keep its ideological positioning along the centre of the political spectrum. It also clearly established Anna as the main leader or face of the movement.

> Mein ek fakir aadmi hoon; mandir mein rehta hun; Sone ke liye ek bistar hai aur khane ke liye ek plate hai… Jeevan mein tay kar liya hai…jab tak jionga samaj aur desh ki sewa karte rahunga; jab mein maronga samaj aur desh ki sewa karte hue maronga.[293]
>
> [I am an ascetic. Living in a temple I have one bed to lie on and only one plate to eat from…I have decided that as long as I will live, I will serve the society and the nation; I will die, too, while serving my society and the nation.]

Anna always described himself as a social worker '*prajasewak*' (one who serves people) and 'apolitical', a selfless crusader dedicated to the country. The self-righteousness and the weight of public service became the ideal against the corrupt political class. The idea of *prajasewak* was engrained in the distinction between 'social work' and 'political work' wherein anything social was selfless, as opposed to being political. Politics was considered to be dirty and associated with self-interest and manipulation. He preferred non-party based political representation rather than political party/interest-based representation. "*Paksh tantra aur party tantra ne jantantra ko aane nahi diya; jagruk hona zaroori hai, party nahi janta se desh mein bhavishya milega*"[294] [The interest-based system or party-based system has not allowed democracy to come in. We need to be vigilant, not in any party, but in people lies the future for the country].

His protest platforms have always been anti-political, connoting in practice that no members of any political disposition would be allowed to share/enter the stage. Not only was politics 'dirty' but the political class was also considered to be corrupting, untrustworthy and disloyal. It was because of this that he discounted any comparison with the JP movement, because it was driven by political parties and had representatives

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[293] Field notes: Anna's speech in the last phase of fasting and protest at Ralegan Siddhi, 10th December 2013, Pune, Maharashtra.
[294] Field notes: Anna's speech at Ralegan Siddhi, 10th December 2013, Pune, Maharashtra.

from political parties who were part of the agitation. On drawing any analogy he clarified that, "*JP ka andolan alag tha...aur usme gadbad ho gaya kyonki usme paksh aur party ke log the*"[295] [JP's movement was different…and it was messed up because there were people from different political parties]. According to him, democracy has been ruined by political party-based interest articulation, mobilisation and participation. This disdain for electoral and party politics can be observed in two concrete spheres, one being his village, where he was instrumental in bringing about fundamental changes in terms of environmental sustainability and overall development and the other the anti-corruption movement itself.

Anna spearheaded the last phase of the protest to push the passing of the *Lokpal* Bill from Ralegan Siddhi, his village in Ahmednagar district in Pune, Maharashtra where he fasted from 10th December to 17th December 2013 (A. Rashid, 2013). After performing the ritualistic *aarti* and paying respect to the Gandhi statue installed in his *ashram* (hermitage) compound, he launched his proposed indefinite fast near the *Yadavbaba* temple complex. This temple complex and his village is the heterotopia of Anna's socio-religious, paterfamilias and anti-political belief system. It is interesting to note that all the arrangements for the protest were made just outside the *Yadavbaba* temple which is considered to be the focal point of all crucial decision-making in the village. Sharma (2006) points out the rebuilding of the temple was one of the primary things that Anna did after returning to the village and it gradually became the centre for all meetings, collective decision making and social gatherings. After paying respect to the deity in the temple, Anna started his fast. The public address system located within the temple complex is used to announce developments to the villagers – from announcements that Anna was beginning a fast to the arrival of political dignitaries, and

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[295] Interview with Anna Hazare, 6th October 2013, New Delhi.

to solicit funds from the general public.[296] The elaborate arrangement for announcements with the public address system installed within the temple complex itself shows the significance of the temple in the larger religio-social life of Ralegan and the reason Anna chose this as the venue for his fast. Anna's fasting, as the public announcement system signifies, had become a ritual performance in the everyday life of the village.

One of the major changes initiated by Anna after he accepted the leadership of the village was the decision to abolish elections to the *gram sabha* (village council) and replace them with the process of nominating members in the belief that elections led to corruption. There have been no elections in the village, neither *gram panchayat* (village assembly) nor that of the cooperative societies for the past 24 years (Sharma, 2006). One of the stories told to me during the course of the fieldwork in Ralegan Siddhi was that those persons found guilty of moral deviations were tied to an electricity pole in the *Yadavbaba* temple and whipped with Anna's belt as punishment.[297] Irrespective of whether this really happened or not, this narrative reflects the acceptance of Anna's high moral authority within the village. For instance, all the shops in the village were shut during the nine days of Anna's fast, mostly voluntarily although there were some who expressed resentment and explained that "this is when we can do business as people have come from outside the village; but we can't do it".[298] Anna's moral authority is unquestionably followed in the belief that he is right; those who disagree do not have the courage to deviate for fear of being ostracised by the rest of the villagers. Meeta and Rajivlochan (1994) highlight in their incisive piece that the transition of Ralegan '*Shindi*' (a particular plant) to '*Siddhi*' (accomplished) manifests the moral

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[296] Field notes: observation from the protest site, 10th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.

[297] Field notes: observation at the protest site, 13th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.

[298] Field notes: observation at the protest site, 12th December 2013, in Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra. Response by a random shopkeeper close to the protest site.

transformation of the village under Anna's leadership as he formed a youth forum called the '*tarun mandal*' for moral cleansing and social reform. As observed in the field, drinking and smoking were prohibited in the village as these were considered immoral activities.[299] Thus, Ralegan Siddhi can be interpreted as the microcosm of Anna's moral fiefdom.

A similar moralistic fascism could be observed in his broader political interventions on issues of corruption and terrorism. "If any candidate takes or gives money in *Vidhan Sabha* or Parliament for asking questions or voting, such people should be given severe punishment, in fact according to me, they should be hanged," Anna said ("Hang MPs", 2011). He had a similar view regarding Kasab's[300] execution (Shaikh, 2012). Expression of blatant support for hanging as a mode of punishment both for politicians and criminals brings out two dangerous aspects of his moral philosophy. The demand that corrupt politicians be subject to drastic punishments demonstrated his high subjective moralistic stance but, most importantly, also his disregard for procedures of legal justice and justifying mob justice based on archaic and non-negotiable norms of morality. The anti-political predisposition explains Anna's decision to neither join nor support the formation of the AAP which emerged as the political extension of the anti-corruption movement of which he was the flag bearer but rather to instead launch a counter movement, *Jantantra Morcha*, on the anniversary of Gandhi's death on 30th January 2013 (Byatnal, 2013). During the last phase of the protest held at Ralegan Siddhi, when Anna was fasting, the leaders of different political parties ranging from the Maharashtra Navnirman Samiti (MNS) to the AAP came from Delhi to express solidarity. When AAP leaders like Mayank Gandhi, Waghela, Gopal Rai, Kumar Vishwas and Sanjay Singh came to Ralegan they were not allowed to share

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[299] Field notes: observation from the protest site, 8th December 2013, in Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.

[300] Ajmal Kasab was a Pakistani terrorist, who took part in the Mumbai attacks in 2008. He was caught by the Indian forces, put on trial and sentenced to death in 2012.

the stage with him because of their political party membership and so Kumar Vishwas and the other leaders sat with the supporters and also addressed the crowds from there rather than the podium.[301]

Unlike the middle-class nature that dominated to some extent the mobilisation in Delhi and Mumbai, the composition of the supporters at Ralegan were largely rural villagers. The composition and range of supporters therefore counter the dominant opinion that the anti-corruption movement was a middle class movement. Apart from villagers from Ralegan, there were supporters who had come from nearby villages, cities and neighbouring states as well as from Delhi. There was huge participation by women and school children as well. For some it was an opportunity to see the 'Gandhi of their times' as one said, *"Gandhiji ko dekhne aye hai!"*[302] [I have come to see Gandhiji!]. There were many youth groups, students from nearby colleges and universities from Pune (Mahasrashtra) and Rajasthan who came prepared with skits, songs and poems, all of which had anti-corruption as the overarching theme. Many of the supporters had their own stories to share about their encounters with corruption ranging from bureaucratic hurdles and land and fertiliser mafias to issues of basic accessibilities to land, water and education leading them to extend support for Anna and the *Lokpal* Bill. Here, too, one could observe not just the range in participation across classes but also the nature of the issues or concerns of people in the rural regions who were mainly involved with the agricultural economy and the nexus between government and the corporate houses. Chants of *"Anna tum sangharsh karo hum tumhare saath hai"* [Anna, we are with you in this struggle] and *"Main bhi Anna; tu bhi Anna; ab toh sara desh hai Anna"*, [I am Anna; you are Anna; now the whole country is Anna] were constantly heard as supporters tried to

[301] Field notes: Observations from the field during the last phase of the protest held, 12th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.
[302] Field notes: Rakesh's (a student from 5th Standard who had come with his classmates to the protest site) response to my enquiry as to why he had come to Anna's protest, 11th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.

infuse energy and support to Anna.[303] Ten people from the supporters also volunteered to undertake '*kuposhan*' (fasting) in solidarity with Anna. The only female participant amongst them, Sarita,[304] 38 years old, who worked in the fields, came from the nearby Gowra village to express solidarity:

> *Lokpal* Bill lane ke liye aan-shan pe baithi hun; *Lokpal* bill aane se saara samaj badal jayega..dilli bhi gayi thi 12 din kuposhan bhi kiya tha, kal se yahan pe kuposhan shuru kiya hai…jab tak Anna baithenge..tab tak mein bhi baithongi …Annaji hamare devta hai…voh apne liye kuch nahi kar rahe…desh ke liye kar rahe hai…agar Anna ko kuch nahi hota…toh mujhe bhi kuch nahi hoga!

> [I am fasting to bring in the *Lokpal* Bill; the whole society will change if the *Lokpal* Bill comes in… I went to Delhi as well and fasted for twelve days…I started fasting here yesterday as well…I will sit as long as Anna continues his fast…Annaji is our God…He is not doing anything for himself…he is doing it for the country…If nothing happens to Anna…nothing will happen to me as well.]

Two supporters from outside Pune who also fasted in solidarity with Anna shared that for them Anna was akin to Gandhi. As described by one of the supporters, Shiv Kheda,[305] 60 years old from Janunda village, Rajasthan had been fighting its own battle against corruption, especially in village level administration under the control of *sarpanches*, for the last twenty years:

> Mein pichle teen varshon se Anna ke saath juda hua hoon…dilli mein bhi tha …gramin sthar pe jo bhrashtachar hai usku door karna hai…aur uske liye padyatra kar raha hu…Anna Gandhi swaroop hai"

> [I have been with Anna for the past three years…I was there in Delhi as well…Corruption at the rural level needs to be removed …and for that I am undertaking a journey on foot…Anna is like Gandhi.]

Gandhian practices combined with socio-religious authority led to Anna's larger appeal amongst the supporters as the narratives above describe. However, it also depicts that the subjectivities that his leadership propelled were of uncritical allegiance and awe.

Anna always ended his fast with a highly symbolic gesture; for example, at *Ramlila Maidan* coconut water was served to him by minority Muslim and Dalit girls.

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[303] Field notes: observation from the protest site, 10th December 2013, in Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.
[304] Interview with Sarita, 11th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.
[305] Interview with Shiv Khedha, 11th December 2013 at Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.

This ending was specifically designed to replicate how Gandhi reached out to Muslims and Dalits and also to counter the critique that these sections were largely absent from the mobilisations. Anna broke his fast in the first round at *Ramlila Maidan* after twelve days and finally at Ralegan after nine days after the Lok Sabha passed the *Lokpal* Bill in the Parliament on 18th December, 2013 (Byatnal, 2013). The change of the protest venues for the movement from Delhi to Mumbai and then the small village of Ralegan Siddhi demonstrated the influence and appeal of Anna's personality to different sections of the population from urban to rural. Also, the diversity in the nature of concerns associated with the rural population went beyond just the political class battering to raising concerns that affected them on an everyday basis of survival as peasants, small farmers, traders and retailers. It also gives an insight into the different dimensions of his appeal amongst the masses, which goes beyond the mediatised image argument and the urban middle class composition.

> Hazare had struck a deep chord. He had become larger than life, an icon symbolizing something more. To the young, he represented integrity, the commitment to fight corruption. He was seen as a symbolic link to history, to the credibility and ethics of the nationalist movement. (Visvanathan, 2012, p. 107)

Through the anti-corruption movement Anna challenged the political class by using the same Gandhian symbolism of the 'Gandhi topi' which was instrumental in establishing an independent political class in opposition to British colonial rule. It is also ironic that he used Gandhian techniques to highlight the corrupt practices of Congress, the party seen as the inheritor of Gandhi's legacy of the freedom movement and ideology.

Figure 6.4: AAP volunteers, Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi[306]

6.3.3 From Gandhi to Anna to AAP – the topi's radical anti-Congress and non-khadi spin

Figure 6.4 shows AAP volunteers wearing AAP *topis* during the campaign. It was perhaps the first time women activists were seen wearing the headgear in both phases – movement and party.[307] The AAP *topi* had a broad reach among the masses since it was cheap and therefore more accessible. It emerged as a powerful social equaliser – both in terms of class and gender.

The strikingly visible thing that came to dominate the visual field of Delhi from the initial days of the protests at Jantar Mantar was the 'I am Anna' *topis*. In Indian history, the Gandhi *topis* were an essential part of the nationalist struggle but they had been non-existent in the political culture of protests and political life for a long time

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[306] Image taken by the author, 3rd December 2013, Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi.
[307] Field notes: I observed that women activists wore AAP *topis* not only at rallies and demonstrations but also within party offices.

since Independence. This movement bought back to focus the Gandhi cap yet again into the political culture, while sustaining its subversive element, ironically against the Congress party.

Having been humiliated for wearing the Sola *topi* in 1917, which was considered a symbol of British Imperialism, Gandhi developed his own version of a *khadi* headgear which became the symbol of the nationalist struggle.

> Two years later he was to exploit this symbolism by inventing his own personalized form of headwear – a white folding khadi version of the Kashmiri cap – which later became known as the Gandhi cap. Gandhi wore it for less than two years but it became one of the most popular symbols of the nationalist struggle. (Tarlo, 1996, p. 70)

The use of the white *khadi* Gandhi *topi* became a part of the official uniform of the Congress party. Post-independence, the *khadi topi* was eventually reduced to being part of the attire of those political activists' attire who identified themselves as followers of Gandhian ideology and his non-violent strategy. Anna Hazare is one such prominent Gandhian social activist. However, Anna wearing the Gandhi *topi* and leading an anti-corruption political struggle against the entire political class, and effectively against the ruling Congress party, reflects the irony of the situation. The visual field with supporters wearing a Gandhi *topi* but with the tagline 'I am Anna' meant more than the addition of a tagline to the headgear; it also implied a larger ideological transformation. This semiotic opposition of the *khadi* Gandhi *topi* being worn in opposition to the Congress Party reflects the journey of both the Gandhi *topi* and the Congress Party as the flag bearers of the nationalist movement and the inheritors of Gandhian legacy coming full circle.

The Gandhi *topi* also underwent a literal makeover from *khadi* (cotton) to *china net* in an authentic *aam admi* takeover from Anna. During both the Gandhian era and the Anna phase of the anti-corruption movement, the *topi* continued to be made of cotton. The tagline shift from *'Main hoon Anna'* (I am Anna) to *'Aam Admi'* (common man) for

the Anna *topi* was not just an ideological shift of the movement to a political party but also symbolised its adaptation into a common man's version of the attire as well.

> The caps are made of 'China Net' — a type of polymer imported from China and known for its durability. But its edge lies in the price — such caps cost Rs 3 to Rs 5 each against Rs 10-12 for those made from traditional textiles. (Nair, 2013)

The shift made by an upcoming political party governed by its financial limitations meant a shift from cotton to china net. "Unlike their rivals who have much deeper pockets, AAP leaders made it clear that they wanted the cheapest material available" (Nair, 2013).

However, this choice should be analysed beyond its cost-benefit, for its impact on the larger political culture. The shift from *khadi* to c*hina net* needs to be read through the broader political ideology of the AAP representing the masses and not the political elite. "A reading of *khadi* thus already exists in terms of the semiotic of corruption in modern Indian public life. It is one that reads *khadi* as 'purity' and 'renunciation' and now as corruption and thievery" (Chakrabarty, 2001, pp. 28–29). Since *khadi* has been associated with the corrupt political class, the choice of moulding the Gandhi/Anna *topi* according to the AAP's ideology gave it a new lease of life by salvaging it from its deep-seated eliteness and transforming it into a symbol of the masses – the *aam aadmi*. The Gandhi *topi* during the nationalist movement represented a person's political and moral commitment and was a visual marker of the values of *swarajya* (self-rule) and *swadeshi* (indigenous).[308] Similarly, in the anti-corruption movement, the AAP *topi* evolved its own normative field of moral righteousness and honesty in public life for its activists and supporters, as discussed in the next section. The metamorphosis of the Gandhian *topi* to *'Anna topi'* to *'AAP topi'* signified the political transition both ideologically specific to the anti-corruption movement and to the far-ranging Indian political culture.

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[308] During the nationalist movement *khadhi* was symbolic of economic self-reliance against British industrial products. Therefore wearing the Gandhian cap during that period signified political allegiance to Gandhian non-violent struggle against British Imperialism.

6.3.4 *'Nayak'* Kejriwal: the political turn with the AAP

> Ek party ne bhi *Lokpal* bill ko support nahi diya, do saal ho gaye; haar ke hamein Aam Aadmi Party banana pada; sabne hamare mazak udhaya;khudh chunav lado aur khud apna *Lokpal* bill pass karo; hum aap ki chunauti sweekar karte hai; hum khud chunav ladenge, jeetenge aur apna *Lokpal* bill pass karenge.[309]

> [It has been two years. None of the political parties supported the passing of the *Lokpal* Bill; we then had to form the Aam Aadmi Party. Everybody made fun of us, saying 'fight elections on your own and pass your bill'; we are now accepting the challenge. We will now fight the election on our own, win it and will pass our *Lokpal* Bill.]

The AAP, the anti-establishment party, was launched by Kejriwal couched in the language of urgency and necessity and decided to contest the Delhi Assembly elections of 2013 (Ali, 2013). Since then, it has transformed the nature of elections and political culture, per se, of Delhi. The formation of the new political party by Kejriwal marked a major shift from the anti-political stance that the movement had projected under Anna thus far. This evolution therefore implied two levels of transition, first at the level of the movement shift from the narrative of 'dirty politics' to 'cleansing the system'. One could draw a parallel with what Fernandes (2006) described as the 'clean up' of the city, an inherent part of the new middle classes' constitution of its civic culture. Second, at the level of political party formation, the AAP emerged as an anti-political establishment party[310] in opposition to the existing dominance of the INC and the BJP in the political landscape of the national capital of New Delhi.

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[309] Field Note: Kejriwal's speech at the *Jan sabha* held at Sector 9, R.K. Puram, 15th September, 2013, New Delhi.

[310] Abedi defines anti-political establishment parties as parties that fulfil the following criteria: "a) A party that challenges the status quo in terms of major policy issues and political system issues. b) A party that perceives itself as a challenger to the parties that make up the political establishment. c) A party that asserts that there exists a fundamental divide between the political establishment and the people" (Abedi, 2004, p. 12).
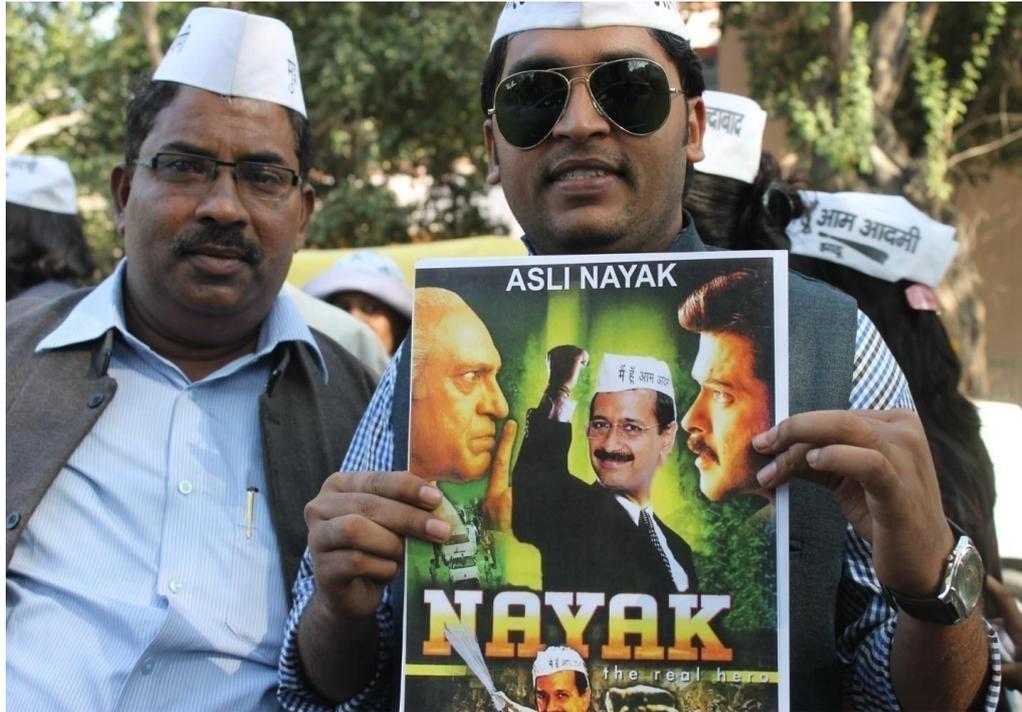
Figure 6.5: AAP supporters, Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi[311]

Figure 6.5 depicts the hero-like identification that supporters had with Kejriwal; the poster was made by the supporter himself, who was at the *jadhoo chalao yatra* in Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi. In this poster, Kejriwal's face has been photo-shopped onto a Bollywood film poster in which the protagonist of the story stands up against the corrupt political system.

Kejriwal emerged as the ultimate redeeming *nayak* (hero) by bringing in the political turn to the hitherto anti-politics movement despite being an outsider to the political system and thus signified performing the *anti-political self*. The more revolutionary, fiery and impatient face of the movement, as opposed to Anna's calmer demeanour; Kejriwal was considered the main architect of the movement and subsequently the formation of the AAP. Realising that there was a lack of political will to finally legislate on the *Lokpal* Bill on the part of the existing political parties, Kejriwal decided to enter the field of electoral politics and launched the AAP on 26ᵗʰ November

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[311] Image taken by the author, 3ʳᵈ December 2013, Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi.

2012. Representing himself as one of the 'common men', his performance of dissent as an outsider to the political system had a potent impact on the masses – whether it was the burning of the government's version of the *Lokpal* Bill during the movement in 2011 (PTI, 2011b) or organising *satyagraha* (non-violent resistance) around unfair tariffs on water and electricity in 2013: approximately 50 RWAs pledged their support to the AAP's campaign and refused to pay water and electricity bills (DHNS, 2013). Electricity bills were also burnt in different parts of Delhi on the occasion of *Holika Dahan.*[312]

A former tax officer and an RTI activist, Kejriwal had been a social activist working through his two initiatives, the People's Cause Research Foundation (PCRF) and Parivartan (an NGO), before he ventured into the anti-corruption crusade. He and his NGO worked mainly in Sunder Nagari, enhancing residents' access to public services and entitlements such as water, public distribution system (PDS) and electricity by effectively using RTI.[313] He was also instrumental in starting the anti-privatisation campaign of the Delhi Jal Board in 2005. By employing confrontationist, oppositional and aggressive positions, he was able to establish legitimacy as an 'outsider' working against the existing corrupt political class and the political order. The dominant cleavage hence became the political class versus the citizens and the anti-establishment party, invigorating the *aam aadmi.*

> As the very name of the AAP demonstrates, the idea of the ordinary plays a central role in these politics. Like other anti-establishment parties around the world, AAP presents itself as a party that advocates for the ordinary citizen or common man who is neglected, misunderstood and actively silenced by the political establishment (Roy, 2014, p. 42).

By invigorating the category of the common man or the people against the system, they constructed the 'other' in the political class. The AAP accused the political class of betrayal, corruption and self-enrichment and portrayed themselves as anti-

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[312] It is a bonfire on the eve of the Hindu festival of Holi. According to the myth, it signifies burning the devil Holika. In this case the occasion was used to signify defiance against the incumbent Congress government in the national capital.
[313] Field notes: Parivartan Office, 15th November 2013, Sundar Nagari, New Delhi.

systemic game changers pledged to the politics of Gandhian *swaraj*. They decided to enter the electoral fray for the Delhi Assembly elections of 2013 on the agenda of anti-corruption and passing of the *Lokpal* Bill. The ideological plank that defined the AAP campaign was aimed at systemic change, democratisation, and accountability. *Swaraj,* as the foundational principle, was explained in the manifesto,[314] detailing the different levels at which decentralisation of power would take place to ensure political accountability to the common man. The dominant discourse was always about not contesting for power, but to work towards democratisation of governmental institutions and agencies, focusing therefore on self-governance whether at the level of block, municipality or state administration. "*Satta parivartan ke liye andar ja rahe hai; satta bhogane ke liye nahi ja rahe hai; satta vahan se hatakar aapke haton mein dene ke liye ja rahe hai*"[315] [We are going in for systemic changes, not to reap the benefits of the system. We want to transfer the reins of control of the system from them to you.]

Emphasising a systemic overhaul by cleansing the political system of corruption, the party launched the *jhadoo* (broom) as the symbol of the party (Baliga, 2013) at the Valmiki Temple, in Valmiki Colony (Ali, 2013) with the slogan, '*poore desh mein jhadoo lagayenge bhrashtachar mukt banayenge*'[316] (We will use the broom throughout the country and make it corruption free). The choice of an 'outcaste symbol' such as the broom signified the equivalential logic that it would play across classes while also advancing the agenda of non-sectarianism; I refer to it as an outcaste symbol because of two underlying significations. First, from the perspective of purity and pollution, despite being used for cleaning, the broom is always differentiated and kept separate in a household. Second, as an implement used for sweeping and sanitation, it is invariably

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[314] See the AAP's Manifesto for the 2013 Delhi Assembly Election. The section on '*Swaraj ki Niti*' further elaborates on the role of *Mohalla Sabhas* where decisions regarding civic development will be taken in accordance with the residents involved (pp. 4-5). The 2013 Manifesto (Hindi version) is available at: http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/files/file/AAP%20manifesto%202013.pdf

[315] Field Note: Kejriwal's speech at *Jan Sabha*, Sector 9, R.K. Puram, 15th September 2013, New Delhi.

[316] Field Note: Kejriwal's speech at *Jan Sabha*, Sector 9, R.K. Puram, 15th September 2013, New Delhi.

associated with the outcastes according to the Hindu caste system – *Valmikis*. The party's launch of its symbol at Valmiki Temple made visible this section of people, i.e. the sanitation workers, and emphasised their role in keeping the city clean and liveable couched in the narrative of dignity of labour:

> With the broom which symbolises dignity of labour, the party hopes to clean the filth which has permeated our government and our legislature. The country needs a clean sweep of its corrupted mainstream political parties. (AAP, 2013a)

The AAP's statement above, however, demonstrates that despite the transition from the movement to the party it was still nested in perceiving politics to be 'dirty' and hence the repertoire of the broom through the grid of cleansing. It is also interesting to analyse the nature of political subjectivity that is aimed at constituting through this choice. At the launch Kejriwal claimed:

> The 'broom' symbolises that the time has come to clean the politics of the country. The Aam Aadmi Party has vowed not to give a ticket to any tainted candidate. The 'broom' will become our weapon from now on. We will fight shoulder to shoulder with this community to clean this country. (Ali, 2013)

By announcing camaraderie in cleansing the political system one can observe a partnership being charted out with the *Valmiki* community who are considered outcastes according to the Hindu caste hierarchy. In fact, *Valmikis* are outcastes even within the Dalit community, since they are even lower in the hierarchy than the already marginalised Dalits. The inauguration was symbolic of mainstreaming them and their work; most potently, claiming their partnership in an endeavour against the existing political system also gave them an acknowledgement of being part of the system – inclusiveness and a role – which was denied by the state administrative category of being a 'Scheduled Caste' and an assumed liability for the government. The community felt included and, as citizen stakeholders, part of the larger political agenda. However, this also demonstrated the inbuilt assumption of equating cleaning as the job of a particular caste, and thus may inadvertently contribute to perpetuating the caste-based

social order. Also, the broom has a broader significance in the Hindu way of life as it is considered auspicious. One of my middle-class Hindu respondents, a resident of Delhi Vishal, said, *"Koi bhi shubh kaam karne se pehle jhadhoo se hi toh safai hoti hai, jaise Lakshmi ji ke aane se pehle bhi"*[317] [Before starting anything auspicious, we clean with the broom; for instance, before welcoming Lakshmiji]. The broom as a symbol is a floating signifier, enabling supporters from varied sectarian backgrounds to identify with it. It is loaded with different meanings depending on which section of the society one talks to and therefore in its ambivalence lays its equivalential logic; it binds all classes together. In the larger scheme of politics though, this shift translates into changing the signposts for mobilisation from a non-emphasis on religion, caste and identity to the mainstreaming of class.

A balanced combination of traditional campaign methods and dialogic interactions along with techno-managerial strategies helped the new insurgent party to reach out to the masses effectively in its electoral debut for the 2013 Delhi Assembly elections. Strategies such as *jhadoo chalao yatra* and *jan sabhas*, discussed in the earlier section, combined with an effective door-to-door campaign laid the basis for the party's outreach strategy. Furnishing information and facts to the masses was one of Kejriwal's most effective election strategies. Making people aware of government policies, the claims that citizens can make against the government, the loopholes in the system and ensuring bureaucratic and political accountability formed the crux of his *jan sabhas* and other public meetings. Unlike the traditional parties who depended more on rhetoric, the AAP's fact-based approach reflected the shift in political practices that the party was setting in motion which I term the 'techno-managerial approach'. The other crucial shift that accompanied the managerial outlook was the renaming of party cadres as 'volunteers'. Emblematic of the managerial outlook to doing politics, the relationship

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[317] Interview with Vishal, a government employee, 23rd January 2014, Sector 3, R.K. Puram, New Delhi.

between the political party and its workers was refashioned into a 'volunteering' activity, albeit governed by the same disciplinary norms.

Two interesting aspects of the AAP's election campaign were its unique process of candidate selection and the most extensive procedure of manifesto-making. Arresting the clout of money and muscle power that had dominated elections in Delhi, the AAP asked individuals who were capable of garnering support from a minimum of one hundred people within his/her constituency to file applications as candidates. After a month-long procedure and public scrutiny, the party's candidatures were finalised. The party's manifesto-making was also a highly creative process which set the AAP apart from other political parties. Taking a people-centric approach rather than a sector-wise one (which is usually the focus of manifesto-making) the AAP decided to take up issues that concerned a specific constituency by going to the people directly. Consequently, it had 71 manifestoes, one for each constituency and one with the overall blueprint for the whole of Delhi (AAP, 2013c; PTI, 2013a). For example, the manifesto for Greater Kailash (GK) was subdivided into various areas and their specific concerns, while that for Savitri Nagar focused on the issue of sewage lines and the drainage system whereas it was issues concerning the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor that found mention in the GK manifesto. The overall manifesto for Delhi, interestingly, had a section on social justice as well as sections on other developmental agendas. Despite categorising different minority sections based on their ascriptive identities such as religion or caste, the articulation of their claims was based on their rights as citizens. *Jan sabhas* played a crucial role in getting feedback from citizens to refine these specific manifestos.

Challenging the dominant political parties who had the money and power to erect big hoardings, the AAP chose to place posters with slogans *'kise chunenge aap baimaan ya imaandaar''* [Who will you select, the corrupt or the honest?] on the common man's mode of transport – pulled rickshaws and auto-rickshaws. The auto-rickshaw

campaign was one of the most innovative strategies introduced by the AAP, for which both, the pulled rickshaws and auto-rickshaws were *challaned* (fined) and harassed by various administrative wings of the Delhi government (either through the Delhi police or the traffic police) which at that time was under the control of the Congress party. Yet they continued to be the most loyal supporters of AAP. By reaching out to large sections of masses, the AAP registered a spectacular debut by winning 28 seats out of 70 and emerged as a real contender for political power. Apart from the electoral victory, it was the coalition of supporters across classes and regions that the party was able to garner which was of political significance. The next section discusses the nature of the political subjectivity constituted by the movement/party.

6.4   Political Subjectivity: Self -Righteousness and Techno-Managerial Politics

Hitashi, a 25 year old BPO worker who left her job during the Anna movement said: *"Andolan se ek disha mili …topi pehenke mein nikalti hoon toh badlav ki zimandari ka ehsaas hota hai..!"[318]* [The movement gave me a direction to life…When I wear the cap and go out there is a feeling of responsibility to bring about change]. She got involved as a volunteer and gradually became an activist with the AAP. She said that the journey from being a first-time protester in the *Ramlila Maidan* to managing booth-level campaigning in areas of Seemapuri and Mustafabad had been incredible. The more striking aspect of her narrative was when she said that wearing the AAP *topi* instilled in her a sense of responsibility to bring about change. Following AAP activists during the campaign validated how the AAP *topi* had developed its own normative field. The activists/participants' bodies became sites of significance. By wearing Anna *topis* and performing opposition and dissent by physical acts of disobedience they created public discussion among the common masses. By making their agendas visible, they

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[318] Interview with AAP Volunteer Hitashi, 24th January 2014, Parivartan Office, Sundernagar constituency, New Delhi.

transformed themselves into agents of change. *"Topi pehan ke bahut izzat milti hai…badi zimmedari ka ehsaas hota hai…kuch galat nahi kar sakte"[319]* [Wearing the cap brings in a lot of respect…It is a source of great responsibility…Therefore I must not do anything wrong]. It is this performative essence that the AAP *topi* inheres, as activists themselves became crusaders and problem-solvers.

Apart from getting respect from people, volunteers (for example, the auto-rickshaw drivers) felt that *they should act* or needed to hold themselves to a higher moral standard than they had before – both legally and behaviourally.[320] Wearing the AAP *topi* came to imply a moral legitimacy; it became a tool for negotiating or intervening in any situation of crisis. As observed during fieldwork, a faulty electricity bill issue could be rectified by a few AAP *topi*-wearing volunteers going to the relevant office, raising the issue, being taken seriously and being assured that the issue raised would be taken care of by the authorities. After this, one of the volunteers noted that *"topi mein bada damm hain"[321]* [there is a lot of power in the *topi*]; the performative essence of the moment was that of self-appraisal – to be in a position to initiate change or intervene and hence be "suffused by sentiments of heroic achievement" (Roy, 2014, p. 49). The movement and the party invigorated large numbers of young activists who had hitherto been apolitical to become active volunteers in the party. Many of the activists, with their stories of tenacity, sacrifice and political commitment, do not only represent a deep sense of political agency in fighting the system but also inspired spectators to political action. All of them represented moral resoluteness and had stories of sacrifice and commitment describing their evolution as AAP volunteers. The movement initiated large sections of

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[319] Field notes: statement by one of the respondents while following the auto-rickshaw campaign, 25th November 2013, CP, New Delhi.
[320] Field notes: observations while following the auto-rickshaw campaign, 25th November 2013, CP, New Delhi.
[321] Interview with Vikas, AAP volunteer, 11th November 2013, New Delhi.

newcomers into political work, challenging their fundamental belief that doing politics is dirty.

6.4.1 *Aam 'aadmi'* volunteers – beyond the 'middle' class

The anti-political stance of the movement was one of the compelling reasons for the neo-liberal, middle-class professionals and corporate citizen subjects to support the movement which then was extended to the party as well. The non-sectarian outlook led to a class coalition. Consequently, politics was reduced to 'management' of interests. The techno-managerial nature of both the movement and the party can be attributed to this leadership and the involvement of large numbers of the professional middle classes from the early days. Many activists who continued to be part of the new party formation were the backbone of the legal wing and the social media campaign for the 2013 election campaign. However, the involvement of the middle class as leaders of this civic activism was not a new phenomenon. Mohanty (2011) argues that many of the movements which intervened for further democratisation prior to the anti-corruption protests of 2011 were initiated by the middle class; for example, the civil rights movement was largely middle-class-led. Similarly, the mobilisation of the Dalits has its base among the upwardly mobile middle class educated sections within the community who spearheaded the movement. But what was new, argued Sitapati (2011), was that for the first time the middle class interests were successfully dispersed as representing everyone else's interests also. Extending his argument, and based on my own observations and talking to activists at the New Delhi AAP office (which was Kejriwal's constituency), it can be claimed that the reasons for the participation of young corporate MBAs and lawyers were governed by the logic of ensuring the accountability and efficiency of the government state machinery. One of the activists, Dinup

Mathew,[322] a corporate professional volunteering at the New Delhi constituency office described his reasons for joining the party:

> I have been at the receiving end of unfair government practices in both my personal and business lives. Greasing the palms of all and sundry to get the most routine work done was increasingly a norm. I had no option. (D. Singh, 2013)

The stories of Ankit Lal, an IT professional, who left his job to manage the social media campaign and Dr Raizada, a practicing doctor based outside India, who came back to contribute to the campaign and was in charge of managing the link between the party and the various NRI activist groups in the UK, Canada and Australia are similar. Hence, the middle class section was heavily involved in the transition from the movement to the formation of the party.

In addition to this background role, one could also observe more sustained involvement by some of these young professionals who took on, for instance, the responsibility of running a constituency campaign or becoming candidates themselves. Many students from colleges, universities and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) either took a year off or did not sit for their exams as they felt it was crucial to be part of the movement and 'do something' for the country. IItian, Vikram,[323] who was responsible for organising the campaign amongst the students in IIT Delhi (one of the first student bodies that extended support to the IAC under the banner 'IITians Against Corruption') and decided to be part of the party responsible for the Malviya Nagar Unit, said, *"Agar mein exam deta toh apne liye deta- naukri karta apne parivaar ko support karta- lekin mein ek dayre ke under seemit ho jata'!"* [If I had sat the exams it would have been for myself; I would have started working and supporting my family. But I would have limited my potential by doing this]. Vikram's response brings out the combination of

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[322] Field notes: conversation with Dinup Mathew in AAP office, 12th November'13. He shared the same sentiments and reasons for becoming active in the movement as mentioned in the news report, Connaught Place, New Delhi.

[323] Interview with Vikram, 2nd February 2014, AAP office, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi.

moral self-righteousness and performing civic activism which defined the young AAP activists.

The corporate classes comprised another powerful support base for the movement as they organised their 'moral panic' against 'corruption' (Ravinder Kaur, 2012). A group of corporate houses wrote an open letter detailing their anxiety and the reasons they identified with the movement (expressed as 'governance deficit') ("India Inc's letter", 2011)[324] and pledged their support. As pointed out by Ravinder Kaur (2012), the fear of losing investments underpins the active participation of corporate players in the anti-corruption movement. The idea of 'nation as a brand' (Ravinder Kaur, 2012), along with the politico-legal perspective of analysing politics defines the participation of techno elites. Sitapati (2011) also highlights that the non-representativeness and undemocratic aspect of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill did not seem to bother the middle classes and the elites. The largest fallout of the campaign, however, has been that the corporate sector have been kept out of the framework of the *Lokpal* Bill altogether since its focus is on the bureaucratic and the political classes (Giri, 2011; Ravinder Kaur, 2012; Navlakha, 2011). Thus the corporate class continues to be insulated from any accountability despite being involved in financial frauds and irregularities of varied kinds.

However, the anti-corruption movement also signified the struggle against day-to-day bribery and malpractices for the urban poor.

> It was no longer just a composite of middle class groups and NGOs and their constituents but also that of ordinary people – rickshaw pullers, vegetable vendors, auto rickshaw drivers, students and lower class families with all their members spent time in the Maidan. (Mohanty, 2011, p. 17)

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[324] The India Inc's (Corporate sector) second letter to the leaders can be read here:
http://www.dnaindia.com/money/report-india-inc-s-second-open-letter-to-leaders-1597346

Thus, a range of different professional bodies/trade unions also came together to pledge their support – doctors, IITians, *auto-rickshaw wallahs* and the *dabba wallahs[325]* of Mumbai – for the movement and also for the party. Mayank Gandhi elaborated on the nature of participation with regard to mobilisations that took place in Mumbai, running parallel to the campaigns in Delhi:

> People from various groups – dabba wallahs, boot-polish wallahs, the coolie workers association, chemists associations and business wallahs were all there. There was not a single association that did not join us, cutting across all classes and across all boundaries.[326]

Visiting the AAP offices at Chakala and Ralegan during Anna's second fast at Ralegan, the media-generated version of the 'middle class event' (Rajagopal, 2011b) faltered; it broke the stereotypical perspective of viewing the movement as being urban-based. On the contrary, the AAP displays a continuum along both rural and urban lines, as well as across the classes. Different sections of the lower-income groups across the cities of Delhi and Mumbai participated in the movement/party. One of the permanent fixtures at the AAP office in Delhi's Connaught Place was Vijay Baba, a rickshaw-puller who was busy handling the phone-in campaign for the party. After being harassed by the police for having AAP posters on his rickshaw, he thought that by campaigning in this manner he also could be part of this politics of change.[327] For many, such as rickshaw pullers, auto-rickshaw *wallahs* and *dabba wallahs*, opting out from a day's work and sitting at the *Maidan* meant a loss of livelihood for the day but they still volunteered during the movement phase and later contributed in campaigning for the AAP. For example, the *dabba wallahs* of Mumbai who are renowned for their efficient lunch delivery service and, up to that point, had never gone on strike, decided to go on a one-day strike in support of the movement. "We want to show the people that we are with

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[325] The men who deliver tiffin box carriers to the white collar office work force. It is a common practice in Mumbai.
[326] Interview with Mayank Gandhi, December 16th, 2013, AAP Office [Chakala Branch], Mumbai, Maharashtra.
[327] Interview with Vijay Baba, Hanuman Road AAP Office, October 2013, New Delhi.

them. When the whole nation is supporting Anna Hazare, we thought that we should also support him in our small way," said Raghunath Medge, president of the Nutan Mumbai Tiffin Association (Raja, 2011; "Supporting Anna Hazare" 2011).

Affected by the day-to-day experience of corruption in the forms of *challans* (fines) and bribes that they had to pay to the police or transport authorities for licenses, to the existing inflation in the economy made the auto-rickshaw *wallahs* of Delhi support the cause of anti-corruption and this group emerged as one of the strongest support bases of the party. While following the auto-rickshaw campaign in Connaught Place, near the New Delhi constituency office, Sanjay Chawla, the coordinator of the campaign, while distributing AAP posters and *topis,* explained the systemic flaws which made them the victims of corrupt practices. Given the absence of regularisation of the licensing system or parking charges, they are forced to pay bribes to the police in order to survive. But, he said, "*Kejriwalji hi hamare helpline hain....vo hi hamare samasyon ko dur karengey!*[328] [Kejriwal is our helpline...He will resolve our problems!]. He explained that the auto-rickshaw *wallahs* that are part of the campaign are often threatened directly or indirectly by the police. However, despite these threats, none of them withdrew from the campaigning responsibilities; in fact, all of them gave up one day's work to campaign for the party. Two other volunteers, Tiwari and Om Prakash, described how they had been involved since the campaign against electricity prices. All of them, with no background in any political work, had now evolved into political activists of the AAP. Also, in Varanasi, during Kejriwal's campaign for the general election in 2014, Nandu, an ardent supporter attending Kejriwal's nomination day rally told me that:

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[328] Field notes: following the auto campaign in the New Delhi Constituency with Sanjay Chawla and interview with him on 18th November 2013, New Delhi.

> Kejriwalji hi hain jo hamare liye kaam kar rahein hai…dikkate pareshani samajhte hai..ek yahi party hai jo paisa nahi banti..Kejriwal ne kisi ko diya nahi…ulta log apni swaicha se jo nban sake de rahi hai..![329]

> [Kejriwal is the only one who is working for us…He understands our difficulties and problems…His is the only party that is not distributing money…Kejriwal has not given money to anyone…On the contrary, people are voluntarily giving according to their means to him.]

Similarly in Varanasi, I observed that the urban poor were the AAP's largest support base. However, what needs to be highlighted here is that this coalition of classes, not just the middle classes, is possible because of the non-definition of the structural reasons for corruption and the unified opposition against the political class. Therefore, supporters' expectation of the current political leadership was accountability as claim-making neo-liberal citizen-subjects – which did not involve much critical scrutiny of what the bill may entail.

6.4.2 *Aam 'aurat'* volunteer – the blind spot

The participation and mobilisation of a large number of women activists and volunteers was the hallmark of the anti-corruption mobilisation. The range of social composition varied across the rural/urban divide and across classes. Also, the non-sectarian axis of the mobilisation galvanised women as co-partners in the struggle against corruption. The political subjectivities that it constituted was that many women and young girls who were hitherto apolitical and considered politics to be dirty became poll campaigners, did door-to-door campaigns and engaged with prospective voters; also some even ended up becoming candidates for the new insurgent party. Hence one observes the possibility for a civic identity to be invigorated. Sarita,[330] the sole woman activist who fasted at Ralegan Siddhi in solidarity with Anna alongside nine other men, recounted her struggle to get to Delhi from Pune and to convince other women from her village to come when Anna fasted for the first time at *Ramlila Maidan* in 2011:

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[329] Interview with Nandu, auto-rickshaw driver, 28th April 2014, Varanasi, while following the AAP campaign in Varansai for the general election 2014, U.P.

[330] Interview with Sarita, 11th December 2013, Ralegan Siddhi, Pune, Maharashtra.

Ghar wale bahut bolte hai…mein akeli gayi dilli dusri das auraton ke saath…sunane ka nahi…acha sunane ka..bura sunane ka nahi…aadat padi hai mujhe acha sunane ki…apne parivar aur desh ke bhavishya ke liye kar rahi hu

[People at home kept nagging me. I went to Delhi along with ten other women, without any family member accompanying me. There is no need to listen to nagging, only listen to good things, no need to listen to bad things. I am used to listening to only good things. I am doing it for the future of my family and my country.]

On the other hand, Nivedita, a 32-year-old mother of two and dedicated volunteer at the AAP R.K. Puram branch, was a first-timer in election campaigning; she had joined the Anna Hazare movement because of her own personal struggles related to her children's school admissions and price rise.

Hamesha parivar ko prathmikta di…isliye job bhi chodha; Iss bari maine apne kaam ko prathmikta di…bachhon ko bukha bhi choda hai campaigning ke dauran…par nikal jati thi.[331]

[Every time I prioritised my family…I left my job also; this time I prioritised my work…I left my kids hungry during the campaign period…but still, I left.]

Her commitment to the anti-corruption cause shown in her narrative is the story of many such women volunteers. Sarita and Nivedita represent the wide spectrum of rural-urban women who were mobilised as part of the movement. They would go to the *Maidan* almost every day and eventually joined the party to bring about change and fight against corruption. However, the fact that women's activism is always couched in their association with the larger nation as mothers, daughter and wives (Sarkar & Butalia, 1995) has resonance with respect to the mobilisation here as well. Speaking to many such activists on the ground, I noted that particularly women's activism is guided by the motivation to lift the country out of crisis, a deep-seated motivation in the gendered understanding of nationalism.

The emphasis on a non-sectarian outlook guiding the movement/party gave the impression that women were considered as equal partakers in the struggle rather than considering or bracketing them as 'women' volunteers or vote banks. Attending the

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[331] Interview with Nivedita, 5th January 2014, Munirka AAP Office, R.K. Puram constituency, New Delhi.

mahila wing (women's wing) meeting in the AAP office, one of the volunteers, Pushpa, said, *"AAP mein mahoul alag hain…yahan auraton ki izzat ki jaati hai"*[332] [The environment in the AAP is different…women are respected here] when explaining her reasons for joining. There is no denying the fact that compared to other political parties the presence of women at different levels of organisational management was responsible for many women activists continuing to be part of the party, even after the movement halted. They felt that as a political party the AAP was 'different' as there was 'space' for women and they were serious about the issues of women's security and anti-corruption. From being homemakers, confined within the private sphere, they were now transformed into full-time political activists. Hence a lot of my female respondents from middle or lower-income group families where engaging in politics which was initially seen as 'dirty', felt empowered. They felt a sense of self-worth and confidence in the public sphere, speaking to people about issues and agendas and, most importantly as first-timer political activists, felt an overall change in the attitude towards politics – it was no longer dirty.

The AAP, despite being a nascent political party, had also given party tickets to women candidates for the Delhi Assembly elections 2013, demonstrating gender parity not just in participation but also in leadership. Following these candidates through their campaigning was an interesting experience on the field as they were not categorised according to their gendered roles or stereotyped such as 'women leaders' or *stree shakti* (women power), etc.[333] They were valued in their own right as participants/volunteers in the struggle against corruption. One observes therefore that the emphasis on non-sectarian politics translates in practice on the ground as gender, caste, class or religion is not the locus for mobilisation. As the combination of the trio of female candidates

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[332] Field Note: an observation from the women's meeting on 16th October 2013 at the AAP [New Delhi Constituency] office, Hanuman Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi.
[333] Field Notes: following the three female candidates during their campaigning in November 2013, New Delhi.

displays (Rakhi Birlan [SC/lower-class/Mangolpuri], Bandana Kumari [upper caste/middle-class/Shalimar Bagh] and Shazia Ilmi [Muslim/upper-class/R.K. Puram], none of the sectarian aspects of their identities were capitalised on in the public campaign to target particular vote banks. Though efforts were made organisationally to have more women candidates, conversations with them revealed few were willing to contest; however, the party did manage to influence a large section of women activists to join as volunteers thereby activating them into political work.[334] Jaishree, an activist with Saheli and an AAP volunteer, who during the first phase of the protests managed to organise and lead interested women from her colony in batches of ten to the *Ramlila Maidan*, described how things had changed in the colony of Sangam Vihar (Asia's largest unauthorised colony):

> Despite being largely uneducated and homemakers, they not only campaigned in their own capacity within their networks but have since also taken up proactive roles in the *mohalla sabhas* (town councils), especially intervening in the issue of water distribution and management. Earlier, they did not even know the difference between an MLA and a councillor, but now they not only know, they also engage in politics.[335]

Visiting the colony and interacting with the volunteers there, it was obvious how institutions and the legal system can be completely absent from people's lives. The ghetto has been the hub of many illegal activities to provide basic amenities such as water; tanker mafias had usurped the role of distribution, forcing people in these areas to pay bribes to access drinking water, food ration or security. Many women in this colony who joined the AAP said they now felt a sense of hope that things would change when a people's party came to power and took up issues of day-to-day corruption and systemic flaws.

However, what is important to analyse is the nature of activism or political subjectivity that is constituted for women volunteers and to what extent they are able to

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[334] Field Note: an observation from the women's meeting on 16th October 2013 at the AAP [New Delhi Constituency] office, Hanuman Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi.
[335] Interview with Jaishree, AAP volunteer, 20th January 2014, Sundarnagri, New Delhi.

renegotiate or challenge the existing patriarchal norms. The fact that many women and girls came out of the confines of the household to enter the public sphere and engaged in political activities needs to be assessed from the perspective of the challenging of patriarchal norms and control. From that perspective, the women's activism that the anti-corruption movement and the party have encouraged seems to have constituted a *social activist*-oriented activism for women rather than *political worker* subjectivity. Most of the women activists and young girls were motivated by the objective of service and intention of bringing about change through anti-systemic non-political interventions. Coming from the NGO sector, many would also make it clear that they joined the party because it provided a forum for *helping* people. Therefore the larger orientation of women's activism was within the norms of the patriarchal expectation of women's role in societal change.

The de-gendered perspective which defined the AAP as a political party also represented its patriarchal and sexist underpinning; in particular, after it formed its government in Delhi many policy decisions and actions displayed a conservative tackling of issues. I wish to highlight two aspects – one ideological and another of practices that establish that the AAP, like all the other political parties, is equally deep-seated in patriarchy and status-quoist in its dealing with women subjects. First, in the wake of the 16th December gang rape case of 2012,[336] the mainstreaming of women's security became one of the dominant agenda points of the party. It was first proposed to set up a citizens' security force and to install CCTVs to check sexual harassment and 'Eve-teasing' (sexual harassment of women). The approach towards managing issues of sexual harassment through technical solutions is one of the ways through which sexual assault is abstracted from social behaviour and patriarchal power relations. Hence, rather than stressing gender sensitisation as part of policy making, the emphasis on

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[336] It involved the brutal sexual assault of a young girl in South Delhi, India.

intrusive surveillance technology and setting up security guards, was based on the patriarchal norms of surveillance and control of female sexuality and mobility, along with male patronising protectionism. Second, the most direct way in which this played out was when a number of Ugandan women living in Khirki village were subjected to a midnight police raid and were assaulted on the orders of Law Minister Somnath Bharti[337] on the alleged assumption that they were engaged in drug trafficking and prostitution, thus exposing the racist stereotyping and sexism informing Bharti's actions. As reported, the women complained of physical abuse, double discrimination, being publicly forced to give urine samples and being humiliated in AIIMs (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) during the medical tests (PTI, 2014a). This incident revealed that the ideology of patriarchal protectionism and control over women's sexuality combined with rigidity of conservative morality informed practice.

6.4.3 The 'dirt' within – of invisibilities, vigilantism and authoritarianism

The presence and visibility of the new middle classes in the mobilisation of both the movement and the party implied two things: First, its dominance covered up the absence of sections that were not part of the 'Anna moment'/'anti-corruption' movement. The AAP's affective politics hints at these differences. Their claim making is based on the class position of middle class assertiveness as opposed to people engaged in a social movement challenging larger structural changes. "Party activists express a kind of self-righteous outrage that is markedly different from the sentiments of despair, fear, humiliation or "wounded injuries" advanced by other political movements" (Roy, 2014, p. 52). One of the dominant issues of concern was the fact that the structural inequalities that perpetuate corruption were not part of the debate or discussion. Despite anti-corruption being a floating signifier, it did not garner support from many

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[337] Somnath Bharti, a lawyer by profession, was elected from the Malviya Nagar constituency to the AAP Delhi government formed in 2013. He was the Minister for Law, Tourism, Administrative Reform, Art and Culture in Kejriwal's cabinet.

sections of people who made their assertion by 'not being there' at *Ramlila Maidan*. The reason that the *Lokpal* Bill and the narrative of anti-corruption left out any discussion of corporate involvement in corruption (Giri, 2011; Navlakha, 2011; Sitapati, 2011) and NGOs from its ambit led many social movement groups to opt out from the anti-corruption mobilisation. The minority groups and their leaders, by and large, were either critical or indifferent. Minority groups and social movements who raised issues about corporate finance and land acquisition were absent. Mohanty (2011) also highlighted that movements protesting against mining and other extractive projects in different states were absent; various groups fighting for forest rights and implementation of various acts were critical of the campaign. The absence of minorities during the mobilisation had to do not only with the dominance of new middle class civic aesthetics but also the inherent majoritarian nationalist vigilantism inherent in the mobilisation.

As discussed earlier, the presence of national flags should be analysed beyond standing in for anti-sectarianism but as signifying rigid nationalism. The anti-political party stand translated into strictly undemocratic on-field regimentation accompanied by a dangerous ideological mix of extreme sentiments of being against both the politicians and all political parties. Second, the narrative of a monolithic understanding of the nation was thrust upon from above, with any discourse that questioned or unsettled the idea of 'One India' being equated with being 'anti-national'. Arunima points out that "the gravest aspect of the Anna Movement has been its contribution to bolstering the increasing fearsome tendency towards neo-nationalism" (2012, p. 115). Neo-nationalism became most evident around two controversial agendas: holding a plebiscite in Kashmir[338] and the issue of racism in Khirkhi village.

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[338] Here, in this context, Prashant Bhushan is referring to the use of the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers) Act by the Indian government within Kashmir to check terrorism and is suggesting that a plebiscite should be called to seek the people's mandate for its deployment in the state.

The issue around holding a plebiscite in Kashmir came up in 2011 after Bhushan, a member of Team Anna, commented that:

> The government can decide if the army needs to be deployed to deal with external threats along the border. The government can also decide if the army needs to be kept to help protect the minorities in the valley. But there should be a referendum on whether people want AFSPA to continue in the valley or not. (Bhushan, quoted by Kunwar, 2014)

Bhushan's statement reveals a viewpoint considering the disenchantment that people in the state of Kashmir have had against the Indian state, but his opinion on a plebiscite was perceived as divisive to the integral unity of the country. However, the reaction that his opinion elicited, both from Anna and Kejriwal, unequivocally displayed the dangers of the conservative and reactionary understanding of patriotism and hard line nationalism. Anna reacted to Bhushan vociferously by reinforcing his commitment to nationalism and patriotism aligned to an undivided India:

> It was then I pledged the rest of my life in the service of my country. Even today you can see the marks on my forehead left behind by Pakistan's bullet. This is my active conviction that Kashmir is an integral part of India and will remain so. Today once again if I have to, am ready [*sic*] to take part in war against Pakistan. But some people can only speak and don't do anything on ground [*sic*] (in reality for Kashmir) and this is unfortunate. (Hazare, 2011)

Consequently, Bhushan was invariably bracketed as being an anti-national and questions were raised as to whether he should be allowed to continue as part of Team Anna (PTI, 2011e). Similarly, in 2014, Kejriwal and the AAP disassociated themselves from Bhushan's statement (Parsai, 2014). Under pressure, Bhushan had to reformulate and reinstate his position to prove his commitment to India's unity and integrity. This episode signalled to lack of space for a dialogue or for dissenting voices or the questioning of the dominant perspective. With respect to the ideological understanding of nationalism within the movement there was no scope for any deviation from an integrated and undivided idea of an Indian nation. Overall, one observes continuity in

the texture of both the movement and the party in the context of understanding the nation, and the practice of patriotism is circumscribed by uncritical obedience.

Similar vigilantism and majoritarianism was evident in the Khirki village incident. Somnath Bharati, the then law minister of Delhi authorised raids in the Khirkhi extension against African nationals accused of drug peddling and prostitution on the basis of complaints filed by the RWA. The press reported that the proper legal procedures were not followed, but more importantly it signified 'vigilante justice' being meted out on the basis of racism against African nationals and inherent sexism. Bharti's action was followed by further racist attacks on African nationals living in the area. This incident brought out two aspects, the issues of everyday racism inherent in Indian civil society and vigilante justice based on racist and sexist stereotypes instigated by groups such as the RWAs. The nexus between the AAP and RWAs, as discussed earlier, is evident in this case as well. The fact that an independent body comprising private individual members such as the welfare association was instrumental in arriving at a consensus to dislodge the African community from the area displays the majoritarian xenophobic anxiety. The dangerous aspect of this majoritarian consensus is further strengthened if the political leadership fails to scrutinise the cases and initiates legal actions based on the dominant majoritarian perspective. The Khirki village incident and the nexus discussed above highlights the complexity of anti-establishment parties such as the AAP who lack clearly defined ideological positioning. They would support claim-making by non-political organisations such as welfare associations, which are usually guided by a majoritarian outlook, without hesitation. Both the above cases focus on the problems associated with a moralistic and self-righteous understanding of political subjectivism.

Anti-establishment parties such as the AAP are also part of the post-ideological phase which explains their rejection of politics and adoption of a techno-managerial

approach. This in turn translates into an organisational pattern governed by the NGO rather than political party format. NGO-based activism tends to be concentrated on the leader as most of the form and course of their respective cause-based mobilisations are based on their individual initiatives and convictions unlike a political party which has a broader body of members at different levels to which the leaders are accountable. The NGO format institutionalises a highly moralistic and authoritarian leadership and in this case both Hazare and Kejriwal displayed this tendency. Despite the fact that individually, both of them were leaders of impeccable character, commitment and dedicated years of public service to their respective causes and campaigns, the exercise of 'moral authority' represented by Hazare and authoritarian decision-making by Kejriwal reflected the undemocratic tendencies within the movement/party.

Kejriwal's decision on 14th February 2014 to resign as chief minister because of his inability to pass the *Lokpal* Bill in the Delhi Assembly laid bare his hasty and autocratic decision-making. His move can be assessed on two levels: firstly, the decision to resign could be read as a high moral commitment to the agenda of passing a *Lokpal* Bill that the movement and the party was committed to and he was unable to do that as the two dominant political parties, the BJP and Congress, opposed it. However, the sudden decision was both historic and shocking. When he announced his resignation from the AAP's party office and the supporters cheered holding *jhadoos* (brooms), he was hailed as a leader who sacrificed his political position to the larger issue at stake, that of fighting corruption. However, it is doubtful that this particular decision was subject to a democratic process or if the rest of the MLA's (Member of Legislative Assembly) in his cabinet were taken into his confidence before announcing such a drastic decision. Secondly, absence of consultation can also be seen with respect to citizens of Delhi. The *Aam Aadmi* (common man) had been part of the decision making process since the inception of the AAP: most of the final decisions were based on

modern day referendum techniques including SMS, surveys and voting – for instance decisions from the establishment of the party itself to staking claim to form the government with outside support from Congress were all based on taking the citizens of Delhi into their confidence. However, when it came to Kejriwal's resignation, no consultation took place and public opinion was not sought; consequently, the masses felt betrayed. Internal consultation processes had also been a consistent issue since the days of Team Anna. Many activists (including Ekta Parishad activist P.B. Rajagopal and water conservationist Rajendra Singh) (HTB, 2011) left the core committee of the IAC, resigning their positions because of unilateral decision making by Kejriwal. The individual self-righteousness and non-consultative nature of decision making eventually led to many prominent activists leaving. In more recent times, activists who were also ideological mentors of this political experiment from the initial phase of the IAC to the AAP, including Shazia Ilmi, lliyas Azmi, Prashant Bhushan and Yogendra Yadav, have resigned due to the lack of inner party democracy in decision making.

Finally, despite the anti-corruption movement providing forums and space for discussions for various other activist groups and NGOs to give suggestions and feedback on the formulations of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill during the movement, it was noticeable that when alternatives were suggested by, for example, the NCPRI, they were not engaged with or accepted. The hardline approach adopted by Team Anna during the different stages of negotiation with the government with regard to their version of the *Jan Lokpal* Bill reflected an imposition and sometimes represented a lack of flexibility to accept suggestions from different groups or the government on their version of the Bill. As Visvanathan (2012) argued, Team Anna needed to be more flexible and receptive to alternative and consensual decision-making. Rather than being uncompromising, the party needed to be acknowledge that the *Lokpal* Bill would not be a 'one size fits all' solution to corruption. "Corruption needs a more cautious and

nuanced problematic and a wider set of solutions. To put it facetiously, Hazare's group should not look like an A grade version of the Munna Bhai effect" (Visvanathan, 2012, p. 15). This perspective is also reflected in making the *Lokpal* an all-powerful authority, which overlooks the other institutional positions.

The narrative of anti-politics and the clean/dirty binary which dominated the discourse of the movement led to shaming of political institutions such as the parliament, the political class on the whole and the realm of politics itself.

> Politics which dredges up the worst and puts them in positions of authority is where all iniquity originates. And no institution constituted through politics can be trusted with the public good, free of the oversight of a body established on foundations of virtue. That is the paradoxical and self-defeating message of Hazare's movement. (Muralidharan, 2011, p. 12)

The fact that the major part of the movement's discursive tone was anti-political had the effect of portraying the realm of politics as something to be wary of and sidelined the maturity and strength of the democratic institutions and traditions that have defined Indian democracy. However, the rise of a new political party in the AAP ushered in a new phase in New Delhi's political system and culture in a democratically vibrant way.

6.5 Conclusion

The anti-corruption movement and its symbolism thus ruptured the dominant political culture of the National Capital Territory. By mainstreaming the *aam aadmi* against the power of the state and its authority it deepened democracy by disturbing the neo-liberal regimentation of the civic-citizen subject. As discussed, the movement, and eventually the political party, mobilised hitherto apolitical or anti-political citizen subjects into sustained political civic activism. The movement revitalised counter-spaces of protest and dissent such as the *Ramlila Maidan* and *Jantar Mantar* and intervened in the neoliberal and statist spatial segregation by invigorating a confrontationist civic citizen unsettling the *sanitised* political culture of Delhi. The bottom-up approach in

defining the symbolic and discursive field of the mobilisation demonstrated the democratic and constructive nature of its repertoire and self-reflexivity with respect to audiences' identification. In mapping the evolution of the anti-political movement under the banner of the IAC to the emergence of an anti-establishment party in the AAP, one observes that it has been embedded in the new middle class civic aesthetics and anxieties. Therefore, while the anti-corruption movement operationalises the category of a 'common man' and a transgressive claim-making self, it also visualises a neo-liberal civic citizen.

7   Conclusion

This thesis has provided an immersive study of symbolic mobilisation, by three types of identity-based assertions - religious, caste and civic – from the vantage points of their respective participants. It does this by deconstructing their performative political actions within the local spatial and symbolic habitus, and examining this within a comparative framework.

I will highlight in this concluding chapter the substantive findings of the case studies to analyse the nature of the subject formation that symbolic and performative political action constitutes.

7.1   Revisiting the Research Questions

The thesis has argued that the encounter between symbolic mobilisation and subject formation does not lead to an assertion of agency in a monolithic form but rather generates layered experiences for the political self in the symbolic political field. Tracing these performative practices outside of institutionalised domains in everyday and spatial engagements, I have sought to problematise the distinction between legal and cultural citizenship. Using a comparative frame, I have drawn out the unifying, yet distinctive, characteristics across the three case studies which I summarise in the following discussion. The first section on symbolic representation discusses their respective symbolic habitus and the power equations they sought to destabilise. The second deconstructs their spatial assertions in the form of the counter-spaces that emerged in the respective cityscapes. Finally, the section on political subjectivity assesses the three cases in terms of the extent to which democratic subjectivities were constituted.

7.1.1 Symbolic representation: identification and assertion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that symbolic politics constitutes claim-making subjects. Intervention in a symbolic universe enables different social classes to contest the dominant power structures along caste, religious, class and gender lines, thus transforming subjectivities. The availability of alternative symbolic repertoires and the intersection of neo-liberalism and identity lead citizen-subjects to affiliate with assertions that challenge different power hierarchies. The discussion in the three case studies demonstrated that all these mobilisations through symbolic interventions in the political field served to question the existing power hierarchies.

The repertoire of Dalit intervention through Ambedkar's commemorative memorial and statues discussed in Chapter 5 disrupted the Brahmanical field of perception. Mayawati's 'statues of dis-order' challenged the caste Hindus' symbolic order, extending the politics of Dalit assertion from the micro to the macro level in UP. The Ambedkar *Sthal* and statues signify values of constitutional equality and dignity for middle and lower class Dalits, and even for sub-castes such as the *Balmikis*. Despite the intra-caste hierarchy between *Jatavs* and *Balmikis*, the figure of Ambedkar unifies them as Dalits, and the Dalit symbolic habitus challenges the violence of the dominant Hindu nationalist worldview by choosing to assert their Dalit identity. The choice of Ambedkar as an icon combined with the adoption of Buddhist imagery with its alternative architectural motifs outside of Hindu temple art (such as *stupas* and *viharas*) represents a conscious decision by the community to defy both Hinduism and its practices. It also displays the Dalit community's respect and appreciation of Ambedkar's vision which inscribed and ensured dignity as a fundamental right for Dalits and all the other marginalised sections in Indian society through the Constitution.

The anti-corruption protests with their deep-seated symbolism in Gandhian and patriotic repertoires enabled civic-citizen assertion. Chapter 6 discusses the anti-

corruption matrix, from its beginnings as a non-political party initiative under the banner of the IAC with a broad anti-political agenda through its evolution into a new anti-establishment political party with the formation of the AAP. The unfurling of the national flag (tricolour), instead of the flags of political parties or groups, in the protest grounds, streets, alleys and at spontaneous sit-ins in New Delhi signified claim-making by the common masses. The anti-political field was defined by the practices of patriotism and governed by norms of self-sacrifice and history being made associated with Gandhi. The political twist to the movement, Kejriwal's decision to form a new political party, was defined by the politics of *swaraj*, and the *jhadhoo* as the party's symbol signified the shift in the narrative from 'politics is dirty' to 'cleansing the system'. The appearance of AAP *topis* on New Delhi's streets symbolised not only the common man's assertion but also a powerful blow against the existing political parties and culture of the city.

The fact that people across classes identified with Modi as *Vikaspurush* demonstrated that his dispersed symbolic practices stood for upward social mobility and determined leadership as discussed in Chapter 4; they gave aspiration and hope, especially to the youth and the lower classes. Modi's emergence in India's political system challenged the established dominance of the dynastic politics of the Congress. He symbolised the emergence of lower caste and class assertion, both against the elite Congress establishment and also within the BJP. A successful blending of Hindutva symbolism with technological suavity ensured that the Hindutva agenda of social engineering was carefully woven into the agenda of development. The symbolic habitus ranged from Modi masks, *kurtas*, and *chai-pe-charchas* to political rallies including saffron-clad *sadhus* with conches, and Modi *sena*. In Gujarat, the majoritarian ethno-religious identity (a combination of Gujaratiness and Hinduness) combined with the reiteration of annual developmental rituals to ensure that the Gujarat growth story was performed

and successfully circulated. In Vadodara, Modi's male Hindu supporters across classes were observed to identify with his assertive masculinity. He was seen as the patriarch of Gujarat who ensured security for all Gujaratis. His Hindu women supporters' backing was based on his promise of a safe and secure environment for all women and various schemes targeting female empowerment. On a pan-India level, Modi as *chai wallah* signified to the masses the successful journey of a common man staking claim to the top political position in the country. Modi's humble background stood in stark opposition to the political and dynastic legacy of Rahul Gandhi as the leader of the Congress Party. However, the Gujarat growth model reflected the majoritarian symbolic universe and thus lacked visibility for Muslim and Dalit minorities, demonstrating the symbolic violence inherent in a majoritarian symbolic assertion.

7.1.2   Symbolic participation: spatial assertion and re-signifying cities

The thesis has demonstrated how cities get re-signified through symbolic assertion. By activating counter-spaces in opposition to the dominant spatial segregation/categorisation symbolic mobilisations embody new subjectivities. Citizen-subjects disrupted the bracketed frame of events through embodied participation across specific spatial locations in Lucknow, New Delhi, Vadodara and Varanasi, as discussed in the respective chapters – thus, these spaces were re-signified with new meanings. These physical sites were not just the loci of material, political assertions and contestations for specific groups, but also the means to stake their 'right to the city'. As a symbolic material assertion, this also enabled groups to redefine social interaction and dynamics between identity-based groups.

Built during Mayawati's regime, the Ambedkar Parivartan *Sthal* in the middle of Lucknow redefined the city as a counter-space with *Bahujan* sensibilities. As discussed in Chapter 5, both the commemorative memorial and the Ambedkar statues in the villages

signify Dalit spatial claim-making, previously denied to them by the Hindu caste order. The *Sthal* makes visible the history of caste oppression and the struggle for equality that have been embodied in Dalit icons across time. It challenges the idea of purity and pollution in Hinduism with its choice of Buddhist architecture, character of visitors and its extension of the idea of the 'right to leisure' to include Dalits. The *Sthal*, by evolving into one of Lucknow's most popular tourist attractions, has redefined and transformed the city. By inscribing Lucknow's spatial and visual landscape with Dalit history the *Sthal* challenges the dominant Brahmanical frame of reference associated with the city.

The anti-corruption movement redefined Lutyens' New Delhi with the *Aam Aadmi*'s sensibilities, challenging the political and symbolic power of the political elite. The re-invigoration of counter-spaces such as the *Ramlila Maidan* and *Jantar Mantar*, and the spontaneous sit-ins and marches by the masses on New Delhi's streets displayed the common man's right to the city. By generating these counter-spaces of civic activism, the anti-corruption movement defied the apolitical regimentation of the capital's outlook. The sanitised political capital of New Delhi with all its bureaucratic red-tape was destabilised by the movement and, eventually, the AAP taking charge of the city. As discussed in Chapter 6, by activating the masses, both the movement and the AAP jolted the complacency of the established political parties and bureaucratic aura of the city through the norms of civic activism, democratic equality and political accountability.

On the other hand, Gujarat emerged as an exceptional spatial prototype of Modi's *surajya* (good governance) with its own model of growth, unlike the rest of India. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, Modi's coronation as the *Vikaspurush* was based on the success of the Gujarat model which he wanted to implement across the rest of India. Modi's growth model, as it evolved in Vadodara, was defined by two particular spatial dynamics. First, developmentalism was governed by reiterative state practices such as

spectacular summits rooted in the neoliberal ethos. Second, spatio-culturally, his model exhibited ethno-religious norms of Hindu-Gujarati identity which topographically excluded and ghettoised both Muslim and Dalit minorities. While Vadodara represented homogeneity spatially, Varanasi as a spatial site challenged Modi's symbolic habitus.

Though he aimed to capitalise on the city's association with the Hindu cosmic order, the inherent syncretism of Varanasi made it a counter-space for political opposition to emerge, both discursively and symbolically, especially from the Muslim minorities. Unlike in Gujarat where the Muslim population was, in effect, invisible, in Varanasi there was a visible counter-assertion of Muslim subjectivity in support of the AAP. Kejriwal provided an alternative symbolic register which was unassuming, yet powerful. Even though there were significant shifts in Kejriwal's secular disposition, the nature of Kejriwal's symbolic assertion (unlike Modi's) was more in keeping with the syncretism that Varanasi stood for, an open rather than a pre-defined space. While staying within the sacred cosmos of Varanasi, Kejriwal and the AAP represented in their symbolism a non-oppositional space for the 'other', a space symbolically absent in Moditva. Hence, the Muslim minority *bunkars*, the weaving community of Varanasi, threw their weight behind the AAP. In the initial few weeks of Kejriwal's campaign in Varanasi, in the field one could sense a mix of anxiety and fear, along with some hope. This gradually transformed into minority participation: skull caps were replaced by AAP *topis*, people came out onto the streets for rallies and *jan sabhas*, defying the symbolic dominance of the Modi wave and asserting their political choice.

Spatially, Modi's case study showed that developmental politics sought to re-signify the city on the lines of heterotopias rather than counter-spaces, a homogenised spatial entity capitalising on the majoritarian ethos and standardised developmental practices.

7.1.3   Symbolic representation and participation: democratic subjectivity?

All three case studies of symbolic mobilisation discussed in the thesis constitute political subjects who have asserted their identification with a particular symbolic register. But to what extent were they democratic? As discussed in Chapter 3, my conception of democratic subjectivity is based on two levels of identification, first at the level of taking up (assumption), and second, the reiteration of being a democratic-subject.

Modi's symbolic mobilisation, discussed in Chapter 4, demonstrated an instrumentalist mobilisation (top-down practices) that constituted less democratic political subjects compared with the Dalit and the anti-corruption mobilisations. The *Vikaspurush* campaign, based on a non-discursive and majoritarian agenda, occluded the scope for a second level of iteration –that of an evolved democratic citizen. In the context of 'doing' Hindu identity there was little potential for challenging or deviating from hegemonic norms or practices and, in the absence of any self-reflexive questioning of the doing of their Hindu identity, the politics of performativity did not contribute to constitute democratic subjectivities. From this perspective, it can be claimed that Modi's constituency of supporters, based on top-down practices and obscuring diversity and dissent, is less democratic than the other two cases.

In the AAP case study, hitherto apolitical or anti-political citizen-subjects from varying socioeconomic backgrounds came out onto the streets and campaigned, sometimes even giving up jobs. Many 'first-timers', both men and women, took part in rallies, campaigns, protests and demonstrations and some also joined as full-time party workers. Political subjectivities thus constituted through AAP's mobilisations fractured the disciplined, individualised and routinised subjectivities characteristic of neo-liberalism. Therefore, active political participation in the public sphere outside of neo-liberal regimentation signals democratic assertion.

The symbolic politics of statues in the Dalit movement constituted a *defiant*, embodied, visible Dalit subject. Mayawati's memorial project not only visualised the caste struggle against the Hindu social order but also the Dalit subject as a claim-making citizen. The Dalit subject, by *being seen* in a monumental public setting, transgresses the Brahmanical/nationalist field of perception. Also, the Dalit gaze embedded in the visual practices of awe, civic pride and de-sacralised reverence aides in producing an assertive political subjectivity. The construction of the commemorative memorial and statues of Ambedkar visualised the Dalits' struggle and their assertion through iconopraxis. First, the symbolism around Ambedkar and the Constitution, Buddhism and Mayawati in the Dalit public sphere is representative of, as discussed in Chapter 5, denting the dominant mould of Brahmanical social order, Hinduism and Brahmanical patriarchy. Thus, the values governing Dalit identification are based on the precepts of equality, dignity and justice as its symbolism made caste hierarchy, untouchability and socio-economic exclusion visible.

Second, it is evident that the representation of Dalit interests has not been monopolised by the political party, either in UP or Gujarat, thereby demonstrating critical reflexivity, creativity and dialogue within the movement. In Lucknow, the link between the two forms of symbolic interventions, the memorial and the statues, is itself representative of an organic process within the movement. At the micro-level, the erection of Ambedkar statues by Dalits has been a long-standing practice. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, individually or collectively, they would arrange for the funds required and put up their own statues of Babasaheb in their courtyards or the village squares. Mayawati accelerated this intervention at the macro level by building the huge memorial depicting a broader historical span of struggle against the caste system on a pan-India level. This demonstrated a bottom-up approach, from the micro to the macro level. Also, civil society groups have relatively more autonomous organisational and

discursive space within the community, as seen in the case of Dalit mobilisation in Gujarat. In the absence of a specific political party representing Dalit interests it was the various civil society organisations that took the lead during the anti-Patel statue campaign.

The comparative study of iconographic practices around Ambedkar statues across UP and Gujarat highlights how the mobilisation in Gujarat challenged the cohesive Hindu coalition that Modi and the BJP had been trying to build and underscored the prevalence of strong caste bias informing Modi's developmental agenda. The counter-mobilisation challenged the symbolic register of Patel upper caste dominance, practices of untouchability and the institutionalised marginalisation of Dalits within Gujarat. Through symbolic politics Dalit subjects transgressed, defied and reasserted their political self against the symbolic violence and dominant discursive practices inherent in Hinduism in both Lucknow and Gujarat.

On the other hand, the anti-corruption protests foregrounded the common man's *dissent* against the established political system. The visual practices in the movement involved a combination of both the sacralised (Anna) and de-sacralised (Kejriwal) ways of looking by the supporters, but, whatever their respective motivations, the citizen-subjects were looking back at power and authority with conviction. The initial anti-political movement led by the IAC brought agitated residents of New Delhi from across class backgrounds onto the streets against the political leadership. The main agenda motivating the spontaneous outrage was the demand for an ombudsman to hold the political class accountable. Initially, the participants in the protests, as I discuss in Chapter 6, believed the realm of politics to be 'dirty' and considered the entire political class to be corrupt and self-aggrandising. The values of honesty, patriotism and sacrifice governed the masses who risked police brutality and participated in impromptu sit-ins and marches through the streets of the city. Gradually, as the movement branched out

to become a new political party in the AAP, many eventually also continued their affiliations with the party. As the political circumstances demanded, they become first-time candidates, campaign managers and volunteers for the AAP. In the transformation from activists to political party volunteers, their perspective on politics also underwent a drastic turnaround. They no longer considered the political field to be dirty; rather it was a powerful means to bring about systemic changes. Furthermore, as first-timers, when they engaged in election canvassing they felt a sense of evolution and accomplishment.

The initial movement phase of protests also displayed scope for dialogue and self-reflexivity. As discussed, the protest sites acted as alternative deliberative spaces for discussions among people, leaders and civil society groups. At various moments during the protests, for instance, the controversies around the background imagery and other points revealed the movement's willingness to listen to the voices of criticism raised by supporters and observers and make amends. Corruption worked as a 'floating signifier', making it possible for the auto-rickshaw drivers and the corporate class alike to rally behind the movement. The IAC and the AAP foregrounded class identity as a mobilising category without substantially challenging or disturbing structural inequalities. Redistributive governance appeared acceptable to the people because it does not disturb established hierarchies or the dominance of the middle classes while seeking to improve services to all.

The emergence of the AAP as a political force in New Delhi brought about a shift in the existing political culture and practices, challenging, for instance, the everyday practices of the political class. Ideologically, the AAP offered an alternative agenda of good governance, making ordinary people's inclusion in decision-making and participation possible in its campaigns. Also, by not positioning itself within the older ideological brackets of the Left and the Right, the AAP moved away from the dominant

ideological spectrum in the existing party system. By asserting the rights of the common man and making them visible as claim-making citizen-subjects, it effectively departed from the deep-rooted patronage-based mobilisation tactics used by both the BJP and Congress. Electorally, by displacing both Congress and the BJP, one after the other, in the politics of the national capital, it also emerged as the 'new age' anti-establishment political party which was redefining the way of doing politics. By managing the aspirational neo-liberal subject who demands accountability and responsiveness but also ensuring some redistributive mechanisms of inclusive governance, the AAP received support across the classes in both elections (although more so among the lower classes and the minorities). Emerging out of a social protest movement, the political party has instigated dissenters' 'speaking back to power' – encouraging and empowering citizen-subjects to challenge state authority.

In comparison with the first two studies, Modi's constituency can be seen as majoritarian neo-liberal assertion. The politics of development inherent in the mobilisation of the *Vikaspurush* constituted an *infantile sacralised* political subject. The combination of Gujarati-Hindu identity and neo-liberal anxieties led to a majoritarian assertion on a new level, enabling a Hindu nationalist party, for the first time, to come to power with a substantial majority in an Indian general election. Based on annual developmental rituals, Modi's good governance model combined values of ethnic-sub-nationalism and Hindutva to produce need-based consumers, but not claim-making citizens. Therefore, citizen-subjects were reduced to passive recipients of the state's benevolence rather than being active participants in defining the agenda. Moreover, as I point out in Chapter 4, the minorities were imperceptible in Modi's growth model in Gujarat. This same tendency was seen during the campaign of generating compliant followers. For instance, the symbolism of Modi as the *chai wallah* was aimed at bridging the gap between caste and aspirational politics with Modi himself representing the

symbol of upward mobility in terms of caste and the neo-liberal dictum of 'survival of the fittest'. It would appear to have yielded political dividends for both Modi and the BJP (as discussed in Chapter 4), attracting the support of OBCs and classes across the board. However, the problem with his symbolic register, as discussed, was the denial of discursive space to dissent, and the absence of any deliberation in the campaign. The lack of discursive platforms across different forums during the campaign demonstrated the leader-centric outlook and exposed the complacency of majoritarian non-engaged subjects. Modi's aggressive masculinity empowered a type of political subjectivity that saw domineering decision-making as emblematic of effective leadership rather than as authoritarian and a violation of democratic norms; this subjectivity constituted voters as mass admirers, uncritically following their leader. Furthermore, the *darshan* visual practices informed Modi's politics constituting sacralised and devout adherents who were content to just *see* their leader. The construction of uniformity within Modi's politics of development produced visible majoritarian assertions and largely dependent, uncritical subjects. Modi's case study therefore suggests that Butler's theory of performativity needs to go further; political subjects situated in dominant cultures and discursive practices do not feel the need to subvert or produce counter-hegemonic cultural practices.

Butler's theory of performativity is, though, helpful in teasing out the nuances and layers of subversive doing of identity – as evident in the cases of Dalit and civic-citizen subjects. The constraints of the politics of performativity become exposed when applied to political subjects occupying positions of power in the cultural schema. In this case, despite the fact that Hindu subjects occupy multiple positions, their majoritarian identity occludes all other insecurities, making them passive recipients of top-down symbolic manipulation. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, my conception of democratic subjectivity consists of two levels – the assumption of democratic

identification followed by its reiteration. Despite active political participation in the public sphere, the absence of the need and the space for deliberation, critical reflection and re-significations meant that democratic political subject formation was very limited in the Modi campaign.

7.2   Limitations of the Study

The discussion of identity-based assertions through symbolic mobilisation and their respective habitus is limited to the dominant identity as the unit for analysis. It does not claim to explain the cultural and symbolic system of the multiple intra-identities that exist within identity groups. For instance, there are alternative symbolic registers and practices for OBCs (Other Backward Classes) within Hinduism, *Balmikis* within Dalits and between JM and the AAP. However, the focus of this work has been to bring attention to the significance of the politics of symbolism and performative political action in claim-making. Similarly, the discussion around the symbolic habitus, practices and dispositions of identity based groups is not exhaustive and is not limited to the specific repertoires that have been stressed here in the respective case studies. Only a few repertoires were chosen for discussion to enable comparison and continuity across the case studies. Finally, spatially, too, the discussion is drawn from specific localities of the respective cities.

7.3   Contributions

Stepping back from the immediate empirical context of these cases, how does this thesis speak to wider bodies of knowledge in the discipline of political science?

By employing a co-constitutive lens, this thesis has sought to challenge the dominant framework of elite manipulation. It draws on and seeks to extend the works of Wedeen, Verdery, Hansen and Isin to dissect performative politics and subject formation. I now want to highlight how it contributes to the larger conceptual and

methodological approaches that enabled this research and which, hopefully, can be extended further to the study of politics.

The study of the encounter between identity, performative practices and the politics of symbolism takes centre stage in the project. By applying a constructivist approach to identity and symbolic politics, I have sought to critique the dominant understanding of this encounter as having a contrived character based on the assumptions that: a) identity is understood to be static and predefined; b) participants are passive consumers of the symbolic habitus; and, c) the encounter is not considered as democratically consequential. Instead, the meaning-making approach across the identitartian assertions discussed here shows that performative practices through symbolic interventions have the potential to challenge dominant hierarchies, visualise hitherto marginalised political subjects and intervene in the field of perception. This, combined with a co-constitutive lens of deconstructing the symbolic universe, allows the challenge of the dominant perspective based on elite manipulation and the conventional distinction made between followers and leaders within a mobilisation.

Theoretically, this thesis uses the conceptual frame of performativity for political analysis. It has demonstrated that perceiving identity-based assertions through performative practices allows the deconstruction of the everyday symbolic habitus and location of the political subjects in relation to various discursive practices. Butler's conceptualisation of performativity is insightful in conceiving identity as a *doing* rather than as performance or theatrics, providing scope for political agents to defy, negotiate and transgress hegemonic practices. Practices of identification are employed by all groups through symbolic interventions; however, as the case studies in the thesis have demonstrated, the subject position of groups and their symbolic power determines whether they will exert agential subversion or acquiesce. Therefore, one could claim that, despite Butler's constructivist underpinning in relation to identity and

subjectification, there are limitations to performative politics in the context of an assertion by a majoritarain identity. In the absence of a felt need to disturb the power dynamics, discursive determinism rather than agential subversion defines political subjectivity in the case of dominant identities.

Furthermore, the application of the spatial standpoint to symbolic politics and embodied practices enhances this analysis in two ways. First, the spatial angle to symbolic mobilisations dismantles the artificial binary between symbolic and material. By focusing on the symbolic habitus, situated within local cityscapes, one is able to discern that each symbolic assertion redefines the material space with its own values and norms whilst also capitalising on what already existed in that particular space in terms of its symbolic capital. Therefore rather than it being symbolic *or* material, it is symbolic *and* material at the same time for the identity groups. Following from this, it also situates embodied subjects anchored in spatial sites. So, for instance, depending on their spatial location, identities on the fringe can feel invisible or visualised within their respective symbolic narratives and universe.

Thematically, this thesis advances the enquiry into symbolic politics in mainstream political science which has usually considered symbolism to be secondary to political mobilisations. Employing the Bourdieusian lens of symbolic power to study various identity based groups foregrounds not just assertion, but also symbolic representation in the political field. Through the case study of the *Ambedkar Sthal,* the thesis supplements the limited research around symbolism in Dalit politics. Specifically, by examining the politics of statues, which to date has been explored only through the lenses of nationalism or race, it provides a new frame of reference from the perspective of caste politics. In the thesis, the comparative frame locates two opposing identity-based assertions, Hindutva and Dalit symbolisms, within the same analytical framework, allowing analysis of simultaneously evolving mobilisations from both perspectives (e.g.,

in the case of the Patel vs Ambedkar statue campaigns). Also, by evaluating the visual practices inherent in each of these movements, the thesis attempts to map how the democratic field of perception is experienced by political subjects.

Finally, I pursue the *'visual'* methodologically, too; this thesis applied an inter-disciplinary approach to the collection of data. It combines the visual with interpretive ethnography which facilitated the uncovering of the affective and expressive aspects of a symbolic habitus. Furthermore, employing photographs from the fieldwork also contributed to providing new ethnographic knowledge. By using photographs and narratives as two equally important sources of data, the images are no longer merely extensions of discourse but, instead, narratives in their own right.

By focusing on the politics of symbolism, the thesis deepens our understanding of agency and subject formation. Subject formation and agency are not as much about empowerment or subordination as the rationalist and materialist approaches would like to define this encounter, but about the space for negotiation, transgression or assertion of an identity. I have also highlighted that there are limits to the performative dimension of political action, wherein lies the potential to constitute undemocratic political subjects and conceal subjects on the margins.

7.4 Symbolic Encounters Ahead

Figure 7.1: District Collector's Office, Surendranagar, Gujarat[339]

"The gau rakshaks [cow protection 'vigilantes'] beat us because they think the cow is their mother. Well, then, they should take care of her and pick up her carcass when she dies" (Rathod, quoted in Daniyal, 2016). Just as I was finishing this thesis, Gujarat was embroiled in yet another Dalit mobilisation in the wake of the Una attacks in July, 2016. Four Dalit youth who were skinning the carcasses of dead cows were beaten and assaulted by Hindu men who claimed to be self-appointed *gau rakshaks* and accused the Dalits of killing the cows (TNN, 2016). The assault of these young men by a vigilante group led to massive protests by Dalit groups across the state. In one district in Surendranagar, the Dalits decided not to perform their traditional job of removing dead carcasses, in protest.[340] Figure 7.1 displays the carcasses of dead cows that were dumped in front of the district collector's office. The symbolism of these performative

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[339] Image Source: https://scroll.in/article/812329/your-mother-you-take-care-of-it-meet-the-dalits-behind-gujarats-stirring-cow-carcass-protests
[340] https://scroll.in/article/812329/your-mother-you-take-care-of-it-meet-the-dalits-behind-gujarats-stirring-cow-carcass-protests

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protests by the Dalit groups around cows' carcasses highlights the other side to the politics around 'holy cows' harnessed by Hindutva groups. By projecting the symbolism of carcasses the Dalit mobilisation highlights the highly important, yet still stigmatised, job that they continue to perform for a society bounded by the caste system. This Dalit uprising is also demonstrative of Dalit assertiveness and the relevance of the politics of symbolism in claim-making. Movements such as these reaffirm the central claim of the thesis that symbolic politics and the representation therein interrupts the existing habitus and field of the perception, impacting the political culture of the democratic politics. This thesis is an effort to contribute to our understanding of the potential and limits of symbolic mobilisations.

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