

Introduction

In 2002, communal violence affected many parts of one of India's most prosperous states of Gujarat. The violence, sometimes described as India's most televised episode of communal violence, generated more commentary than any other previous instance, and yet by 2014, in the run up to the national elections, questions were raised about whether the violence was all that it was made out to be when the administration that was widely believed to be complicit in the violence went on to run one of the most economically successful state administrations in India. In addition to those who take on the mantle of 'naming names' such as journalists, political commentators, academics, writers and politicians, a large number of people on the many platforms of social media tried to articulate what was at issue in the cacophony of voices over facts and counter-facts.

A large number of reports by independent fact finding teams of journalists, academicians, politicians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), investigative undercover journalists, as well as the National Human Rights Commission, condemned the failure of the state machinery that caused a large number of Muslims to flee their homes, and pointed to the state government's complicity in the violence.¹ In addition to this significant body of reportage, films such as the

1 Reports by Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report, Aakar Patel, Dileep Padgaonkar, B. G. Verghese, *Rights and Wrongs: Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat*, New Delhi, Editors Guild, May 2002; Amnesty International, *Justice the Victim: Gujarat State Fails to Protect Women from Violence*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/001/2005> (accessed on 12 May 2010); Human Rights Watch, 'We have No Orders to Save You': State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat, 14 (3) (C), April 2002, <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/india/> (accessed on 12 May 2010); Commonwealth Initiative for Human Rights, Citizen's Initiative, People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), *Violence in Vadodara*, June 2002, <http://www.onlinevolunteers.org/gujarat/reports/pucl/index.htm> (accessed on 5 July 2010); People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), *Maaro! Kaapo! Baalo!: State, Society and Communalism in Gujarat*, Delhi, May 2002, http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Religion-communalism/2002/maro_kapo_balo.pdf (accessed on 5 July 2010); and *Tehelka*, 4(43), 3 November 2007 among others.

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Sanjeevini Badigar Lokhande

Excerpt

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award winning documentary *Final Solution* and artwork, not to mention almost relentless commentary on the violence for years to come, sought to capture what had happened and often sought to invoke the ‘power of shame’ to produce accountability and prevent such a situation from ever occurring again. However, in what befuddled left liberal commentators and academics, Narendra Modi who was in power at the time of the violence responded to this campaign with a campaign for pride named *Gaurav Yatra* and went on to win emphatic electoral support for three successive terms in the state. By 2008, increasingly, voices in mainstream media, some Muslim businessmen and even the head of a leading Islamic seminary began to urge Muslims² to participate in the economic progress facilitated by the same administration and to move on from the violence in 2002 when according to official estimates by the then home minister L. K. Advani, one and a half lakh people had fled their homes for 121 relief camps³ across parts of north and central Gujarat.

‘Things have returned to normal in Gujarat for everyone save some sections of the media, academicians and activists who keep recalling it’, asserted the state’s spokesperson for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) because, ‘it (*accounts of the 2002 violence*) makes good copy’.⁴ In the 2009 Gujarat assembly elections, Muslims publicly expressed support for the BJP-led administration in the state. In the run up to the 2014 elections a large number of media reports, some academics and websites described the violence as just another riot that lasted for the whole of three days that did not justify the vilification of Narendra Modi⁵ who went on from first being demonized and then idolized to become the prime minister of India all in little over 12 years. This book seeks to understand and explain these years through the unlikely lens of displacement that centrally engages with the question of whether communal violence and the displacement it engenders is

2 Maulana Vastanvi’s comments as Vice Chancellor of Darul Uloom Deoband created an uproar that forced him to step down. Viewed on 28 March 2011, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-01-27/india/28367708_1_maulana-vastanvi-seminary-resignation-issue.

3 Bharat Desai, ‘Fear Still Stalks Gujarat’, *Times of India*, 27 March 2002, <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com>; Dionne Bunsha, ‘The Crisis of the Camps’, *Frontline* 19 (8) (13–26 April 2002), <http://www.frontline.in>.

4 Yamal Vyas (BJP Spokesperson for Gujarat) in discussion with author, 10 February 2009.

5 Madhu Purnima Kishwar, *Modinama: Work in Progress*, Madhu Purnima Kishwar, Manushi Trust, <http://www.manushi.in/docs/Modinama-ebook.pdf>; economists Jagdish Bhagwati and Arvind Panagariya in a letter to *The Economist*, 12 April 2014.

an aberration in the life of a citizen as it is popularly made out to be, or if it has larger implications.

The 2014 national elections saw BJP capture power at the national level for the first time with an emphatic majority in the Lok Sabha with 282 seats out of a vote share of an estimated 31 per cent.⁶ Founded in 1980, BJP is the political wing of the family of right wing formations called the Sangh Parivar working for the revival of a lost Hindu golden age before the advent of foreign aggressors, that includes a number of organizations the most prominent of which are the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the Association of National Volunteers a paramilitary organization that also serves as an advisory body, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the World Council of Hindus that imitates Christian organizations as an ecclesiastical structure that seeks to unify Hindus and resist Muslim and Christian aggressors (Jaffrelot, 2001, pp. 388–411) and Bajrang Dal (BD) or the army of Hanuman, which is a loose structured federation of militant youth. The Sangh Parivar also has many others groups that specifically cater to sections of society such as students, women, trade unions and farmers. Groups in the Sangh Parivar are cadre-based and while in the past there have been differences between ideologues in the RSS and the political wing of the BJP under more moderate leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Narayanan, 2014), the various organizations are united in the ideology of *Hindutva* of exclusive cultural nationalism. The 2014 elections were an epoch making national election as no political power had gained substantial power, let alone an emphatic majority in the national government of India in the name of Hinduism, combined more recently with good governance, since independence from British rule and Partition of the Subcontinent.

The Partition to create the modern states of India and Pakistan had caused one of the largest displacements of people in the twentieth century comparable with the displacements produced by the Second World War in Europe. During the Partition an estimated 12 million people were displaced in divided Punjab alone and an estimated 20 million in the Subcontinent as a whole. In addition to this there were forced migrations that occurred in waves especially from Bengal that went on for more than half a century (Zamindar, 2007, 6; Chatterjee 2007, pp. 995–1032). Despite the horrors of Partition at a time when the scaffolding of newly formed state structures were yet to fall in place and safety was a central

6 'BJP's 31 per cent Lowest Vote Share of Any Party to Win Majority,' *Times of India*, 19 May 2014.

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Sanjeevini Badigar Lokhande

Excerpt

[More information](#)

concern, that people including Muslims in India looked to the state to provide safety is perhaps an indication of the potency of the emancipatory ideal of the nation-state created by the Indian national movement. In both the newly formed postcolonial states of India and Pakistan displaced persons were an integral part of the first two Five Year Plans where refugee rehabilitation plan was part of the universal and rational programme for development of the nation as a whole. In case of Muslims that formed a minority in Delhi for instance this programme initially involved their rehabilitation into mixed areas and then to 'Muslim areas' when they no longer felt safe in mixed areas due to the perception that due to the Partition Muslims had lost the right to live there. Notwithstanding the limited capacity of states, their failure and allegations of betrayals, taking care of displaced persons was an important aspect of establishing the legitimacy of newly formed states (Zamindar 2007, pp. 9, 26, 28).

In the climax of the 1973 Hindi movie *Garam Hava*, set in Uttar Pradesh in the aftermath of the Partition of India where people continued to be faced with the dilemma of whether to migrate to Pakistan or remain in India, Salim Mirza, an elderly Muslim shoemaker in Agra has to deal with the dilemma of whether to move to Pakistan or stay back in India. The film has been hailed for its poignant picturisation of the questions that partition raised for millions of ordinary citizens, among those being that of displacement and the hope of finding citizenship. Initially Salim Mirza chooses to stay back with his wife and two grown children even when members of his own extended family leave their ancestral home one by one to live in Pakistan, a land of plenty, by the reports of the women who come back to visit with exaggerated accounts. Despite his firm belief in the ideals of the freedom struggle, the travails of his everyday existence make him realise the change in the power equations in the new republic where his community is reduced to a minority. The family is hard pressed on all sides because of the vitiated atmosphere that makes it difficult for him to even earn a living. The last straw in that time of instability is when his daughter commits suicide after a second relationship is unfruitful because the man does not return from Pakistan to marry her. On what is to be his journey to finally migrate to Pakistan, having packed all his belongings and closed his ancestral home, along the way he sees his son who has decided to join his friends of other communities, agitating for their right to employment as citizens. Something turns in Salim's mind seeing this and he turns back, perhaps an indication of a decision to live life and struggle as a citizen of India rather than seek citizenship with co religionists in another country.

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Sanjeevini Badigar Lokhande

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[More information](#)

Cut to the present reality and most observers would find the existence of democratic and constitutional structures and peaceful co-existence among communities in most parts of India. However, every once in a while, violence among religious communities called communal violence has occurred in some parts and that has led some scholars to even describe communal violence as endemic to India.⁷ At times when this communal violence has played out on the streets, depending on the time taken for authorities to restore law and order, the rampaging of mobs has caused damage to life and property causing people to flee their homes either temporarily, permanently or to even relocate eventually to find safety in the numbers of one's own community while groups have come together in the name of 'citizens' initiatives to highlight the plight of victims and to organize relief.⁸ And yet while most of the scholarship and ongoing debate on communal violence so far has attempted to understand the causal aspects of such violence, there have been fewer attempts to understand the effects of violence⁹ and fewer still on those who flee their homes when state institutions are rendered ineffectual to guarantee their safety.

Gujarat, one of India's most prosperous states has had a history of considerable success in the pursuit of economic growth and has projected itself as a model for good governance under the leadership of Narendra Modi who was chief minister of the state for three consecutive terms. Gujarat however has also had, despite many syncretic elements in its culture (Singh, 2002; Yagnik and Sheth, 2005), a history of communal violence. India's westernmost state, which shares a land and water boundary with India's neighbour Pakistan described as an enemy in

7 Paul Brass, 2003, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Riots in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 6. Riots have also occurred in Pakistan and their frequency has increased since 1992.

8 Veena Das uses 'citizen's groups to describe such collectives in her 2007 book, *Life and Words*, University of California Press, 182. It is noteworthy however, that in polarized situations such as those of major communal violence in 1969 and 1985 riots in Ahmedabad, the 1984 anti Sikh riots, the 1992 riots in Mumbai as well as in 2002, civil society groups have mobilized efforts for relief and rehabilitation of displaced people as 'citizens groups'.

9 See Veena Das, (ed.), 1992. *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks; Rowena Robinson, 2005, *Tremors of Violence: Muslim Survivors of Ethnic Strife in Western India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications; Darshini Mahadevia, 2007, 'A City with Many Borders: Beyond Ghettoization in Ahmedabad,' in Annapurna Shaw ed., *Indian Cities in Transition*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 341–89; and Veena Das *Ibid*.

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Sanjeevini Badigar Lokhande

Excerpt

[More information](#)

government departments, legislation and policy,¹⁰ has like some other border states, what is known colloquially as, the Disturbed Areas Act. However, besides the fact that Gujarat has never experienced insurgency or secessionist movements and the dynamics of society and polity in the state are very different from those of other states considered as frontier areas of the Indian territory that have Disturbed Areas Act, the legislation commonly referred to by a similar name in Gujarat¹¹ was intended to empower the Collector and to prevent further polarization of living spaces during the 1980s when instances of communal violence frequently occurred and people turned increasingly to their co-religionists to create enclaves of safe zones that have been described elsewhere (Jaffrelot, 2012) as ghettos.¹² Communal violence was therefore not without precedent in Gujarat and yet the violence in 2002 created an upsurge of interest and drew national and international attention to the state that has been vital politically for the growth of the BJP. While riots have known to be localized phenomena (Brass 2003, p. 149), many hold that the violence in 2002 was different.

Earlier we would hear that a riot has taken place in one place but we were still eating and doing our thing at our own houses. Even if there was a riot in one place you could run out of one *galli* (street) and escape to another but 2002 was different.¹³

On 27 February 2002 a large number of volunteers for Hindu right wing groups called *karsevaks* were returning to Gujarat from Ayodhya by the Sabarmati Express. Some of them were caught in an altercation in the early hours of the morning when the train stopped at the railway station in Godhra, a town with a

10 The Custodian of Enemy Property is a government of India department. The Enemy Property Act of 1968, Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Bill 2010 are legislations enacted after the 1965 India-Pakistan War.

11 'The Gujarat Prohibition of Transfer of Immovable Property and Provisions for Protection of Tenants from Eviction from Premises in Disturbed Areas Act, 1986'.

12 The Act that was first promulgated in 1986 in the context of Ahmedabad has been extended to other areas and retained by successive governments including during Narendra Modi's tenure as chief minister. However, the act has been ineffective in stemming increasing polarization in parts of Ahmedabad where they had already occurred to the extent that living spaces are divided by borders. Moreover in the run up to the 2014 elections the VHP advised its members to pressurize the government to extend it to other parts of Gujarat to prevent Muslims from cohabiting with Hindus (Vijaysinh Parmar, 'Evict Muslims from Hindu Areas: Pravin Togadia', *Times of India*, 21 April 2014).

13 Ayesha Khan (then a journalist for Indian Express, Ahmedabad), in discussion with the author, 13 December 2008.

large Muslim population. They were returning from a *mahayagna* (a grand ritual) organized by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (The World Council of Hindus) in Ayodhya in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh that was part of sustained mobilization for the construction of a Ram temple at what is believed to be the birthplace of Ram over which a sixteenth century mosque called Babri Masjid has stood since more than four centuries.¹⁴ After the altercation at the Godhra railway station, the train stopped a few metres away from the station again and subsequently a mob from the nearby *basti* (habitation) of Muslims surrounded the compartment attacking it with stones and in the melee that ensued the compartment caught fire as a result of which 57 people including women and children were burned alive. The then chief minister, Narendra Modi visited the station at 2 o'clock the same day and the bodies, some of which were burned beyond identification, were brought to a hospital in Ahmedabad. By the evening of the same day the chief minister announced that he suspected the role of ISI (Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan) in the killings and announced that there would be a state wide *bandh* (strike) the next day to mourn the deaths. Already right wing groups of VHP and BD had given a call for state *bandh* the next day and for a *bharat bandh* (nationwide strike) on 1 March. The newspaper *Sandesh*, a leading Gujarati daily carried a front page report that stated that before the burning of the train 10–15 Hindu girls were taken from the train compartment and burned and that their bodies were badly mutilated.¹⁵ As shops and establishments remained closed the next day i.e., on 28 February organized mobs of hundreds led by the VHP and BD began to take to the streets armed with sticks, swords, petrol, cooking gas cylinders and even guns and hand-made bombs in violence that affected 15 to 16 districts¹⁶ and was most intense in the districts Ahmedabad, Anand, Mehsana, Sabarkantha, Panchmahal,

14 The Ramjanmabhoomi movement led by the BJP has sought to mobilize national support since the late 1980s for the construction of a temple in Ayodhya. Right wing activists mobilized around the disputed site by such campaigns as *shiladan* (donation of bricks) and collection of construction material near the disputed site. This was despite the matter being subjudice and the Supreme Court injunction issued on the matter over the disputed site in the wake of the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 by right wing activists that had led to riots in different parts of India. On 26 February 2002 there were repeated disruptions by members of parliament (MPs) in Parliament demanding that the *karsevaks* gathering in Ayodhya be arrested and the construction material collected there be seized.

15 *Sandesh*, 28 February 2002, quoted in Citizens' Initiative, 2002, *How has the Gujarat Massacre Affected Minority Women: Survivors Speak*, <http://cac.ektaonline.org/resources/reports/>, (accessed on 10 March 2011) Fact Finding by a Women's Panel.

16 *Frontline*, 19(12): 8–21, June 2002.

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978-1-107-06544-4 - Communal Violence, Forced Migration and the State: Gujarat Since 2002

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Vadodara, Bharuch and Dahod. Families were burned alive in their homes, a large number of women raped, people were stabbed and stoned, their houses damaged, and shops and businesses owned by Muslims were looted and set on fire. The violence caused at one time more than one and a half lakh Muslims to flee their homes and others to permanently relocate to places of Muslim concentration while an estimated 82 relief colonies came up in ten districts of Gujarat for Muslims, who did not return to their earlier homes.

Communal violence is an important theme in Indian politics since colonial times. Colonial administrators had used the term ‘communal’ to refer to sectarian conflicts that was subsequently used by them as well as scholars, policy-makers and in common parlance to refer to conflict between religious communities especially between the majority Hindus and Muslims that constitute the largest minority¹⁷ of nearly 150 million citizens. Communal violence along with violence by extreme left wing groups referred to as naxal violence and terrorism that accounts for most of the violent deaths in India, constitute the major forms of non-state violence that challenge the entity of the state that in Max Weber’s famous formulation has the legitimate use of force. Although enumeration of incidents of communal violence has serious methodological and logistical problems in India given that home ministry of the government of India, whose responsibility includes the reporting of law and order, has stopped the regular publishing records of riots since 1985 (Brass 2003, pp. 60–67) according to one estimate, from 1961 to 2002, except for two years, there was one or more riots every year in India (Engineer 2004, pp. 230–35). In another estimate of communal incidents between Hindus and Muslims from 1950–95 in 28 Indian cities, 7173 lives were lost as a result of communal incidents (Varshney and Wilkinson 1996, p. 19). According to estimates compiled from analysis of newspaper reports from the period 1960–93 to enumerate the number of communal incidents in which there was at least one death for India as a whole and by state, communal incidents between Hindus and Muslims rose during the 1960s reaching a peak in 1969, declined between 1971 and 1977, and then began a sharp increase during the years from 1978–93 (Varshney and Wilkinson 1996, p. 19). According to Paul Brass, ‘Rioting and killing in the years between 1990 and 1993 reached peaks not seen since 1947.’ In these years communal violence took place in two waves of riots across large parts of

17 India is among the three largest Muslim countries in the world. Amartya Sen. 2006. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, New Delhi: Allen Lane and Penguin Books, 60.

northern and western India that have been associated with mass mobilizations by the VHP and BJP for building the Ram temple in Ayodhya. In the significant scholarship on communal violence the role of the state, civil society and communities involved has been analysed to determine causality and processes of communal violence. Rich empirical and theoretical accounts have sought to explain communal violence through social science,¹⁸ anthropological¹⁹ and psychological²⁰ lenses employing essential, instrumental and constructivist arguments²¹ that examine the role of communities involved, the concepts of state or civil society or a combination of these.²² In one of the more recent works it has been argued that communal violence is not just sectarian violence but a more complex phenomena where tensions within the Hindu social order due to the state's redistributive policies led to the increase in communal violence and the rise of 'Hindu nationalism' in Ahmedabad, Gujarat and subsequently at an all India level as well (Shani, 2007). Ornit Shani argues that prolonged instances of communal violence brought to sharp relief a fragmented state to which the unitary cultural nationalism of the BJP presented an alternative. What also needs to be taken into account however, is the fact that in Gujarat, periods of prolonged communal violence were also contemporaneous with important policy decisions in the state in the 1980s that proved to be decisive during the opening up of the economy leading to structural transformation and economic

18 Such as Paul Brass, 2003, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Riots in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 6. Jan Breman, 2002, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 April; Jan Breman, 2004, *The Making and Unmaking of an Industrial Working Class: Sliding down the Labour Hierarchy in Ahmedabad*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; *Ethnic Conflict and Civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.

19 Veena Das, 2007, *Life and Words*, University of California Press; Rowena Robinson, 2005, *Tremors of Violence: Muslim Survivors of Ethnic Strife in Western India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

20 Ashish Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram, and Achyut Yagnik (eds.), 1995, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhoomi Movement and Fear of the Self*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Sudhir Kakar, 1990, 'Some Unconscious Aspects of Ethnic Violence in India', in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, 134–45, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

21 From Ashutosh Varshney's classification in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.

22 Ornit Shani, 2007, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 267–93.

Cambridge University Press

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Sanjeevini Badigar Lokhande

Excerpt

[More information](#)

growth through diversified and rapid industrialization spurred by an aggressive industrial policy (Hirway, 2000). This has sought to be explained by the thesis that while economically rather than having a broad-based, egalitarian agenda the state has chosen to ally with drivers of privatized economic growth namely the national and international big business elite, for popular measure, it pursues a majoritarian Hindu nationalist agenda that ensures its legitimacy socially and culturally (Nikita Sud, 2012). In the same explanation, from the understanding of the state as emerging from a protean make up of ideas, institutional practices and politics, it has been argued that government's support for the cultural nationalist agenda has been constrained by alternative norms and pressures thereafter. In another volume that sought to portray the amorphous character of the everyday state however it was argued that despite the efforts of the entity of the state in India to maintain 'the myth of neutrality through spectacles' such as inquiry commissions, *mohalla* committees etc. it continues to have evident majoritarian biases (Hansen, 2000, pp. 31–67) notwithstanding the stated constitutional ideal of secularism. To say that the state is not a unitary entity but a multi-hued lattice and a protean, amorphous entity need not occlude the possibility of the dominance and paramountcy of certain trends in it.²³

Violence does inevitably beg the role of the state constructed as the neutral arbiter of public interest and the guarantor and protector of life. In recent times there has been renewed interest in unpacking the meaning of concepts such as the state particularly for those who study governance²⁴ and among anthropologists to understand what constitutes the state.²⁵ The entity of the state constituted by ideas, rituals, institutions and organizations is conceptualized rather than a monolith, as a protean, disaggregated and banal entity. There is the thesis that

23 Sanjeevini Badigar, 2013, 'Gujarat and its Protean State', *Economic and Political Weekly* 48(39): 35–37.

24 Among others, Joel Migdal, 2001, *State in Society: Studying how States and Societies Transform and Constitute one Another*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Francis Fukuyama, 2004, *State Building: Governance and the World Order in the Twenty First Century*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; Mark Bevir and R. A. W. Rhodes, 2010, *The State as Cultural Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

25 See Akhil Gupta, 1995, 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, The Culture of Politics and The Imagined State', *American Ethnologist* 22: 375–402; Jonathan Spencer, 1997, 'Postcolonialism and the Political Imagination', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3: 1–19; C. J. Fuller and John Harriss, 2012, 'For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State', in C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei (ed.), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, 1–30, New Delhi: Social Science Press.