

'Saffronisation of India':

A critical discourse analysis of contemporary political ideology

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ABSTRACT : The victory of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has shaped current socio-political discourse through the lens of Hindu fundamentalism. Driven by right-wing Hindu nationals in the party that advocate the hegemony of the Hindu way of life, or *Hindutva*, contemporary political narrative can be seen to recontextualize the country's history through 'saffronisation' of public space, social practice, and education. This paper will explore how under the governance of the ruling party, socio-political sentiment is perceived to be shaped increasingly through *Hindutva*, by analysing the media framing of political ideology. To conduct the analysis, the paper will draw on Bhatia's (2015) theoretical framework of the Discourse of Illusion, with application to analysis of data occurring at three levels: historicity (use of the past to justify the present or predict the future); linguistic and semiotic action (subjective conceptualisations of the world made apparent through significant metaphorical rhetoric); and the degree of social impact (the rise of delineating categories as a result of one's rhetoric).

KEYWORDS: Discourse of Illusion, Political discourse, India, Categorisation, Metaphor

1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Economist Intelligence Unit described India as a 'flawed democracy'ⁱ, the evaluation based on a range of 60 indicators, covering essential aspects of a country's governance and structure, including electoral process, pluralism, political culture and functioning of government. Perhaps this is not entirely surprising given the task of narrowing down over 400 contesting political parties, vying for the votes of over 900 million people, without the influence of 'money, muscle/mafia and media', which yet remains 'endemic and perilous, threatening the security and freedom for voters to exercise their franchise' (Shashidharan, 2019). More specifically, what seems to have emerged in the last few years in Indian politics has been the suffusion of right-wing nationalist ideology in socio-political media discourse, popping up in forwards on Whatsapp, or thought-provoking columns in dailies, heated commentary on news channels, or in contemporary pop cultural forms. It is thus possible to assume that the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, can be explained by the effective discursive construction of their ideology, the dispersion of *Hindutva* in collective social argument about the direction India should be heading in.

Scholars have increasingly noted the Hindu turn in popular culture and journalism, both of which can often be described as conduits for political ideologies and influences

(Holbrook and Hill, 2005). Chakrabarti (2014) in his study of television content on Star Plus, for instance, reveals the absorption of Hindu nationalist ideologies in Indian soaps within which female characters have increasingly donned the roles of protagonists in the form of *bahus* (daughters-in-law) living in extended families. In doing so, the soaps represent the 'logic of banal Hindu nationalism, with the *performance* of Hindu identity central to their characters... [resonating with] the sphere of politics, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the Sangh Parivar's focus on "middle-class" audiences' (p. 474). Chakravartty and Roy (2015) further note that the ownership of media structures and networks in India also encourage production bias of prominent commercial media towards 'telegenic populist leaders', as such the last several years have seen the occupation of English-language media by 'Hindi language news media... [that has] allowed the BJP to successfully maneuver tensions between competing sets of elites—in this case marked by language (Hindi vs. English) and class (new entrepreneurial elites vs. established elites)' (p. 318).

This trend appears most evident in news media channels and national dailies, where the popularity of Hindi news media mushroomed after the dominance of English news media, which had continued from the late 1940s till 1990 reflecting urban views, but slowly giving way to Hindi news as political figures representing rural and caste politics of smaller towns grew to prominence (Neyazi, 2011) (cf. Ninan, 2007; Kaul, 2017). As such, the growth of Hindi newspapers began to represent 'the rise of communal and identity politics in India', and more recently, their growth can be argued to be a result of a 'rise in literacy levels, aggressive marketing strategies, better transportation infrastructure, the rising political significance of the Hindi publics and an increasing awareness among the masses about participation in the political process' (Neyazi, 2011, p. 78) (cf. Michelutti, 2008; Srivastava, 2015).

The vernacularisation of Indian media is a complex issue with deeply entrenched historical roots, and I do not wish to present a reductive summary of the evolution of this sociocultural and political phenomenon, but rather I intend to focus on a smaller more concentrated slice of this issue. Thus, this paper hopes to illustrate the discursive influence of Hindu nationalist values fuelled by the hegemonic power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on media discourse, giving rise to political commentary that comes to represent the unique English of local politics. By drawing on the multidimensional theoretical framework of the Discourse of Illusion (explored in more detail in the following section), this paper will investigate how culture-specific politics shapes language, and how, in turn language shapes local politics, more specifically, how ideologies of one contesting political party are legitimised in public discourse through both positive and negative political commentary rampant in news reporting, especially on highly democratised platforms offered by new media technology.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE DISCOURSE OF ILLUSION

It has often been posited that our minds actively participate in the construction of our realities (Kant, 1970). This process of reconstruction drawing on past experiences and ideologies (cf.

Berger and Luckmann 1966; Bhatia, 2015), evolving over the course of time, apparent 'not in documents or static things, but only in 'the actual run of event in experience' (Hart 1929, p. 492). This cognitive-socio-historical phenomenon Bourdieu (1990) terms our habitus, generating both individual and collective habits and practices 'in accordance with the schemes generated by history... [that] tend to guarantee the "correctness" of practices' (54). These predisposed forms of regulative ideological behaviour naturalize into our consciousness, becoming difficult to discern in everyday activities. These reconstructions of reality are subjective because they are no more than an ideological 'bundle or collection of different perceptions' (Hume 1970, p. 278), created through our language and action, and eventually legitimised through collective consent. This societal consent, achieved through a combination of authority, power asymmetry, and hegemony, as well as material means (e.g. language, modality etc.), creates discursive acceptance and ideological justification for ultimately subjective versions of reality.

In particular, this paper is concerned with discursive illusions arising from political-media discourse when dominant discourse clans, that is typically powerful groups in society (Bhatia, 2015), with access to proliferative mediums (e.g. mass/social media), employ particular semantico-pragmatic and lexico-syntactic resources to persuade audiences of the legitimacy of their versions of reality. Thus, collective illusions arise when particular reconstructions of reality (be it of an event, issue etc.) become recognised as the dominant framework (through endorsement from many witnesses) within which understanding of that reality operates (Bhatia, 2015). Such illusions become challenging to disprove because they start representing what is true (for any particular social group) with regards to any aspect of reality.

Furthermore, such subjective reconstructions of reality are persuasive to their audiences because they evoke either social fear, prejudice, doubt, or other such core emotions, and which 'message recipients perceive that they are free to reject... then, as a practical matter, they are free; and the influence attempt is regarded as "persuasive in nature"' (Perloff, 1993, p. 12). This process Gramsci refers to as efforts by a hegemonic class to attain 'the consent of other classes and social forces through creating and maintaining a system of alliances by means of political and ideological struggle' (in translation, Simon, 1999, p. 25-6). In regarding this process as hegemony, then, I further elevate the earlier notion of dominant framework to representations of specific instances of reality that proceed to 'constitute the hegemonic discursive framework through which understanding, action and discussion is formed. What is of concern here is not necessarily the falsity or subjectivity of the representations conveyed but rather the process through which they acquire a status of facticity/objectivity' (Bhatia, 2015, p. 14). Ultimately, this framework generates a collective illusion that enforces unity in terms of in-group beliefs and practices, societal categorizations, and a common agenda. These beliefs and practices often generate categories becoming 'representations of who we are, what we stand for, what our values are and what our relationships with others are... a self-serving schema for the representation of *us* and *them* as social groups' (Oktar, 2001, p. 313-14).

The Discourse of Illusion is an appropriate multidimensional framework to adopt for this paper because it focuses on the discursive construction of nationalist Hindu ideology which colours dominant political-media discourse. This invariably draws discursive illusions away from basic text to larger areas of context and social reality. The analytical framework employed will explore discursive illusions through three interrelated components- history, linguistic and semiotic action, and social impact- analysed through a combination of three methods (structured immediacy, metaphor analysis, and categorization analysis). The integration of these models distinguishes this approach by allowing for a deeper and richer multi-perspective analysis of dynamic discursive processes at both textual and contextual levels.

3 | METHODOLOGY

In order to more closely explore how discursive illusions are realized, the paper will draw on a combined analysis incorporating dimensions of historicity, linguistic and semiotic action, linked to an account of some of the social effects of these actions:

1. Historicity- a group's habitus is fundamental to the Discourse of Illusion as it involves recontextualization of past experience into present day action, to analyse which the framework draws on the concept of structured immediacy (Leudar and Nekvapil, 2011), focusing on 'how participants enrich the here-and-now of action by connecting it to the past' (p. 66), and which we can define as 'the unconscious or conscious reconceptualization of historical antecedents in an attempt to situate and present specific instances of current reality, often in relation to the future' (Bhatia, 2015, p. 52). In doing so, I also extend Bourdieu's notion of habitus beyond individual practice to include collective practices of discursive entities (e.g. newspapers, political parties, ethnic groups etc.) with evolving repositories of experience. Analysis at this level involves looking at invocation of past events or sociocultural/political history, and recontextualization of present occurrences in terms of past events.
2. Linguistic and semiotic action- subjective conceptualizations of the world give rise to our linguistic and semiotic actions, often through metaphorical rhetoric, to analyse which the framework borrows elements of critical discourse analysis (CDA), focusing in particular on the construction of metaphor (cf. Charteris-Black, 2005), which 'aims to identify the intentions and ideologies underlying language use' (p. 26). The emphasis here is on the speaker or writer's intention in the creation and diffusion of metaphor by blending both cognitive and pragmatic perspectives, recognising that metaphor is not just a linguistic phenomenon but also a persuasive tool. Analysis at this level involves looking at various metaphorical representations which can 'bring to a discourse event traces of previous uses and of previous discourse events' (Cameron, 2003, p. 27).

3. Social impact- the language and actions of an individual or group engenders many categories, which can be analysed through Jayyusi's (1984) concept of Categorization that explicates how people 'organize their moral positions and commitments round certain category identities' (p. 183). Analysis at this level involves identifying three classes of membership categories: self-organised groups (united by common beliefs and commitments); type categorisation (predicting actions believed to be typical of members of a self-organised group; and individual descriptor designators (assigning labels with both an ascriptive and descriptive function to types of people in those groups). Put together, analysis of categorization at these levels reveals the ideologies behind the positive or negative representation of self and other in the context of complex issues.

Data

The data for this paper has been taken from Indian English-language online newspapers (of various political leanings), including The Hindustan Times, The Hindu, The Deccan Chronicle, and The Indian Express. Although, it is entirely possible to identify the slant of newspapers/periodicals based on the editorials for example, the focus of this study is not on the allegiance of the newspapers from which articles are analysed but rather the narrative construction of political ideology specific to the government in power- the BJP. It is for this reason that the paper, given the context, regards the newspapers as a conduit of information reflecting dominant ideology, its sponsored framework of reality, and the discourse clans it originates from. A focus on English-language newspapers, it is argued, will reveal more clearly the extent of the discursive representation of Hindutva ideology through Hindi-English. The primary data set consists of e-articles taken from the News and Opinion webpages of the newspapers, within the time period of 2014-2019 that marks the rise to power and re-election of the Modi government. The paper also draws on a secondary dataset comprising news and views expressed in a variety of new media and academic English-language sources in order to better inform understanding of the socio-political issue (e.g. Indian political history, RSS etc.) and its analysis.

4 | ANALYSIS: SAFFRONISATION AND HINDUTVA

Across the globe, there has been a perceivable rise in right-wing nationalist sentiment, with political leaders, elected to office and otherwise, curating populist narratives that encourage protectionist sentiment. I use the term curate here to emphasise the fact that each narrative is woven with threads of local sociocultural sentiment and language to evoke the appropriate response and emotions in the target audiences. In other words, the language of politics and populism is not universally-templated, but adapted to specific contexts, giving rise to several local varieties. In the context of India too, '[l]ike the political Right in many countries faced

with the globalisation of moral values and the growing influence of Western, especially American, culture, the BJP has reactively committed itself to purify Indian society' (Marsh and Brasted, 2002, p. 235-6). In fact, BJP's primary ideology of Hindutva seeks to not only colour the secular nature of state, but rather enforce 'a communal reconstruction of national identity', whereby this new India paradoxically reverts into 'a primordial Hindu community, which transcends regional, language and cultural difference and is bound together by a common history, civilisation and destiny' (p. 235).

Banerjee (2017) writes that the origins of Hindu nationalism, more commonly referred to as Hindutva, can be seen to date back to the 1920s, and goes beyond Hinduism as a religion, to frame India's, and consequently Indians', cultural identity through denoting 'all people who believe in, respect or follow the eternal values of life that have sprung up in Bharat [Republic of India]'. Hindutva, a current form of Hindu nationalism, is seen most keenly championed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a volunteer paramilitary organization, also seen as the parent of organization of the BJP (cf. Anderson and Damle, 2019). As such, many argue that Hindutva in its current form is a political effort to better organise Hinduism, to doctrinise a religion which is often associated with a way of life as opposed to a set of rules. This has included a controversial ban on beef, as part of *gau raksha* ('cow protection')- the cow is considered a sacred animal in Hinduism- emerging from political parties vying for rural, Hindu votes; the re-creation of a Hindu Temple in Ayodhya, believed to be the birthplace of Hindu deity Lord Ram, over disputed land where Hindu activists demolished a 16th century mosque; renaming public space and infrastructure with names of foreign origin, specifically Mughal etymology; attempts to Indianize the education curriculum; and even a soft power push towards Ayurvedic medicine and yoga. The emergent dominant Hindutva framework then begins to reveal the contentious debate surrounding religion and secularism in the context of relations between class, caste, religion and ethnicity, highlighting how 'populists are never entirely divorced from their specific cultural and national contexts but are equally (and often unconsciously) tied up with the master signifiers of imagined objects, such as the nation or religion' (Kinnvall, 2019, p. 286).

Extract 1 3/4th of India's map is now saffron...Saffronisation of India goes on unabated. Opposition is wary of resurgent saffronisation....Modi is a vocal proponent of 'sab ka sath-sab ka vikas'. He talks of development and keeps parroting it... Premier Modi has been articulating his ideas and ideals for new and resurgent India almost on a daily basis and in his 'maan ki baat'... The way Modi's idea of Swachh Bharat has caught the public imagination is unimaginable... toilets built in rural areas... Swachh Vidyalas with separate toilets for girl students have largely reduced school dropout rates. 'Beti bachao-beti padhao' has remarkably changed the pro-infanticide and anti girl mindset. (Singh, Daily Excelsior, 23/3/18)

Extract 2 The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), whose founders idealised protection and encouraging Hindu training to form a Hindu rashtra (Hindu nation), is seen

a major force driving the BJP's brand of politics... The group at the forefront of the protest called 'Hindu Ekta Manch' is backed by BJP leaders... Hindutva politics plays a bigger hand in the BJP's rise to power and the blind support of Modi's followers... pro-Hindutva or right-wing groups are unleashing violence targeting Muslims in the name of gau raksha or cow protection... the BJP is simply pandering to the needs of the pro-Hindutva groups in the hopes of building a Hindu rashtra. The BJP as a party is sustained by the promotion of Hindutva politics and ideologies. (Jain, The Week, 25/4/18)

Extract 3 ... the Congress has gone saffron with a vengeance. Its manifesto reads like a BJP manifesto. The Congress has promised the Madhya Pradesh electorate that it will build gaushalas in every panchayat. It has pledged to develop Rath Path Gaman, the route Lord Ram took during exile. The Congress manifesto goes on unblinkingly to say it will begin commercial production of gau mutra (cow urine). To emphasise its new saffron credentials... the Congress has promised that, if elected, it will establish a "spiritual" department in its state government though it didn't say whether sadhus and saints would head it... will Gandhi follow this saffron-lite strategy at the national level? (Merchant, DNA, 22/11/18)

Extract 4 Modi and Amit Shah will exploit Congress fault lines to their best abilities to saffronise the remaining 1/4th India. Thus 'Congress Mukht Bharat' is no off the cuff huff... Their results will have ramifications on 2019. BJP today has a dedicated cadre, an ideology and a leader by which it should it sail through these states (in Bollywood filmi style, BJP can say 'hamare paas to leader hai, tumhare paas...?'). BJP's organisational strength is unmatched. (Singh, Daily Excelsior, 23/3/18)

The first thing we note in the extracts is an attempt to reinforce the correlation between BJP and Hindutva, through the unique political neologism *saffronisation*, which derives from the saffron robes of holy men, and essentially refers to linguistic and semiotic actions of right-wing nationalists in enforcing a reversion to the ancient Hindu way of life. The neologism becomes an illusory metaphor for the party, personified as a being who *goes unabated, resurging* in its effort to indoctrinate Indian citizens, the spread of saffronisation depicted as an ideological invasion. The extracts from various media sources create a definitional socio-political narrative, discursively constructing what contemporary Hindutva is about: *idealised protection, encouraging Hindu training to form a Hindu rashtra* ('Hindu nation'), *unleashing violence targeting Muslims, pandering to the needs of pro-Hindutva groups, with a vengeance*, and offering *spiritual* guidance, representing Hindutva as the nation's forced moral compass.

More interestingly, the extracts also metaphorically reconceptualise BJP as an effective corporation as opposed to a nationalist party. The party is attributed a CEO in the form of Modi who is a *vocal proponent* of the company's *ideas and ideals*, reflecting its *brand of politics*. It is a company that specialises in *commercial production of cow urine*, able to *exploit the fault lines* of its competitor, the National Indian Congress, sustained through *the*

promotion of Hindutva politics, overall, its organisational strength is unmatched. This echoes what Udupa (2018) describes as ‘enterprise Hindutva’, that is ‘a mediatized form of Hindu nationalism shaped largely by the affordances of social media and the cultural practices surrounding them in urban India’ (p. 453). Such a conceptualisation of Modi and his party can be seen to have the effect of transforming the perceived saffronisation of the nation from an invasion of conservative ideologues to the neo-liberalization of *new and resurgent India*. In this way, we see the BJP’s marked success in strategically redirecting the discursive turn in media away from ‘the taint of narrow ethnoreligious nationalism and majoritarian violence’ to reframe its party message in terms of ‘a commitment to fast-track neoliberalism’ (Chakravartty and Roy, 2015, p. 312).

Most notably, the extracts display a relatively high degree of code-mixing, switching between Hindi and English thus reflecting the ‘evolution of a hybrid media language – Hinglish’ (Thussu, 2000, p. 71). We see use of Hinglish most commonly in the extracts when describing BJP agenda, for instance *sab ka sath-sab ka vikas* (extract 1) a reference to Modi’s political slogan ‘Collective Effort, Inclusive Growth’, the use of Hinglish here, we can assume, attempts to diminish the polarity between both urban and rural consumers of news, as well as the inherent casteism of Indian society. In doing so, both the slogan itself and its written form negate the commonly thrown accusation that Hindutva is the forced reversion to the Hindu way of life. However, a typical feature of discursive illusions is the creation of ‘double contrastive identity’ (Leudar et al., 2004), which arises from the contestation between different narratives offered by opposing discourse clans, each attempting to dominate the discussion about an issue or event. In this case as well, Modi’s official website claims:

Narendra Modi has come a long way from how the political discourse has been conducted in India. Politicians in India have very often used & thrived on vote banks by playing emotions of one against the other. While some leaders pit one religion against the other, others pit one caste against each other...In such times, Narendra Modi’s thoughts strike a refreshing contrast... Narendra Modi has proven to be an apostle of unity and inclusivity... The most important thing that he has done is to break the myth that growth of a caste, community, religion, village, city or sector has to be at the cost of another. He has shown that development, upliftment and progress need not be a case of one against the other, but it can include everyone.ⁱⁱ

However narrative from opposing discourse clans illustrate the danger of Modi and BJP’s increasingly extremist vision for India:

Ethnic democracy implies two-tiered citizenship, the majority enjoying more rights than the minority, both de jure and de facto... India under Narendra Modi has moved towards this model over the past five years... Of all the minorities, the principal victims of this trend are Muslims, the traditional target of Hindu nationalists... Not only are Muslims marginalised in major institutions and the public sphere, they are also targeted by Hindu nationalist militias, who are trying to rid the public space of this minority by

(re)converting its members to the dominant religion, preventing them from praying in the open and prohibiting them from acquiring real estate in mixed residential areas. They are also trying to cut the majority community off from the Muslim minority by preventing interfaith marriages, and are also attacking Muslims on charges of cow slaughter. These militias often enjoy police protection.

(Jaffrelot, The Caravan, 2019)

In these two extracts, we see the multiple, sometimes contrasting, roles that Modi plays, including those that surface from the corner of positive self-representation in the ideological square (van Dijk, 1998) (*has come a long way, strike a refreshing contrast, apostle of unity and inclusivity, break the myth of caste, community, religion...*), and those from the negative other-presentation corner of the square (*Hindu nationalist, Hindu nationalist militia, (re)converting its members to the dominant religion, preventing them from praying in the open, prohibiting them from acquiring real estate, preventing interfaith marriages, attacking Muslims*). In either case, what is interesting is not the facticity of one version of reality over the other, but rather the discursive means by which 'people categorize one another to the comparative and normative fit of the categories within a context' as such intentions and ideologies play a key role in 'constructing inter-group relations' (Oktar, 2001, p. 318).

The extracts mention several other policies that are aimed at bettering largely rural life, including *Swachh Bharat*, *Swachh Vidyalas* ('Clean India, Clean Schools'), *Beti bachao-beti padhao* ('Save Daughter, Educate Daughter') and *gau raksha* ('cow protection'). These instances of code-mixing seem to reflect in some sense the changing trends in political reporting, at least during the powerful rise of BJP. Kachru (1983) argued that code-mixing with English in India was a symbol of education and westernisation; it reflected in its verbal, visual and textual forms global currency and legitimacy. However, the instances of code-mixing here, one can argue, represent a revisit to more traditional language references, perhaps to generate a more inclusive readership, creating what Bhatt (2008) refers to as a 'third space'. In other words, the use of Hindi in English newspapers in India, creates a negotiated semiotic space for diverging collectives, including the indigenous and alien, the rural and urban, the local and global, English and other bilinguals, 'setting up new structures of socio-linguistic authority and new socio-political initiatives... occasioned by major political-economic transformation in India' (Bhatt, 2008, p. 178). The use of code-mixing in outlining the BJP mandate, and in line with an all-inclusive unified nation, illustrate the party's push for both rural and semi-urban constituencies, in addition to retaining urban votes.

Furthermore, instances of code-mixing without any offered translation (*build gaushalas in every panchayat* ['cowsheds in every village council'], *Congress Mukht Bharat* ['India free of Congress'], *Hopes of building a Hindu rashtra* ['Hindu nation'], *didn't say whether sadhus or saints would head it* ['whether holy men and saints would head it']) can serve to recontextualise sociocultural history on part of the informed reader. This includes negatively depicting dynastic rule under the previous ruling party, the Indian National Congress; warning of reversion to traditional roots of Hindutva that were carried through the

RSS to achieve cultural hegemony; or even to cast doubt through subtle humour about whether holy men and saints would head a spiritual department, alluding to the co-option of state by religion. While these examples of code-mixing may seem ordinary, however, the ‘more plausible subversion/transgression interpretations of these switches... [occur] once they are read within the broader political context in which these texts begin to appear, viz., within a particular political (Hindutva) ideology that actively contests the former structures of secular social and political relations’ (Bhatt, 2008, p. 181).

Extract 4 uses code-mixing as well in its reframing of a Hindi movie dialogue (Bollywood) *hamare paas to leader hai, tumhare paas* (‘we have a leader, and you have?’) from the 1975 film *Deewar*, which lords the non-negotiable power of one party over another, in the case of the movie it was family versus money, in this context the power BJP derives from Modi and his *dedicated cadre* over Congress’s feeble leadership. Thus, while English represents language of law, state and education, Hindi remains the lingua franca dominant across Indian pop culture, accessed across class, caste and religion. The intertextual use of popular movie dialogues in Hindi, again, seem to reinforce the populist nature of Modi’s discourse, whereby Hindutva takes its discursive form across carefully managed intersections of political, religious, commercial and cultural expressions of identity (Udapa, 2018).

Muscular nationalism

During their rule over the last few years, the narrative centred around BJP’s political ideology has also forged a notably more aggressive, muscular tone (Ganguly, 2014), reconceptualising Hindutva as a gendered, masculine being that becomes metonymic of an India that is ‘Hindu supremacist and masculinist—Muslims and other minorities are located as the Other of this body politic’ (Kaul, 2017, p. 525). This particular angle in the narrative then doesn’t just depict Modi and the BJP as the moral compass of new India, but also justifies their rule by way of their Hindu roots, positioning them against the rule of a foreign otherⁱⁱⁱ, pushing an ‘antagonistic divide between “the people” and illegitimately powerful, born-to-rule elites by associating the latter with the foreign Other. This discursive strategy conflates elite and foreign Other and makes them a collaborative threat to “the people”’ (Wojczewski, 2019, p. 11).

Extract 5 ...Modi had found his 2019 trumpcard; muscular nationalism... The heart-stopping capture of Wing Commander Abhinandan and his subsequent release by Pakistan were seized by Modi as his own superman prowess that intimidated Islamabad. Ghar Me Ghus Ke Maroonga (I will enter each and every home and kill them all) was his thundering pomposity.... People whistled and clapped like they did once for Amitabh Bachchan bash up goons in Deewar. (Jha, The Pioneer, 28/5/19)

Extract 6 When Narendra Modi is on the campaign trail in his *janmabhoomi* (place of birth) of Gujarat, his rhetoric usually gets even more theatrical. No surprise then, that he chose a public rally in Ahmedabad last week to launch a ferocious

attack on Pakistan. “Ghar mein ghuskar maareng (will enter their homes and kill them)”, he thundered, while threatening more air strikes on Pak-based terror camps. The adoring crowd, which, until then, was relatively subdued, erupted into loud applause. This was the kind of talk for which they had been waiting... muscular nationalism is the terrain which suits Team Modi, especially across the Hindi heartland where the 2019 elections will be won and lost... Now, it's the men in uniform and TV studio warriors who are being used to create an emotional nationalist upsurge around the notion of a strong Hindu nation taking on an Islamist Pakistan with Modi as the mascot of this new majoritarian awakening...When the battle lines are drawn between “desh bhakts (patriots)” and “desh-drohis (traitors)” in such crude terms, the political climate is bound to be further vitiated. (Sardesai, Hindustan Times, 15/3/19)

Extract 7 In 2019 Lok Sabha campaign, Narendra Modi build a successful narrative around muscular nationalism to strike a cord with the voters as the protector of the nation and someone who is capable of taking hard decisions like launching air strike across the line of control (LoC)... helped Mr Modi to solidify his image of hard-line nationalist and a Hindu Messiah. Soon the campaign was about “Modiji ki sena” striking a fear in the minds of terrorists and “our nuclear bombs are not for Diwali”. (Bali, Deccan Chronicle, 24/5/19)

We see in the extracts above Modi, and by association the BJP, metaphorically reconceptualised as a *sena* (extract 7), which translates to *army*, in this case a nationalist army. Words and phrases emanating from a similar semantic field denoting protection and defence (*seized, intimidated, Ghar mein ghus ke maroonga* [‘enter them homes and kill them’] *thundering, bash up goons, attack, threaten, strike, taking on, protector, taking hard decisions, launching air strike, striking a fear*) are used to denote Modi’s actions. These descriptions fit into the muscular nationalism narrative, enforcing the image of a worthy commander and defender. Such type categorisation predicts the actions believed to be ‘embedded in the features of that categorisation’ (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 24) as a consequence of previous experience with such types of people, denoting ‘what is perceivably common to all that is the focus of such projections, typifications and inferences’ (p. 24-5). In this context, Modi, the BJP, and Hindu nationalists by association are ascribed the same warrior and nativist qualities; the notion of ‘type’ thus becomes ‘the intertwining of description and judgment’ (p. 45), indicative of pre-existing ideologies through which we routinely frame our experiences. In addition, such social categorisation also draws on descriptor designators as a way of labelling types of people, since the ‘constituent property or feature of the type is given in its naming, unlike the type constructed by reference to a named group’ (p. 26). Such labelling does not just provide a description of certain ‘types’ of people but also carries with it an ‘ascriptive’ function that serves to either deny grounds for explanation, or in this case predict future actions. Again, in this particular context, beyond just being part of a Hindu nationalist community, and based on his actions, Modi is ascribed the qualities of *superman*, one who is masculine, ferocious and pompous in his strength, a *desh bhakt* (‘patriot’), and

Messiah. In this way, the narrative presents a positive presentation of Modi, conflating Hindutva with muscular nationalism to achieve a conceptualisation of reality within which the posturing of masculinity and manhood is activated not as much by 'an effeminate other' as by a fear of a hypermasculine enemy' against which the *sena* ('army') has to defend the denigration of Hindu identity (Kinnvall, 2019, p. 294).

Through such categorisation, the BJP and Hindu Nation also form a national habitus (de Cillia et al., 1999), derived from stereotyped discourses about Others that serve to segregate them from the values of one's own national group, while also solidifying the unity of the in-group. Thus, we find a Hindu nation which showcases an aggressive disposition against those who threaten it, in this instance, the narrative reveals the other to be *Pakistan*, more specifically *Islamabad*, designated as the enemy through descriptions such as *goons*, *terror groups* and *terrorists*. In assigning these actions to the Other, they are insinuated as being evil, violent, lawless and murderers, as such Modi's own air strikes and threats of attack become justified and even applauded. In this way, the construct of a terrorist enemy becomes a useful tool in declaring moral judgment, by the honest and civilised Hindu nationalists, reinforcing the us and them dichotomy on the basis of moral superiority. The discursive construction of morality serving as a powerful tool used by political leaders to legitimise their version of reality, and to project a positive presentation of themselves as trustworthy. Others are then judged by the good side and against the standards they set. The emphasis on muscular nationalism in the Hindutva narrative, therefore, seems even more dependent on the construction of a necessary enemy, as '[e]nunciating the "enemy" is pivotal to defining, establishing and maintaining a moral order, for the enemy is one who violates "our" values' (Lazar and Lazar, 2004, p. 227). However, once again, we see the rise of discursive illusions, with the resurgence of 'double contrastive identity' where the roles of us vs. them, good vs. bad, moral vs. immoral, are reversible depending on which side's perceptions are taken into account. While rhetoric in favour of Modi's nationalism describes a willing and eager collective in the form of a *majoritarian awakening* which *adores, whistles and claps* in appreciation of *the kind of talk for which they had been waiting*, other discourse clans may project a different reality.

India is going to see a Hindu extremist leader and sworn enemy of Muslims and Pakistan taking an oath as prime minister... The BJP achieved historic success as a result of fanatic anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim campaigning... Modi has remained a controversial leader all through his career and earned notoriety for being tagged an enemy of Muslims and a butcher of Muslims, especially after he was accused of masterminding the anti-Muslim riots in Ahmadabad during his stint as the chief minister of Gujarat state... cast sinister effects not only on the future of Indian Muslims but also on the peace of the entire region.

(Jafar, Al Arabiya, 2014)

At work, these clean-cut, middle-class Indian men in their saffron t-shirts displaying Modi's face probably exuded deference and respectability, at least toward those they associated with power and wealth. But gathered in numbers, with their puffed-up chests and clenched fists, they replicated what they admired most about Modi—a kind of unmoored nihilism that dresses itself in religious colors and acts through violence, that is ruthlessly authoritarian in the face of diversity and dissent, and that imprints the brute force of its majoritarianism wherever it is in power... Modi rose rapidly through the ranks of this organization [RSS], one not dissimilar—in its paranoia, violence, and sense of victimization—to the Ku Klux Klan.

(Deb, The New Republic, 2016)

In the preceding extracts, we see a version of reality within which it is Modi who is categorised as the *sworn enemy*. In contrast to the Pakistani terrorists who deserve a fitting reply from India's Prime Minister with his *own superman prowess*, in these extracts, it is Modi who is believed to be capable of actions emanating from a semantic field that depicts fanatic brutality: *butcher of Muslims, masterminding the anti-Muslim riots, cast sinister effects, acts through violence, brute force, violence, sense of victimization*. Instead of a glorified comparison with India's most famous actor *Amitabh Bachchan* (key protagonist in *Dewaar*), Modi is compared to a member of the *Ku Klux Klan*. In doing so, this narrative reframes Modi's heroic version of muscular nationalism in terms of *paranoia, violence and victimization*. In contrast to the moral patriots depicted in the former narrative, here Hindu nationalists are insinuated to be barbarians with their *puffed up chests and clenched fists*. Furthermore, the invocation of a past event, in this case the 2002 Gujarat pogroms, recontextualises the meaning of current reality, demonstrating in the process how the meaning of sociocultural and political events can be creatively rendered through ideologically solid connections between the past and present (either by denial of a historical connection or historical conditioning of the present with it) (Bhatia, 2015). Categorisation in this sense draws on our history, through a reframing of events within different contexts, implying a certain 'bind' when it comes to making sense of experiences- our interpretations constrained by our habitus (or past experience). Again, this is quite typical of social categorisation whereby the designation of certain groups with particular labels reveals our preconceived notions; that is an appeal to previous frames of experience with such people is made, leading to the expected-ness of their behaviour and practice. The use of membership categorisations within membership categories can be seen as indicative of the influence that our habitus has on our way of perceiving the world, as the discourse of illusion implies, we structure our experiences and relations with others in society within our subjective framework of reality. We categorise not always on the basis of what is objectively true, but rather what we believe to be the truth.

Nevertheless, the key narrative under focus, can be argued to be an integrative one that weaves a compelling argument about a *strong Hindu nation* comprised of *Modi ji ki sena* ('Modi's army'), *warriors* and *desh bhakts* ('patriots'). The peppering of Hindi within the extracts, especially in the form of the rallying war cry *ghar mein ghuske mareng* ('enter their

homes and kill them') repeated in extracts 5 and 6, with an embedded translation we can assume is meant to unify those *across the Hindi heartland*, true nationalists of the Hindu *rashtra* ('nation'), and the English translation an implied threat to those who part themselves from this new India- *desh drohis* ('traitors') and *terrorists* alike. Knowledge and context of references to Bollywood, India's socio-political history with Pakistan, previous tensions across the Line of Control (LoC) illustrate that 'the interpretive demands of text-in-context require bilingual *and* bicultural' knowledge (Bhatt, 2008, p. 186), that is an understanding of language and culture is required for participation in political ideology, dialogue and community.

Analysis of the dataset revealed the use of common linguistic devices and rhetorical strategies, including metaphor, recontextualisation, categorisation, and intertextuality to create a compelling narrative about the neo-liberal transformation of new India and the purification of the Hindu identity through adherence to Hindutva. In this way, the discursive construction of Hindutva and its successful infiltration in public discourse, relied on the creation of an imagined homogenised community, with a distinct 'national essence' (Wojczewski, 2019, p. 5), that granted consent to a version of nationalism used as 'a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy' (Campbell, 1998, p. 11). The powerful and effective proliferation of Hindutva can be seen as a result of Modi's charismatic sermons, creative use of Hinglish in attracting both urban and rural readership, and the creation of a formidable other against whom to unite. Ultimately, what we find is the rise of effective discursive illusions surfacing in public discourse about the justified rule of the BJP party, validation of their moral judgement, and ability to defend against the erosion of the Hindu nation.

5 | CONCLUSION

This paper explored the shape political ideology takes in socio-political media commentary, revealing how collective memory and sentiment is shaped by powerful discourse clans. To do so, I drew on the multi-perspective framework of the Discourse of Illusion, that implements a three-pronged critical analytical approach to deconstruct how discursively shaped social issues reflect ideological conceptualisations of various discourse clans, in support of their respective agendas. The suffusion of Hindutva in social and political dialogue demanded a closer look at just how much of our world is based on social construction. These social constructions become dominant frames through which we make sense of the world, and of the meanings of events, issues and people- the so-called truth of reality. In this way, '[t]here is no way to step outside interpretation. There is no objective Truth to discover; only competing interpretations to navigate' (Dunn, 2006, p. 377).

The analysis revealed a dominant frame that projects the power and purity of a new Hindu nation, led under the idealised protection of muscular governance, which can defend the nation's integrity and identity. The increasing use of Hindi-English code-switching, and combination of rural-centric policies expressed through urbanised message platforms becoming a means to diminish polarity between urban and rural constituencies across the Hindi-speaking belt, creating a 'third space' (Bhatt, 2008) within which diverging

demographics assume a collective sociolinguistic identity. The efficacy of this rather nativist narrative, which serves to unite Hindus across caste, community and religion, is also dependent on the animation of a foreign other, an enemy against which to unite. In this manner, the Discourse of Illusion was helpful in bringing into better focus the power struggles between competing narratives, offered by different discourse clans in society, to generate a single hegemonic discourse used to frame the understanding of socio-political events and issues, for the purpose of maintaining or reforming economic, social, or political status quo.

More importantly, the paper revealed the interpretative demands made on part of target audiences in their creation of and contribution to overarching socio-political narratives. Though arguments are expressed using typical linguistic tools and rhetorical devices (e.g. metaphor, categorisation, recontextualisation, intertextuality etc.), they are derived from sociocultural and historical knowledge, unique to the communities they address. The construction of local political-media discourses demand a knowledge on part of their audience of local culture, language and history, as these very characteristics of the discourses are intended to unite or segregate members of the in-group and out-group. This indicates as well, the power of ideological discourses in creating rather reductive and polarising categorisations of groups and communities, often on the basis of politics and religion, but also militaristically, nationally, patriotically, and racially. Such polarisation of a community, country or even more globally, can make obvious the power struggles between the strong-weak, and the majority-minority (whether linguistically, politically, socially, or ethnically). The contrasting categories generated in these discourses also reflect the perennial struggle between different discourse clans, all of whom believe they are objective in their way of thinking and practice, and thus their code of moral superiority (whether based on religion, history or a positive engagement with 'the people') serves to legitimise their actions and consequences.

The Discourse of Illusion approaches the analysis of ideological discourses by focusing on recontextualisation of the past in determining the present, often represented through metaphorical rhetoric and resulting in socially delineating categories. It can be considered a multi-perspective approach to critical discourse analysis, one which allows the researcher to look past simply linguistic discoveries to demystify the impact of cultural sentiment, political affiliation and social constructions on argumentation and narratives. Such an approach allows the researcher to 'place greater emphasis on the actual construction of sociopolitical categories such as "the people" and enables us to distinguish between populist and nationalist modes of identity formation by identifying the distinct practices of differentiation and Othering through which such subjectivities come into being in the first place' (Wojczewski, 2019, p. 2). This framework can be further applied to the investigation of various socio-political issues, including study of democracy, migration, refugees, emancipation, and globalisation, as each of these issues become the embodiment of ideological tensions of competing discourse clans. Such issues come to mean different things in different contexts and by different voices, often playing a significant hand in societal understanding.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ <https://infographics.economist.com/2017/DemocracyIndex/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.narendramodi.in/sabka-saath-sabkavikas-collective-efforts-inclusive-growth-> 3159

ⁱⁱⁱ President of the key opposition party Indian National Congress, Sonia Gandhi, is Italian and was raised Roman Catholic