



The (im)possibility of a term: ‘Pasmanda’, the (non-) addressability of the state, and the ghettoization of communication

Britta Ohm¹

Accepted: 26 January 2024 / Published online: 19 March 2024
© The Author(s) 2024

Abstract

‘Pasmanda’ is arguably the most explosive term that the more recent anti-caste discourse in India has produced. It is assembled from the Persian words *pas* (‘back’) and *manda* (‘left behind’), thus describing somebody ‘at the back’ (of society), who ‘has been left behind’. Like ‘Dalit’, ‘Pasmanda’ is essentially a political term, which means that it only comes into being and develops significance if people decide to acquire it and to identify themselves as different and as discriminated—in this case as lower-caste and ‘Dalit Muslims’. ‘Pasmanda’ is hence intrinsically reliant on being communicated and mediated so as to enable its acceptance among the signified and to normalise the creation of a respective reality through a newly collectivising identity. This essay approaches ‘Pasmanda’ as ‘a term to think with’, in tracing the very possibility, among deprived and discriminated groups, to openly communicate, negotiate, and mediate this identity that challenges claims of religious (comm)unity and demands for national loyalty. This possibility varies greatly even across north India. As I examine ‘Pasmanda’ through three different local prisms, the term thus also becomes a dialectical index for the political conditions of its realisation: the conditions of its emergence and, however increasingly precarious, its thriving (in the state of Bihar) as much as the conditions for its suppression (in the capital Delhi) and even of its complete absence (in the state of Gujarat)—i.e. of the conditions that render Pasmandas non-existent. A different form of regional comparison thus emerges.

‘Pasmanda’ is arguably the most explosive term that the more recent anti-caste discourse in India has produced. It is assembled from the Persian words *pas* (‘back’) and *manda* (‘left behind’), thus describing somebody ‘at the back’ (of society), who ‘has been left behind’ (Anwar 2005: xii). ‘Pasmanda’ is akin to ‘Dalit’, a Sanskrit

✉ Britta Ohm
briohm@uni-mainz.de

¹ Institute for Film, Theater, Media and Cultural Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany

derivate meaning ‘broken’ or ‘crushed’, and a term that has been adopted—most prominently by B.R. Ambedkar, Dalit leader and architect of the Indian constitution—to rename India’s former ‘Untouchables’ so as to express their unjustifiable dehumanisation rather than their ‘impurity’ (Ambedkar 2014 [1936], Kumar 2019, Rao 2009).

Both ‘Pasmanda’ and ‘Dalit’ are essentially political terms, which means that they only come into being and develop significance if people decide to acquire them and to identify themselves as different and as discriminated—in the case of ‘Pasmanda’ as lower-caste and ‘Dalit Muslims’ (Alam 2015, Indian Social Institute 2010). Yet, ‘Pasmanda’ is different from ‘Dalit’ in that it does not—and cannot—reframe hitherto referred-to caste categories, such as ‘Untouchable’. Partly, this is because ‘Pasmanda’, by potentially encompassing large sections of Indian Muslims (and even beyond), seeks to de-legitimise caste not merely by politicising but by transcending it. In particular, though, ‘Pasmanda’ seeks to publicly expose the very concept and practice of caste, i.e. of a discriminatory hierarchical social order, in South Asian Islam in the first place.

Despite a substantial body of studies on social stratification among Indian Muslims (Ahmad 1978, Bhatti 1996, Khanam 2013), the relevance of caste for Muslims has been sidelined in much academic literature even on the caste system, which tends to remain confined to India’s Hindu majority population (thereby, erroneously yet by default, subsuming ‘Untouchables’/Dalits under Hinduism; Anwar 2005: 6, Lee 2021). Clearly, this omission resonates with the ‘the reified and static notions of the Indian Muslim “community” so often seen in the representations of the *ulema* [religious leadership, B.O.] and the religio-political Muslim elite’ in South Asia (Alam 2009: 171). Which is to say: a caste-based hierarchy has often been plainly denied on the part of upper-caste Muslims who like to portray a caste-free and organic community that is well advanced vis-à-vis the Hindus in terms of equality and harmony.¹ The ‘Pasmanda’ term is rejected not only on theological grounds and referred to the absence of the concept of caste from the scriptures (see Fazal 2020: 118–19). ‘Pasmanda’ also insists on a historicizing, inherently secular perspective onto Islam, subjecting it to ‘homogeneous, empty time’ (Anderson 1991: 24–25, Benjamin 1940), by understanding it as an evolved empirical system implicated in the practice and justification of inequality and subjugation. This, however, is not merely discomfiting for conservative readings of the religion that claim representative authority. It also complicates a rather plausible political argument that is commonly advanced by upper-caste Muslims, namely that the Muslim community is collectively—as *Muslims*—disadvantaged and discriminated against in India and that this collective cannot afford to be weakened by accentuating internal disparities.

Essentially, these counter-arguments indicate that the notion of ‘Pasmanda’, as a lower-caste signifier, is in complex and confrontative ways implied in the long-standing politics of affirmative action in India, i.e. the policies of legal reservation quotas in public educational institutions and government employment for

¹ Instead of ‘caste’, often the term ‘biradari’ (lit. ‘brotherhood’) is used for different ‘sub-communities’ among Muslims.

underprivileged sections of Indian society (see “[Patna/Bihar: low-caste communication, democracy-confidence, and the assumption of the addressable state](#)” section). Put differently: ‘Pasmanda’ is intrinsically tied to ethical and constitutional registers of redistribution and equal access across religious communities and prevailing categories of caste. As such, however—and in a different way than the ‘Hindu’ Dalit who faces upper-caste but not anti-minority assault—the possibility of ‘Pasmanda’ is also precariously exposed to the twin-politics of violence and appropriation, i.e. the contestation, de-legitimization, and political employment of these registers of social justice, which has substantially increased with the rise of Hindu nationalism, both as an anti-minority, supremacist mobilisation (*Hindutva*) and as an evolving apparatus of the ‘majoritarian state’ after 2014 (Chatterji et al. 2019). The realisation of ‘Pasmanda’ thus operates in the growing tension of opposing the ‘own’ Muslim elite and violently anti-Muslim Hindu nationalism at the same time.

Scholars and activists who work on the question of ‘Pasmanda’ often use the term, unsurprisingly, to refer to a section of up to 85% of Indian Muslims, comprising of the larger groups of the *Ajlaf* (‘degraded’ castes) and the *Arzal* (‘inferior’/Dalit castes), as against the small elite of *Ashraf* Muslims (‘nobles’), who claim direct descent from Arabs, Afghans, Persians, and Turks, if not a lineage with the prophet Mohammed. This generous scholarly and activist use of ‘Pasmanda’ is intelligible, because in order to research or to support a cause, the object of the research or the reality of the cause must somehow be existent; otherwise, the endeavour makes little sense. Given the historical and the acute difficulties within which the term moves, however, it is not quite so clear how existent *Pasmandas* actually are, i.e. how far a *Pasmanda* consciousness and identity indeed reach among Indian lower-caste Muslims. This is the basic question from which this essay starts.

As mentioned above, *Pasmandas* are lower-caste Muslims unless they discover and acquire the term for themselves. As a political term, ‘Pasmanda’ is hence intrinsically reliant on being communicated and mediated so as to enable its acceptance among the signified and to normalise the creation of a respective reality through a newly collectivising consciousness (Couldry and Hepp 2017; Touraine 1985). In turn, just like ‘Dalit’, ‘Pasmanda’ requires an addressee at whom to direct the criticism and the demand that the term expresses. If ‘Dalit’, and by extension ‘Dalit Muslim’, entails the demand not to be broken and crushed, ‘Pasmanda’ entails not being left behind any longer. Both represent demands for recognition and respect (Fazal 2020: 117), i.e. they describe struggles ‘waged in the name of values that are deemed central by the whole of society’ (Touraine 2001: 49). Consequently, the addressee of such demands cannot, or not directly, be the very groups accused of routinely practicing discrimination, i.e. *Brahmins/savarna* (‘twice-born’/upper) castes and *Ashrafs*, respectively. It needs an instance or representative agent that speaks the language of the demands, as it were, i.e. a political party, a (regional) government, but most specifically the democratic state as an embodiment of the rule of law and of constitutional enforcement (which explains the traditionally strong constitutionalism among Dalits; see Jodhka 2015; Viswanath 2015). If, as we shall see, the state does not avail itself in this capacity any longer, ‘Pasmanda’ and all that the term stands for ceases to be a possibility—or at least a possibility that could be

directed by Pasmandas themselves and is not becoming exposed to strategic capture and exhibition by the majoritarian state (see Táíwò 2022; Teltumbde 2020).

My interest in this essay, even though clearly sympathetic to the idea, is thus not to explore whether ‘Pasmanda’ synonymises a ‘good’ cause or even a realistic claim in India’s current political scenario, or whether the term is a useful one for academic research. My focus is also not where and why Pasmandas have engaged in more or less successful mobilisation and politics in India, even though, of course, existing Pasmanda movements, centred in the state of Bihar, made for an indispensable orientation of my field research. But respective historical and contemporary work has been done by scholars much better equipped for that than I am (Ali 2010; Ansari 2018; Anwar 2005; Sajjad 2014; Shah 1977; Fazal 2020; Rai 2012; Witsoe 2013). By contrast, I rather approach ‘Pasmanda’ as ‘a term to think with’, as Joel Lee has put it in his fascinating exploration of ‘Halalkhor’ (Lee 2018: 24), a term used to describe members of a north Indian Dalit Muslim sweeper caste (and hence potentially Pasmandas). I attempt an epistemological variation of Lee’s path by understanding ‘Pasmanda’ as a term that denotes the very possibility, among deprived and discriminated groups, to openly communicate, negotiate, and mediate a political identity that challenges claims of religious (comm)unity and demands for national loyalty. This possibility shows great differences even across north India. As I examine ‘Pasmanda’ through three different local prisms, the term thus also becomes a dialectical index for the political conditions of its realisation: the conditions of its emergence and, however, increasingly precarious, its thriving (in the state of Bihar) as much as the conditions for its suppression (in the capital Delhi) and even of its complete absence (in the state of Gujarat)—i.e. of the conditions that render Pasmandas non-existent. A different form of regional comparison thus emerges that inadvertently betrays an Ambedkarite logic. Whereas Ambedkar spoke of ‘graded inequality’ in a society in which ‘not even the aggrieved parties are on a common level’ (Ambedkar 1987: 320), we can thus trace a regionally graded possibility, or, looked at the other way round, a graded impossibility of ‘Pasmanda’ as a signifier of socio-political mobilisation.

This graded (im)possibility is directly linked to graded conditions of what I will call in the following ‘low-caste communication’. This does not simply relate the question of which media lower castes (I refer here to both lower-caste Muslims and Hindus/Dalits) use in order to advance their respective causes and demands (see “[Patna/Bihar: low-caste communication, democracy-confidence, and the assumption of the addressable state](#)” section). Rather, ‘low-caste communication’ describes a horizontal form of mediated, often personal understanding and the creation of a common, also controversial discourse as a precondition for ‘Pasmanda’ to become a theme and a political practice (as did ‘Dalit’ before). Invariably, the scope of such communication, devoid of larger dissemination apparatuses, is already historically and regionally defined in India’s federal structure. Even though the ‘Pasmanda’ idea inherently demands a more encompassing, transregional proliferation, this remains something that social media platforms clearly failed to achieve (the few ‘Pasmanda’—Twitter/X and Facebook—sites have no more than 1000 followers each and are semi-active) and that has become additionally complicated under the digital politics and mobilisation of the Narendra Modi-government (see “[Juhapura/Gujarat:](#)

privatised community, the ejecting state, and communicative extinction” section). In fact, it has been one motivation for me to begin this research—in 2015, one year after this government first came to power—to observe that, while the academic discourse on ‘Pasmanda’ has picked up over the past two decades, the public visibility and political currency of Pasmandas ‘on the ground’ appeared to have rather receded even in Bihar. This indicates that the rapidly evolving ‘media abundance’ (Parthasarathi 2018) during that period has worked to the disadvantage of the underprivileged and, in particular, their organisation for social and political justice, in a media(tised) landscape that has come to be re-organised under corporate and ideological dominance.

Details of this media disadvantage also feed into rethinking the spatial ghettoisation of Muslims that I develop as a key-register of graded-ness and that the (im)possibility of ‘Pasmanda’ and of lower-caste communication immanently relate to. What might be called Muslim ghettoisation in urban centres (here: Patna, Delhi, and Ahmedabad) has a long history in independent India (Ali 2010; Seabrook and Siddiqui 2011) but is, yet again, undergoing significant qualitative change with the rise of Hindutva and the majoritarian state. The potentiality of choosing to live in a Muslim-dominated neighbourhood has increasingly made way, as particularly the “*Jamia Nagar/Delhi: processual segregation, the violent state, and (reversible) communicative closure*” section traces, for involuntary concentration and coerced segregation. As this ghettoisation is essentially driven by fear—fear of an Other that is stoked by those who want to justify the segregation and fear that is experienced by those becoming ghettoised—it marks a tremendous recalibration not only of everyday life prospects of the affected but also of their communication, and hence of their politics (Arendt 2013 [1958]). The significance of this complex has remained virtually untouched by current research on oppressed groups, which instead still tends to be driven by what Sumi Madhok has aptly termed ‘action bias’ (Madhok 2013), i.e. the unacknowledged expectation of active resistance. The case of the (im)possibility of ‘Pasmanda’ suggests, in contrast, that the graded spatial concentration in and through fear corresponds not only with grades of violence, grades of state addressability, and grades of the reproduction of the community as ‘Muslim’. It also indexes grades of the freedom to speak of and critique caste and to work towards its collective transcendence. In this sense, what follows represents, above all, an account of graded landscapes of injured, or damaged, communication in contemporary India.

Patna/Bihar: low-caste communication, democracy-confidence, and the assumption of the addressable state

Bihar, situated to the east of the country, is India’s third most populated state and stands out with a long history of Muslim low-caste movements and participation in politics, the beginnings of which can be dated back before independence (Rai 2012). This history already bespeaks caste as a factor that is as decisive as it is ambivalent in Bihar politics (Witsoe 2011; Sajjad 2014). The implementation of the Mandal reforms by the central government from 1989 onwards (under the brief tenure of the left-of-centre National Front) only buttressed this factor: lending unprecedented

legitimacy to lower-caste claims to socio-economic access, and thus enabling what Jaffrelot has called the ‘silent revolution’ (Jaffrelot 2003), the reforms marked a watershed in the (anti-)caste discourse in India at large, but particularly in Bihar.

Based on a survey² that found 52% of India’s population to be ‘backward’, i.e. socio-economically disadvantaged, the Mandal reforms introduced the category of Other Backward Classes (OBC) to India’s existing reservation system. The move legalised a 27% quota in government jobs and public education for these groups in addition to the 15% for the most disadvantaged so-called Scheduled Castes (SC, i.e. Dalits) and 7% for Scheduled Tribes (ST, i.e. Adivasis, India’s aboriginal population) that had already been assigned under colonial rule. The ensuing dynamics both fueled and complicated low-caste communication in Bihar as they generated an increasing number of caste-based political parties and organisations (Bagchi 2019), while the dominance of a vibrant local and regional press and media through upper castes was now continuously challenged by lower-caste and Dalit opposition, intervention, and the production of alternative voices. It was in this dynamic of a strengthened counter-public (Ansari 2011; Warner 2002) that ‘Pasmanda’ became the name of a movement in the state that soon was so extensive that it could even afford to eventually bifurcate, in 1998, over conflicting definitions of the ‘85%’ it claimed to represent.

A basic reason for this bifurcation can be found in the fact that the OBC category inserted for the first time openly the term ‘class’ into the caste discourse and into the reservation practice, i.e. it acknowledged modern correspondences between class and caste and thus appeared to liberate from the inherent dilemma of caste, under conditions of legal empowerment, as an entity that defies caste-based discrimination but maintains caste as an identity in order to keep up that defiance (Teltumbde 2020, see Gupta 2004, Natrajan 2012). As such, however, the OBC category also handed minorities, and particularly the Muslim upper-caste leadership, an additional reason to reject caste as applicable in their community. Identifying ‘class’ with ‘community’, they demanded Muslims to be collectively included in the new category as a disadvantaged group (Ali 2012, Anwar 2005: 3–5). It is crucial in this context to point to the role that various national mainstream media played during the 1990s and 2000s in disseminating and normalising this demand as ‘the Muslim position’. Notably the then emerging talk-show format on fast-proliferating commercial news television routinely staged the same upper-caste representatives from the (Hindu) majority society and the Muslim community (see Ohm 2011 [2007]). In effect, these hegemonic debates buttressed two mutually constitutive discourses on Muslims as, on the one hand, a disadvantaged and discriminated group, advanced by the Congress Party and the Left,³ and, on the other hand, Muslims as an unduly pampered minority, which was essential to the BJP’s anti-minority mobilisation (Hansen 1999).

² The survey was conducted by a commission that was headed by B.P. Mandal, a former chief minister of Bihar. The Mandal Commission had already been appointed ten years earlier, by the Janata Party-government, but its recommendations were ignored by the two following two Congress governments under Indira and Rajiv Gandhi.

³ This assessment was backed by the Sachar Committee Report (2006), which established that the percentage of Muslims in government employment was lower even than that of SC/ST-groups and Muslim representation in the so-called informal, low-income sector was disproportionately high.

It became thus widely articulated on the national level that a good share of Hindus rejected any claim of Muslims being disadvantaged and discriminated against. Beyond Bihar, though, it remained virtually non-perceivable, at least through mass media, that the same claim was also contested by both parts of the bifurcated Pasmanda movement as an Ashraf claim on the grounds that a collective quota for Muslims would squarely benefit the Ashrafs themselves. Both parts demanded that caste-based hierarchies among Muslims be acknowledged by opening the SC-category to Dalit Muslims, which Article 341 of the Indian constitution continues to limit to Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists (thereby reifying colonial administrative classifications, see Dirks 2001). Where the two parts came to differ was on the question of who counted as a Dalit Muslim.

Ejaz Ali, a medical doctor who treated—when I met him in 2015—low-income patients in his small clinic in Patna on a symbolic rate of 10 Rupees (currently around 12 US Cents), had mobilised those who were willing to accept 'Pasmanda' for themselves from 1993 onwards. His *All India Backward Muslim Morcha* (AIBMM, lit. 'Backward Muslim Front') claimed that 'over 80% of [Indian, B.O.] Muslims are Dalit because the converts to Islam in Mughal India all came from the Hindu Dalits' (interview Ali, 14 April 2015; see Rahman 2019; Sikand 2001). In Ali's definition, 'Pasmanda' and 'Dalit Muslim' were thus basically identical, rendering all non-Ashrafs eligible for the SC (Dalit)-category. This definition came to be contested by Ejaz Ali's fellow campaigner Ali Anwar, a Hindi journalist who soon became known as Ali Anwar Ansari by his added caste name Ansari (denoting the weaver castes). Anwar broke away from the AIBMM in 1998, forming the *All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz* (AIPMM, lit. 'Pasmanda Muslim Front'). He critiqued Ali for his 'ahistorical understanding that neglects all the changes among different Pasmanda castes over the centuries. [...] Pasmanda might be 85% of the Muslims, but they are not all Dalits now, there are many differences' (interview Anwar, 02 May 2015). Referring to the Ajlaf ('degraded') castes, the influential study that Anwar published in 2001 in Hindi, 'Masawat ke Jung' ('The Battle for Equality', 2005), spoke of 'Dalit and backward Muslims' (2005: 144). While advocating SC-reservation for 'actual' Dalit Muslims, the AIPMM aimed at making 'Pasmanda' a broader, trans-caste and cross-community signifier of a *bahujan* (majority) political consciousness that challenged both Muslim upper caste-hegemony and the ideological Hindu majoritarianism of the *Sangh Parivar*—an endeavour, though, that the very bifurcation of the Pasmanda movement already put into question.

The publicness, on the other hand, with which these arguments could be exchanged between Pasmanda-leaders and respective supporters could be mobilised in Bihar also spoke of the fact that, historically, caste violence has been more pronounced than communal, i.e. anti-Muslim violence, in the state. Inadvertently, this emphasis created a greater space of freedom for Muslims, which in turn explains some of the political resentment among (Hindu) Dalits against Pasmandas. While, within the Muslim community, forms of violence against Dalit Muslims through Ashraf castes are not unknown, they mainly relate to practices of untouchability, i.e. active segregation and discrimination (Ali 2018; Trivedi et al. 2016). They do not, however, reach the dimensions of lethal violence that Hindu upper castes continue to execute against (Hindu) Dalits. Caste violence had reached a climax in

Bihar between the 1960s and the 1980s in the course of land reforms but was met with organised anti-caste violence by the Maoist Naxalite movement that politicised, under enormous effort and sacrifice, many landless Dalits (Kunnath 2012; Shah 1977). It was from the late 1980s onwards, with the infamous Bhagalpur ‘riots’ in 1989 (Pandey 1992) and looming neoliberal reforms, that the emphasis began to shift towards communal violence: attacking the Mandal reforms, the rising Hindutva-movement claimed that quotas ridiculed the importance of merit and that caste was insignificant and a mere tool of votebank-politics of the Congress Party. The correspondence of this communal appeal with the assertion of the Ashraf Muslim leadership—that Dalits do not exist in ‘their’ community—is quite apparent. At the same time, this shift underlines the intrinsic conditionality between (anti-)caste and communal violence: the more the (upper caste-led) *sangathan* (unity) of Hindus was pursued at the expense of acknowledging caste as a problem (see Narayan 2009), the more ‘the Muslims’ had to be constructed as an equally homogeneous but dangerous Other (see Lee 2021: 77–87).

The fact that the Hindutva movement has struggled to find a foothold in Bihar can thus also be attributed to caste-based politics as the most effective, and indeed the only available, counter-strategy under the conditions, which was rigorously enforced by Lalu Prasad Yadav when he became Bihar’s chief minister in 1990 with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) (see Kumar 2018). Demonstrating a political will to confront the violent Hindutva mobilisation that was rather unique among north Indian political leaders, Yadav ostentatiously detained BJP-leader L.K. Advani as he entered Bihar on his infamous *yath yatra* (‘chariot pilgrimage’) to Ayodhya. This resistance was then backed by OBC Hindus, especially of his own Yadav caste, who Yadav had aligned with Muslims in what Witsoe has aptly called an ‘ultimately incomplete democratic revolution’ (2013: 54). Evidently, this incompleteness was down to democratic gains that yet again came at the cost especially of Dalit Muslims (Anwar 2005: 147–48, Sajjad 2014: 302). Yet, Yadav’s political will has resulted in the near-complete curbing of communal violence and consequently in the absence of ‘Muslim ghettos’, notably in Patna. Phulwari Sharif, for instance, a large neighbourhood with a slight majority of Muslim inhabitants (around 60%), has been an important Sufi centre for centuries and has gradually become part of Patna, without, however, turning—or rather being turned—into a segregated space. This clearly also benefited an everyday realisation of ‘Pasmanda’. When I visited the area in 2015, community meetings and cultural events of Pasmandas, openly under the eyes of Ashrafs, were quite the norm. ‘What can they do against their claim [of caste difference; B.O.] and their presence? It’s there, it’s in the open, they cannot ignore it’, said a Muslim social activist working in Phulwari Sharif (interview, 11 April 2015). Both he and a (Hindu) Dalit colleague, however, recounted even then—a year after the Modi-government had first come to power at the centre in 2014—the intensified penetration by the *Sangh Parivar* of the wider Patna population with varying strategies: well-financed targeted ritualism and practices of superstition as far as OBC Hindus and Dalits were concerned; perks such as chicken and alcohol for Muslims both in order to mark their difference (as impure) and to win their electoral support (interview, 12 April 2015). Anti-Muslim violence, the essential complementation to these strategies of inclusion and appeasement, was activated

again in 2018 with a series of provocations and attacks in the course of Hindutva processions in eight different places in Bihar, including Bhagalpur and Aurangabad.

Moreover, even if critical caste-consciousness, among low-caste Hindus and Dalits, clearly helped against a Hindu majoritarian politics of their inclusion, it is somewhat ill-equipped to withstand strategic appropriation or capture, which has been a salient trait of mass-mediated Hindutva politics, differing from earlier Hindu nationalism (Rajagopal 2001; Berti et al. 2011). A most recent reinforcement of this strategy now aims, rather than demonising or appeasing 'the Muslims' as a whole, at exploiting caste-divisions: the Modi-government has in 2022 begun to more systematically refer to 'Pasmanda' in the course of initiating *sneh yatras* ('pilgrimages of affection') for the disadvantaged in minority communities. Ironically, Modi has thereby made the term 'Pasmanda' better known than it ever has been on the level of national politics (see Ansari 2022)—in a move that is hardly unrelated to the BJP's still rather volatile electoral and ideological prospects in Bihar.

This now increasingly charged volatility resonates in many ways with my earlier conversations with Ejaz Ali and Ali Anwar in Patna and Delhi. On the one hand, the two Pasmanda-leaders displayed, each in their own way, a democracy-confidence in terms of an assumed naturalness of public debate and of the legal addressability of the state that a local colleague of mine considered to be 'dangerously taken for granted in Bihar after all these years [of anti-Hindutva, democratic/caste-based politics [B.O.]]' (conversation, 27 April 2015). In his view, both Ali and Anwar then still underestimated the evolving political scenario with the Modi-government at the centre. On the other hand, though, their very different attitudes at the time already allowed for a glimpse on how the looming changes were likely to affect their politics and the possibility of 'Pasmanda'.

For the journalist Anwar, democracy-confidence basically translated into media-confidence and the need of public communication as a creator of political reality. Over the years, he had led the AIPMM to collaborate, not without frequent tensions, in the regional media scene of small publications, ranging from pamphlets and handbills via few pages-strong journals and booklets to multimedia and digital contents, that was cultivated by (Hindu) Dalits and OBCs (see Narayan 2011, Thakur 2019). Inspired by the resonance of Anwar's study 'Masawat ki Jung', the *Mahaz* also published the magazine 'Pasmanda ki Awaz' (Pasmandas' Voice) from the early 2000s (now ceased). In 2015, when I spoke to him as member of the Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament) in Delhi; however, Ansari was already making the experience that the then newly elected Modi-government 'refuses productive communication on all levels' (interview, 02 May 2015). Aware that his media-confidence and the options of low-caste communication with the state were becoming actively compromised, he advanced a subversive strategy of placing ruptures into the flow of a largely Hindu upper-caste national mainstream media that had been trained over years to homogenise 'the Muslims' and was now also ideologically reconfiguring against them:

We have to use all the media now. And not only our own. Most of all, we have to use *their* media for *our* cause. [...] Every day some TV-team or press person

comes here for a soundbite. There are so many of them now. I always make sure I tell them something they did not expect to hear in the situation. And I always take note how they later edited it. Next time I tell them [what I've noticed, B.O.] and again I say something they may not want to hear. [...] They cannot manage to cut us the way they want all the time. Something always transpires (interview *ibid.*).

While Anwar has since become an open critic of the Modi-government, defending the Pasmanda cause against both aggression and appropriation, Ejaz Ali has been less public, certainly on the national level. If Anwar stands for the fundamentals of the Pasmanda idea and for those who afford 'conscientization' in its pursuit (Ansari 2022: 21), Ali, a practitioner, rather put the ends before the means. Many of those he had managed to mobilise into the AIBMM (meanwhile renamed into AIUMM, *All India United Muslim Morcha*)⁴ were illiterate, i.e. not able to read Pasmanda-pamphlets or booklets but depending on personal communication and physical meetings (see Loynd 2008). 'So poor they don't have a door to knock on' (interview Ali, 14 April 2015), they were most exposed to the denied practice of untouchability among Ashrafs. Before this background, and clearly also in view of the overall political shift from 'social justice' towards 'aspirational development', Ali's democracy-confidence was focused on legal recognition and economic prospects for as many Pasmandas/Dalit Muslims as possible.

Centering the abolition of the Hindu-centric constitutional Article 341, Ali did not only presume the addressability of the democratic state as a partner in political negotiations about quotas. He was now also willing to personalise the state in the then new prime minister. Whereas Anwar was in Delhi already experiencing the new BJP-administration as outright anti-communicative and non-addressable, Ali was convinced that 'Modi will do it, he will help us'. The plain reason for this belief was that Narendra Modi was the first Indian prime minister to widely advertise his own caste membership: 'He is the first PM who understands caste because he is an OBC himself' (interview Ali *ibid.*). Other Pasmandas have been quick to decipher Modi's ostentatious self-declaration, and his claimed caste-status, as a publicity stunt in the populist fishing for low-caste votes.⁵ Ali's ready personalisation, on the other hand, spoke of the enormous importance that (all) Dalit activism attributes to the acknowledgement of personal implication in caste as an instrument of suppression, exploitation and violence—an acknowledgement that also leading (upper-caste) Congress politicians have habitually avoided for long, passing off the denial of caste for the overcoming of caste in the modern secular state (Jodhka 2015: 12).

Eventually, Ali might well be the least impressible with Modi's recent Pasmanda-outreach, because his movement puts forward the most unequivocal demands to measure it by: inclusion in the SC-category, government jobs, quotas in public

⁴ This re-naming also indicated how 'backward' had shifted from the affirmative into a term that was understood to be derogative.

⁵ Pasmanda scholar and activist Khalid Anis Ansari, for instance, has doubted the validity of Modi's well-advertised OBC-status and asserts that his caste was only pushed into the category when he was chief minister of Gujarat (conversation, 18 August 2017).

education.⁶ However, in Ali's own Patna home, in 2015, it also became apparent how the will to see Modi and his governance in a bright light was undergirded by an absence or manipulation of information on fast expanding media circuits, then particularly vernacular news television that I happened to watch with a female family member, Seema,⁷ one night. It was, of course, known in the family that Modi had presided, then as chief minister, over the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in the state of Gujarat (1500 km to the west of Bihar), which now prominently featured as the 'development model' for India on these news channels. But Seema was convinced that 'Gujarat is a good place for Muslims now. It's very safe and very prosperous. People make good money and there is no violence. I saw it on TV, they showed a documentary' (interview, 16 April 2015). Interestingly, Seema was not defending but was ready to qualify her impression when I detailed how after repeated visits to Gujarat I could not subscribe to that narrative. Her ready qualification hinted at some instant realisation that certain alternative viewpoints might be missing from India's galloping mediatisation that Seema then still perceived as a democratising force. Yet, her equally ready absorption of media contents spoke of some habituation to everyday propaganda, eased through geographical distances and lingual differences and resulting in the confinement of regional realities. Much like PM Modi's 'caste consciousness' buttressed Ejaz Ali's imagination of an addressable state, media that were in fact increasingly working Modi's ideology supported Seema's imagination of a 'Muslim' success story, against all likelihood, at the other end of the country. The desire for attainment and upward mobility appeared to take precedence, for Seema, not only over the political realisation of 'Pasmanda', which she did not mention. Absent from our conversation was also, as it seems to be from the Pasmanda discourse at large, the question of gender and of caste as a prime instrument of patriarchy that takes an important role in the (Hindu) Dalit discourse (Omvedt 2008; Paik 2021; Rege 2013). While I will return to this aspect in the following section, Seema's assessment inadvertently, and somewhat tragically, also mirrored both the empirical absence of 'Pasmanda' and the post-violence self-deception of Muslims on location in Gujarat that I will elaborate in the third section.

Jamia Nagar/Delhi: processual segregation, the violent state, and (reversible) communicative closure

In her work on Muslim neighbourhoods in Aligarh (state of Uttar Pradesh), Galonnier (2015) has argued the simultaneity of three forms of spatial concentration that scholarship has otherwise often contrasted: the exclusive citadel, the at least partly intentional enclave, and the constrained ghetto. However, with regard to Jamia Nagar ('university town'), located in New Delhi, it is more plausible to understand these

⁶ Ironically, or tragically, the desirability of public education, and even of government jobs, becomes increasingly questionable under the ideology of this government, particularly for lower castes and minorities.

⁷ Name changed.

three spatial formations as phases in a chronological process of Muslim segregation that fundamentally differed from the situation in Patna. Enforced by a normalisation of communal (Hindutva) and state violence, this process has been commensurate with the successive closure of avenues to communicate ‘Pasmanda’ as low-caste and Dalit politics under conditions of increasingly aggressive national mainstream media and abundant information technologies.

As the ‘citadel’ can be described Jamia Nagar’s original design as a teachers colony around Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI, lit. ‘national Islamic university’), situated close to the Yamuna river towards the capital’s south-east. The university has been a prime achievement of India’s secular (upper-caste) Muslim intelligentsia, founded in progressive opposition both to the long-established, more conservative Aligarh Muslim University and the Muslim League, which is dominated by religious Ashrafs. Ironically, it was just after JMI—joining the status of other big Delhi universities—became a so-called central university in 1988 that Jamia Nagar began to increasingly attract Muslims from Old Delhi, among them eventually also the leadership of the Jamiat-e Islami Hind (JIH) and other religious organisations such as the Tablighi Jamaat. It was likely not accidental that many of the newcomers, in their majority lower-caste Muslims owning small-trade businesses, settled in Jamia Nagar’s then freshly developing neighbourhood that even carried the enclave in its name: Abul Fazal Enclave. With neoliberal reforms already looming, the intentional aspect of the newcomers’ enclaving was the hope for upward mobility and the aspiration to get out of increasing congestion and dilapidation in Old Delhi. Inscribed in the move, however, was also a new apprehension and insecurity in the face of the increasing Hindutva mobilisation and anti-Muslim violence around the Ayodhya campaign across north India. While Delhi, unlike states such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, hardly had a history of anti-Muslim violence, it was obvious that Delhi governments did not oppose the swelling mobilisation as determinedly as Lalu Prasad Yadav did in Bihar. Staying among people of the own community suggested the unhampered pursuit of newly upcoming facets of a ‘Muslim lifestyle’ (*mahol*)—including religious media contents, then disseminated by the local cable operators (Kirmani 2008; Mishra 1999). Enclaving thus opened windows towards ‘Ashrafisation’ (Ansari 2018: 83, Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 7).⁸ At the same time, it promised more safety from potential communal attacks. This was already a constellation not exactly favourable for lower-caste communication and the acquisition of ‘Pasmanda’.

That enclaving eventually neither protected from state violence nor discriminating mainstream media discourses, moreover, but rather facilitated them, became obvious with the infamous ‘Batla House encounter’, which occurred after a series of bomb attacks in the city: in September 2008, with a Congress government in power, the Special Cell of the Delhi Police killed in an armed operation and ‘under conspicuous

⁸ ‘Ashrafisation’ describes the equivalent of ‘Sanskritisation’, a term introduced by sociologist M. N. Srinivas for the Hindu society, which tries to capture ‘a process by which a lower caste or tribe or any other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a higher or more often twice-born caste’ (see Srinivas 1952: 32).

media glare'⁹ two young men in a students' flat in Jamia Nagar's neighbourhood of Batla House. The police claimed they were Islamist terrorists and members of the so-called Indian Mujahideen (IM)—a group that, in the absence of provable operative structures, has never been able to shed the suspicion of being a convenient invention by Indian Intelligence (Farooquee 2018; Sethi 2014). The 'encounter'¹⁰ marked the increasing consolidation of Jamia Nagar as a 'Muslim ghetto', from which the intentional residence faded as fast as the relationship with the state shifted. The stigmatisation of the area as a 'site which harbours terrorists' (Kumar 2010: 47) was constructed in an unprecedented mutual validation between police as the executives of the state and a then fast-evolving 'breaking news' TV sensationalism whose incriminating narratives washed over Jamia Nagar, drowning local counter-views and observations (Ibrahim 2013; Sengupta 2013).

Significantly, this early humiliating experience of media as a weapon against the weak happened alongside a growing abundance of user-based media and digital technology, especially the then just upcoming smart phone—which proliferated, like all earlier media, first and fastest in India's metros—followed by evolving social media platforms. While these were eventually discovered as helpful channels of aggression and silencing both by private users and *Sangh parivar*-outfits (Banaji and Bhat 2022: 75–95, Chaturvedi 2016, Udupa 2017), they equally facilitated a democratisation of discussing class, caste, race, religion, and gender in a university campus area such as Jamia Nagar. The apparent paradox of a simultaneous communicative closure and opening still reflected in the modes in which 'Pasmanda' was being spoken about—and, mostly, not spoken about—at the time of my fieldwork in Jamia Nagar. There was 'Pasmanda' as an intellectual and research-driven endeavour that was telling of a rekindled engagement with the works of B.R. Ambedkar across India (Ramnarayan and Satyanarayana 2017, Yengde and Teltumbde 2018). In the waning lights of Jamia-as-a-citadel, this endeavour was encapsulated in the *Patna Collective* (now dissolved), which, as its name suggested, took inspiration from the Pasmanda movements in Bihar. In the clear absence of a comparable movement in Delhi, associates of the collective (both women and men, and not necessarily caste-Pasmandas) rather understood 'Pasmanda' as an 'identity by choice' that was to avoid appropriation by taking the term as the signifier of an emancipatory identification with the idea of *bahujan* politics and the 'annihilation of caste' (Ambedkar 2014 [1936]), predicated on (all) Muslims' acknowledgement of the own implication in caste practices and perceptions. In this limited framework, Jamia Nagar represented something of a practice laboratory that, in addition to generating knowledge about low-caste Muslims, enabled explorations of what being low-caste meant for the affected and what forms of solidarity the realisation of 'Pasmanda' required. If one had not personally experienced, for instance, the habitual

⁹ Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Group (later Association (JTSA) (2009) 'Encounter' at Batla House: Unanswered Questions. A Report. Delhi: <https://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/batla/batla.htm>.

¹⁰ 'Police Encounters' are a variant of extra-judicial killing that has become very wide spread in India over the past two decades: 'disagreeable' persons are thereby shot by police (on the spot or in custody), without warrant or judicial hearing, on the clam of self-defense (see Jauregui 2011).

condescension of many Ashrafs for the alleged religious or cultural deficits of Ajlafs and Dalit Muslims, solidarity was to exceed critique of the growing power of the Ashraf-dominated JIH in Jamia Nagar (see Ahmad 2003). It required developing sensitivity to everyday critical expressions among lower-caste/Pasmanda Muslims against the very focus on the religious, the cultural and the symbolic among the upper castes (see Ansari 2018): a caste-Pasmanda might cringe, for instance, at the loud *azan* (call to prayer) from a loudspeaker that to them signals an illegitimate and potentially unbearable Ashraf dominance over the local public sphere (interview Pasmanda resident, 09 March 2015).

Ever since the ‘Batla House encounter’, however, any possibility of a broader political communication of ‘Pasmanda’ had remained stifled in the face of permanent state presence, evolving information technologies (Ohm et al. 2018; Xynou 2014) and monetised police collaboration among Jamia residents. People made meanwhile daily the experience that ‘[t]he very means of your representation [democratic media and the state; B.O.] can become the instruments of threatening your life’ (interview resident, 04 April 2015). Frequent police terror such as patrols, raids and unlawful detentions as well as everyday surveillance in the form of phone-tapping, digital monitoring, and information gathering yielded what can be called ‘negatively media-shaped hierarchies’. Inscribed in them was the mutation of ‘untouchability’ into a contingent state of desirability that supplanted every possible scrutiny of practiced untouchability against Dalit Muslims in Jamia Nagar (see Sarukkai 2012): ‘Of course people are afraid, [...] but usually they tend to think that if you’re famous enough they won’t touch you, that’s the kind of feeling’ (interview newspaper editor and Islamic scholar, 17 March 2015). One way of attaining such ‘untouchability’ was to serve as an antagonist in the daily media spectacle. Precisely because Jamia Nagar was kept visible to mainstream media audiences as constituting a danger to national security, there was a need to reproduce recognisable faces and names to this danger, whose disappearance would at least be noticed.

This ‘untouchability’ through a negative (and ultimately precarious) media profile, however, was largely reserved for the upper-caste leadership. Especially Jamia Nagar’s sea of younger, mostly lower-caste men, the prime targets of police, had to invent other ways of dealing with their inherent invisibility, namelessness and hence unnoticed ‘touchability’ by the state. Buying the imagination of safety by selling information at dumping prices to the police was one avenue traveled particularly by riskshaw drivers and mobile vegetable vendors in the area. For a larger part, the imposed struggle for the retention of some dignity conditioned the rejection, if not the denial, of victimhood, whose articulation as political protest was complicated not least by an increasingly ingrained caution in personal media-use. Consequently, such rejection rather motioned inwards, turning into ready individual or collective self-denigration (in terms of personal insufficiency and the ‘backwardness’ of the Muslim community; see Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012 below). This resulted in the nurturing of private aspirations to make money in local family businesses or the area’s informal economy so as to retain maximum independence from state structures and to at least mentally ‘exit from the neighbourhood’ (Wacquant 2008: 116). Sharply contrasting the conditions in Patna, such observable withdrawal into private aspiration supported

communicative atomisation and a potentially involuntary depoliticisation. In turn, it indicated, notably for the Pasmanda cause, a communicative sphere whose closure was predicated upon the state's successive relinquishing of its political addressability for the citizens of Jamia Nagar. Because it mainly figured as a violent threat, the state ceased to be seen as the addressee for legitimate demands for recognition and as a negotiation partner in the political struggle for rights and quotas. This rendered not only the very talking about 'Pasmanda' futile. The term lost its empowering potential as state benefits came to be identified as a humiliation and a pretext for potential further aggression, while the state reduced to being the, habitually dismissive, addressee for individual justice in cases of police violence. As such it was repeatedly challenged by the shifting membership of a group of Jamia Nagar residents that increasingly familiarised itself with criminal law (interview former researcher *Patna Collective*, 29 August 2017).

And yet, Jamia Nagar's communicative sphere-in-closure turned out to be anything but irreversible. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Ohm 2021), it was under the conditions not a caste-/Pasmanda consciousness but precisely this lingering awareness of legal abuse by a professedly still democratic state that appears to have been decisive in bringing many thousands to stand up for the protection of the Indian constitution in the streets of Jamia Nagar and Abul Fazal Enclave from December 2019 onwards. They protested the swift implementation, by the then just re-elected Modi-government, of the anti-Muslim Citizen's Amendment Act (CAA) and the announcement of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) that threatens to render millions of poor, low-caste, and Dalit Indians stateless. The protest practices were quite imprinted by the long-rehearsed ambivalence between a need for and the fear of media: while platform and social media were extensively employed for mobilisation, the distinctive feature of the protests was a spatial emphasis on non-mediated, on-site physical communication, which redefined 'the ghetto' into a 'safe space' but which was, bizarrely, superimposed by government internet shutdowns intended to curb communication—with the effect that the opposite was the case (Bhatia and Gajjala 2020; Shah 2021). Significantly, the protests were led by Muslim women who overwhelmingly were local lower-caste and Dalit Muslims and who had ample experience with detained, harassed, and humiliated husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons. While their demonstration marked 'the first time that we have seen Ambedkar-placards and *Bahujan ka Hindustan* (the majority of India)-posters in Jamia' (JMI-teacher interview, online, 29 January 2020), however, this unprecedented visibility of a highly gendered Muslim discrimination came at the cost of the term 'Pasmanda', which still did not appear anywhere. Clearly, its absence continued the lack of a respective political reality in the area. In the specific context, though, it also indexed how compromised freedom and existential threat condition priorities in public communication: in revering Ambedkar as the architect of the constitution rather than as a Dalit leader, the lower-caste Muslim protesters inadvertently defended a body of rights that continues, under Article 341, to reject their own entitlement to reservations, which Ejaz Ali in Bihar—counting on the same prime minister whose discriminating legislation had provoked these protests—so relentlessly, and so remotely, pursues.

Juhapura/Gujarat: privatised community, the ejecting state, and communicative extinction

The vast expanse of Juhapura, on the south-western outskirts of Gujarat's largest city of Ahmedabad, can be seen as an exponentiated form—except the protests—of what I observed in Jamia Nagar, to the extent of negative turnabout. In particular, this concerned the pronounced absence of the state from the area and the genuine unawareness among Juhapura residents of the very word 'Pasmanda'. None of the people I have spoken with here so far had even heard of the term.

This unawareness bespoke an even enhanced impossibility of low-caste communication and can be related to Juhapura's genealogy, differently from Jamia Nagar, as the very product of 'riot politics', which has a particular history in Gujarat (Berenschot 2011, Shani 2007; Yagnik and Sheth 2005). Over recurring waves of anti-Muslim violence since the 1960s but especially in course of the 2002 pogrom, under Narendra Modi's then chief ministership, Juhapura has swollen into the state's (and potentially India's) largest Muslim ghetto, now housing more than half a million people that are geographically completely cut off from Hindus and (Hindu) Dalits (Ohm 2007; Thomas 2015). The pogrom, during which police-aided Hindutva mobs killed over 2000 and displaced nearly 200,000 (Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2002), has been the so far most genocidal and ideologically motivated attack against Muslims since India's independence, seeing drastic levels of sexual violence against lower-caste/Dalit women and serious assaults also against the upper-caste elite (Dayal 2002; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; Laul 2018; Mander 2019). Moreover, it was India's first communal violence that was efficaciously organised with the help of early digital media—e-mail (then through Internet-café) and the first generation of mobile phones—and that was live-televised by India's first bunch of private national news channels (primarily NDTV, Aaj Tak, Zee News; see Jain 2010; Ohm 2010). Different from the 'Batla House Encounter' in Jamia Nagar six years later, when mainstream media already operated largely alongside police, much of this visual broadcasting had still been intended to critically highlight the carnage as Hindutva-organised and government-supported. However, it did not provoke the majoritarian condemnation that was expected by many journalists then, neither in India nor abroad. On the contrary, a significant section of acutely media-empowered Indian audiences condemned the media for an alleged bias against Hindus (Ohm 2014). Yet, the coverage was considered by many Muslims I have spoken to over the years, not only in Gujarat, as something like an ultimate insurance against further violence against them, at least on this scale. Even if the new media spectacularly failed to establish the violence as a pogrom in public consciousness, and hence to work as a stark warning against the destructive potency of Hindutva politics (Ohm 2018), the extensively documented fact remains that it did happen, and 'there is no denying that' (Juhapura resident, interview 18 May 2015). Moreover, so the reasoning went, Muslims had with suffering this dimension of a pogrom—after the Bombay violence in 1992/93 (Eckert 2003; Masselos 1994)—already paid the highest possible price to Hindutva politics given their substantial percentage of

India's population: 'They [the *Sangh parivar*, B.O.] know now they cannot kill us all. There's just too many of us, so repeating 2002 makes no sense' (ibid).

In an obvious psychological battle against existential fear and for future options, there showed different imaginations of community safety among Juhapura residents that were clearly caste-infused. The young student who accompanied me along the ghetto's sandy paths, flipping his Sony Xperia smartphone in and out of the pocket of his jeans, and whose surname (Shaikh) gave away an Ashraf caste, coolly analysed that 'Modi got what he wanted and so we are safe for now' (interview, 24 May 2015). He said he was aware that violence was ongoing elsewhere and was likely to increase once Modi was losing grip one way or other, but 'there aren't many here who think like that. They're happy it's over and think it'll stay this way' (ibid). On the other hand, there was the elderly teacher at the Gandhian Gujarat Vidyapith (lit. 'Gujarat University') with a lower-caste name (Ansari). The fact that he was also a local board member of the (Ashraf-dominated) Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind, which had been at the forefront of Islamic relief after the pogrom, suggested that he had made some social ascent.

Other scholars have post-2002 observed the resorting to fate or divine punishment among Gujarati Muslims in their effort to make sense of the murderous aggression against them (Jasani 2008; Lokhande 2015). In Ansari's view, fate was replaced with political necessity that had compelled then chief minister Modi to allow the pogrom to happen: 'He had to do it to consolidate his vote. He doesn't hate us. He had no choice' (interview, 22 May 2015). Playing this psychological trick equalled Modi and the Muslim community as victims to understandable political calculations, thereby undoing both personal and ideological hatred, power relations as well as political responsibility, i.e. elements that hold continuous existential danger. Jaffrelot and Thomas, moreover, have encountered among their informants in Juhapura not only the self-denigrating conviction that Muslims had been attacked because of their 'backwardness' but also the notion that the pogrom had actually been a 'blessing in disguise' (2012: 74) in view of the community's alleged overdue modernisation. Ansari, in our conversation, offered a variant of this narrative, namely the community's moral catharsis and the discovery of the 'right path'. The pogrom served here as the force that redeemed Gujarati Muslims from their long institutionalised criminal dealings, especially bootlegging (Gujarat is a so-called dry state; see Shani 2010).¹¹ Erased from Ansari's mind was thus the clear-aimed destruction during the pogrom of the community's 'considerable economic independence through this trade, on which Hindus and even the government were factually dependent for their illegal booze – and they truly hated that' (interview local NGO-worker, 02 June 2015).

¹¹ Bollywood film director Rahul Dholakia has honoured the most famous representative of that trade, Abdul Latif, and his efforts to put it to use for the socio-economic development of Gujarati Muslims, in *Raees* (2017), with Shah Rukh Khan in the lead role. The slow and painful death in the desert that *Raees* is subjected to at the end of the film can be read as a metaphor for the community's decay and dying hopes for dignity and equality.

In many ways, these variants of self-denigration and self-deception tragically reflected the fundamental perversion of truth in Hindutva ideology, namely the claim that India's 80% Hindu majority were at the mercy of its minorities, and chiefly the 'aggressive by nature'—Muslims (Sharma 2011). It thus appears problematic, as Jaffrelot and Thomas (2012) have done in their Juhapura study, to prioritise the demonstrated restorative efforts of the Muslims as a community, which rely on resources of both religious and secular upper castes, over the psychological and structural consequences of the violence, prominently the destruction of communicative and political options. In particular, such a perspective neglects the significance that bears the near-thorough privatisation of the community through the withdrawal of the state after the pogrom. The striking absence of the state in Juhapura did not exhaust itself in the absence of proper roads, public infrastructure (schools, offices, banks) and supplies (water, electricity), most of which had to be organised privately through Muslim investors or NGOs. In contrast to Jamia Nagar, there was also no sense of police presence, even if raids did occur (not so much on the suspicion of terrorism as of meat consumption, in which also reflected the shift from a secular to a Hindutva police). As Shaikh, the student, put it, when I asked him about patrols and monitoring: 'We are not even important enough to come under surveillance'. Instead, he pointed to digital terror of local Hindutva groups that had led him to close his social media accounts: 'RSS youth is very well organised around here. They become your friends under a different name and then post so much aggressive comments that you lose your real friends' (interview, 28 May 2015).

If Jamia Nagar residents recoiled into the private from the permanent presence of the state and the mainstream media, Juhapura, by contrast, signified Hindutva's increasing legal disinhibition that was expressed in the organised inhibition of the ghetto's communication and its virtual ejection from state responsibilities and provisions—and hence from the state's addressability. In fact, his pronounced silence at anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit violence that Narendra Modi has palpably transferred from his 13-year chief ministership in Gujarat to his prime ministership in Delhi after 2014 can be seen as the most ostentatious display of this non-addressability of the state. Because Modi can, to this point at least, as the prime representative of a constitutionally still democratic state not openly embrace violence against minorities and the weak, he signals disinterest in its ongoing production, making it clear that it is not mentionable to him and the institutions over which he holds power. This demeanor holds a good degree of necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) in terms of an indirectly claimed sovereignty over life and death, as became particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Desai and Amarasingam 2020; Ohm 2022b). Facing the impossibility of overall Muslim physical extinction, though, Modi's conduct can also be understood as the attempt of their communicative extinction (a logic that also seems to have driven the digital shutdown of Kashmir 2019/20, see Ohm 2022a). For Juhapura's citizens post-2002, this silence meant that avenues of articulating victimhood, let alone demands, to the state were closed beyond an increasingly compliant judiciary (International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (IHCRC) 2014; Jasani 2011). And because there was no

instance to address with collective demands, political communication among lower-caste Muslims lost its meaning, or rather: never acquired any, rendering pronounced collectivising too precarious and 'Pasmānda' an unthinkable term. 'Caste', said teacher Ansari, 'can only divide in our situation and work for our disadvantage as against the richer Muslims [sic]' (interview, 22 May 2015). Consequently, the existential dependency on affluent Ashrafs, some with connections to Gulf countries (Thomas 2015), remained without alternative, aggravating in turn the common Hindutva-narrative that Muslims' loyalties lie not with India.

It is important to re-emphasise that the Gujarat pogrom had genocidal quality because it targeted all of the community and not only, as is mostly the case, the more exposed lower castes (who still bore the brunt, though, and especially women, see Kumar 2017). In the aftermath, however, caste hierarchies tended to be reenforced rather than reduced because Ashrafs could often mobilise social and financial capital, whereas many lower-caste Muslims merely lost everything. Particularly the context of the post-pogrom Gujarati Muslims thus evinces that the image of the 'Muslim community' adhering to a religious support culture for the weak especially during calamities, which is often nurtured by scholars, is actually reliant on blanking not merely class but caste as a constitutive factor, and even more so under neoliberal conditions. The dependency of low-caste Muslims, moreover, concerned not merely material survival and, eventually, economic aspirations but also the factor, as the variants of self-denigration underline, that life purely as a victim is humanly impossible. In the absence of alternatives, the urge to prove worth to the self and the community as much as even to an incalculable state has fostered individually competitive overcompliance in Juhapura with hopelessly conflictive requirements of social and economic privatisation and the dominant Hindutva ideology. Remarkable efforts of being a 'good Muslim', being successful in business and education (not being 'backward'/'left behind') and voting for the BJP (Dhattiwala 2014; Lokhande 2015: 130) were invested so as to blend in, somehow, with the then widely mediated 'Gujarat model of development'-project (see Rajagopal 2010)—an investment that bespoke either the refusal to comply with, or the inability to imagine the reality of their political ejection and their exposure not necessarily to further pogroms but to disposability (Evans and Giroux 2015, see Biehl 2013).

If, moreover, 'untouchability' by the state could in Jamia Nagar be precariously achieved through a mainstream media presence of select (upper-caste) community representatives, the ejection of the Gujarati Muslims from the state found an equivalent in their eventual ejection from an Indian public through the national mainstream media. Had the live-telecast pogrom in 2002 catapulted the killing of the Gujarati Muslims into living rooms across India, the failure of an outcry from audiences, the subsequently evolving Modi-worship among the middle classes, and the commercial and political priorities especially of the mushrooming vernacular news channels made the event fade from the screens almost as fast as it had appeared (Ohm 2007). Over the following years, anyway sporadic reports rarely dwell on the continuing abject living conditions, the institutionalised violation of democratic rights or the digitally supported deepening of Hindutva politics in the state. Instead, they tended

to focus precisely on ‘self-help’ success stories especially in Juhapura,¹² purporting an image of rising Muslim prosperity in said ‘model state’ for India’s progress under the Modi-government. And it is here that a circle closes of disinformation and convenient imagination from the Gujarat ghetto to the faraway Bihar neighbourhood, where such narratives were made consumable and credible also in the house of Pasmanda leader Ejaz Ali, whose family, like those around them, were in the fast Hinduising media sphere less and less able, or inclined, to fact-check or contextualise the contents they were served (see Shah 2021).

For Juhapura residents themselves, it appeared that media had become reduced to largely three meanings. They were tools of technological or instructive individual or collective improvement (computer courses, IT, and e-learning, also religious); they were targets of and defense devices against digital attacks from Hindutva IT cells; and they were means of leisure, consumption, and symbolising status. Juhapura’s young men ostentatiously hanging out on their bikes at the ghetto’s dusty junctions, often flashing the latest smartphone models, were complemented by their TV-viewing families at home, who aspired for flat screens while consuming their own absence from the programming.

The precarity of ‘Pasmanda’

The journey of thinking ‘Pasmanda’ through locations and political conditions in three Indian states that I have undertaken with this essay suggests a variety of conclusions; however, tentative they may be. Most basically, it has become quite clear that the extent to which ‘Pasmanda’ can be realised as a form of politics that resists both its marginalization and dismissal through Ashraf dominance and its appropriation through majoritarian politics is intrinsically dependent on some form of functioning low-caste communication. In turn, the curbing and the (im)possibility of this communication—and hence the reproduction of ‘the Muslim community’ both as a homogeneous, organic self-imagination and as a disposable Other—is predicated on grades of anti-minority violence and physical ghettoisation.

If we understand Gujarat as the ‘ideal state’ of Hindutva (as the movement has explicitly advertised it), the graded-ness of the three locations exemplifies how the rise and assertiveness of Hindutva politics, and its entanglement with neoliberal corporate logics, make the self-directed realisation of ‘Pasmanda’ successively impossible. We have seen how the delegitimising, the practical erasure even, of social and legal justice claims takes ascending steps from one location to the next. This development corresponds with a notable (re-)degradation of the terminology of ‘backwardness’ from an expression of differentiating affirmative action, after the Mandal reforms, towards a term that now not merely describes Muslim hopelessness at large. It also puts the responsibility for ‘being left behind’ on the Muslim community itself, while privatising their shame. Similarly, the redefinition of ‘(un)-touchability’

¹² For instance NDTV, 17 September 2008: “Juhapura in Gujarat emerges from shadows [...] they have made lives better for themselves and the results are heartening” (<https://www.ndtv.com/video/news/news/juhapura-in-gujarat-emerges-from-shadows-38841>).

into a code for personal media visibility and exposure was in the three locations not only expressive of the tension between media aspiration and media fear in a Hindu mainstreaming and fast-digitising environment. It also involves the logic of regional echo chambers, easy to play off against one another in the presence and absence of information. Moreover, this redefinition, and the vulnerability it entails, also indicates on different levels, exemplified particularly in Jamia Nagar, the mutual exclusion between political organisation for justice and struggles for upward mobility (Ashrafisation).

The degree of low-caste communication, i.e. the possibility of speaking with each other in recognition of a common political reality, and the injury, or damage, of this possibility thus appears to be measurable by the varying potency of Hindu nationalism (both as a movement and a state apparatus) to exert appropriation (in Bihar), violence (in Delhi), and ejection/disposal (in Gujarat)—which is another way of saying that the form of low-caste communication as I have referred to it here indexes 'Pasmanda' as a (precarious) reality (in Bihar), a (precarious) possibility (in Delhi), and a (precarious) absence (in Gujarat). The fading of democratic politics in this regional gradation expresses at the same time a remarkable oscillation between the neoliberal retreat of the state and the ideological return of the state. This collusion connotes to graded imaginations of the state or, in this sense, 'states of imagination' (Hansen and Stepputat 2001) as a calculable and addressable relation (in Bihar), as an owed democratic institution (in Delhi), and as an indispensable hope and reference (in Gujarat).

Finally, what we have seen along this journey appears to warrant contemplating a thought that qualifies the common assumption (see Arendt 2006 [1963]), shared among Ashraf-dominated organisations, that victimised and persecuted minorities cannot afford to diversify and show disparities, lest they fall prey to divide-and-rule strategies of the majoritarian power. Obviously, Hindutva politics has begun pursuing precisely such strategies in Bihar, courting potential and existing Pasmandas for support with *sneh yatras* ('pilgrimages of affection'), as elaborated in the "[Patna/Bihar: low-caste communication, democracy-confidence, and the assumption of the addressable state](#)" section. It is important to keep in mind, though, that the very emotional, or rather sentimental, focus of these events reveals the basic calculation of Hindutva politics: the promise of material gain and (patronising) cultural inclusion in exchange for losing constitutional rights and social justice. While Hindutva has, given its increasing concentration of resources, clearly more seductive power on the first count, material gain, it corresponds, as I tried to point out repeatedly, to quite a degree with the claims particularly of the religious Ashraf elite in suggesting protection and collective strength. At the same time, it is worth noting that Hindutva engages in this courting only where they actually have to, i.e. only where their course meets with discriminated minorities that, in the Ambedkarite sense, 'educate, organise, agitate', and communicate and that they cannot ignore, i.e. in Bihar, and, after the Shaheen Bagh protests, to a certain degree also in Delhi. The absence of such communication-based organisation and politics, as Gujarat shows, neither protects from violence in any reliable form nor does it genuinely strengthen the Muslim minority. On the contrary: Hindutva can indulge in a free rein, while some upper-caste Muslims (precariously) profit, and the larger minority is invisibilised

and, hence, existentially vulnerable. The political diversification of the minority thus appears to yield precisely the opposite of what is being often claimed. However precarious under the evolving political conditions, the naming and challenging of Ashraf dominance supports an interception of the minority's overall exposure to arbitrary and strategic Hindutva action. Interestingly, it is rather for the majority community that the claim of vulnerability through political diversification applies. The unity of Hindus (*sangathan*), imagined and enforced by Hindutva, becomes only more porous with well-organised Dalits and OBCs, potentially thwarting a prime intention of Hindutva politics: the organised injury of self-awareness and political understanding and the production of irreparably damaged landscapes specifically of low-caste communication, i.e. the impossibility of 'Pasmaṇḍa'.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Ahmad, Intiaz. 1978. *Caste and social stratification among Muslims in India*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Ahmad, Irfan. 2003. A different Jihad: Dalit Muslims' challenge to Ashraf hegemony. *Economic and Political Weekly* 38 (46): 4886–4891.
- Alam, Arshad. 2009. Challenging the Ashrafs: The politics of the Pasmaṇḍa Muslim Mahaz. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 29 (2): 171–181.
- Alam, Aftab. 2015. Discrimination and exclusion: a case of Dalit Muslims in India. In *Unequal worlds. Discrimination and social inequality in modern India*, ed. Vidhu Verma, 371–395. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ali, Manjur. 2010. Politics of 'Pasmaṇḍa' Muslims: A case study of Bihar. *History and Sociology of South Asia* 4 (2): 129–144.
- Ali, Manjur. 2012. Indian Muslim OBCs: Backwardness and demand for reservation. *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (36): 74–79.
- Ali, Manjur. 2018. Forgotten at the margins - Muslim manual scavengers. In *Vision 2025: socio-economic inequalities. Why India's economic growth needs an inclusive agenda*, eds Amir Ullah Khan and Abdul Azim Akhtar, 157–168. New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies.
- Ambedkar, BR. 1987. "Revolution." *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar writings and speeches, Vol. 3*. Bombay: Government of Maharashtra.
- Ambedkar, BR. 2014. *Annihilation of caste. The annotated critical edition*, ed S. Anand, New Delhi: Navayana Publishing.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined communities*. London: Verso.
- Ansari, Khalid Anis. 2009. Rethinking the Pasmaṇḍa movement. *Economic and Political Weekly* 44 (13): 8–10.
- Ansari, Khalid Anis. 2022. Interpreting BJP's Pasmaṇḍa outreach in new India. *Seminar ("Exploring Muslim India")* 758: 20–25.

- Ansari, Khalid Anis. 2011. Pluralism, civil society and subaltern counterpublics: reflecting on contemporary challenges in India through the case-study of the Pasmanda movement. *Pluralism Working Paper Series, Paper no. 9*.
- Ansari, Khalid Anis. 2018. Contesting communalism(s): preliminary reflections on Pasmanda Muslim narratives from North India. *Prabuddha Journal of Social Equality* 1: 78–104.
- Anwar, Ali. 2005. *Masawat ki Jung* [Struggle for equality]. Trans M.I. Ali and Z. Jowher. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.
- Arendt, Hannah. 2006. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil*. London: Penguin
- Arendt, Hannah. 2013. *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bagchi, Sarthak. 2019. Understanding small caste-based political parties in India. *The Indiaforum*, <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/making-vip-understanding-small-caste-based-parties-india>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Banaji, Shakuntala, and Ramnath Bhat. 2022. *Social media and hate*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1940. On the concept of history (theses on the philosophy of history). Simon Fraser University. <https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Berenschot, Ward. 2011. *Riot politics: Hindu-Muslim violence and the Indian state*. Oxford University Press.
- Berti, Daniela, Nicolas Jaoul, and Pralay Kanungo, eds. 2011. *Cultural entrenchment of Hindutva: Local mediations and form of convergence*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Bhatia, Kiran Vinod, and Radhika Gajjala. 2020. Examining Anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh: Muslim women and politics of the Hindu India. *International Journal of Communication* 14 (2020): 6286–6303.
- Bhatty Zarina. 1996. 'Social Stratification among Muslims India'. In Srinivas M.N. (Ed.) *Caste: Its Twentieth Century Avatar*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press: 244–262.
- Biehl, João Guilherme. 2013. *Vita: Life in a zone of social abandonment*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chatterji, Angana, Thomas B. Hansen, and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds. 2019. *Majoritarian state: How Hindu nationalism is changing India*. London: Hurst.
- Chaturvedi, Swati. 2016. *I am a troll. Inside the secret world of the BJP's digital army*. New Delhi: Juggernaut Books.
- Couldry, Nick, and Andreas Hepp. 2017. *The mediated construction of reality*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Dayal, John. 2002. *Gujarat 2002: untold and re-told stories of the Hindutva lab*. Delhi: Media House.
- Desai, Shweta and Amaranth Amarasingam. 2020. *#CoronaJihad: COVID-19, misinformation and anti-Muslim violence in India*. London/Washington/Beirut/Toronto: ISD.
- Dhattiwala, Raheel. 2014. *The puzzle of the BJP's Muslim supporters in Gujarat*. Policy Report Nr. 5, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy. <https://www.thehinducentre.com/publications/policy-report/article5858521.ece>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Dirks, Nicholas. 2001. *Castes of mind. Colonialism and the making of modern India*. Princeton University Press.
- Eckert, Julia. 2003. *The charisma of direct action: Power, politics, and the Shiv Sena*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, Brad, and Henry A. Giroux. 2015. *Disposable futures: The seduction of violence in the age of spectacle*. San Francisco: City Lights Publishers.
- Farooque, Neyaz. 2018. *An ordinary man's guide to radicalism: Growing up Muslim in India*. Chennai: Westland Publications.
- Fazal, Tanweer. 2020. Caste, religion and recognition: trajectories of Pasmanda Muslim Movements. In *Change and mobility in contemporary India: Thinking M. N. Srinivas today* eds Sobin George, Manohar Yadav and Anand Inbanathan, 117–132. London and New York: Routledge.
- Galonier, Juliette. 2015. The enclave, the citadel and the ghetto: The threefold segregation of upper-class Muslims in India. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39 (1): 92–111.
- Gayer, Laurent and Christophe Jaffrelot. 2012. "Introduction - Muslims in the Indian city: from centrality to marginality. In *Muslims in Indian cities. Trajectories of marginalisation*, eds Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, 1–22. London: Hurst.
- Gayer, Laurent. 2012. Safe and sound: looking for a 'good environment' in Abul Fazl Enclave, Delhi. In *Muslims in Indian cities. Trajectories of marginalisation*, eds Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, 213–236. London: Hurst
- Ghassem-Fachandi, Parvis. 2012. *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim violence in India*. Princeton University Press

- Gupta, Dipankar, ed. 2004. *Caste in question: Identity or hierarchy?* New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom. 1999. *The saffron wave: Democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom, and Finn Stepputat, eds. 2001. *States of imagination: Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial state*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW). 2002. *We have no orders to save you': state participation and complicity in communal violence in Gujarat*. Vol. 14, No. 3 © <https://www.hrw.org/report/2002/04/30/we-have-no-orders-save-you/state-participation-and-complicity-communal-violence>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Ibrahim, Amrita. 2013. Who here is a bigger terrorist than the police? - photography as a politics of encounter in Delhi's Batla house. *South Asian Popular Culture* 11 (2): 133–144.
- Indian Social Institute (2010) *Dalit Muslims*, New Delhi.
- International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic (IHRCRC), Stanford Law School. 2014. *Gujarat: when justice becomes the victim*, report, <https://www.sabrangindia.in/reports/2014-gujarat-when-justice-becomes-victim>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe and Charlotte Thomas. 2012. Facing ghettoisation in 'Riot-city': old Ahmedabad and Juhapura between victimisation and self-help. In *Muslims in Indian cities. Trajectories of marginalisation*. Edited by Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, 43–80, London: Hurst.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2003. *India's silent revolution: The rise of the low castes in north Indian politics*, Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Jain, Anuja. 2010. 'Beaming it live': 24-hour television news, the spectator and the spectacle of the 2002 Gujarat carnage. *South Asian Popular Culture* 8 (2): 163–179.
- Jamia Teachers' Solidarity Group (later Association (JTSA). 2009. 'Encounter' at Batla house: unanswered questions. A report. Delhi: <https://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/batla/batla.htm>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Jasani, Rubina. 2011. A game of hide and seek: Gendered ethnographies of the everyday state after communal violence in Ahmedabad/Western India. *Contemporary South Asia* 19 (3): 249–262.
- Jasani, Rubina. 2008. Violence, reconstruction and Islamic reform: stories from the Muslim 'ghetto'. *Modern Asian Studies* 42: 431–456
- Jauregui, Beatrice. 2011. Law and order: police encounter killings and routinized political violence. In *A companion to the anthropology of India*, eds Isabelle Clark-Decès, 237–258, London: Blackwell
- Jodhka, Surinder S. 2015. *Caste in contemporary India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Khanam, Azra. 2013. *Muslim backward classes: A sociological perspective*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Kirman, Nida. 2008. Competing constructions of 'Muslim-ness' in the South Delhi neighborhood of Zakir Nagar. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 28 (3): 355–370.
- Kumar, Ravi. 2010. *Ghetto and within: Class, identity, state and politics of mobilisation*. Delhi: Aakar Books.
- Kumar, Megha. 2017. *Communalism and sexual violence: Ahmedabad since 1969*. New Delhi: Tulika Books.
- Kumar, Sanjay. 2018. *Post-mandal politics in Bihar: Changing electoral patterns*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Kumar, Raj. 2019. *Dalit literature and criticism*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan
- Kunnath, George J. 2012. *Rebels from the mud houses: Dalits and the making of the Maoist revolution in Bihar*. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Laul, Revati. 2018. *The anatomy of hate*. Chennai: Westland Publications.
- Lee, Joel. 2018. Who is the true Halalkhor? Genealogy and ethics in Dalit Muslim oral traditions. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 52 (1): 1–27.
- Lee, Joel. 2021. *Deceptive majority: Dalits, Hinduism, and underground religion*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lokhande, Sanjeevini Badigar. 2015. *Communal violence, forced migration, and the state: Gujarat since 2002*. Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Loynd, Maxine. 2008. Politics without television: the BSP and the Dalit counter-public sphere. In *Television in India. Satellites, politics and cultural change*, eds Nalin Mehta, 62–86. New Delhi: Routledge
- Madhok, Sumi. 2013. Action, agency, coercion: reformatting agency for oppressive contexts. In *Gender, agency and coercion: rethinking gender in transnational times*, eds Sumi Madhok, Anne Philips and Kalpana Wilson, 102–221. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Mander, Harsh. 2019. *Between memory and forgetting: Massacre and the Modi years in Gujarat*. New Delhi: Yoda Press
- Masselos, Jim. 1994. The Bombay riots of January 1993 the politics of urban conflagration. *South Asia Journal of South Asian Studies* XVII: 79–95
- Mbembe, Achille. 2003. Necropolitics. *Public Culture* 15 (1): 11–40.
- Mishra, Samina. 1999. Dish is life: cable operators and the neighbourhood. In *Image journeys: audio-visual media & cultural change in India*, eds Christiane Brosius and Melissa Butcher, 261–278, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Narayan, Badri. 2009. *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron politics and Dalit mobilisation*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Narayan, Badri. 2011. *The Making of the Dalit Public in North India: Uttar Pradesh, 1950–Present*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Natrajan, Balmurli. 2012. *The culturalization of caste in India: Identity and inequality in a multicultural age*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Ohm, Britta. 2007. Narratives of the underbelly of democracy (silences in Gujarat). *Economic and Political Weekly* 42 (49): 26–31.
- Ohm, Britta. 2010. Forgetting to remember: the privatisation of the public, the economisation of hindutva, and the medialisation of genocide. In *South Asian Media Cultures: Audiences, Representations, Contexts*, ed Shakuntala Banaji. London: Anthem Press.
- Ohm, Britta. 2011 [2007]. *The televised community. Culture, politics, and the market of visual representation in India*. <http://opus.kobv.de/euv/volltexte/2011/46/>. Accessed 22 May 2023.
- Ohm, Britta. 2014. Contesting interpretational authority: Democracy and fascism in the Indian empowered public. *Media International Australia* 152: 119–132.
- Ohm, Britta. 2018. Live-reporting and democracy: the non-publishable crime of the televised anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat 2002. In *Vision 2025: socio-economic inequalities. Why India's economic growth needs an inclusive agenda*, eds Amir Ullah Khan and Abdul Azim Akhtar, 91–100. New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies.
- Ohm, Britta. 2021. Media against communication: Media/violence and the conditionalities of Muslim silencing in Northern India. *Media, Culture & Society* 43 (4): 750–763.
- Ohm, Britta. 2022a. Aborting Kashmeer, Erasing Kashmir: A trajectory of storytelling and political censorship in India. *South Asian Popular Culture* 20 (1): 77–96.
- Ohm, Britta. 2022b. Defying responsibility: modes of silence, religious symbolism and biopolitics in the COVID-19 pandemic in India. In *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Medicine and Health*, eds Dorothea Lüddeckens, Philipp Hetmanczyk, Pamela E. Klassen and Justin B. Stein, 502–508. London/New York: Routledge.
- Ohm, Britta, Vibodh Parthasarathi, and Per Stahlberg. 2018. Introduction: Critical explorations of media modernity in India. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 10 (3): 322–331.
- Omvedt, Gail. 2008. *Seeking Begumpura: The social vision of anticaste intellectuals*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing.
- Paik, Shailaja. 2021. Dalit feminist thought. *Economic and Political Weekly* 56 (25): 127–136.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 1992. In defense of the fragment: writing about Hindu-Muslim riots in India today. In *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986–1995*, ed Ranajit Guha, 1–33. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Parthasarathi, Vibodh. 2018. Constituted contexts. In *The Indian Media economy vol.1: industrial dynamics and cultural adaptation*, eds Adrian Athique, Vibodh Parthasarathi and S.V. Srinivas, 93–104. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, Abdur. 2019. *Denial and deprivation: Indian Muslims after the Sachar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Commission reports*. New Delhi: Manohar
- Rai, Santosh Kumar. 2012. Muslim weavers' politics in early 20th century northern India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 47 (15): 61–70.
- Rajagopal, Arvind. 2001. *Politics after television: Hindu nationalism and the reshaping of the public in India*. Cambridge/UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rajagopal, Arvind. 2010. Special political zone: Urban planning, spacial segregation, and the infrastructure of violence in Ahmedabad. *South Asian History and Culture* 1 (4): 529–556.
- Ramnarayan, Rawat and K. Satyanarayana. 2017. *Dalit studies*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black
- Rao, Anupama. 2009. *Dalits and the politics of modern India*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black.
- Rege, Sharmila. 2013. *Against the madness of Manu*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishers.

- Sachar Committee. 2006. *Social, economic, and educational status of the Muslim community of India. A report*: <https://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/WriteReadData/RTF1984/7830578798.pdf>. Accessed 10 January 2024.
- Sajjad, Mohammed. 2014. *Muslim politics in Bihar: Changing contours*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Sarukkai, Sundar. 2012. Phenomenology of untouchability. In *The cracked mirror: An Indian debate on experience and theory*, eds Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai, 157–199. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Seabrook, Jeremy, and Imran Ahmed Siddiqui. 2011. *People without history: India's Muslim ghettos*. New York: Pluto Press.
- Sengupta, Shuddhabrata. 2013. The 'terrorist' and the screen: afterimages of the Batla house 'encounter'. In *No Limits. Media studies from India*, ed Ravi Sundaram, 300–323. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sethi, Manisha. 2014. *Kafkaland Prejudice, law and counterterrorism*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective.
- Shah, Ghanshyam. 1977. *Protest movements in two Indian states: A study of the Gujarat and Bihar movements*. New Delhi: Ajanta Publications.
- Shah, Nishant. 2021. (Dis)information blackouts: Politics and practices of internet shutdowns. *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021): 2693–2709.
- Shani, Ornit. 2007. *Communalism, caste, and Hindu nationalism: The violence in Gujarat*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shani, Ornit. 2010. Bootlegging, politics and corruption: State violence and the routine practices of public power in Gujarat (1985–2002). *South Asian History and Culture* 1 (4): 494–508.
- Sharma, Jyotirmaya. 2011. *Hindutva: Exploring the idea of Hindu nationalism*. New Delhi: Viking.
- Sikand, Yoginder. 2001. A new Indian Muslim agenda: The Dalit Muslims and the All India Backward Muslim Morcha. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21 (2): 287–296.
- Srinivas, M.N. 1952. *Religion and society among the coorgs of South India*. Oxford/UK: Oxford University Press.
- Táíwò, Olúfémí O. 2022. *Elite capture: How the powerful took over identity politics*. London: Pluto Press.
- Teltumbde, Anand. 2020. *Republic of caste: Thinking equality in the time of neoliberal Hindutva*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing.
- Thakur, Arvind Kumar. 2019. New media and the Dalit counter-public sphere. *Television & New Media* 21 (4): 360–375.
- Thomas, Charlotte. 2015. Being Muslim in Modi's India: ghetto life, between domination and resistance." *Noria Research*. <https://www.noria-research.com/being-muslim-in-narendra-modis-india-ghetto-life-between-domination-and-resistance/>
- Touraine, Alain. 1985. An introduction to the study of social movements. *Social Research* 52 (4): 749–787.
- Touraine, Alain. 2001. *Beyond neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Trivedi, Prashant K., Srinivas Goli, and Fahimuddin and Kumar, Surinder. 2016. Does untouchability exist among Muslims? Evidence from Uttar Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly* 51 (15): 32–36.
- Udupa, Sahana. 2017. *Gaali cultures: The politics of abusive exchange on social media*. *New Media & Society* 20 (4): 1506–1522.
- Viswanath, Rupa. 2015. *The pariah problem: Caste, religion and the social in modern India*. New Delhi: Navayana Publishing.
- Wacquant, Loic. 2008. Ghettos and anti-ghettos: An anatomy of the new urban poverty. *Thesis Eleven* 94: 113–118.
- Warner, Michael. 2002. Publics and counterpublics. *Public Culture* 14 (1): 49–90.
- Witsoe, Jeffrey. 2011. Rethinking postcolonial democracy: An examination of the politics of lower-caste empowerment in North India. *American Anthropologist* 113 (4): 619–631.
- Witsoe, Jeffrey. 2013. *Democracy against development: Lower-caste politics and political modernity in postcolonial India*. University of Chicago Press.
- Xynou, Maria. 2014. Big democracy, big surveillance: India's surveillance state. In *Open Democracy*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/big-democracy-big-surveillance-indias-surveillance-state/>. Accessed 21 May 2023.
- Yagnik, Achyut, and Suchitra Sheth. 2005. *The shaping of modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva and beyond*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Yengde, Suraj, and Anand Teltumbde, eds. 2018. *The radical in Ambedkar: Critical reflections*. London: Penguin.