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VIEWPOINT

Hindu nationalism and the ‘saffronisation of the public sphere’: an interview with Christophe Jaffrelot

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

This in-depth interview with Professor Christophe Jaffrelot – one of the world’s most distinguished, prolific, and versatile scholars of contemporary South Asia – focuses on his first area of expertise: Hindutva and the Hindu nationalist movement. In conversation with Dr Edward Anderson, Jaffrelot considers the development of Hindutva in India up to the present day, in particular scrutinising ways in which it has evolved over the past three decades. The discussion explores the diversity of Hindu nationalism and how the movement and ideology have spread beyond the purview of the RSS into various new spaces and normalised, vernacular expressions of ‘neo-Hindutva’. The interview also reflects on recent tensions involving vigilantism and the banalisation of Islamophobia and anti-Dalit violence, and considers what Hindutva’s current proliferation will mean for the future of Indian democracy.

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Nationalism; Hindutva; Hindu nationalism; Indian politics; Democracy

\textbf{Introduction}

Professor Christophe Jaffrelot is widely regarded as one of the world’s leading scholars of contemporary South Asia. His numerous publications, in both English and French, have shed light on democracy and nationalism, Pakistani politics, Muslims in India, Dalit politics and caste, Ambedkar and untouchability, terrorism and violence, and electoral politics at the local, regional, and national level. But it is the subject of Hindutva and the Hindu nationalist movement, on which he wrote his doctoral thesis and first monograph – the ground-breaking \textit{The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics} (1996) – that Jaffrelot first made a mark. He has continued to conduct research and publish on Hindutva throughout his career and, to this day, is considered a preeminent expert on the subject.

His research on Hindu nationalism spans a substantial period from the ‘proto-Hindutva’ Hindu reformists of late-colonial India, through the formative years of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the evolution of its \textit{panivar} (family) of affiliated organisations, up to the most recent developments in the formal political realm and the Bharatiya Janata Party’s rise to national power. \textit{The Hindu Nationalist Movement} – perhaps the single most important monograph on Hindu nationalism – achieves a rare feat of being forensic and richly detailed, while simultaneously overarching and panoramic. It has been cited more than 1,120 times to date. The work demonstrates remarkable levels of multidisciplinarity and is substantially empirically grounded, with access to significant individuals and elusive archives.

In the book, Jaffrelot showed how a ‘collective Hindu consciousness’ and nationalist identity were developed, often discursively vis-à-vis a threatening colonial, Christian or Muslim ‘Other’, and deployed for political gain through ethno-religious mobilisations.
Jaffrelot’s work illuminates Hindu nationalism’s thick layers of ideological and institutional entrenchment, cultivated over many decades by cadres across the country, that enabled the proliferation of Hindutva and its efforts to establish India as a Hindu rashtra (nation-state). This has helped us to understand the challenges to secularism and pluralism that reverberated across India at the end of the twentieth century, how they emerged, and why they remain a dominant force in the political landscape of India today. In its great breadth and scale, Jaffrelot’s work on Hindutva has elucidated the Sangh Parivar network, Narendra Modi and the recent ascendance of the BJP, communal riots, various mobilisations from Ram Setu to Ramjanmabhoomi, and the Hindutva of the Indian diaspora. This expertise on Hindu nationalism is located within, and informed by, a much broader understanding of the region; according to another leading scholar of Indian politics, Thomas Blom Hansen, Jaffrelot is ‘one of the most prolific, insightful, and deeply informed analysts of Indian politics and society’ (2011).

Jaffrelot’s career has involved positions in France, Britain, the United States, and India, but his enduring professional relationship has been with the Paris Institute of Political Studies (widely known as Sciences Po), where he completed his PhD in 1991. Today, Jaffrelot is based at Sciences Po’s Centre for Studies in International Relations (where he was Director from 2000 to 2008), and he is now Director of Research at the National Centre for Scientific Research. He is also Professor of Indian Politics and Sociology at the King’s India Institute, King’s College London, a scholar with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and has been a visiting professor at Columbia, Yale, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, and Montreal universities.

Few academics are as prolific: he has published six monographs, co-authored two more, edited and co-edited eighteen volumes, and produced an enormous corpus of more than 200 journal articles, chapters in edited volumes, edited special issues, encyclopaedia entries, and working papers. Jaffrelot also writes a regular column in The Indian Express, and is a contributing editor at The Caravan, alongside editorial responsibilities for a number of book series and academic journals. His remarkable level of productivity shows no sign of slowing down, with two forthcoming edited volumes, and three monographs nearing completion: books on the rise of the Sangh Parivar, the Emergency, and Saffron ‘Modernity’ in India: Narendra Modi and his Experiment with Gujarat, which is scheduled to be published by Hurst in July 2019. His long-time publisher, Michael Dwyer, told me that working with Jaffrelot for more than two decades was ‘a highlight of my publishing career’. Dwyer added: ‘There are few if any sharper minds devoted to the study of modern India and Pakistan, whose history and politics he has illuminated in a series of prodigiously well researched volumes. Nor should his role as a mentor to a generation of scholars working on South Asia be overlooked’.

This interview was conducted in Paris, in June 2017, and then through correspondence in the months following. We discuss, in depth, the development of Hindutva in India up to the present day, in particular scrutinising ways in which it has evolved over the period during which Jaffrelot has worked on Indian politics. In the conversation we explore the diversity of Hindu nationalism and how the movement and ideology have spread beyond the purview of the RSS into various new spaces and normalised, vernacular expressions of ‘neo-Hindutva’. The interview also reflects on recent tensions involving vigilantism and the banalisation of Islamophobia and anti-Dalit violence, and considers what Hindutva’s current proliferation will mean for the future of Indian democracy.

**Interview**

Edward Anderson (EA)
Christophe Jaffrelot (CJ)

EA: May I begin by asking you about how you became interested in India and South Asia, and in particular why you were first drawn to Hindu nationalism. What was it that made you start working on this topic in the 1980s?
CJ: I was first introduced to India by my philosophy teacher when I was still in high school; she was well versed in philosophies of India, in Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism. When I joined my university, Sciences Po, I had to find a common ground between this interest and social sciences. I began with the social religious reform movements: how the encounter between the East and the West, so to speak, between India and Britain, or Europe at large, took place in the nineteenth century. I started by working on the Brahmo Samaj, Ram Mohan Roy, and then I embarked on the following movements that are more revivalist than reformist, and focused on the Arya Samaj and Dayananda Saraswati.

I was doing this research in the mid-80s – I went to India for the first time in 1984 and I wrote a dissertation on these movements in 1985 – when the Ayodhya movement started. I was doing archival work while in the street demonstrations were gaining momentum. So I decided to write the complete history, from Arya Samaj to BJP. But I had to find fieldwork – as a political scientist you need to do empirical research on the ground. Paul Brass told me that in Brighton, at Sussex University, I would meet someone who knew a lot about the Jana Sangh and BJP: Bruce Graham. I went there and met Bruce, and Jim Manor who was at the Institute of Development Studies at that time, and we had a long chat. They decided, so to speak, that I should focus on Madhya Pradesh, because that was the state that was a stronghold of the Sangh Parivar for a long time and, compared to Uttar Pradesh or Rajasthan, had been studied relatively little.

I continued to work with Bruce throughout my PhD. Bruce was my real supervisor. He was fluent in French; he was in fact writing a book on the socialist party during the Fourth Republic, and I helped him find some sources in France during that time. He read the successive drafts of all the chapters of my PhD. I have kept all the letters he used to type, on a typewriter; long letters, single spaced, ten pages, commenting upon each chapter of my PhD. That went on for three or four years, and he came for the viva and was part of the jury. The book he had written on the subject (Graham 1990) was published just before I submitted my own PhD in 1991. Bruce also introduced me to Christopher Hurst and Michael Dwyer, who has remained my publisher since 1996. Then, after so many years working on Hindu nationalism I was tired of the topic and I decided to move on and look at Ambedkar and low caste politics (Jaffrelot 2003, 2005).

EA: You have covered a remarkable range of subjects in your career so far. There are few scholars whose oeuvre touches on so many aspects of politics not just in India, but South Asia, and so prolifically. But you have always continued to work on Hindu nationalism in one way or another, and kept on writing on it, in a way that others who produced significant work on Hindu nationalism in that period did not necessarily do. What was it that kept you going?

CJ: As early as the mid-1980s, I was absolutely convinced that this force was on the rise and had the potential of taking over. I was systematically told by my colleagues: ‘No way!’ Even after BJP took over in 1998 and finally lost in 2004, so many people told me: ‘You saw, it was just a moment, it is over. Done.’ Since I had researched the grassroots movement and had seen the network of the Sangh Parivar taking root, and disseminating, even infiltrating institutions, I was convinced that this movement had a longer perspective. And that is one of the reasons why I insisted on following what they were doing, even when I was focusing on other topics.

EA: That is very interesting. To an extent you can identify two ‘spikes’ in research on Hindutva: one is late-1980s to early-1990s, around the lead up to the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the aftermath, the other is around the time of the first BJP government and the Gujarat Riots. And there was quite a large dip, and it is only just now that it is coming back. Many people, even less than a decade ago, felt that Hindu nationalism was in decline. But, in a way, it was. The BJP had just lost a second general election in a row, the number of RSS shakhas was falling …

CJ: The last sentence of my 1996 book was ‘of course they are out of power, they may not be in power again, but they are so active elsewhere …’. If you focus only on the BJP and forget the rest of the Sangh Parivar, then you see only the tip of the iceberg. That is where the strength of the Sangh is, in this networking, in this infiltration.

EA: You describe yourself as a political scientist, but there is lots of ethnography in your work, and lots of history as well. How important do you think this multidisciplinary approach is to studying Hindu nationalism?

CJ: Not only Hindu nationalism. History plays a huge role in my understanding of Indian politics: that is true of Hindu nationalism, of low caste politics, of Muslim politics, and so on. Anthropology is also important. You need it for making sense of the categories of the discourse on politics. Caste identity and religion matter so much …

Political scientists working on India have to be at the crossroads of disciplines. And we have also to be at the interface of methodologies – mixed methods are highly recommended anyway, but in particular for
these kinds of topics, because you need the data. For that, I need to build my own data. The first database I built was about the caste background of the Jana Sangh and BJP MLAs [Members of the Legislative Assembly] of Madhya Pradesh. That was the initial building block of the huge enterprise Sciences Po and the Trivedi Centre for Political Data at Ashoka University are now completing. But this quantitative work has to be done alongside ethnography. I have done hundreds of interviews, trying to emulate the founders of the discipline (the Rudolphs, Paul Brass, etc.). Because that is how you learn what words mean, and how you understand the way people act in the field. This is something I learnt in the late-1980s/early-1990s when I did fieldwork with Jean-Luc Chambard, an anthropologist who, since the 1950s, had visited every year a village in Madhya Pradesh. I've discovered rural India in this village. My best Indian memories, perhaps.

So in terms of methodology, I think data and interviews, plus interdisciplinarity, are key. And I am a bit worried on that front. Because I see American political science taking us in a different direction. If we want to understand identity politics (not an unimportant dimension of politics today!) we cannot rely on quantitative data only and certainly not on the existing data. We have to do fieldwork and build our data according to the cognitive categories we have identified in the field. Otherwise, political science becomes irrelevant. At best, you study the few things a limited methodology gives you access to. The methodology overdetermines the objects of your study.

EA: Perhaps part of the reason why multidisciplinarity is particularly important in studying Hindu nationalism is that there are so many challenges. The data is often not there, or is very hard to get hold of, making a purely political science approach very difficult. But for the anthropologist, access to conduct ethnography is often very challenging (particular with certain people and at certain times). And when researching using historical methods the archive isn’t necessarily there, or again very hard to access. So in this sense, Hindu nationalism is inherently quite unsuited to being studied through a monodisciplinary approach.

CJ: It is true. To write a history of the RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh], there are not many sources available. The movements’ newspapers and journals are not easily available (Sapru House was the only place where I found the collection of the Organiser since 1947). RSS people did not benefit from the legitimacy of Congressmen, socialists and even communists. As a result, they are not part of the series of oral history transcripts that is available in Teen Murti at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. Private papers are few: no Sarsanghchalak [Supreme Leader of the RSS] has made his papers available and for the early years of the Sangh I had to consult, at Teen Murti, the papers of B.S. Moonje, one of Hedgewar’s associates. For the following period, the best thing to do was to conduct interviews with old timers like Vasant Rao Oke, Kushabhau Thakre, Bhai Mahavir, Nanaji Deshmukh, K.R. Malkani, H.V. Seshadri, and of course A.B. Vajpayee and L.K. Advani. I met dozens of them.

EA: As we all know, your engagement with Hindu nationalism has spanned both the ‘Saffron Wave’ of the late-1980s and early-1990s, and the current resurgence leading up to and since Narendra Modi’s election in 2014. How has Hindutva of the past few years replicated that seen around the Ramjanmabhoomi mobilisations at the end of the twentieth century, and that of the period of the first NDA government? And in what ways are we seeing new phenomena?

CJ: The new phenomena we are seeing today are of two kinds. Some of them reflect merely a change in degree, not in kind. This is true of most of the attacks against the minorities. They were there before. They have ‘simply’ gained momentum, become more systematic and banal because of the post-2014 political dispensation that allows the rise of vigilantes, like gau rakshaks (self-proclaimed protectors of the cow). This lumpsenisation of the Sangh Parivar did not start in 2014; it harks back to the formation of the Bajrang Dal in 1984, in the framework of the Ayodhya movement. Similarly, saffron-clad figures were there before: BJP had half a dozen of them as MPs in the late-1990s. But, of course, never before has one of them been made Chief Minister, like Yogi Adityanath. These developments are not new; their magnitude is new. But they could have well been anticipated by looking at the situation in BJP-rulled states like Gujarat in the 2000s.

The second set of new phenomena which could not be anticipated so easily pertain to the power structure with the Sangh Parivar, and therefore India! Traditionally, the BJP was ruled by a group of people who reported to the RSS and when there were tensions, the latter prevailed over the former (see the way Advani was eased out after his 2009 defeat). Today, Narendra Modi and Amit Shah concentrate power in their hands, at the expense of collegiality and, to some extent, the RSS. In that sense, the Sangh Parivar has changed. It may be a Modi-related aberration that will get normalised; it may be a deeper transformation reflecting the metamorphosis of politics, in India like elsewhere, due to the rise of a populist repertoire relying on new techniques of communication which enable the leaders to relate to the people directly and make parties almost redundant.
EA: What then is the current status of the relationship between RSS and BJP? You have written about conflict during the time of Vajpayee stemming from disagreement over economic policies.

CJ: Even before the Vajpayee government some tensions between the BJP and its predecessor, the Jana Sangh, had appeared. In the early 1970s, for instance, Balraj Madhok, the President of the then RSS-supported party, the Jana Sangh, fell out of grace in Nagpur [the headquarters of the RSS in Maharashtra] because he was too independently-minded (and probably too self-centred). He was eased out and Vajpayee became the party leader. In the early 1980s, the RSS did not endorse Vajpayee’s mottos, ‘Gandhian socialism’ and ‘Positive Secularism’. In fact, the RSS supported Congress in several places in the 1984 elections, but gradually marginalised Vajpayee’s views by promoting L.K. Advani. Subsequently, Advani was publicly criticised by the then RSS chief, K.S. Sudarshan, after BJP lost the 2009 elections, and he had to step down. These episodes show that RSS eventually prevails over its’ party’s strategy. But Nagpur does not interfere in the daily life of its offshoots – be it the BJP or any other component of the Sangh Parivar. Micromanagement is seen as counterproductive since the pracharaks (full-time cadres) dispatched to direct them are supposed to know better their domain of expertise.

EA: Has this changed in recent years?

CJ: Yes and no – so far as this rather secret matter can be interpreted. What was new in 2014 was the magnitude of the RSS support to the BJP. You had to go back to 1977 to see such a massive mobilisation. The RSS wanted the BJP to win because they thought they could not afford a third defeat, especially when Congress leaders were after ‘Hindu terrorists’ since the Malegaon case. But my impression is that the RSS did not necessarily want Modi to win. There were some tensions for the reasons I’ve already mentioned. For instance, in 2014, Nagpur was not in favour of appointing Shah at the helm of BJP in order to retain its influence over the party. RSS leaders apparently claimed that the Prime Minister and the President of the BJP could not come from the same state. To no avail: Modi’s support was stronger and Shah had achieved such a clean sweep in UP that he was clearly legitimate as a party chief. However, these issues have been solved and it seems that both sides look at their relations as a win-win, after RSS got some of the things it demanded.

Amit Shah went to the RSS headquarters in Nagpur even before his appointment was ratified by the BJP’s National Council and he was told ‘not to allow Modi government to overshadow the party’ and reminded about the ‘Sangh’s Hindutva agenda’ which included the building of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the abolition of Article 370 [that provides autonomy to the state of Jammu and Kashmir], and the making of a Uniform Civil Code. Subsequently, the RSS took part in the formation of the new National Executive of the BJP. As a result Ram Madhav, who was spokesman of the RSS since 2003, was appointed at this Committee.

Similar developments took place at the government level where mechanisms have been introduced for ‘better coordination’ between some ministers and the Sangh Parivar. As a result, in the meeting which took place in October 2014 with five ministers and Ministers of States in charge of Agriculture, Labour, Power and Information and broadcasting, there were representatives of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Bharatiya Kisan Union, Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Laghu Udyog Bharati, and Sahakar Bharati. Similar meetings between other ministers (including Smriti Irani, the then Minister of Human Resource Development) and other offshoots of the RSS have followed. Already, the RSS has set up a consultative body, the Bharatiya Shiksha Niti Ayog (BSNA) to ‘Indianise’ the education system. Among the most prominent members of the BSNA was Dinanath Batra, the man responsible for the pulping of Wendy Doniger’s book on Hinduism in 2014 (Doniger 2009; Pennington 2016). There are RSS full time cadres in the team of many ministers whose portfolio matters the most for the RSS: HRD, home, defence … Also, Narendra Modi and Mohan Bhagwat – who are the same age, and it matters in the RSS – have a good equation. At the state level, the osmosis between the administration and the RSS is sometimes more systematic – like in Haryana for instance. Beyond Ministers, the RSS has been allowed to relate to civil servants. RSS Sarkaryavah [General Secretary], Bhaiyaji Joshi was welcomed by the BSF [Border Security Force] in-charge officer when he visited Tinibigha Corridor in Cooch Behar for instance.

The RSS has also penetrated the state apparatus thanks to the appointment of several governors – like in the late 1990s – who replaced the Congress appointees in a few weeks. For instance, Kaptan Singh Solanki, a former RSS office-holder in Madhya Pradesh has become the governor of Haryana – a state whose Chief Minister himself is from the RSS. Last but not least, RSS ideologues have been appointed at the helm of research and educational institutions, sites of power that the RSS values a lot because of their capacity to somewhat reshape the Indian mind. Prof. Y. Sudershan Rao had been appointed chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research, for instance.

EA: Has the relationship between the media and Hindu nationalism changed over the years you have been working on Hindutva? In your scholarship you have considered how, over the course of the twentieth
CJ: I agree and there is much at stake there! The risk is that gradually, the education system will start inculcating some greater danger than others. History is a case in point because of the way the deviant. This technique is very old – M.F. Husain fled India because of militias, and then because of the state (that did not protect him) – and you find it elsewhere (in Russia for instance). But it has gained momentum in 2014 when it became clear to the vigilante groups that the new rulers would not ask the police to intervene against them – at least not as much as before.

EA: Related to this, I would like to ask you about the relationship between Hindu nationalism, academic spaces, and freedom of expression. As with the media, the Hindu nationalist movement has also been involved in various forms of ‘parallel’ pedagogy: setting up networks of schools, research institutes, think tanks, and so on to propagate Hindutva counter-narratives to the more dominant strands of secularist, and often leftist, scholarship. But in many senses I think we can identify a shift from this creation of a parallel discourse, to, in more recent years, a focus on influencing ‘mainstream’ academic spaces. Some of the most well-established, leading scholarly institutions have become battlegrounds for Hindu nationalist claims to the state. Would you agree with this analysis and, if so, what might be the impact of this shift from outsider to insider?

CJ: I agree and there is much at stake there! The risk is that gradually, the education system will start inculcating an ‘indigenous’ type of knowledge – not social sciences as we still know them. Some disciplines are in greater danger than others. History is a case in point because of the way the ‘Vedic era’ and the medieval era may be taught one day. But there is nothing new in the Hindu nationalists’ modus operandi! Islamists and Christian fundamentalists have questioned the modern rationality in the same way. Their impact on the public universities of Pakistan has been quite severe since Zia’s Islamisation policy for instance.

Colleagues in India have increasingly been under attack because what they said or what they wrote displeased new hegemonic forces. Interestingly, like the Muslim herdsmen who have been lynched by ‘cow protectors’, they were not targeted by the state apparatus, but by vigilantes who are part of the new power structure: the official face of this structure is not misbehaving, but it let others intimidate the deviant. This technique is very old – M.F. Husain fled India because of militias, and then because of the state (that did not protect him) – and you find it elsewhere (in Russia for instance). But it has gained momentum in 2014 when it became clear to the vigilante groups that the new rulers would not ask the police to intervene against them – at least not as much as before.

EA: Online Hindutva is today most infamous for its social media trolls, but the Hindu nationalist movement, globally, has pioneered the use of the internet in forging and expressing political identity since the 1990s. Have online spaces transformed Hindu nationalism, or do they represent a new medium for traditional messages? We know that the BJP have capitalised on social media in a way that most other parties have not managed, but in what ways has this form of mobilisation actually impacted Hindutva, politically or ideologically?

CJ: I don’t think the content of Hindutva has changed but social media have made some difference for two other reasons: first, by allowing trolls or activists to disseminate this ideology anonymously, and therefore more aggressively, second, by enabling them to reach thousands of people across the globe. But Ram Madhav, when he resorted first to social media in a rather pioneering manner used it within the Sangh Parivar because WhatsApp and other applications are very effective for group communication. Let me emphasise the role of the army of trolls the Sangh Parivar is paying for: they indulge in such abusive language and intimidation that the atmosphere they create prepares the ground in a banal manner for physical attacks, including lynchings. It’s one of the facets of today’s banalisation of evil.

EA: Cow protection has loomed large in politics over the past few years. One of the most shocking elements of the current ‘saffron wave’ is cow vigilantism, with news stories about the lynching of Muslims transporting cattle, or simply ‘allegedly’ selling beef, occurring with frightening frequency. Regional governments, most notably that of Yogi Adityanath in Uttar Pradesh, have further tightened an already heavily regulated meat industry, introducing bans on cow slaughter and shutting down ‘unlicensed’ butchers of the current ‘saffron wave’ is cow vigilantism, with news stories about the lynching of Muslims transporting cattle, or simply ‘allegedly’ selling beef, occurring with frightening frequency. Regional governments, most notably that of Yogi Adityanath in Uttar Pradesh, have further tightened an already heavily regulated meat industry, introducing bans on cow slaughter and shutting down ‘unlicensed’ butchers.
CJ: Yes and no, again. No, because the cow has been the main symbol for mobilising Hindus in history. I am not talking about at the ‘pre-history of communalism’, as Chris Bayly would have said (1985); I am talking about the history of communalism. From the late nineteenth century onwards, when for the first time ideologues tried to mobilise Hindus against Muslims, they singled out the cow as their main symbol. The movement in 1893 was probably the first moment when you have a kind of pan-Indian Hindu mobilisation using the cow as its symbol. There is a very good article by Gyan Pandey (1981), ‘rallying round the cow’, that tells this story. And the RSS continued to do that after independence: the first mass movement that the RSS could organise was in 1952 when a huge petition, gathering thousands of signatures, was taken on bullock carts to Rashtrapati Bhavan. Then of course you have the 1966 movement, when not only the Jana Sangh but the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which had been created two years before, wanted cow slaughter to be banned by parliament. Protesters attacked government buildings and nearly stormed the Lok Sabha; seven people were killed by police.

What is new today is the use of vigilantism. Vigilantism again is not so new. The Bajrang Dal was a vigilante movement, created in 1984 and specialising in cultural policing since then with the blessing of the police in BJP-ruled states. But now, with gau rakshaks, a parallel police is becoming legitimate across India, not only because it has the blessing of the state (we have seen many gau rakshaks using police jeeps or policemen looking at these people lynching others without intervening), but also the blessing of BJP MLAs, MPs, Ministers, who even, sometimes, garland them. A parallel state structure is taking place, and therefore the Hindu Rashtra (Nation) is materialising.

EA: With so many of the most belligerent and militant protagonists of these vigilante mobilisations belonging to groups beyond the purview of the Parivar – or perhaps no formal organisation at all – how does the Sangh view them?

EA: Can this be linked to the current wave of vigilantism across parts of India?

CJ: It is not as necessary as it used to be, but still: it is easier to mobilise masses by claiming that they are victims of some injustice – especially if the mobilisation needs to take a radical turn. Even today, after years of Hindu majoritarianism, the idea that Muslims are ‘pampered’ by ‘pseudo-secularists’ continues to prevail in the Hindutva discourse. The Sangh Parivar always needs a new cause – love jihad, ghar wapsi, beef ban, triple talaq – in order to maintain a semi-permanent state of mobilisation, articulating noble causes. And what it tries to do, always, is to foster fear and anger: the politics of fear, that relies on the Islamic/Pakistani threats must generate some anger (against Muslims, secularists, and so on): the ‘pampering’ or even the presence of ‘such people’ is unbearable because it is unfair to the Hindus.

CJ: One key trope for neo-Hindutva is the use of outrage and offence in mobilisations to challenge and regulate voices deemed to compromise Hindutva visions of Indian society. In 2008 you framed some of these ideas in terms of ‘the (not so easy) art of being outraged’. You identify in this, and other publications, that a narrative of victimisation and being ‘under siege’ is part of the very matrix of Hindu nationalism. How central is this to the contemporary rise of Hindutva?

EA: It is a movement that, they claim, is built on discipline and samskars [ethos of good/virtuous behaviour]. Others, including the Shiv Sena, have a more aggressive discourse and even resort to violence more or less openly. But the gap between the two is narrowing, as evident from the political culture of the Bajrang Dal, a component of the Sangh Parivar.

EA: There are traditionally two schools of thought. RSS leaders fear that uncontrollable elements will give a bad name to Hindutva – a movement that, they claim, is built on discipline and samskars [ethos of good/virtuous behaviour]. Others, including the Shiv Sena, have a more aggressive discourse and even resort to violence more or less openly. But the gap between the two is narrowing, as evident from the political culture of the Bajrang Dal, a component of the Sangh Parivar.
EA: Returning to this question of caste. Has Hindu nationalism transformed the politics of caste in recent decades? Is the rise of OBC leaders across the Hindu nationalist movement still a ‘silent revolution’ (Jaffrelot 2003)?

CJ: Hindutva has been recurrently activated in order to resist the politicisation of caste: forget your caste, ‘think of yourself as a Hindu first’ was the motto, and sanskritization was the recipe. It has worked somewhat vis-à-vis the OBCs, but for many different reasons. First, caste politics has lost some of its appeal: once quotas have reached their saturation point, low-caste parties could not promise more. Second, they could not deny that reservations were no panacea: positive discrimination was not an employment scheme but, as V.P. Singh once said, a means for the OBCs to have their people in the corridors of power. But everybody wants jobs in India today! And reservations cannot give many, especially at a time when the public sector is shrinking.

Third, post-1991 growth has generated a middle class and a ‘neo-middle class’ (to cite Modi) of aspiring men and women who thought less in terms of caste because they have left the village where caste is more prevalent, and because they believe that jobs will come from ‘development’ (another catchword of Modi). For the young OBCs of the emerging ‘neo-middle class’, caste politics was not the future of India – Modi’s ‘Gujarat model’ was! Now, the jobless growth of the last four years has been a disappointment and caste is back, but in a different garb, with dominant castes – such as Patels, Jats, Marathas – demanding quotas. Whether their mobilisation is sustainable remains to be seen. But even if caste politics is declining, the BJP will have to cope with another resurging force: kisan [farmer] politics, as evident from the discontent in village India.

EA: How has Hindu nationalism affected Dalit politics and the lives of Dalits in India recently?

CJ: Dalits have been affected by the beef ban – and by the vigilantes ‘implementing’ it. First, while Muslims suffer because slaughter houses are closed, the leather industry is also penalised. Second, Dalits have been accused of killing cows and harassed and assaulted for that in some places – the Una episode, in Gujarat [in 2016], is a case in point. Generally speaking, according to the National Crime Records Bureau, the crimes registered under the Prevention of Atrocities Act have increased by 176% between 2012–13 and 2015–16 (ten times more than crimes in general).

At the same time, Dalits remain divided along caste and class lines. In most of the states, jatis classified as Scheduled Castes do not join hands at the time of elections, and some of them are supporting the BJP (like groups of Valmikis in northern India). Also, the richer they are, the more BJP-oriented Dalit voters tend to be (except Jatavs), if we go by the CSDS [Centre for the Study of Developing Societies] data. As a result, the party attracted about one fifth of this group in 2014. Dalit politics – or Ambedkarism to be more precise – is facing a huge challenge today. The Bahujan Samaj Party is less and less in a position to mobilise SC voters as a bloc, as it becomes a Jatav party. Second, young Dalits resenting the rise of atrocities, and the new assertiveness of upper castes, tend to revolt but not via party politics – in the street. The rise of the Bhim Army in Saharanpur district is pointing in this direction. There, Dalits and Rajputs are at loggerheads, in the context of the return to power of the savarnas in UP: after the 2017 victory of the BJP, the percentage of upper castes among the MLAs is back to what it was before the Mandal moment.

EA: One way the Hindu nationalist movement has been able to mobilise the support of SCs and STs (albeit in fairly limited ways) is through the establishment of new organisations in the Parivar, oriented specifically towards these communities. Thinking about this trend more generally, I wonder if you might reflect upon when it comes to Indian federalism: autonomy of the states, including Jammu and Kashmir, fosters unity, in fact.

CJ: The Sangh Parivar has become a huge network, a nebula indeed. It allows the RSS to penetrate different milieus and enables it to use different ‘faces’ for propagating its message: a peasant’s face for the Bharatiya Kisan Sabha, a labour face for the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), etc. The RSS adapts somewhat to social diversity by being coterminous with society but does not dilute its doctrine at the expense of Hindutva’s mainstays. Unity prevails thanks to the key role of the RSS-trained pracharaks who lead all the components of the Parivar – and thanks to the autonomy they enjoy, something the RSS should reflect upon when it comes to Indian federalism: autonomy of the states, including Jammu and Kashmir, fosters unity, in fact.

EA: Your scholarship has charted the development of Sangh affiliates in areas in which the RSS felt vulnerable (for instance where they had direct competition and did not operate themselves, such as unions, student groups, etc.) In discussing this trajectory, you shed light on how various ‘components’ of the Parivar ‘emulated’ their enemies (Jaffrelot 2005a). Could you reflect on the success of this strategy, and consider if the modus operandi has changed or developed in recent years?

CJ: Hindu nationalism was conceived by elite groups in reaction to threatening others who, according to these ideologues, could be resisted more effectively by emulating them. The complex of inferiority they articulated
was partly genuine, partly tactical: they felt vulnerable because of the divisions of Hinduism in castes and sects, and because of demographic change, but they also instrumentalised fear (and exaggerated the threats, for instance demographic threats) to mobilise ‘their’ people for the Hindu nation they wanted to create.

But the interesting mechanism lies in their strategy of emulating the threatening others, as if that was the only way the Hindu elite could defend themselves, as if they had no other indigenous resource for organising themselves. The Hindutva forces are chameleon-like, but at the same time they do not imitate the other to become like him.

Sometimes, they imitate a third party: the RSS adopted the uniform of the British police to fight Muslims more effectively when they were perceived as posing the main threat to Hinduism after the Khilafat movement. But most of the time they imitate the Other directly: the Sangh has been remarkably successful in copying the communists through the development of unions, launching a student union, the ABVP, in 1948 in order to fight ‘the reds’ in university campuses and creating the BMS in 1955 to do the same among industrial labourers. In between, they initiated the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, that emulated the Christian missionaries, in order to resist them more effectively in the tribal belt (including Chhattisgarh). They also developed the VHP in order to endow Hinduism with a church-like structure, like the one the Catholics have built. When the jihadists started to strike India, Hindu nationalists indulged in terrorism too and recently the Hindu Mahasabha has created Hindu courts designed on the model of the Sharia courts! The Hindu Rashtra could one day be a mirror image of Pakistan, cow protection being a functional equivalent of the anti-blasphemy law and the RSS a variant of the ‘deep state’. This faculty of resistance by imitation is not new: after all, Brahmins resisted Buddhism by borrowing its main values from the Buddha’s message, before adapting further when threats started to come from other quarters.

EA: You have recently written of an important shift in the Sangh Parivar ‘towards a statist style’, supporting the ‘groundwork’ of the RSS (Jaffrelot 2017). Might this more formal, ‘top-down’ institutionalisation of the Parivar have an influence on the emergence of many ‘grassroots’, neo-Hindutva groups (which are often oppositional to the RSS)?

CJ: Indeed, while the RSS’s strategy has resulted in the making of a huge network, there may be some internal contradictions at work there. On one hand, the Sangh Parivar attempts to represent society through not only a labour union but also a Dalit Morcha, a peasant union, and other sectorial, plebeian organisations. On the other hand, Hindutva politics relies primarily on the upper caste, urban middle class, and aspires to minimise social divisions in the name of an all-encompassing Hindu nation – hence a denial of caste and class conflicts that the organisations mentioned above cannot endorse without taking the risk of losing their credibility. Today, the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (the peasant union of the Sangh Parivar) must defend the peasants against some state BJP governments to retain its following. These contradictions are transcended by paying allegiance to Hinduism and mitigated by an all-encompassing discourse on holistic harmony, but this may be manageable up to point only.

EA: The role of gurus and heads of sampradayas (religious fellowships or sects) has been key to the Hindu nationalist movement, particularly in the development of the VHP and the Ramjanmabhoomi mobilisations. Could you reflect on the nexus between Hindu spiritual figures and the Hindu nationalist
movement: in what ways is this an interdependent relationship? And what can we make of their political and economic influence?

CJ: The saffron-clad members of VHP were particularly important during the Ayodhya movement, as evident from the role of Sadhvi Rithambara or Uma Bharti. They may be back on the front stage if this movement is re-launched for instrumentalising religious sentiments. But what we have seen in this domain over the last five years is different: the saffron-clad people who mattered the most were not representing sampadayas and mobilised to legitimise Sangh Parivar’s activities, they were individuals. The two main cases in point are Baba Ramdev and Yogi Adityanath. The former epitomises a new brand of ‘yogi’ because of his career on TV and as a businessman. His company, Patanjali, is experiencing a meteoric rise thanks to the state’s patronage. The latter, by becoming Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, has shown that the Sangh Parivar was prepared to mix spiritual authority and political power, like in a theocratic framework. Whether they exemplify new forms of saffronisation of business and politics by religious figures remains to be seen.

EA: You wrote about the Parivar as ‘Janus-faced’: looking in two directions (2007, 17). But perhaps it is really looking in hundreds of directions!

CJ: Yes, it helps the Sangh to practice the denial strategy and remain below the radar. When the Gau Raksha Dal (GRD) is implicated in lynching cases, the RSS remains unaffected because the GRD has only indirect, distant relations with the Sangh.

EA: But at some stage, if you try to be everything, is there not some risk of losing identity, of becoming nothing? Of no longer being a coherent and cohesive movement. We have seen glimpses of that before: for instance during the first NDA government, with the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, who were very resistant to the liberalisation policies that the BJP were pursuing.

CJ: Yes, but in identity building you always have the core and the periphery. And, of course, they would always be very worried if this diversification would result in some dilution of the core ideology and the core identity. Globalisation was not a core element of the RSS ideology, but you can make this concession if in return you get support from the corporate sector. Same with language. They thought, in the 1950s, that they would impose Hindi on everybody. In the 1960s, they realised that they needed to dilute this stand if they wanted to make inroads in South India.

The core, the issues about which the Sangh Parivar will probably never make substantial concessions, are Islam and, to a lesser extent, Christianity. The Hindutva movement has crystallised in reaction to these two ‘existential’ threats, against these Others. Incidentally, they need these others for flourishing politically and that is why they keep ‘othering’ Muslims and Christians by claiming that they pay allegiance to Mecca and Rome. Beyond otherisation, demonisation is also taking place, making any dialogue impossible. Indeed, New Delhi does not try very hard to negotiate with Kashmiri Muslims: if the Valley is in the CP’s activities, they were individuals. The two main cases in point are Baba Ramdev and Yogi Adityanath. The former epitomises a new brand of ‘yogi’ because of his career on TV and as a businessman. His company, Patanjali, is experiencing a meteoric rise thanks to the state’s patronage. The latter, by becoming Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, has shown that the Sangh Parivar was prepared to mix spiritual authority and political power, like in a theocratic framework. Whether they exemplify new forms of saffronisation of business and politics by religious figures remains to be seen.

EA: But anti-Muslim strategies are often framed in ‘positive’ terms – by which I mean rather than simply advocating to rid India of Islam, it is advocating a cultural nationalism predicated on a hegemonic form of Hindu society. And that hegemonic form of Hindu society has to be underpinned by discipline and unity. If you have got hundreds of different organisations, all talking about different things and behaving in different ways, then that does not really constitute discipline.

CJ: It depends what you mean by discipline. If you discipline society by making sure that everybody follows the Hindu ethos, everybody is vegetarian, everybody pays allegiance to Hindu gods, India as a Hindu sacred territory, and so on, they can live with the little indiscipline you will find parallel to that. In that sense it is hegemonic in a Foucauldian sense; it epitomises a kind of governmentality of the people that should not come from the state only but from society itself. So the day Muslims stop being non-veg, the day they stop revering Mecca and Medina etc., the goal will be reached.

EA: Your work has illuminated the ways in which the Sangh Parivar established a network to challenge or supplant state structures of power in certain ways, and we have also been talking about certain types of vigilantism. But I wonder if we could move to almost the obverse of this and consider the ways that the state, and its legal apparatus, has been deployed in furthering (or resisting) Hindutva’s ideological and societal goals. Is Hindutva now finding greater salience and acceptance within India’s courts?

CJ: We have seen the legal apparatus being attracted by the Hindutva ideology to some extent. The judiciary is part of society and, of course, is influenced by the same kind of dynamics. So, if Hindutva becomes pervasive in society, how far can the judiciary be spared? But the RSS has also infiltrated the judiciary and benefited from state patronage too. The 1996 decision saying that Hindutva is a way of life, at the Supreme Court level, is the most telling reflection of this influence.6 The Ayodhya verdict of the Allahabad High Court [in 2010] was also an eye opener, with one of the judges considering that we have to believe
what Hindu mythology tells and we have to go by this narrative, which was certainly not what we were used to.

But the judiciary is probably the institution that is still resisting the most effectively the saffronisation process because of the way judges are appointed and their tenure secured. As a result, some judges have convicted BJP leaders. Jyotsana Yagnik, for instance, sentenced Maya Kodnani to 38 years of imprisonment because of her role in the Gujarat pogrom.

Today, many judges and lawyers are facing threats of a new kind which may transform the Indian judiciary further.

EA: These trends you describe find many parallels in other parts of South Asia, particularly Pakistan, as you considered recently in The Pakistan Paradox (Jaffrelot 2015).

CJ: Certainly, many developments I’ve described so far have already taken place in Pakistan. But there is also something of Israel in India today. What is Israel if not an ‘ethnic democracy’ to use the concept of an Israeli political scientist, Sammy Smooha (2002); it has a rather independent judiciary, rather free and fair elections, a rather free press, but some citizens are more equal than others because of their religion. All that is there in India now, de facto if not de jure like in Israel. We see the ethnicisation of the state and of the public sphere takes place in spite of the laws, in spite of the citizenship rights, in spite of the constitution.

Today, no more than 3 or 4% of MPs are Muslims. It is not because of the law – it is because of the new, majoritarian brand of politics, because of power relations in society. Similarly, there are many Muslims behind bars: 21% of the jail inmates are Muslims, but only 15% of the convicts. The gap between the two figures reflect the anti-Muslim bias of the police who arrest Muslim young men after an incident without sufficient proofs. They are free again, sometimes after many years, when their trial finally takes place.

This is a result of a de facto ethnicisation of democracy, not any change in law.

EA: In your work on Hindu nationalism you have identified various regional specificities to Hindu nationalism – illuminating the ‘Maharashtrian Crucible’ (2007, 14) of the Sangh Parivar, and the extent to which Hindutva has gained traction primarily in northern and western India. While today these concentrations are still pronounced, and the South has maintained its resistance to the BJP, it seems like Hindutva has become more nationalised (not to mention internationalised), than ever. How far can Hindutva forces go geographically?

CJ: For a long time this movement was ‘confined’ to northern and western India. There was a kind of frontier that was not easy to cross: the south and the east seemed out of the Hindu nationalists’ influence because of its Hindi-oriented discourse and upper caste-dominated organisation, a clear liability in regions where the non-Brahmin movements had been the crucible of Dravidianism. That is not so much the case any more in the provinces where the Sangh Parivar has succeeded in highlighting the Hindu versus Muslim cleavage as the line of cleavage at the expense of other identities. The Parivar has therefore, to a certain extent, transcended caste differentiations and regional identities.

This strategy has worked in Assam where they somewhat abolished the difference between Bengali-speaking and Assamese-speaking Muslims, saying ‘they are Muslims first, and we are Hindus first’. And for the first time we saw a large number of Bengali-speaking Hindus and Assamese-speaking Hindus thinking of voting together for the BJP. This tactic may also work in West Bengal too if Mamata Banerjee is convincing portrayed as pro-Muslim because of the way she’s building a kind of Muslim vote bank. In both states, the Sangh Parivar has contributed to the multiplication of communal riots which have prepared the ground for electoral polarisation and the rise of the BJP – like in UP before 2017.

EA: It has been pointed out that voters in certain parts of India can be particularly responsive to strong leaders and personality politics …

CJ: If you read the CSDS/Lokniti [surveys] carefully, you can see that this is true across the country, especially among the upper caste/middle class which do not believe so much in democracy – at least in its parliamentarian incarnation. The cult of the strong man can help the BJP to make progress in southern and western India because the towering figure of Modi, the neta [politician] around whom Hindus are invited to rally, in itself transcends regionalism. And the BJP cultivate this personalisation and concentration of power at the expense of federalism. The BJP has been very particular not to appoint as Chief Minister men having a strong local base, and in particular leaders of the dominant castes. For the first time after so many years, Maharashtra doesn’t have a Maratha Chief Minister, Haryana doesn’t have a Jat Chief Minister, Gujarat doesn’t have a Patel Chief Minister. As a result, Chief Ministers are more and more appointees of New Delhi – like under Indira Gandhi’s Congress. That was also a way to marginalise caste politics in the name of Hindutva.

EA: There seem to be two slightly different, and in some senses conflicting, trends that you have identified. One is about the nationalisation of Hindutva, the other about the vernacularisation of Hindutva. And
this narrative of vernacularisation which we see in Assam, and other parts of the northeast, even in Kerala to an extent, is a different trend to what you are saying in terms of the regional significance of individual leaders being set aside as less important than their Hinduess.

CJ: There's been a change in the vernacularisation process of Hindutva indeed. Until recently, this process used the channel of caste – and this is why Rob Jenkins (1998) could speak of 'Rajput Hindutva' – or made a detour via some alliances with regional interpreters like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra. It seems that Modi's BJP considers these proxies as redundant today: he's the rallying point of the nation in which regional sub-cultures can recognise themselves. And he manifests this sense of diversity, when he's canvassing in the states, by making a point to say a few words in the local language, to dress the most folkloric way and to refer to the local Hindu heroes of the past, to show that whatever your ethno-linguistic identity, you belong to Hindutva. This new modus operandi has been permitted by the nationalisation of the Indian public sphere and in particular the progress of Hindi – the Hindu nationalists' favourite language – because of education and the mass media, including Bollywood.

EA: What effect has the internationalisation of Hindutva had on the Hindu nationalist movement? To what extent, and why, does the Sangh Parivar see the Indian diaspora as important?

CJ: Hindutva belongs to the broad category of ethnic nationalism for which the sense of belonging is not overtaken by territory but by ascriptive characters inherited from ancestors. In Europe, this brand of national identity found expression in the German notion of Volk [people] which knew no borders. As a result, Germans who were born out of Germany but had German parents could 'come back' to their motherland after the reunification. Israel has cultivated similar views and made all Jews eligible for immigration. For Hindu nationalists too, their coreligionists belong to the nation (the way they define it) even when they live abroad – whereas Muslims and Christians who were born in India may not, if they do not look at this land as their punyabhoomi (sacred land), to use Savarkar's words. This is why the Sangh Parivar related to the Hindu diaspora as early as the late 1940s when a branch of the RSS took shape in Africa and then in the UK.

But identity is not the only reason why the Parivar pays so much attention to the Hindu diaspora – especially its western component, and even more specifically its American sub-unit. The Hindu diaspora in the US – mostly Gujaratis – have helped the BJP financially as early as the 1970s, during the Emergency when the Parivar was targeted by Indira Gandhi, and needed external support (Anderson and Clibbens 2018). This strategy has gained momentum since then. The more affluent and the more numerous they became, the more attention they attracted among the Sangh Parivar because of fundraising operations, but also because of the influence they exerted in Washington D.C. and in Wall Street. By the 1990s, the model they emulated was clearly the Jewish lobby. And while most Indian Americans voted for Hillary Clinton last year, Hindu activists tended to support Donald Trump, considering that they had affinities with his brand of nationalism and Islamophobia. But his hostility to migrants concerns Indians today, since they are supposed to deprive white Americans from jobs too. Whether this contradiction will dissuade Hindu nationalists from supporting Trump remains to be seen.

EA: In an article on the 2014 elections and the BJP's 'Modi-centric' campaign you wrote about the 'banalisation' of Hindu nationalism (2015a). This dovetails quite a lot with ideas around the normalising of Hindu nationalism, which I suggest can be understood through the concept of 'neo-Hindutva' (Anderson 2015). In your article you consider 'banal Hindutva' in electioneering, such as veiled or explicit of Islamophobic rhetoric, and the political marginalisation of Muslims. But your focus was very much about the election process. I wonder if you could say a few more words about whether you think there is a banal form of Hindutva in everyday life in India?

CJ: The 'saffronisation' of the public sphere finds expression in many different ways. It is a twofold process. On one hand the promotion of Hinduism has gained momentum at the expense of secularism because of the new role of saffron-clad personalities like Baba Ramdev, the yogi-turned-billionaire, or Yogi Adityanath (who merges theocratically spiritual authority, political power, and muscle power, for the first time), because of the beef ban, new laws against conversion, the use of 'Bharat' instead of 'India' and the chanting of Bharat Mata ki Jai (if you don't you're 'anti-national'), because of the 'Hinduisation' of the names of streets and villages, because also of the rewriting of history textbooks and the public articulation of beliefs presented as scientific because they emerge from Hindu antiquity. All this is creating a new atmosphere, where legitimacy prevails over legality for redefining the national identity and mindset.

On the other hand, and more importantly, the banalisation of Hindutva finds expression in the marginalisation of the minorities: it's 'normal' not to let Muslims pray outdoors in Gurgaon, not to rent a flat to Muslims, not to call Muslims for a job interview (but someone else with the same CV) because his name has betrayed his religion. These forms of discrimination were there before, but to a lesser extent and not that openly.
EA: That is very interesting and perturbing. This issue of textbooks and school curricula gives rise to a significant aspect of banal or normalised Hindutva: you do not necessarily know when you are consuming it. If it is latent or concealed, if can be hard to identify and decipher, whether in the form of 24/7 news channels, Patanjali hyper-expansion, or even Bollywood.

CJ: Tensions within the Sangh Parivar have been monitored closely and rather contained. It remains a very active resistant to the ethnic and cultural nationalism of Hindutva. So, in spite of Hindutva being mainstreamed, tension remains. Hindutva advocates are disgruntled at the lack of progress with the construction of a Ram mandir in Ayodhya, but others who voted for Modi are disappointed that the same problems or societies. It is not easy, even for a well-off Muslim, to find a place to live in a Hindu-dominated neighbourhood. Segregation means that Hindus and Muslims live continuously in a Hindu and a Muslim atmosphere, without even knowing it. They can develop fantastic ideas about the Other. Demonisation of the Other is easier when there is no first-hand knowledge of this Other and when he is described on social media as having five wives and 25 children, sacrificing animals for pleasure, etc. And from demonisation to dehumanisation there is only one step, that is crossed by lynchers and rioters in the first place.

EA: Hindutva appears to increasingly permeate a variety of spaces, often in new forms and with different inflections. What we have seen in the twenty-first century seems rather different to that which you identified in the twentieth century. Might this be understood as a ‘mainstreaming’ of Hindutva?

CJ: Urbanisation is also contributing to the shaping of this new normal because it fosters segregation. In a village, at least in a state where there are Muslims in large numbers, Hindus often mix with Muslims – except where riots have taken place of course. But in cities today, Hindus and Muslims can live without interacting with each other because of special patterns of segregation and the sheer size of neighbourhoods. Muslims’ ghettoisation not only results in the making of Muslim slums, but also Muslim colonies or societies. It is not easy, even for a well-off Muslim, to find a place to live in a Hindu-dominated neighbourhood. Segregation means that Hindus and Muslims live continuously in a Hindu and a Muslim atmosphere, without even knowing it. They can develop fantastic ideas about the Other. Demonisation of the Other is easier when there is no first-hand knowledge of this Other and when he is described on social media as having five wives and 25 children, sacrificing animals for pleasure, etc. And from demonisation to dehumanisation there is only one step, that is crossed by lynchers and rioters in the first place.

EA: This mainstreaming of Hindutva requires a degree of catholicity: it is partially contingent on a number of developmentalism-oriented, economically liberal-minded people in the BJP who are either ambivalent or actively resistant to the ethnic and cultural nationalism of Hindutva. So, in spite of Hindutva being mainstreamed, tension remains. Hindutva advocates are disgruntled at the lack of progress with the construction of a Ram mandir in Ayodhya, but others who voted for Modi are disappointed that the same problems with the economy under Congress have continued or even become worse.

CJ: Tensions within the Sangh Parivar have been monitored closely and rather contained. It remains a very disciplined organisation where the dissidents are systematically eased out: Pravin Togadia was recently suspended from the VHP for instance – and once a leader is out, few followers continue to support him. This is why factionalism is so limited in the BJP.

Tensions within will probably emerge if the BJP does not win a clear majority in 2019. In 2009, L.K. Advani was asked to step down by the RSS because of the BJP’s defeat – and he tried to resist, but in vain. It is too early to make any kind of prediction, but past experience suggests that electoral setbacks are some of the few events leading to tussles within the Sangh Parivar.

EA: What might an extended period of BJP hegemony mean for the Indian state, and for Indian society more broadly, looking 5, 10, even 20 years into the future?

CJ: India will probably replicate structurally some of the features of an ‘ethnic democracy’. Minorities will retain some rights but, de facto, they will be second-class citizens. Democratic institutions will continue to exist on paper, but they will be badly affected by the concentration of power, that will result in the weakening of alternative power centres, including the judiciary, the states, the Election Commission. This is why the 2019 elections are so important.

EA: Thank you, Christophe. This has been an extremely interesting and edifying discussion. We look forward to your future scholarship on South Asia just as much as we have enjoyed learning from it in the past!
Notes

1. ‘While the BJP does not appear to be in a position to capture power at the Centre, the ideas spread by the shakhas, by RSS-affiliated unions such as the BMS and the ABVP, and by Seva Bharti, Vidya Bharti and the Hindu nationalist media constantly strengthen the influence of the RSS combination. This trend, if sustained, will help the latter to crystallise a Hindu nationalist identity which in the long term could challenge the durability of India’s multicultural society’ (Jaffrelot 1996, 531–2).

2. ‘Sanskritization’ refers to the emulation of upper-caste or -class culture, traditions and rituals by lower castes or classes. The concept was first delineated in the 1950s by the anthropologist, M.N. Srinivas (1956). See also Jaffrelot (1998, 2000).


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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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