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Viral Fundamentals: Riding the Corona Waves in India

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Abstract

In the last few decades, we have seen a steady rise in Hindu nationalism in India, culminating in a Hindu nationalist government in 2014. The BJP won again and expanded its majority in 2019. Then COVID-19 hit! This essay explores the national and body politic in India during COVID-19. It argues that Hindu nationalism has been mobilized and strengthened during the pandemic.

VIRAL FUNDAMENTALS: RIDING THE CORONA WAVES IN INDIA

> The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster… The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.
>
> Milan Kundera, Book of Laughter and Forgetting, 1979

Last year, I published a book, *Holy Science*: *The Biopolitics of Hindu Nationalism* (Subramaniam, 2019). The book explores the central role of science and the scientific imagination in the evolving vision of Hindu nationalism in India. Written before the 2019 election, the book nonetheless captured some of the successful scripts of Hindu nationalism that have strengthened in recent years. Then COVID-19 hit! Science, medicine, and governance suddenly took center stage. Almost a year later, the viral drama continues to dominate our lives, and our fears for what seem like precarious futures still in the making. Here, I reflect on the themes of the book through the evolving pandemic. Born and brought up in India, I now live in the United States, and have been tracking the viral dramas in both nations. It will be many years before we can write the definitive histories of the pandemic. At present, the best we can do is analyze history in the making, and for this we have to rely on the latest data, information, and analyses of our cotemporary moment—which lie more in the journalistic record than scholarly texts. This essay, thus, draws on "real-time reporting" and journalistic accounts on COVID-19, but always in conversation with academic scholars and scholarship. I attempt to theorize the pandemic by developing a history of the present.

It is mid-November in 2020 as I revise this essay. World over, we are engulfed in the pandemic caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. I perform my morning ritual of examining updates on COVID-19 world dashboards. In first place is the United States of America, and in second place, India—together the two are regarded as the world's oldest and

the largest democracies. The gap between the two has widened over the last 2 weeks in the wake of the recent elections in the United States There are many theories on what characterizes the countries at the top of the list—authoritarian regimes, capricious leadership, widening inequality, impoverished health infrastructures, and an ambivalence towards expertise and science. Both countries fit the bill in this regard. In both cases, there is much to fault in the leadership and their actions. Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump were awarded the 2020 Ig Nobel Prize for Medical Education (along with seven other leaders) for "using the COVID-19 pandemic to teach the world that politicians can have a more immediate effect on life and death than scientists and doctors can" (Arora, 2020). However, there is one important distinction between the two countries, and leaders. President Trump's low approval rating throughout his presidency were remarkably stable around 42% (fivethirtyeight.com). He lost the election in November 2020, a loss he has unsuccessfully contested. In contrast, Prime Minister Modi has remained immensely popular with his popularity ranging from 78% in some polls to a whopping 80%–90% (India Today Web Desk, 2020; Gettleman and Yasir, 2020). In fact, his popularity has grown during the pandemic, despite the alarming rise in the virus. Why and how?

To appreciate the popularity of Mr. Modi, one needs to follow the steady and unmistakable rise of Hindu nationalism in India over the last many decades. To understand Hindu nationalism, three groups are key. First, the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), a political party, and currently the majority party in power. After coming to power in 1998 in a coalition government, we have seen the steady rise of Hindu nationalists in government. Today, they are the majority party in power in India. The political success of the BJP draws on two other Hindu nationalist groups—The *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP), an organization of religious leaders, and the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), a grassroots nationalist organization (These two are not political parties and do not contest elections.) Mr. Modi joined the RSS as a child, was trained, nurtured, and matured within its circles and ideologies, while steadily moving up its ranks. With time we have seen the growing synergy between the BJP and the RSS, their fortunes today closely tied to each other. It is worth noting that the RSS was banned thrice in postindependent India for its militancy (Some would suggest that these bans were politically motivated). But it is significant that a life-long RSS member and leader now heads the country.

The power of Hindu nationalism lies in the effective way by which it has mobilized the country. At the heart of Hindu nationalism is the idea of *Hindutva* or "Hinduness," and the imagination of India as a Hindu nation. Milan Kundera's epigraph is a fitting description of what is unfolding in contemporary India. First, nationalists' invoke a grand Vedic (Hindu) civilization and claim this for India's glorious past; India is, thus, rendered a Hindu nation, rather than a multireligious secular nation. Next, this Vedic past becomes a prelude to India's modernity. As the story is narrated, India's grand Vedic civilization was thwarted by "outsiders" (i.e., non-Hindus) who destroyed its heritage and history. Much of Hindu nationalism is grounded in a politics of injury and the victimhood and grievance of India's Hindu majority (Jaffrelot, 2008). With Hindu nationalists at the helm now, the politics of injury has been harnessed into a powerful political movement. The grand Vedic past is the prelude to a future of India as a Hindu nation, paving the way for India to reclaim its rightful place as a global superpower. There is a powerful campaign within India and outside to rewrite the history books and tell a new story of India—its past, present, and future. Hindu nationalists have selectively, and strategically, used rhetoric from both science and Hinduism, modernity and orthodoxy, western and eastern thought to build a powerful but potentially dangerous vision of India *as* a Hindu nation, what I have called an *archaic modernity* (Subramaniam, 2000). It is also critical to understand that Hindu nationalism is a deeply transnational movement, embraced enthusiastically by a vibrant and wealthy Hindu diaspora. Their efforts have reshaped the perception of Hindu nationalism and Mr. Modi away from its hyper-nationalistic agenda through "diaspora diplomacy," a financial whitewashing to Hindutva (Friedrich, 2020).

To understand how the Hindu nationalist government under the leadership of Mr. Modi has dealt with the pandemic, we must understand the relationship of Hindu nationalism and science, and life in an archaic modernity. As I argue in my recent book *Holy Science* (Subramaniam, 2019), at the heart of Hindu nationalism is not only a mythological, but an imagined mytho-scientific corpus—where Hindu mythology and modern science meld seamlessly into the other. Vedic sciences have been resurrected *as* modern science. For example, Mr. Modi, like many

others in his government, invokes mythological stories as evidence of India's scientific prehistory. As Mr. Modi famously said, "We worship Lord Ganesha. There must have been some plastic surgeon at that time who got an elephant's head on the body of a human being and began the practice of plastic surgery" (Rahman, 2014). Here, the narratives of Indian mythology mingle with the powers of scientific reason to imbue the fantasies of Indian mythology and story-telling with rational possibilities and an energetic Indian scientific prehistory. Perhaps Mr. Modi was being humorous or ironic as some of his supporters have claimed. But Ganesha is an elephant-headed god; he is divine. Mr. Modi could well have claimed that a god could, through divine powers, connect the bodies of an elephant and human, or that a god does not need circulating blood or a central nervous system! Rather, Mr. Modi invented a plastic surgeon to perform an operation to connect the two interspecies body parts. This is precisely the imagination of Hindu nationalism that is both fascinating and significant—science and technology and their practitioners mediate mythological and divine worlds. Even gods need doctors (Subramaniam, 2019)! The supremacy of an ancient Hindu civilization is a potent backdrop to events unfolding on the ground during the pandemic. The government does not cede the ground of expertise solely to epidemiologists or medical experts; rather we see that the government plays a central role in mediating science and medicine through the claims of Vedic science and medicine. It is this melding of the past and the present that so characterizes the unfolding of science and expertise in India.

The unfolding of COVID-19 in India, is thus not the familiar "western" COVID-19 failure story brought on by a hostility towards science. Unlike Christian fundamentalists, Hindu nationalists are not opposed to science. Quite the contrary. Indeed, India has embraced scientific epidemiology and followed global protocols, often more vigorously than other nations. As a modern nation, India claims a cutting-edge scientific profile—in biotechnology, renewable energy, and aerospace (Nature, 2015). It is a nuclear power with a robust military arsenal. But, and this is key—modern science is not all that constitutes "science" in contemporary India. In addition to global scientific protocols, the Indian government and Indian popular culture have enthusiastically promoted Vedic science *as* modern science. Indeed, Mr. Modi has championed India's indigenous medical systems (IMS). Once in power, he elevated IMS as a separate Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) ministry, including a new minister of state charged with promoting IMS. In the first 3 years, 64 AYUSH hospitals were inaugurated across the country, and he has called for private companies to invest in Ayurveda and find "medicines which can, like allopathy, give immediate relief to people" (Times of India, 2017). He has also sought to allow practitioners of Ayurveda and traditional Indian system to prescribe allopathic drugs after passing a "bridge course" (Times of India, 2018). Thus, the constant blurring of the boundaries between ancient Vedic science and modern science is significant in the circulations and consolidation of Hindu nationalism in Corona times. In particular, Mr. Modi and his cult of personality have played a significant role in mobilizing the nation, while consolidating Hindu nationalism.

I should make very clear that "Vedic" science and medicine here as broad terms and by definition are *not* necessarily antiscience. Indeed, significant ideas of western science and medicine were appropriated from nonwestern civilizations (including India) through centuries of colonial extraction and exploitation. Furthermore, for centuries, many medical systems in India have thrived alongside allopathy. These indigenous systems are vital and vibrant parts of India, and in need of investment and innovation. There is a vibrant literature on the indigenous foundations of science and modernity in India. In many ways, the revival of ancient India is a real moment of opportunity to challenge the colonial roots of modern medicine. Take the case of Ayurveda as a system of medicine. It is an ancient and well-developed system, grounded in distinct epistemologies, methodologies and methods that are distinct and irreconcilable to those of western medicine. These differences are exciting and sources of insight for an anticolonial science. They provide spaces for imagining new modes of knowledge formation freed from their western colonial roots. And yet, and this is significant, it is not the possibilities of new more anticolonial, liberatory, or indigenous knowledge that contemporary Hindu nationalism promotes. For example, efforts such as Ayurgenomics attempt to reframe Ayurveda as a 21st century modern medical system fully compatible with modern genetics and modern pharmaceuticals. Recent trends have worked to integrate genomics insights to create individually driven, personalized medicine—to augment western medicine rather than offer new remedies (Aggarwal et al., 2010; Prasher et al., 2016, 2017). What we have witnessed is a fundamental revision of Ayurveda

from a medical cosmology that embraced "mysticism, superhuman capacities, intangible agencies, and mysterious therapeutic powers," (Mukharji, 2016) into a system molded on the knowledge systems of the west. Despite the lofty claims of an ancient civilization, in practice, Hindu nationalists have reduced Vedic science to a handmaiden to western medical systems of knowledge, a facile system compatible to the aspirations of a neoliberal and increasingly corporatized state. This, among others, is a reminder that the goals are less about decolonization but rather a consolidation of power. And we see this playing out again through the pandemic. In what follows, I trace the unfolding pandemic and the government's actions.

First, let us consider the early days of the pandemic, and the initial actions by the government. At first, when the pandemic broke out, government decisions were top-down. None have been more consequential than the imposition of a 3-week national curfew by Mr. Modi late in March 2020, dramatically announced with a 4-h notice! This fateful action was particularly significant for millions of India's migrant (internal migration within India) workers left stranded in cities and India's informal labor market (80% of India's workforce). For many, physical distancing meant hunger, and in innumerable instances, the lockdown was enforced with great brutality (Abi-Habib and Yasir, 2020). This action was followed with innumerable cases of rumors that there were special buses and trains back to their villages resulting in throngs of panicked migrants utterly disregarding lockdown rules (Economic Times, 2020). Through the lockdown and after, we have seen that rather than uniting the country, the Hindu nationalists are solidifying their agenda. We have seen a rise in false rumors about Muslim businesses (Ellis-Petersen & Azizur, 2020), claims of it being a Chinese virus or being spread by Muslims (Abi-Habib & Yasir, 2020), violence against those allegedly eating meat (Pandey, 2020), and even violence against health care workers (Aravind, 2020). For a more detailed discussion see Subramaniam and Bhattacharyya (2020).

Despite the hurried decision and the many cases of rule breaking, COVID-19 numbers in India remained relatively low in the early months (The Week, 2020). Many theories were proposed—India's population is unusually young compared to other countries, the heat is a deterrent, the mandatory BCG vaccination against tuberculosis in India may provide immunity against the coronavirus, and finally the theory of innate immunity that made Indians exceptionally resistant to the virus (Rammohan & Mohamed, 2020). Indians applauded their politicians for this quick and brave action, and there was an upbeat and congratulatory tone in many newspapers early in the days of the virus. Of course, the rest is history. As predicted by many epidemiologists, once the curfew regulations were lifted, numbers soared. Newspapers and television news channels chronicled the horrendous plights of the migrants who returned to their villages, many walking their way back, hungry and dehydrated, some dying on the way. With migrants reaching home, the virus has now reached every corner of India.

This was not inevitable. First, there were some epidemiologists in India who were advising against the western model of a national and total curfew. Many have argued that in a country with widespread poverty, and without national resources to feed the poor during such a long curfew period, and a poor health care infrastructure, following the western model was not appropriate. It helped and protected the middle class who could "order in" their supplies into their gated communities, but was devastating to the poor who were forced to leave their homes as they tried to make a living and garner resources to feed their families. The migrants also could have been housed and been taken care of in cities, or provided safe transportation to their homes early in the pandemic before its spread, thus preventing them carrying the virus to remote villages on their return. For example, a leading Indian epidemiologist, who is also advising the government among many other experts, Jayaprakash Muliyil argues that instead of the draconian lockdown policy, "we should focus on two things. The first is a reverse quarantine for elderly people—where the old and the vulnerable are quarantined from others to protect them. The second is to put all our money in hospitals, and provide oxygen for patients. That manoeuvre [sic] will save lives" (Pulla, 2020). He is also particularly concerned about rural villages, which is about 66% of India's population, where health care facilities, including mechanisms to ascertain causes of death remain poor. It is striking that the government went with a policy that doubled down on a western model that helped India's rich, rather than models that could have helped India's vast population. Not surprisingly, as many predicted, while the 3-week curfew postponed the inevitable, the inevitable did eventually come to pass. At present, India has the second highest number of

COVID-19 cases and the third highest death toll. Many predict that India is likely to top both lists because of its large population.

While the number of infections is high, it is important to note that the mortality rate remains low. Many reasons have been cited—population of India is young and perhaps there is inherent immunity in the population. But there is widespread doubt on the official mortality rates emerging from India (Pulla, 2020). Indeed, India is not alone here. Suspicion of data has proven to be a hallmark of authoritarian regimes, and COVID-19 is engulfed in a world of questionable data—intentional and unintentional. Rumor and rumor mills are rife with alarming scenarios of much higher mortality rates. As we have seen the world over, COVID-19 is not a leveler where all individuals are equally susceptible. Rather, it is the poor and marginalized (by race, caste, and class hierarchies) that have been unequally affected (Chauhan, 2020).

Second, starting with early in the pandemic, there were many success stories at the local level in India: the state of Kerala (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020), city of Bhilwara (Mukherjee, 2020), and even the site many worried about the most—the largest slum in Mumbai, Dharavi (Biswas, 2020). Each of these (among many others) offered good lessons and strategies on how critical local and on-the-ground efforts were to contain the virus. These local efforts were targeted efforts—shaped by local infection rates, testing and contact tracing, rather than a wholesale curfew for the entire population. The point of the 3-week national curfew was to buy time to put in place efforts that would mitigate the pandemic once the economy opened up. But the efforts were completely inadequate and we have watched the numbers rise each day at alarming rates.

So why then are people so complacent? Why has Mr. Modi's popularity remained remarkably high? Here we need to understand the unfolding theater of COVID-19 and the central role of Hindu nationalism and its media savvy chief have played during the pandemic. In his tenure as Prime Minister, Mr. Modi has emerged as a charismatic leader who has managed his media presence astutely. A good example is his visit to meditate in a cave near the holy Kedarnath shrine in Uttarakhand just before the national elections in 2019. Photographs released showed a serious, energetic, somber Mr. Modi briskly trekking to the austere cave, and then we saw images released of him as a saffron clad monk in a rustic cave meditating with eyes closed. Of course, subsequent media stories revealed that this was a 5-star cave replete with multiple cameras, lighting, and many modern amenities including electricity, drinking water, and food on request (Scroll, 2019). Opposition parties protested that this was a pre-election gimmick that flouted election laws, but the election commission did nothing.

One sees similar media-savvy actions during COVID-19 times. Unlike some other leaders, Mr. Modi always appears in a mask, and we have seen images of his cabinet meetings with ministers all wearing masks, and sitting in physically distanced formations interacting remotely with state leaders on television screens. The images highlight a tech savvy movement, a hallmark of Hindu nationalism. In "A Viral Education," Debjani Bhattacharyya and I make this point by analyzing two key media events that Mr. Modi called for early in the pandemic (Subramaniam and Bhattacharyya, 2020). The first on March 22, 2020, a 1-day "Janata Curfew" (People's curfew) where at the end of the day long curfew, people were to come out to their balconies at 5 PM in order to "Taali, Thali Bajao" (clap hands and bang metal plates). People followed the advice enthusiastically, posting on social media countless images of joyous throngs violating curfew rules. Government ministers were filmed chanting "Carona Go! Go Carona," and "Chinese Virus go back." (PTI, 2020) In a second speech midway through the 3-week lockdown, he addressed the nation asking them on to turn off their lights for 9 min at 9 PM on April 5, and "diya jalao" that is, light a lamp (or candle or flashlight). Mr. Modi for his part asked the nation to come together in solidarity, a worthy goal to unite the nation. However, as we chronicle it, an examination of popular social media reveals a different story. They were abuzz interpreting Mr. Modi's actions as Vedic wisdom. Why the number 9? For example, some argued that Mr. Modi was following mystical theories of astrology and numerology in his choice of time and actions (Jha, 2020). Again, we saw the blurring boundaries of modern science and Vedic science. Mr. Modi always remained the serious leader, never actually promoting any claim himself. His speeches, while motivational, are opaque and evasive on important details such as the government's preparedness and response (Kumar, 2020). The former President of the Indian Medical Association explained that Mr. Modi was mobilizing the scientific "principle of collective

consciousness" to strengthen the ACE2 receptors of the lung (Staff, 2020a, 2020b). As this quote reveals, it is critical to note that the enthusiastic throngs supporting these actions include affluent, educated, and urban citizens. Despite the religio-scientific turn in modern India, there has been little innovation of India's scientific infrastructure—Western or Vedic. The government has towed the line of western epidemiological models that favor the rich rather than listening to epidemiologists and activists who remind is that it is critical to support life *and* livelihood.

Could the government have done something different? Most certainly. Befitting its claims of being a global superpower, it could have listened to its experts that advised a model better suited to the Indian political, economic, and social context, one that acknowledged the critical importance of health *and* the economy. A national lockdown with a 4-h notice helped the affluent, not the poor and marginalized. Rather than anodyne prescriptions of India's greatness, Mr. Modi could have highlighted the nation's religious diversity and the need to look out for "all" of one's neighbors. Mr. Modi could have highlighted the critical role of healthcare workers, and why everyone ought to support and celebrate them in our midst. Rather than ignore the important and large migrant workforce, the government could have recognized and attended to their needs—housing and feeding them, and sending them early and safely back home before they contracted the virus in the chaotic throngs that emerged in the cities. Mr. Modi could have called for unity, a politics of solidarity with India's minorities so they were not fearful of government actions. Mr. Modi could have used his considerable charisma to explain to the populace the mechanisms of the coronavirus. Simple precautions—such as masks and social distancing—go a long way in reducing the transmission of the virus. Yet Mr. Modi in his charismatic addresses said little of these details. In many critical ways, the government's voice and silence reveals its priorities.

The blurring boundaries of science and pseudoscience are all around India's COVID-19 response. From symbolic offerings and drinking of the sacred cow urine "gaumutra" by the All India Hindu Mahasabha (Irish, 2020), to worship of new religious deities such as Corona Mata (Sen, 2020). The government's Ministry of AYUSH have issued various advisories during the pandemic that include dubious prevention measures and prophylactics to the virus, such as cow urine, ginger, and turmeric. We have also seen a plethora of slick infographics circulate through India's social media landscape of WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, that champion the wonders of Ayurveda and cowpathy, mixing alternative healing practices with quackery. The influential Baba Ramdev who has utilized the pandemic to tout ancient Vedic knowledge and promote his company Pathanjali, promoted a new cure for the virus—launching Coronil and Swasari—ostensibly ayurvedic cures with 100% favorable results (Sen, 2020). As with many such products, they come with scientific claims of randomized studies, and clinically controlled trials. But once details of the poorly conducted experiments are revealed, scientists find the claims grossly misleading. Throughout the pandemic, Mr. Modi's government has continued to promote Ayurveda, homeopathy and practices such as drinking water with holy basil (Chandna, 2020). The Union Minister for health has claimed that Prince Charles was cured of COVID-19 using Ayurveda (Press Trust of India, 2020).

While some of these claims may be laughable to some, what is striking is the blurring of boundaries between well-established science and medical knowledge, alternative medical practices, and blatant quackery. How is a citizen supposed to distinguish between well-established information, misinformation, and disinformation, especially when these come from the halls of government, all touting the power of the ancient Hindu sciences as modern science?

In part the blurring of boundaries is deliberate, as the mainstream political apparatus, media, and the judiciary have all been coopted into an unquestioned support for Hindu nationalism. Indeed, with Mr. Modi winning with an even more resounding majority in 2019 than he did in the earlier election, we are seeing clear signs of the success of Hindu nationalism. Even opposition parties are afraid to embrace a secular agenda, and instead promote a Hindutva-lite message. We are seeing a brazen march towards a Hindu India, with actions such as abrogating provisions of Article 370 that gave Kashmir special status, removing Article 35A from the constitution that gave special rights and privileges to those in Kashmir, the recent Supreme court verdict allowing the building a temple in Ayodhya where the Babri Masjid stood, and the passing of the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) that differentially targets and treats Muslim immigrants from neighboring countries. As Debjani Bhattacharyya and I show, the

government's increasing reliance of technology has been appropriated towards increasing authoritarian ends. For example, the government issued a phone app, Arogya Setu ("Bridge to Health") that helps track COVID-19 cases. As we argue, the program was launched with little privacy protections. There was no information on how the data would be used, how long or where the data would be stored or who would have access to it. Yet in the first few months over a hundred million people had downloaded it. As we argue, India's digital landscape is overlaid on an existing caste matrix and an ecology of sectarian hatred. In practice, this translated into poorer neighborhoods and slums being more heavily surveilled as "high risk," and people tracked if they move between zones. Many of the high risk "red" zones are in Muslim and Dalit neighborhoods. Thus, a public health tool was transformed into creating and enforcing ghettos of the sick. As scholars have long warned us, medical geographies are also caste geographies in India. Contactless human interaction and segregated "red zones" only consolidate caste prejudice (Bhattacharyya & Subramaniam, 2020).

Despite the hope that pandemics bring unity, peace, and cooperation, history teaches us that it is rarely the case. In his famous *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*, the invaluable P. Sainath chronicles how the political economy of tragedies such as droughts further oppresses the marginalized and rural poor (Sainath, 1996). We are seeing much the same during the pandemic. COVID-19 has offered a platform of distraction through which there has been a consolidation of authoritarian actions. We have seen the targeting of minorities, and the marginalization of the poor. We are watching the active criminalizing of dissent for anyone who challenges the government (Kumbamu, 2020). With the availability of social media and video footage from phones, the violence against minorities, Dalits and the poor are heart wrenching and appalling. While India has long been a poor country, and stratification of caste and religion have long enduring history, the open the brazen campaigns of hate are striking. A leadership that consolidates the rich diversity that is India—even in rhetoric—is singularly absent in contemporary India. The change in tone, voice, and message is one of the most chilling shifts as Hindu nationalism grows increasingly authoritarian and ignores the targeted violence on India's streets.

One of the most striking images I have seen in India's unstoppable march towards a Hindu Rashtra was the inauguration of the temple in Ayodhya, recently sanctified by the Supreme Court. We saw images and a video of a make shift tent where the ceremony took place, masked priests—male and female—sitting in a safe physically distanced circle as they conducted and consecrated the first brick that would signify a new era, a revived Hindu Rashtra. At the head of the configuration was the patriarch of the country, Mr. Modi who presided as head of state and head of the Hindu family. As Mukul Kesavan's notes in his column *Against Forgetting*, "The *bhoomi pujan* in Ayodhya with the prime minister of India presiding was an important moment in the political evolution of the Republic. Narendra Modi had a double role. He was both *jajman* and *karta*: the Hindu client who had commissioned the ceremony on behalf of the Hindu Undivided Family, now known as India, of which he was the regnant patriarch" (Kesavan, 2020). In 2025 the RSS will celebrate its centenary. From being banned thrice by the country for its militancy, it now has the country firmly in its grip. Its faithful leader, Mr. Modi once banned from entry into the United States, now is welcomed by the Hindu diaspora in jubilant mega events. It should bring a chilling realization that the much-awaited *Hindu Rashtra* and its patriarch are upon us.

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