

Yale University

## EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale

---

Masters of Environmental Design Theses

Yale School of Architecture

---

Spring 5-23-2022

### Maximum Governance: Managerial Populism and Violent Infrastructures in the New India

Mila T. Samdub

Yale University, mila.samdub@yale.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/envdesign>



Part of the [Environmental Design Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Samdub, Mila T., "Maximum Governance: Managerial Populism and Violent Infrastructures in the New India" (2022). *Masters of Environmental Design Theses*. 7.

<https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/envdesign/7>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Yale School of Architecture at EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters of Environmental Design Theses by an authorized administrator of EliScholar – A Digital Platform for Scholarly Publishing at Yale. For more information, please contact [elischolar@yale.edu](mailto:elischolar@yale.edu).

# Maximum Governance: Managerial Populism and Violent Infrastructures in the New India

Mila Samdub

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of the School of Architecture in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of: Master of Environmental Design

22 May 2022

Advisor: Keller Easterling

Reader: Rohit De

## Abstract

Alongside rampant state violence, the systematic disenfranchisement of minorities and a draconian approach to dissent, since 2014 India has been the site of a relentless project of managerial competence. Projects like the Aadhaar biometric identity programme, the government's embrace of performance indices, and the construction of a massive new capital in central Delhi – the case studies at the heart of this thesis – promise a new, transforming nation, characterised by Narendra Modi's slogan "maximum governance, minimum government". Dramatizing efficiency and transparency against the perceived inefficiency and corruption of the old India, such projects' aesthetics allow a violent Hindu majoritarian government to claim global respectability and leadership and underwrite an aspirational managerial populism. At the same time, the apparatus of maximum governance – which encompasses not just PR and advertising but also novel forms of measurement and identification, laws, regulations, organizational processes and built environments – is bringing about radical shifts in Indian state and society. Empowering new kinds of agents and institutions, these infrastructures are at the core of a vast project of neoliberal redistribution, leading to exclusion and impoverishment, while cementing Hindu majoritarian power. Most worryingly, the ever-shifting ambiguity of maximum governance elides contradiction and short circuits failure, presenting a predicament for democracy and dissent.

## Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	4
Governance and Hindutva .....	9
A Populist Apparatus .....	13
Institutions .....	17
Agents .....	20
Infrastructures .....	24
World-Class Innovation.....	26
Prelude: A Genealogy of Maximum Governance.....	30
Efficiency.....	34
Transparency.....	38
Identity .....	43
Little Aadhaar, Big Aadhaar.....	44
Financial Inclusion and Actually Existing Entrepreneurship .....	48
Targeting, or the Ontology of the Parasite.....	56
“Government will disappear”: Caste and citizen experience .....	60
Internationalizing Aadhaar .....	64
Out From the Zone.....	69
Index .....	73
Framing competitive federalism .....	77
Ranking Governance .....	79
Displacing Statistics.....	83
“Composite water”: the index as a source of authority .....	86
Big Data and the Dashboard.....	89
Entrepreneurial State Apparatus .....	93
Central Vista .....	97
The Project.....	101
After Modernism .....	103
Neoliberal High Modernism.....	107
Efficiency.....	110

Hindu Managerialism .....	114
A Bureaucratic Counter-Environment .....	118
An Icon of Governance .....	122
Conclusion .....	124
Dissent and Democracy in Postcolonial India .....	125
Making Failure Stick .....	128
The Violence of Maximum Governance .....	132
References .....	134

## Introduction

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that the country still doesn't know the real meaning of minimum government and maximum governance.

In an exclusive interview with Aaj Tak, PM Modi said that the sad thing about this country is that we don't research about these things.”<sup>1</sup>

- India Today

“For many of us in India, governance has been an intractable problem.”<sup>2</sup>

- Nandan Nilekani

Like many words used in large corporations, intergovernmental organizations and other corridors of power, “governance” is both self-evident and endlessly in need of explication. Attached to modifiers like “corporate”, “global”, “market” or “good”, it refers to regulations and procedures that determine how things are carried out.<sup>3</sup>

According to the proponents of “high quality” governance, it enables the smooth and predictable functioning of organizations and economies regardless of the individuals who populate them. Often these organizations are states, usually in the developing world.

Neoliberal theorist Francis Fukuyama writes, “the quality of governance is different from the ends that governance is meant to fulfil... governance is thus about execution ... as

---

<sup>1</sup> India Today Web Desk, “PM Modi Explains Minimum Government and Maximum Governance.”

<sup>2</sup> Nilekani, *Imagining India*, 362.

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank defines governance as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”. World Bank, *Governance and Development*.

opposed to politics”.<sup>4</sup> As a long tradition of critical scholarship and activism has pointed out, the segregation of politics away from administration is often profoundly anti-democratic, placing the efficient functioning of a state imagined as a machine out of the fray of politics and in the domain of select experts.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of whether one supports or opposes governance, and despite the continuing vagueness of the term, there appears to be a broad consensus that it names a technical domain of procedures, specifications, and regulations.

This is no longer the case in India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) speaks constantly of “maximum governance and minimum governance”. In Modi’s mouth, in addition to referring to technical rules and procedures, governance has become a neoliberal feeling and a populist promise. In the age of maximum governance, the state works to improve India’s score on global rankings as if playing a game. It is obsessed with indices that provide an at-a-glance measure of performance. The plugging of “leakages” and the reduction of inefficiency becomes a mania. Governance’s agents love case studies of “best practices” that provide replicable models to be implemented across territories or agencies.

The replacement of the bland vagueness of “good” with the hyperbolic “maximum” suggests that governance is no longer a matter for experts alone. Of course, the term still refers to a set of policy interventions – often recommended by the World Bank or comparable institutions – that are designed to increase transparency in the

---

<sup>4</sup> Fukuyama, “What Is Governance?,” 4. This is an “initial conceptualization” that Fukuyama somewhat complicates later in the paper.

<sup>5</sup> Erkkilä and Piironen, “(De)Politicizing Good Governance”; Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*; Cooke, “The Managing of the (Third) World”; Chatterjee, “Development Planning and the Indian State.”

bureaucracy, ensure rule of law, or improve the ease of doing business. While such projects have always had a palpably performative element, this has been dialled up in recent years. Modi's heavily promoted project to build a hundred "smart cities", for example, has little content except for a shared mythos of the future.<sup>6</sup> In India today, the form of governance has become as critical as its content.

Modi's innovation has been to turn governance into an aesthetic and entrepreneurial project. As such, many of the interventions made in the name of governance transcend the technocratic realm altogether. A range of seemingly unrelated phenomena are expressed in its increasingly fantastical idiom. The Central Vista redevelopment to rebuild central Delhi is described, meaninglessly, as "an icon for governance".<sup>7</sup> 25 December, which is Christmas as well as the birth anniversary of former BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has been designated "Good Governance Day" and bureaucrats are compelled to attend work on what had previously been a gazetted holiday.<sup>8</sup> Taken to an extreme, governance takes on a popular political valence for the vaguely defined but often invoked middle class, where it is a platform that gestures towards virtues like transparency and efficiency with little specific content. Governance as form transforms a body of wonkish expert knowledge into a populist politics for the managerial class and those who aspire to it.<sup>9</sup> The bland administrative

---

<sup>6</sup> Datta, "Postcolonial Urban Futures."

<sup>7</sup> Sreedharan, "The Master Urbanist."

<sup>8</sup> There is a clear attack of Indian secularism too here taking place in the name of good governance. The new holiday has been heavily criticized by Christian bureaucrats.

<sup>9</sup> Of Modi's broader platform of inclusive development (in Hindi "sabka saath, sabka vikaas", roughly "development with and for everyone"), Partha Chatterjee notes that "part of [it] was a promise to corporate business interests and the upper middle class; the other part was to recognize the aspirations of the upwardly mobile and the younger generation, who yearned for access to the glittering world of consumption." Chatterjee, *I Am the People*, 105.

concerns that exited politics through the backdoor of the technical are rendered aesthetic and occupy centre stage. Maximum governance has become a general shorthand for the “new India” that Modi keeps promising: more entrepreneurial, more innovative, more efficient, more transparent, more digital.

Because governance is so heavily mediatized it can be easy to see it simply as a spectacle, a mask that hides the party’s true politics. Such a simplified view of mass mediation, which has become common-sense in the age of fake news, understands the aestheticization of maximum governance as a distraction from the true reality of things. Thus when Modi’s BJP first embraced “vikas”, or “development”, in the run up to the 2014 elections, it was seen by some as a sign of “the duplicity of the party in presenting a face that would be more appealing to a wider section of the electorate, while the hidden agenda was Hindutva.”<sup>10</sup> But aesthetics is not reducible to spectacle or even to representation.<sup>11</sup> While the spectacular content of maximum governance is crucial to this story, a critique of maximum governance – even a critique that sees it primarily as form – cannot stop with seeing it as a mask. While the analysis of the governance as form must address the mass media, it should not be limited to it, for a capacious understanding of media can help us unpack the many sociotechnical systems that are being deployed in the name of governance.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the fact that the promises of maximum governance have not and cannot materialize, major managerial shifts have occurred in Indian statecraft since the BJP’s

---

<sup>10</sup> Gopal Jayal, “Introduction,” xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

<sup>12</sup> Here I particularly draw from the “cultural techniques” project of German media theory. See for example Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*; Martin, “Infrastructure and Mediapolitics.”

election win of 2014, the first time in three decades that a party has ruled the country with an outright majority. A new culture and aesthetics of performance tracking is proliferating at every level of the government. A vast programme of demolition and construction, which will result in a new Parliament building and massive new government offices, is underway in the centre of the national capital. Almost every resident of India is now enrolled in a biometric identity database that is used for everything from opening bank accounts to targeting voters to excluding Muslims from Indian citizenship.<sup>13</sup> These shifts in form and procedure underwrite concrete changes in the everyday workings of the state and in what it means to be a citizen. However, the changes that are taking place are not the changes that are promised: the outcomes of biometrics, of dashboards, of the central vista redevelopment — the three cases studies this thesis considers in depth — are often very different from the declarations that are made on their behalf. More often than not, the sociotechnical systems instituted in the name of maximum governance facilitate a neoliberal programme of extraction and accumulation of data, capital and resources. And while “minimum government” is maximum governance’s corollary promise, these schemes tend to centralize and enhance the power of an increasingly violent and majoritarian state.<sup>14</sup>

## **Governance and Hindutva**

---

<sup>13</sup> Khera, *Dissent on Aadhaar*.

<sup>14</sup> As anthropologist of technology Nafis Hasan puts it, “lesser or leaner government does not necessarily translate into either less regulation or weaker states. Indeed, it proliferates the sites for regulation and domination by creating autonomous entities of government that are not part of the formal state apparatus but are instead guided by an enterprise logic.” Hasan, “‘Slow Violence’ and Vacant Citizenship— The Legacies of India’s Digital Governance,” 94.

The BJP's politics are usually understood chiefly in terms of the ethno-nationalist ideology of Hindutva. First articulated by VD Savarkar in the 1920s, Hindutva (translating to "Hinduness") sees the multi-cultural and multi-religious India as the holy land of the Hindus. According to political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot, under Hindutva "Indian culture was to be defined as Hindu culture, and the minorities were to be assimilated by their paying allegiance to the symbols and mainstays of the majority as those of the nation".<sup>15</sup> Today, it is the animating ideological force behind a host of right-wing parties and organizations in India, clustering around the Rashtraya Swayamsewak Sangh, "a tentacular organization that is exceptional for its longevity and its reach", of which the BJP is the national electoral front.<sup>16</sup>

What is the relationship between governance and Hindutva? Niraja Gopal Jayal, a historian of citizenship in India, describes the relationship between two sides of Modi's politics – "vikas", or progress, and Hindutva – as one of "deep, persistent and almost irreconcilable tension".<sup>17</sup> Though this is an appealing reading, it only holds because Jayal collapses progress, governance and technology, all associated with Western modernity. Rather than treating governance, technology and progress as parts of the same imported project of techno-modernity – and hence opposed to the "traditionalism" of Hindutva – vikas (or its bedfellow, governance) and Hindutva can more productively be understood as interlocking and occasionally overlapping projects.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than being Hindutva's opposite, governance might be another way of

---

<sup>15</sup> Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Jaffrelot, *Modi's India*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Gopal Jayal, "Introduction."

<sup>18</sup> For more on interlocking relationship between neoliberalism and Hindutva, see Gopalakrishnan, "Neoliberalism and Hindutva – Fascism, Free Markets and the Restructuring of Indian Capitalism"; Chatterjee, *I Am the People*; Chhachhi, "Neoliberalism, Hindutva and Gender."

expressing some of its most pernicious ideals. As management scholar RFI Smith points out, governance has a particular valence in India, indexing not only modern European ideas about control but also Hindu ideals about virtue. The Hindi “shaasan”, which governance is usually translated as, refers to “administration and other terms such as kingship, dominion, rule, direction, edict, management and guidance.” In Modi’s mouth, “good governance as accountable, citizen-centred government seems to take second place to governance as a tight hand on the reins.”<sup>19</sup> The problematic of maximum governance in the age of Hindutva lies precisely in the slippage between the cybernetic fantasy of governance as a self-correcting digital system and governance as virtuous Hindu kingship.

At the same time, projects of “Digital India”, another of Modi’s catchphrases, and one which is central to maximum governance, are increasingly Hinduised. In the 1970s and 1980s, Indian government IT initiatives had unwieldy acronyms like DISNIC, GISTNIC and MEDLARS.<sup>20</sup> By the early 2000s, according to anthropologist William Mazzarella, the new mnemonics “manifested all the diminutive endearment of cyberpunk convention: Andhra Pradesh’s SMART (Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsible, Transparent) and Kerala’s FRIENDS (Fast, Reliable, Efficient Network for Disbursement of Services)”<sup>21</sup>. The aspirations that such acronyms indexed sought to partake of a global techno-managerial order. Fast forward to today and these mnemonics have been replaced by awkward multilingual puns bridging the high-tech of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an

---

<sup>19</sup> Smith, “Governance.” “Good governance” is also occasionally translated to “suraj”, which has similar connotations. See Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy*.

<sup>20</sup> These refer to the District Information System of the National Informatics Centre, the General Information Service Terminal of the National Informatics Centre and Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System.

<sup>21</sup> Mazzarella, “Internet X-Ray.”

imagined Sanskrit mythos: DARPAN (Dashboard for Analytical Review of Projects Across Nation) also means mirror in Sanskrit. NITI Aayog translates to “policy commission” in Hindi, where NITI is also an acronym for “National Institution for Transforming India”.

Vikas and Hindutva are not idealist categories, then, but overlapping and interlocking political strategies that speak to various constituents at the same time. Maximum governance provides a sanitized, business-friendly technocratic basis on which to make allies, project futures, win over various stakeholders and contest elections. Bangalore billionaires, elite architects, middle-class consumers and global organizations that might shy away from the overt communitarian violence of Hindutva happily clamour after maximum governance’s promise of profit. Rather than attempting to uncover the essence of the BJP, this thesis argues that the party under Modi is Hindu nationalist *and* techno-managerial (as well as crony capitalist and great-leader fascist). It is not reducible to any of these. The idea that it has a true nature that must be revealed, that the drama of managerialism is merely a cover-up for something else, understates the many, interwoven fronts on which politics unfolds and does a disservice to those who oppose this government.

If there is, as Shankar Gopalakrishnan has argued, a “tactical alliance” between neoliberalism and Hindutva, where even as Muslims are being targeted for a potential genocide Hindu corporate elites are becoming ever richer, maximum governance is the means by which this unfolds.<sup>22</sup> To borrow a phrase from art historian Kajri Jain,

---

<sup>22</sup> Gopalakrishnan, “Neoliberalism and Hindutva – Fascism, Free Markets and the Restructuring of Indian Capitalism.”

maximum governance is part of the “uneasy détente between local populisms refracted via an idea of the global and the actual adherence to the institutional imperatives and protocols of neoliberal free trade.”<sup>23</sup> Governance occasionally functions as a mask for Hindutva, but as this thesis argues it also goes hand in hand with its overt violence, ushering in the BJP’s broader innovations: new “distributions of the sensible”, new accumulations of capital, and new forms of exclusion and violence.<sup>24</sup>

## A Populist Apparatus

This thesis combines three case studies – on the ubiquity of performance indices, the Aadhaar biometric identity system and the new architecture of the state – in an inquiry into maximum governance. The case studies in this thesis are knots that draw together institutions, forms of enumeration, methods of visualization and display, practices for the management of people and resources, the construction and ordering of space, a constantly churning PR machinery, and more. Together they provide a sketch of a vast apparatus of governance that has taken shape in India in the past eight years.

The apparatus, a concept drawn from Michel Foucault, brings together the range of phenomena under whose onslaught – felt in different ways by different people – life unfolds. Foucault describes an apparatus as “a thoroughly heterogeneous set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions”.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy*, 254.

<sup>24</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 195.

Living beings are “incessantly captured” in these networks, according to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Building on Foucault, Agamben theorises the apparatus as a diffuse form that congeals various subjectivities and positions in relation to multiple centres of power.<sup>26</sup> In the apparatus of maximum governance, these systems of power span the BJP’s Hindu nationalism and the economic agendas of international organizations, the technologies of control produced by the Bangalore tech industry, the brute deregulation engineered by India’s biggest corporate families, as well as – more obliquely – the outright violence of Hindutva.

The apparatus of governance produces various dichotomies – bureaucratic inefficiency vs managerial efficiency, secular vs Hindu, transparency vs corruption, governance vs government, the people vs the elite – structuring governmental practice, the terms of discourse and how politics is ordered. By existing, by being updated with new numbers, and being continually dramatized by the state’s PR machinery both unofficial and official, the index dashboard, the Aadhaar system, and the Central Vista redevelopment perform and produce the difference between efficiency and inefficiency, between governance and government, transparency and corruption. In this way, maximum governance produces a hegemonic vision of politics as a choice between a technocratic, transparent, Hindu, people’s nation and a corrupt, bureaucratic secular, elite nation. These are the terms on which politics unfolds in India today, and which ineluctably nudge electoral politics to the right.

This production of a “chain of equivalences” is at the basis of Ernesto Laclau’s influential theorization of populism as a “mode of articulation”. For Laclau, populism is a

---

<sup>26</sup> Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*

linguistic and performative form that concatenates various grievances to create a single overarching binary between the common people and an Other.<sup>27</sup> Usually, the Other is an ethnic or religious minority, refugees, corrupt elites or a neighbouring country. In the case of managerial, technocratic and entrepreneurial populisms, which have been theorized in Eastern Europe and Latin America, populists have crusaded against corruption or positioned themselves as business leaders who will run the state like a firm; here, the Other is a corrupt, elite regime characterized by “perceived bad governance”.<sup>28</sup> While most scholars describe these populisms as “centrist” and distinct from more exclusionary identity-based populisms, in India managerial and Hindu nationalist populisms go hand in hand.

Though it has apprehensive elements to it, Modi’s populism is aspirational, promising a new, digital India.<sup>29</sup> His genius has been to integrate the project of Hindu nationalism into a message of tech-savvy national resurgence and transformation. If we follow his economic policies – the so-called “Gujarat model” of deregulation and liberalization – India’s GDP will grow to \$5 trillion by 2024 (at the time of this writing it is just over \$3 trillion). A new era of national greatness will be ushered in by projects like Aadhaar (which is crucial to India’s digital dreams) and by NITI Aayog’s indices (which are crucial to making Indian states more competitive). The new Central Vista project, completed in record time, will be a world-class symbol of this great new nation.

However, the binaries produced by the apparatus of maximum governance do not

---

<sup>27</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

<sup>28</sup> See for example Hartikainen, “Authentic Expertise”; Buštková and Guasti, “The State as a Firm”; Havlík, “Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe.”

<sup>29</sup> For two influential accounts of Modi’s populism in India, see Chatterjee, *I Am the People*; Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*.

neatly coincide. Rather, they are disjunctive, combining in various, often unexpected, ways: efficiency, for example, has long been invoked in relation to both secular and Hindu nationalist politics, while technocracy produces corruption just as often as the traditional bureaucracy, though in different forms. Attending to these disjunctures, to the slippages between these forms, the instability of these seemingly self-evident categories, can allow for a more thorough accounting of contemporary politics and its fractures. Hoping to do just this, the first chapter of this thesis traces a short history of efficiency and transparency – two of the virtues that underwrite the contemporary aesthetics of governance – in post-colonial India. Their histories reveal the various ways in which these terms have been activated in very different political moments and the potentials they hold today. The hope in exposing these disjunctures is not to bring out some truth that has been masked by populist performance but to bring attention to some of the faultlines in an order that can appear watertight, helping move beyond some of the impasses that structure contemporary politics in India and seem to tip the playing field on every occasion in favour of neoliberal Hindutva.<sup>30</sup> This is the subject of this thesis' final chapter. Along the way, this thesis tracks institutions, infrastructures and agents that provide entry points into the governance apparatus.

---

<sup>30</sup> A crucial part of attending to such slippages and disjunctures is to examine to the ways in which these interventions land on the ground, how they are received by people and lower-level bureaucrats. This has unfortunately been beyond the scope of this project. However, this thesis is inspired by the work of journalists, activists and ethnographers that track the reception of top-down government schemes. For activist engagements with the failures of governance, particularly around Aadhaar, see for example Khera, *Dissent on Aadhaar*; “Rethink Aadhaar”; “Aadhaar FAIL!”; “People’s Tribunal on Aadhaar-Related Issues: Evidence Book.” For ethnographic literature, see for example Solanki, “Management of Performance and Performance of Management”; Rao and Greenleaf, “Subverting ID from above and Below”; Cowan, “Uncertain Grounds”; Chambers, ““Lean on Me””; Sriraman, *In Pursuit of Proof*; Masiero, “Digital Governance and the Reconstruction of the Indian Anti-Poverty System.”

## Institutions

Since 1947, India's vast bureaucracy has been a continuing site of crisis as well as the interface through which the government in New Delhi extends control around the country and its people. A series of proposed reforms beginning in 1949 have sought to alter the disposition of this institution, which was inherited largely unchanged from the British. During the later years of Nehruvian socialism, the bureaucracy implemented a complex regime of controls that was popularly known as the license-and-permit raj, leading to a reputation for inefficiency and corruption and new calls for reform. Under Modi, attempts at reform have been spectacularly visible in the construction of new offices for government employees in New Delhi, which promise to increase their efficiency and productivity. But a major part of institutional reform in contemporary India consists of less obviously visible innovations in institutional form that seek to reform or escape postcolonial administration.

For example, the number of think tanks in India has doubled in the last ten years, and the country now has over 500 think tanks, second only to the USA. Signalling a break with the past, these institutions perform new mediations between state and private sector. The think tanks that pop up in this thesis – NITI Aayog and Indian Software Product Industry Roundtable (iSPIRT) – break away from the Planning Commission and the National Association of Software and Service Companies respectively, older institutions of the postcolonial state and capital. The new think tanks embody a transforming India, combining the organizational spirit of startups, a commitment to free market ideals and a subdued – but almost always visible – Hindu aesthetics. They also mediate between the nation-state and the international community of foreign think tanks,

other nation-states, IGOs, and NGOs, functioning, much like the consultancy, a for-profit institutional form with which they share this particular space, as conduits by which managerial forms filter in and out of the country.

Like governance itself, the think tank is a form that encompasses many different types of institutions. Much of the literature on think tanks notes the vagueness and capaciousness of the term. NITI Aayog is an organ of the state and issues policy briefs while iSPIRT functions more like a tech-sector lobbyist. A recent book on the subject notes that “think tanks are both incredibly diverse and difficult to define”.<sup>31</sup> This vagueness, which art historian Pamela Lee calls “structural blurriness”, does work for the think tank: “it is precisely the vagaries of the term – indicating something that can’t be easily circumscribed, named, or rationalized – that endow the think tank with its acute sensibility and power”.<sup>32</sup> This is true for many of the phenomena in this thesis.

Another such institutional form is “the start-up within the government”, an increasingly visible actor in the governance space in the last few years. One of the key actors here — and central to the first case study — is the Unique Identification Development Authority of India (UIDAI), the state organ that is responsible for Aadhaar. Institutions like the UIDAI are described as exceptions to the normal slow, messy functioning of the state. Theorising this common description of the UIDAI as a start-up, anthropologist Vijayanka Nair argues that the start-up form is a means of navigating challenges that the bureaucratic procedural state finds difficult to resolve: “as it encounters challenges, the state forges start-ups, which in turn regenerate the state”.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Landry, “An Introduction to Critical Studies of Think Tanks,” 2.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, *Think Tank Aesthetics*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Nair, “Governing India in Cybertime,” 523.

Citing Aadhaar’s founder Nandan Nilekani, infrastructure scholar Ranjit Singh argues that the UIDAI sees that the “fundamental nature of government is a platform... Such platforms will be implemented by start-ups within the government (like the UIDAI) that later integrate ‘into the main body of the government’”.<sup>34</sup> In both cases, there is a vision of the UIDAI as bringing a new energy, ethos and organizational culture – that of the start-up – to the work of governance and ultimately transforming the state.

Communication scholar Lilly Irani, meanwhile, describes a different kind of institution, private but nevertheless involved in the work of governance: the design consultancy, which produces developmental knowledge that mediates between international funding bodies, the state and communities “on the ground”. Though Irani’s design consultancy occasionally interfaces with the state, it is more properly situated within transnational circuits of expertise that signal the diminishment of the state in development.<sup>35</sup> This seeming diminishment of the state’s role might more accurately be understood as a reorganization of the distributions of responsibility within – and the ends of – developmental governance, where the state cedes the ground of implementation while gaining in the domain of facilitation.

The promise of development has been central to the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Indian state since the beginning of the postcolonial period. Postcolonial India inherited *tout court* the colonial state’s bureaucratic and legal infrastructures as well, significantly for a later section of this thesis, its architecture. In the absence of revolutionary changes to the state structure during the transitions of 1947, a discourse of development allowed the Nehruvian state to distance itself from the colonial state and

---

<sup>34</sup> Singh, “Give Me a Database and I Will Raise the Nation-State,” 514.

<sup>35</sup> Irani, *Chasing Innovation*.

claim legitimacy.<sup>36</sup> Since then, development has continued to play a central role in the discourse and practice of the state. The start-up within the government, the design consultancy, and the new think tanks produce a reanimated framing of the old problem of development, one in which the state and its bureaucracy are not the protagonists of development so much as its handmaidens and facilitators.

This thesis tries to situate these innovations in institutional forms within a broader transnational ecology of actors where state and non-state are no longer easily distinguishable from one another. The startup within the state and the government think tank interface with an architecture practice with an attached consultancy, international not-for-profits that promote data in governance, for-profit companies masquerading as public agencies, national information utilities, and a range of other institutions. As political theorist Ajay Gudavarthy puts it, governance “entailed and envisioned the conversion of the citizen who engaged with the state into essentially a consumer in the market... citizenship itself comes to be defined, not in terms of negotiations with the state, but consumption of goods and services delivered by a plethora of agencies.”<sup>37</sup>

## Agents

One way of tracking the rise of maximum governance is to focus on the individual agents who design, manage and implement projects of governance under Modi. These agents are opportunistic, entrepreneurial characters for whom the slipperiness of maximum governance provides a fertile ground on which to operate. In this they bear a family

---

<sup>36</sup> Chatterjee, “Development Planning and the Indian State.”

<sup>37</sup> Gudavarthy, *Politics of Post-Civil Society*, 161.

resemblance to the global operators that architecture theorist Keller Easterling describes as “pirates”, smooth operators who exploit the faultlines in transnational economics and politics.<sup>38</sup>

In the 1980s, Sam Pitroda, a US-returned tech millionaire, founded the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), a proto-startup-within-the-state that led India’s move from analogue to digital telephony. Before Pitroda’s arrival and the founding of C-DOT — which was celebrated as a space where employees could address their boss by name -- the waiting time to get a phone line for Indians famously extended to five years or longer; by the late 1980s millions of new lines had been installed. International relations scholar Itty Abraham glosses Pitroda and other charismatic nationalist managers of techno-science as “technology czars”. These figures, who crop up throughout the story of postcolonial Indian technoscience, “reinforce the widely circulating belief that advances in technology come from the genius of individuals who are able to circumvent bureaucratic hurdles and material difficulties of innovation through the sheer application of their unique talents and skills”.<sup>39</sup> In addition to having supposedly unique skills, these individuals were highly networked, often close to the Prime Ministers in power (Pitroda was one of Rajiv Gandhi’s right hand men).

While Pitroda has remained more or less devoted to the Congress party, many of the tech czars that followed him have been more slippery. It is worth tracking agents over time, for while they are more than happy to switch allegiances, they also come to the table with their own agendas — if not ideologies — that are often aligned with larger global forces. The tech billionaire Nandan Nilekani, for example, who is the architect of

---

<sup>38</sup> Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*.

<sup>39</sup> Abraham, “From the Commission to the Mission Model,” 19.

the Aadhaar biometric identity project which is the topic of the first chapter of this thesis, ran a failed bid to become the Congress Party Member of Parliament from Bangalore in 2014. Shortly after the BJP won the central elections that year, Nilekani flew to Delhi to meet Modi and altered the immediate ends of the Aadhaar project to suit the BJP's goals.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Nilekani continues to fund and preside over a network of institutions that aggressively pushes an agenda of good governance for development — in India and globally — which, though largely compatible with Modi's "maximum governance", differs from it in important ways. Nilekani calls himself an "entrepreneur within government".<sup>41</sup>

A related type is what historian Ravinder Kaur calls the "bureaucrat-as-CEO".<sup>42</sup> Amitabh Kant, the CEO of the NITI Aayog and the agent at the heart of my second chapter, is just such a character. A character who is at home at the World Economic Forum in Davos and in central Delhi, the bureaucrat-as-CEO constantly innovates to produce the new nation. He is a symptom of an "entrepreneurial society", a character who has to discharge the work of the state while balancing his book and finding "convergences" with other actors.<sup>43</sup> A lifelong civil servant of the Indian Administrative Service, the top rung of the Indian bureaucracy, Kant is most famous for leading the development of a string of tourism branding campaigns, first for the state of Kerala and then for the nation (the well-known "Incredible India!" campaign is his handiwork).

The architect of the Central Vista redevelopment, Bimal Patel is more genial and more genteel. From a family of architects, the grey-haired, bespectacled Gujarati is

---

<sup>40</sup> Aiyar, *Aadhaar*.

<sup>41</sup> Nilekani, *Imagining India*.

<sup>42</sup> Kaur, *Brand New Nation*.

<sup>43</sup> Bear, *Navigating Austerity*.

described as “Modi’s favourite architect”.<sup>44</sup> A PhD in Planning from UC Berkeley, the buildings that Patel has built since the 1990s have been chameleonic, shapeshifting to match the needs of various (usually government or corporate) clients. His body of scholarship, co-authored with experts at the World Bank and the Brookings Institution, propose privatization and deregulation as the answer to the problems facing Indian cities. Efficiency and productivity are his favourite words. Patel’s strength is not ideology, it is image. Hailing from Gujarat, his rise has paralleled Modi’s to the point where he is today the country’s most powerful architect, the charming and reasonable face of a new order.

The architect as global managerial professional, the bureaucrat-as-CEO and the entrepreneur within the government: these three characters have different platforms, ideologies and motivations but they are all entrepreneurial agents who are manipulating and benefiting from the new India. Despite the different positions they inhabit, the three much in common: All are upper-caste men in their sixties, who portray themselves as children of socialist India. While it is impossible to ascertain their ideological positions, they are clearly not of the hard-line of the Hindu right. Nilekani has run for elections on the Congress ticket and supports a range of liberal causes and institutions and Amitabh Kant has openly declared that beef should be allowed in India.<sup>45</sup> All three are pragmatists and have a predilection for public-private partnerships.

Like agents through history, whether of empires or of large corporations, they are faces of larger systems. Behind them lurk numerous less visible actors who profit or gain from their visibility in many ways. But this thesis is not about the dense networks of

---

<sup>44</sup> Trivedy, “Parliament to Kashi Vishwanath.”

<sup>45</sup> PTI, “People Should Be Allowed to Eat Beef If They Want To.”

power and control that lurk just out of sight. Unlike shadowy business tycoons and savvy political string-pullers, these characters don't try to hide themselves. In fact, like successful managers around the world, they write books about their successes, distilling their victories into repeatable formulas that provide a hook for the aspirations of millions. The genre of detecting to which this thesis is aligned is not the "whodunit" but the "howdunit", seeking to understand how these agents have manipulated and strategically aligned themselves within the apparatus of power to achieve their desired ends and usher in a new order.

## **Infrastructures**

Each of the case studies in this thesis looks at an infrastructure or set of infrastructures between institutions of governance and various actors. "Matter than enable the movement of other matter", infrastructures limit what subjects can do in exchange for extending their reach and enhancing their power.<sup>46</sup> By producing channels of communication and control between subjects through networked systems, infrastructures formalize relations of power and exchange. They produce distinctions, between users and technical systems, between designer and users, and between different kinds of users.<sup>47</sup> Attending to their design allows us to detect the dispositions of technosocial systems, to analyse what kinds of communications and control they afford, who they empower, and who they exclude. This thesis takes a range of approaches to the infrastructures of maximum governance.

---

<sup>46</sup> Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure"; Hookway, *Interface*.

<sup>47</sup> Siegert, "Introduction"; Martin, "Infrastructure and Mediapolitics."

They unpack their aesthetics, the promises that are made on the behalf the main case study, how they function in the world of images and desires. At the same time, recognizing the technical function of infrastructures as crucial, they address how their designs are contributing to the entrepreneurial neoliberal (and often Hindu nationalist) restructuring of Indian state and society

The first chapter of this thesis is on the Aadhaar biometric identification project. Aadhaar is an ecosystem of infrastructures with the registration of biometrics and the exchange of user data for services at its core. Putatively built as a system to deliver welfare benefits efficiently, Aadhaar has proliferated into a ubiquitous feature of life in India. From its initial promise of “targeted” development, stemming “leakages” in the welfare system, its targeting capabilities have been used on isolate groups of voters, immigrants and consumers, sometimes with chilling consequences. India Stack, a set of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) built on Aadhaar, enables entrepreneurial actors to use the Aadhaar system for various, usually extractive ends. The project undergirds a vision for a model of development based on Digital ID which is being exported around the global South as part of a World Bank-supported global regime of Identification for Development.

The second chapter turns to the performance index, an enumerative form that NITI Aayog uses to rank territorial units against each other. The visualization and ranking of states and districts facilitates an understanding of development as perpetual competition in the hopes of promoting entrepreneurship. NITI Aayog’s indices often incentivize the setting up of Aadhaar-style infrastructures to create a broader ecology of entrepreneurship based on the extraction of data. A break from the state’s old sample-

survey based statistical apparatus, the production of indices takes place in the name of “competitive federalism”. In fact, these interfaces have centralized power while inaugurating a race to the bottom in deregulation and privatization.

Finally, the Central Vista redevelopment, a project of demolition and construction in central Delhi, promises to remake the employees of the central government into efficient and productive innovators. Building a new state Secretariat in the image of a data centre, the buildings promise a hermetically networked government that intensifies the projects of Aadhaar and the index. Even as they function as an icon for an increasingly confident Hindu nationalist government, they use the language of management to mask and defuse their links to Hindutva.

While these are specific case studies, these interfaces have broad-reaching effects. They are doing important work for the government and as such are being replicated and taken up in various domains. India Stack promises to alter healthcare, travel, payments, and more in the image of Aadhaar, and its model is being spread around the world, particularly in parts of Africa. The index is a viral form and in India today it is applied to everything from water management to measuring innovation. And the Central Vista is only one of the most visible examples of a pattern of urban redevelopment that is taking place across the country.

## **World-Class Innovation**

These interfaces are simultaneously technical, entrepreneurial and aesthetic. They continue to be animated by a familiar set of technical projects: the projects of reorganizing how the government works, of enumerating and collecting data, of creating ever-more efficient infrastructures for the transfer of capital and commodities. According to anthropologist James Ferguson, who called development an “anti-politics machine”, the discourse of development renders complex entanglements of the social, geographical and economic as technical problems. This “rendering technical” closes off the possibility for democratic debate and dissent and turn large domains of the political into a matter for experts.<sup>48</sup> How have these technical projects, in contrast to the projects described by Ferguson, escaped the domain of experts and bureaucrats and entered the stage of the political?

This thesis describes two major ways in which the transformation from technical to political occurs in India today: through the medium of the entrepreneurial and the aesthetic. Lilly Irani describes “rendering entrepreneurial” as a means by which certain issues are designated as sites for innovation. The entrepreneurial is domain in which social problems are treated as design challenges and become the subject of hackathons, where innovation and creative thinking will provide agile solutions to entrenched problems. In Irani’s account, it is the domain of “empathetic”, feminized design thinking that takes place at development consultancies and is contrasted with a putatively masculine “rendering technical” that is identified with technocratic states.<sup>49</sup> Rather than being opposed to one another, in India this thesis finds that the two are symbiotic. For

---

<sup>48</sup> Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

<sup>49</sup> Irani, *Chasing Innovation*.

example, the UIDAI, a state agency despite its startup performance, regularly organizes hackathons to build applications on top of Aadhaar. And by facilitating competition the rankings of the index are supposed to push bureaucrats to behave more like innovative entrepreneurs. In India under maximum governance, then, the state undergirds the entrepreneurial, by using its coercive technical apparatus to collect the data that will enable innovation. The state making such data transparent and available for entrepreneurship is even described as a triumph of Indian democracy.<sup>50</sup>

If the entrepreneurial refers to activities carried out under the sign of innovation, it goes hand in hand with the aesthetic, whose leitmotif is the world class. The urban geographer D Asher Ghertner proposes the perception of world-classness as the means by which slum clearance decisions are made in millennial Delhi. According to Ghertner, under constraints of urgency and in the face of an increasingly complex system of statistics and maps, aesthetics came to replace enumeration as the principle that determined people's legitimate habitation in a locality. How well an area matched up to the image of the world class determined its fate. While Ghertner's conceptualization is useful, rather than seeing the aesthetic as replacing the enumerative in chronological succession, this thesis argues that enumeration itself is being rendered aesthetic.<sup>51</sup>

Irani and Ghertner both implicitly argue that the technical is an older form, identified with the technocratic expertise of post-colonial planning and statistics, which has withered away under contemporary neoliberalism. While this is true of certain forms and instruments of technical knowledge, others have emerged to replace them: NITI

---

<sup>50</sup> Jain, "The West Created Monopolies, We Democratised Data."

<sup>51</sup> Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics*.

Aayog's indices, borrowed from the World Bank and other IGOs, are clearly more world class and more supportive of innovation than the sample surveys of postcolonial statistics. Likewise, the digital and biometric Aadhaar is a more world-class and more innovative form of identification than the ration cards and PAN cards that it is supposed to one day replace. These new infrastructures – that are simultaneously technical, aesthetic and entrepreneurial – are today continually hawked in the political domain.

Rendered aesthetic and entrepreneurial, the technical is finally introduced into the domain of the political, though within the narrow and highly managed arena of electoral politics. This is the mechanism of managerial populism and its chief achievement. This slippery chain of equivalences, however, can also be a site of dissent, which the conclusion of this thesis tries to open up. The next few chapters trace a path through the web of associations and dissimulations that characterise maximum governance, beginning with the history of two virtues that are the cornerstone of governance: efficiency and transparency.

## **Prelude: A Genealogy of Maximum Governance**

Maximum governance's direct precursor can be found in World Bank-sponsored discourses of "good governance" that have been ascendant since the 1990s. Under the so-called Washington consensus that emerged after 1982, International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programmes imposed a standard package of free market reforms on Third World countries regardless of their historical and social specificities. But it soon became clear even to their supporters that these programmes, which sought to sideline the state, were failing to bring about their desired results. By the late 1990s, for example, former World Bank chief economist Joseph Stiglitz was arguing for a "post-Washington consensus".<sup>52</sup> These policies had not only failed to bring about development by their own metrics, they were also, as critical legal scholar Radha D'Souza points out, unable to maintain the continued extraction of capital and resources from the Third World economies they had restructured.<sup>53</sup>

Stiglitz was both echoing and responding to developments from the Global South. At the 1989 meeting of the World Bank, for example, Manmohan Singh, the mild-mannered economist who had been the chief of India's Planning Commission and was serving as the Secretary General of a short-lived organization called the South Commission, was already calling for a kind of neoliberal reform "tailored to the specific requirements of each country".<sup>54</sup> In the late 1980s, through the South Commission, the

---

<sup>52</sup> Stiglitz, "More Instruments and Broader Goals: Moving toward the Post-Washington Consensus."

<sup>53</sup> D'Souza, *What's Wrong with Rights?*

<sup>54</sup> Prashad, *The Poorer Nations*.

states of the Non-Aligned Movement attempted to balance the IMF-World Bank free market approach with the state-led approach that had been followed in East Asia, hammering out various proposals for what historian Vijay Prashad has called “neoliberalism with Southern characteristics”.<sup>55</sup> While none of these proposals took hold, they lay the groundwork for “good governance” and the form of neoliberalism that emerged in India and much of the global South.

Though India was largely able to avoid IMF-imposed austerity through the 1980s,<sup>56</sup> an economic crisis in 1991 finally forced it to abandon the planned economy and take a 5.7 billion dollar IMF loan with the conditions that went along with it. A country that had been famous for its distinct model of state-led protectionism – the mixed economy of “Nehruvian socialism” – rapidly privatised its public enterprises, dramatically curtailed state subsidies and threw open its doors to foreign capital. When it did so, it followed a path that hewed closer to the experiments of the South Commission than IMF orthodoxy. Manmohan Singh was in charge, first as Finance Minister and a decade and a half later as Prime Minister. Built on growth in the service sector (particularly in IT) and private infrastructure development, by the mid-2000s, India’s “success story” appeared to be part of a global trend that was also emerging in countries like Brazil and South Africa. Under this model, excess capital was put towards social welfare programmes, buying dominance over subaltern groups who were excluded from economic growth in a set-up that political theorist Partha Chatterjee has called the

---

<sup>55</sup> Prashad.

<sup>56</sup> When India took a 5 billion dollar IMF loan in 1981, instead of being imposed from outside a softer version of the IMF’s conditions were – somewhat paradoxically -- built into the five-year plan. See Chaudhry, Kelkar, and Yadav, “The Evolution of ‘Homegrown Conditionality’ in India.”

“tactically extended state”.<sup>57</sup> Though it was gentler than the IMF hard line, this “inclusive neoliberalism” nevertheless facilitated mass dispossession and gave rise to skyrocketing inequality.<sup>58</sup> Responding to the success of the BRICS countries, as they came to be called, the World Bank’s recommendations shifted from a simplistic fundamentalism of the free market to a “reconstructed neoliberalism” with a limited recognition of the importance of the state.<sup>59</sup>

This shift, “from market fundamentalism to governance fundamentalism”, meant the beginning of World Bank involvement in the micromanagement of Third World administrations.<sup>60</sup> Good governance programmes came to replace structural adjustment programmes as the conditions for loans. Now reforms focussed less on macroeconomic and monetary policy and more on changing processes of public administration, rule of law, accountability and transparency to create a more favourable business environment for investors and corporations from the global north. Good governance was the new way to guarantee continued returns for global finance, countering movements to the left and manage the state’s tactical extensions.

If governance fundamentalism has been a largely top-down process promoted by intergovernmental organizations and governments (with international consultancies and multinational corporations as their accomplices and beneficiaries), it depends on virtues that also managed to garner broad public support on the ground. In India today, values like transparency and efficiency, which are the cornerstone of good governance, have

---

<sup>57</sup> Chatterjee, *I Am the People*.

<sup>58</sup> Nilsen, “From Inclusive Neoliberalism to Authoritarian Populism: Trajectories of Change in the World’s Largest Democracy.”

<sup>59</sup> Prashad, *The Poorer Nations*.

<sup>60</sup> D’Souza, *What’s Wrong with Rights?*, 160.

become what anthropologists Laura Bear and Nayanika Mathur call “public goods”: desirable ideals that are “considered universally beneficial for everyone and [are] the rationale for radical changes to bureaucratic organizations”.<sup>61</sup> At work here is what Michel Foucault calls “governmentality”, or the “conduct of conduct”, the ways ordinary people are trained to take up the state’s categories in their own lives, filtering the goals of government into everyday mentalities.<sup>62</sup> For “minimum government, maximum governance” to work as a slogan in BJP’s election 2014 campaign and after, governance had to have a collective emotional charge for citizens. A significant minority of Indians had to have a stake in values like transparency and efficiency. In order for the aestheticization of governance to be successful, in other words, it had to have first been governmentalized. Administrative concerns that were once arcane and wonkish had to become meaningful to the public. This process has been in the making for decades.

## Efficiency

As is well known, the postcolonial Indian state was born with technocratic tendencies.<sup>63</sup> In 1953, Ford Foundation expert Paul Appleby was invited to India by Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of the newly independent nation. After touring the country for three months Appleby, who taught public administration at Syracuse University, gave a set of recommendations on how to improve the efficiency of the Indian administration.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Bear and Mathur, “Introduction: Remaking the Public Good,” 21.

<sup>62</sup> Foucault, “Governmentality.”

<sup>63</sup> Partha Chatterjee argues that these technocratic tendencies predate independence. Chatterjee, “Development Planning and the Indian State.” See also Khilnani, *The Idea of India*.

<sup>64</sup> Appleby’s recommendations were preceded by two reports by senior Indian bureaucrats on administrative reorganization: the Ayyangar report and the Gorwala report of 1949 and 1952 respectively.

Borrowing from the state of art in corporate management, Appleby advocated setting up a Division of Organization and Methods (or O&M) within the Cabinet, which vetted governmental procedures to make them more efficient. His other recommendations, broadly motivated by an O&M approach, ranged from a wholesale restructuring of the civil services, which did not take hold, to new procedures for handling paperwork, which did.<sup>65</sup> But Appleby's most lasting contribution may have been in setting up of the Indian Institute of Public Administration, which turned the question of governmental efficiency into an expert discipline, to be debated at its conferences and in the pages of its journal by scholars and civil servants. The Nehruvian period was in general a period characterised by technocratic expertise and the question of governmental efficiency would be treated no differently.

By the mid-1980s, the problem of governmental efficiency was being approached differently. Rather than individual experts like Appleby proposing sweeping reforms, the pursuit of efficiency became a problem of monitoring performance.<sup>66</sup> In a landmark public broadcast outlining his new government's commitments in January 1985, the computer-savvy Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi "asked that the decision-making

---

<sup>65</sup> Appleby was obsessed with paperwork. One section of his report, for example, describes in painstaking detail the movement of a single file through a government office: There were 30 to 42 different handlings of a letter when the letter was given consideration only within a single department of a ministry; six of these handlings are required in a single office at six different points in the process, four in each of two other offices, and from 12 to 18 different offices were involved in the whole process, not including the central despatch office. In addition, records and indexing appear to be entered in journal-type books, papers to be assembled in tied bundles of presumably self-sufficient character, cross indexing to be extremely difficult and inadequate, and any individual paper to require laborious search through these tied bundles! Modern files, loose-leaf and card files and cross-indexing, the use of fewer pins, less cord, more paperclips, more carbons, and more flexibility and expedition in access to particular papers seem to be as much indicated as a reorganization of the system of preparation and review." Appleby, "Public Administration In India: Report Of A Survey."

<sup>66</sup> Mathur, *Recasting Public Administration in India*.

processes should be decentralised along with enforcement of accountability. Rules and procedures will be drastically simplified to speed up decision-making. *Results will take precedence over procedures.*"<sup>67</sup> In the account of civil servant Prahlad K Basu, the changes were being made to “bring about greater efficiency and effectiveness in the functioning of government and to make administration more *responsive, accountable and result-oriented*”.<sup>68</sup> The careful reordering of process and structure – which earlier efforts at reform had strived for – was being replaced by the collection of information on the basis of which “performance” could be evaluated. Governance was taking the place of public administration.<sup>69</sup>

Spurred on by the emergence of governmental computer networks in India after the founding of the National Informatics Centre in 1976, a new Ministry of Programme Implementation, founded in 1985, collected and monitored data on government projects in an Online Computerised Management System.<sup>70</sup> The ministry’s goal was to be a “catalyst”, simply providing information so that organizations could make themselves more efficient. As theorist of public administration B Guy Peters notes, this was reflective of a global shift from traditional public administration approaches, wherein performance was “judged primarily on legal and accounting grounds”, to approaches derived from New Public Management, a school of administrative thought that borrowed from techniques of corporate management, where performance was judged on

---

<sup>67</sup> Gandhi, *Rajiv Gandhi Selected Speeches 1984-1985*, 1:13. My italics.

<sup>68</sup> Basu, “Strategic Issues in Administrative Reorganisation,” M49. My italics.

<sup>69</sup> Fukuyama points out that governance concerns itself with “execution, or what has traditionally fallen within the domain of public administration.” Fukuyama, “What Is Governance?,” 4.

<sup>70</sup> For more of this history, see Subramanian, *India and the Computer*. For a take on this history that centres the technology of relational databases, which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, see Hasan, “‘Slow Violence’ and Vacant Citizenship— The Legacies of India’s Digital Governance.”

“quantifiable indicators of the outputs of government”.<sup>71</sup> These quantifiable indicators – which in the 1980s were still largely internal matters – lay the basis for the current government’s dramatization of performance.

Even as it facilitated a cybernetic imaginary of a self-correcting system, increasingly granular performance tracking enabled the intensification of fantasies of control and centralization that have always been a part of postcolonial development.<sup>72</sup> The boyish Rajeev Gandhi, an Air India pilot before he was thrust into political leadership, compared running the country to flying an aeroplane: “What fun it used to be to fly. Now I find myself being relegated to being a Prime Minister. Although I am strapped behind a desk, the task of moving ahead in a particular direction is not very different. But somehow there seems to be a lot more inertia, momentum — the instrument seems to have tremendous lag, and the controls are very sluggish”.<sup>73</sup> This fantasy has reached new heights under Modi’s government, which has instituted systems for the “real-time” tracking of performance with great zeal.

While some of the concerns of efficiency haven’t changed very much since the 1950s, today they are dramatized in new ways, celebrated in newspaper exclusives: “It has taken six years for the Narendra Modi government to push this major reform through the bureaucracy, but finally, from next month, no central government file will pass more than four hands before a decision and ministries will also be able to submit e-files to each

---

<sup>71</sup> Peters, “The Changing Nature of Public Administration: From Easy Answers to Hard Questions.”

<sup>72</sup> Two major institutions in this history are the Planning Commission, which directed economic development, and the postcolonial statistical apparatus centred on the Indian Statistical Institute and the National Statistical Office, which collected detailed numbers in order to track the progress of development.

<sup>73</sup> Gandhi, *Rajiv Gandhi Selected Speeches 1984-1985*, 1:182. Here the nation-state is figured implicitly as a measurable and manipulable economy. For the history of this emergence of “the economy” as congruent with the nation-state, see Mitchell, “Fixing the Economy.”

other.”<sup>74</sup> Efficiency has shifted from being a rarefied discourse of planning elites, buried in reports and journals, to a public good that is advertised by politicians and cited as the motivations for reforms. Even as increased efficiency underwrites new forms of control, it has moved to the front of the house, a way of adjudging a relation of investment between the state and its entrepreneurial citizens, for whom less paperwork means smoother services and more ease of doing business.

## Transparency

The economic liberalization of 1991 brought to a head trends towards a consumer society that had been in the making throughout the 1980s. Economic reforms, along with the widespread availability of information technologies, led to the promise of a new relationship between the state and its citizens. Writing about e-governance initiatives in the 1990s, anthropologist William Mazzarella argues that “after a high-modern interregnum of impersonal and alienating bureaucratic institutions, e-governance heralded the return – now on a national scale – of the face-to-face polis.”<sup>75</sup> At the same time, through the 1990s, transparency was being posed globally as the solution for corruption in poorly governed regimes around the global South.<sup>76</sup>

The turn to transparency required nothing less than a shift in the normative ideal of the Indian citizen. While the rural poor had been the idealized citizens of Indian

---

<sup>74</sup> Sharma, “Exclusive | Big Governance Reform.”

<sup>75</sup> Mazzarella, “Internet X-Ray,” 486.

<sup>76</sup> Hood and Heald, *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?*

popular politics and media in the Nehruvian period, by the 1980s, an emergent urban consumer middle-class began to take its place.<sup>77</sup> As India lost its socialist momentum, the new Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi had called “for the construction of autobahns, airfields, speedy trains, shopping malls, and entertainment centres of excellence, big housing complexes, modern hospitals and healthcare centres.”<sup>78</sup> In the wake of these reforms a new breed of “middle-class activist” began to emerge in Indian cities, demanding not only transparency but also efficiency from government services and the clearance of slums that were deemed “nuisances”.<sup>79</sup> Such mobilizations by a class of consumer-citizens laid the basis for present performances of transparency under the BJP.

Beginning in the 1990s organizations like the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (or the Association for Empowerment of Labourers and Farmers, MKSS) began to counter local corruption to ensure that workers were being paid fair rates. The movement countered corruption that was often collusive between the lower bureaucracy and workers, who would be paid less in exchange with the understanding that they would have to work less. The organization led a campaign for a nationwide Right to Information Act, which was passed in 2005 and became a powerful tool to demand transparency and accountability in the state’s workings.<sup>80</sup> While MKSS is a non-party political organization with a broadly leftist persuasion, many of the new activists who promoted the cause of transparency often eschewed the political ideologies of the left and the right.

---

<sup>77</sup> Rajagopal, “The Emergency as Prehistory of the New Indian Middle Class\*.”

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Prasad, *The Poorer Nations*.

<sup>79</sup> Bhan, *In the Public’s Interest*.

<sup>80</sup> Mukhopadhyay, “Foregrounding Financial Accountability in Governance.”

Chief among these was the India Against Corruption movement, a massive political agitation that took place in 2010, which brought together a range of characters including a religious leader with ties to the World Economic Forum, a Gandhian activist, a popular TV yogi, a Delhi University political scientist, a retired police chief and a former school teacher with political ambitions. The political party that emerged from the movement, the Aam Aadmi Party (Common People's Party), led by the former schoolteacher Arvind Kejriwal, has held the majority in the National Capital Territory of Delhi since 2012, where it is committed to a putatively de-ideologized politics of efficiency and transparency. Calling it a "movement against politics", political theorist Partha Chatterjee parsed it as "a populist movement in Ernesto Laclau's sense in which groups with a variety of complaints and demands come together by asserting that their demands are equivalent since they are all demands of the "people" directed against a common "enemy." In this case, the enemy was designated as the class of politicians and government officials, all of whom were said to be corrupt."<sup>81</sup>

In contrast to the rural corruption that was impacting the livelihoods of the poor which had been centred by MKSS, the India Against Corruption movement was taken up by an urban middle-class for whom corruption was an inconvenience and a national shame. Technology played a central role here, with websites like [ipaidabribe.com](http://ipaidabribe.com) acting as platforms to dramatize middle-class consumer-citizens' encounters with corruption. William Mazzarella has called this sort of transparency "crucial to the multilateral marriage of an antipolitical politics, management theory, and corporate infotech".<sup>82</sup> The

---

<sup>81</sup> Chatterjee, "The Movement against Politics," 118.

<sup>82</sup> Mazzarella, "Internet X-Ray," 489.

“technomoral” language of the AAP, “mixing technocratic languages of law and policy with moral pronouncements”, set the stage for the BJP’s embrace of transparency and accountability as its own platform.<sup>83</sup>

In the run up to the 2014 elections, a group of savvy young managerial professionals who supported Modi echoed the AAP’s calls for accountable governance. As Sunil Khilnani puts it, “the real masterminds of Modi’s political campaigns are not shadowy figures wearing RSS uniform under their plainclothes. They are smart, cheery IIT-ians [alumni of Indian Institutes of Technology]”<sup>84</sup>. A group that called themselves the Citizens for Accountable Governance (or CAG) sought to project Modi as a dynamic pro-business leader. The group “chose their name in a nod to ... the national auditor [the Comptroller Auditor General, with which it shares an acronym], which called attention to corruption during a time of Congress party-led government.”<sup>85</sup> It was largely successful in its projection of Modi as a pro-business technocrat. The uneasy coupling of transparency and efficiency, then, composed the technomoral core around which Modi broadened his appeal beyond Hindutva to a neoliberal, globalized aspirational urban middle-class.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Bornstein and Sharma, “The Righteous and the Rightful.”

<sup>84</sup> Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*.

<sup>85</sup> “Cagey.”

<sup>86</sup> Political scientist Priya Chacko points out that the BJP’s embrace of neoliberal economic policy largely followed Modi’s rise. Previous BJP leaders had tended to favour more protectionist policies. Chacko, “Marketizing Hindutva.”



## Identity

“The Aadhaar programme has now conclusively proven that we need not look only to the Silicon Valleys of the world for cutting-edge innovation in technology. Government is an equally fertile environment in which to build such solutions, not as an end in itself but as a means to improve the lives of all 1.2 billion of our fellow Indians.”<sup>87</sup>

- Nandan Nilekani

“‘Honey,’ I confided, ‘I think the world is flat.’

How did I come to this conclusion? I guess you could say it all started in Nandan Nilekani's conference room at Infosys Technologies Limited”

- Thomas Friedman

## **Little Aadhaar, Big Aadhaar**

At first glance, the Aadhaar biometric identification project appears to have been laid out impeccably in advance. In stark contrast to the fickleness of most government schemes, which are subject to the vagaries of political will, according to its proponents the project was designed from the beginning. Aadhaar, meaning “foundation” in various Indian languages, has been hailed as “the world’s most ambitious and biggest social inclusion

---

<sup>87</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*.

program”.<sup>88</sup> Begun in 2009, by 2020 Aadhaar had enrolled the fingerprints and retinal scans of over 90% of India’s population of 1.3 billion into a centralised database. In exchange for scans of their fingerprints and irises, each Indian is assigned a unique 12-digit number. Today, the combination of this number and biometrics is an inescapable part of life in India and undergirds private enterprises as well as government services.

Aadhaar’s billionaire architect Nandan Nilekani is hailed as a visionary. In neoliberal columnist Thomas Friedman’s words: “Silicon Valley has ‘Steve’ – as in Jobs. Seattle has ‘Bill’ – as in Gates. Omaha has ‘Warren’ – as in Buffett. And Bangalore has ‘Nandan’ – as in Nilekani.”<sup>89</sup> Nandan’s 2015 book, *Rebooting India*, lays out a detailed vision of how the entire system of Indian government can be remade in the model of Aadhaar. Chapters are devoted to healthcare, voting, government welfare, highway tolls, and even a plan for “a new federal structure”. Many of these schemes are currently underway. The legendary founder of Indian tech giant Infosys treats the nation-state, reduced primarily to its economy, as a design problem with neat outcomes and cute diagrams.<sup>90</sup>

Yet despite the image of a grand plan laid out in advance, Aadhaar’s designers have also been nimble and agile – to use their own language – in response to changing realities. Questions of public policy are approached with the bluster of a Silicon Valley elevator pitch: “When in the meeting I committed 600 million [enrolments] by March

---

<sup>88</sup> “Nandan Nilekani on What It Takes to Build the World’s Biggest Social Inclusion Program.”

<sup>89</sup> Nilekani, *Imagining India*, x.

<sup>90</sup> The reduction of the nation-state to an economy, rendered as a machine, as a set of “pipes” or “rails” or “platforms” as Nilekani describes it, has a long history. Timothy Mitchell demonstrates that the discursive construct of “the economy” came about in the mid-twentieth century as a way of imagining development without political upheaval. Mitchell, “Fixing the Economy.”

2014, I had no clue how to get there. It's a happy situation that we comfortably surpassed it."<sup>91</sup> Developmental problems are treated as "ten grand challenges" that can be solved by "dedicated teams of hundred" working in "ten startups in government". The intractable problems of the postcolonial nation-state are approached with the logic of a hackathon. Aadhaar is a paradigmatic case of what Evgeny Morozov calls "technical solutionism", an approach to the world that regards social and political issues as problems to be solved.<sup>92</sup>

A CEO with statesmanly ambitions, Nilekani adapted quickly to Modi's election. In his first book, 2009's *Imagining India*, when Modi was still a regional politician, Nilekani disparaged "all his baggage and his unappealing Hindutva triumphalism"<sup>93</sup>, where the "baggage" in question was the fact that as Chief Minister of Gujarat he presided over a pogrom that resulted in the ethnic cleansing of over 2000 Muslims. In the 2014 elections, Nilekani ran a failed bid for office as a candidate of the opposition Congress Party. But by the time his second book was published in 2015, when Modi was Prime Minister, all references to Hindutva had been dropped, and Modi was enthroned at the very top of the new design of the nation-state: "we firmly believe ... that all we need is a start-up in government to address every grand challenge we face...in order to ensure that these projects do not sink under the weight of bureaucratic gravity, it is essential that

---

<sup>91</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*, 24.

<sup>92</sup> Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here*.

<sup>93</sup> Nilekani, *Imagining India*, 293.

they be anchored under the national leader, the prime minister.”<sup>94</sup> As Nilekani puts it, he “would rather be right than righteous”.<sup>95</sup>

[Figure 1]

But beyond the images of nimbleness and the agility, Media scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha has argued that “creep”, the gradual widening of its use beyond its initial purpose, has always been built into Aadhaar. According to Rajadhyaksha, Aadhaar has always been two creatures: a “Little Aadhaar” that is “lithe, lean-and-mean, up front and visible, and a massively data-guzzling Big Aadhaar lurking in the shadows”.<sup>96</sup> This “ghost-image effect” is particularly powerful in matters of citizenship, where from behind the façade of a Little Aadhaar that is apparently agnostic to all markers of culture and identity a Big Aadhaar occasionally emerges, using the forms of enumeration and targeting offered by Aadhaar to render Muslims and other minorities as intruders in the nation.<sup>97</sup> This doubleness is also at work in the “financial inclusion assemblage”, whose proponents have maintained that Aadhaar is nothing more than a voluntary,

---

<sup>94</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*, 292. Even still, through his network of charities Nilekani continues to fund a growing portion of liberal intellectual and civil society activity in the country. While other tech billionaires have set up universities bearing their names, Nilekani has preferred to fund multiple smaller organizations, often through Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, which is run by his wife. These include the New India Foundation, the Indian Institute for Human Settlements

<sup>95</sup> Nilekani, *Imagining India*. In this pronouncement we can detect an attempt to move beyond the righteousness that Erica Bornstein and Aradhana Sharma have diagnosed as part of the “technomoral politics” of governance in 21<sup>st</sup> century India. Bornstein and Sharma, “The Righteous and the Rightful.” Though perhaps Nilekani is more aptly understood as a pirate, “too smart to be right, too smart to be righteous” Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*.

<sup>96</sup> Rajadhyaksha, “Ambivalences of ‘Creep’: Citizenship, Personhood and the Second Digital Turn.”

<sup>97</sup> Rajadhyaksha demonstrates that Aadhaar was designed alongside another enumerative database, the National Population Register, from the very beginning. While the former had “to do with residents, as a populational anonymization, the other ... work[ed] over the same data to create a visibility apparatus for Citizenship that would also weed out the illegal migrants.” Rajadhyaksha, Shah, and Hasan, *The Crisis of the Informational Subject: Overload, Creep, Citizenship*, 79.

“minimalistic” means of verifying identity while also claiming it as the basis for a new form of development.<sup>98</sup>

## **Financial Inclusion and Actually Existing Entrepreneurship**

Aadhaar’s scope has slowly but surely expanded, from an initial proposal for making government services more efficient to a plan to entirely reorganize the Indian economy and nation under the sign of “financial inclusion”. In its initial articulation, Aadhaar, known simply as UID (Universal Identity Document), was supposed to address corruption and “leakages” in the Indian welfare system by verifying the identity of welfare recipients. Nilekani’s first book, published in 2009, doesn’t mention the phrase “financial inclusion” even once. Though he was clearly already interested in what urban theorist Ananya Roy calls “poverty capital” – a way of “doing well by doing good” to use a phrase from management guru CK Prahalad<sup>99</sup> – he had not yet settled on financial inclusion as his *modus operandi*.<sup>100</sup> Before long, the promise of financial inclusion – and the promise of improving the conditions of life of the poor rather than simply improving government efficiency – came to be central to Aadhaar.

While interventions to bring banking to the poor have taken place since the All-India Rural Credit Surveys of the 1950s, these efforts took on a new character in the 1990s and 2000s. In this period microfinance efforts were first routed through Women’s

---

<sup>98</sup> Schwittay, “The Financial Inclusion Assemblage.”

<sup>99</sup> Prahalad, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*.

<sup>100</sup> Roy, *Poverty Capital*.

Self Help Groups and then through “non-banking financial institutions” modelled on the experiments of Mohammed Yunus, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2006 for inventing microcredit, a form of small-scale lending that was taken up across the global south as a preferred form of developmental intervention.<sup>101</sup> By the late 2000s, following the publication of a report on financial inclusion by the Rangarajan Committee and a microfinance crisis in Andhra Pradesh, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was encouraging mainstream banks to enter microfinance, to open new branches in small towns and to create new banking products aimed at financial inclusion. For the RBI, financial inclusion included having a checking account, a savings account, a credit card and being able to use the bank system to send and receive money.<sup>102</sup>

But identity was a problem for mainstream banks, as unlike more informal and local banking systems, their formalized systems could not depend on social relationships to verify identity. Instead, they needed codified markers like photographs, addresses and biometrics that could function at a national scale. Aadhaar pitched itself as the answer to this problem. By 2012, the ability to verify identity based on Aadhaar was expanded to private companies, allowing them to use Aadhaar to comply with the government’s Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements. Globally, stringent KYC requirements had been promoted by the US government in the wake of 9/11, putatively to clamp down on money laundering for terrorism.<sup>103</sup> While KYC requirements for opening a bank account, acquiring a SIM card or registering for a government programme previously required the

---

<sup>101</sup> According to Joanne Meyerowitz, Yunus had asked investors to “change the character of capitalism radically” by replacing “maximization of profit” with “doing good to people and the world.” Meyerowitz’s excellent book is about the centrality of women to global discourses of microcredit. Meyerowitz, *A War on Global Poverty*.

<sup>102</sup> This history is mainly from Sriram, “Identity for Inclusion.”

<sup>103</sup> Breckenridge, *Biometric State*.

submission of multiple forms, proofs of address and identity, passport photographs and so on, in the wake of Aadhaar, fingerprint-based biometric authentication takes care of all these requirements. In place of messy, slow paper-based documents submitted in duplicate, a fingerprint could instantly verify that you are who you say you are.<sup>104</sup> The success of Aadhaar in facilitating KYC processes meant that it had a strong position in determining the course of financial inclusion. As a result, MS Sriram argues, the RBI's comprehensive definition of financial inclusion, which included savings accounts and credit cards, was largely abandoned and the major focus of financial inclusion efforts became micropayment transactions, which could also be facilitated by Aadhaar.<sup>105</sup> To use Ashish Rajadhyaksha's turn of phrase, Aadhaar became "the cog that sought to define the wheel itself".<sup>106</sup>

By December 2009, Nilekani had been invited to head the new Unique Identification Development Authority of India (UIDAI). At a meeting between the UIDAI, Reserve Bank of India, the National Payments Corporation of India and "all major banks", the link between Aadhaar, the banking system and "micropayments" – the basis of financial inclusion – was chalked out.<sup>107</sup> In 2010, the landmark UIDAI report "Creating a Unique Identity Number for Every Resident in India" dedicated a small section towards the end to "one of the potential applications of the UID – the use of the

---

<sup>104</sup> According to historian Keith Breckenridge, "biometric tools have ... commonly been used to curtail or obliterate an existing (and often inadequate) system of documentary government. An effort to escape the limits of the old paper state – of slow, susceptible or unreliable bureaucratic processing, of forgery, deception and translation in the preparation of documents – lies at the core of the effort to develop biometric identification technologies. And this political imperative – to sweep away the slow and messy and unreliable paper-based systems of government – remains a key part of the appeals of these systems". Breckenridge, 18.

<sup>105</sup> Sriram, "Identity for Inclusion."

<sup>106</sup> Rajadhyaksha, "Ambivalences of 'Creep': Citizenship, Personhood and the Second Digital Turn."

<sup>107</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*, 58.

number in driving financial inclusion, and in enabling a micropayments solution that the poor can use to access financial services”.<sup>108</sup> By the publication of Nilekani’s second book in 2015, “financial inclusion”, by now reshaped around microtransactions, was the key to the nation’s developmental problems: “a nation cannot progress when a huge number of its citizens are cut off from accessing the fruits of the country’s development.”<sup>109</sup>

Microtransactions infrastructures were gradually added to Aadhaar. The Aadhaar-Enabled Payments System (AEPS) was launched in 2011, enabling the government to disburse welfare directly into recipients’ bank accounts (opened smoothly using Aadhaar’s KYC technology). The possibility of doing so changed the welfare landscape dramatically, with so-called “Direct Benefit Transfer” being promoted everywhere as an alternative to in-kind welfare disbursements. Instead of receiving grains or gas cylinders, the plan was for welfare recipients to receive money directly in their bank accounts. AEPS was followed in 2016 by Unified Payments Interface (UPI), a protocol that can be used by private players for interoperable microtransactions and has been the foundation of some of India’s biggest and most celebrated tech “unicorns”, enabling them to create payments apps like PayTM and PhonePe.

Seeing Indian capitalism as “lacking”, Aadhaar aimed to transform not-yet-capitalist – in Nilekani’s words, “feudal” – subjects into proper capitalist consumers.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Unique Identification Development Authority of India, Planning Commission, “Creating a Unique Identity Number for Every Resident in India,” 39. A draft version of this document, leaked by Wikileaks on November 2019, does not contain a section on payments.

<sup>109</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*, 50.

<sup>110</sup> This is part of a long tradition of reading “Indian history in terms of a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into ‘inadequacy’” Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 34.

Financial inclusion would not be about helping the poor build up savings but lubricating the exchange of money within a consumer economy. In the 1980s and 1990s, advertising was a major site through which Indians were “trained” to be proper capitalist consumers, often resulting in alignments between the state and large corporations.<sup>111</sup> Instead of training consumers through images, the preferred modality of Aadhaar-enabled financial inclusion is the creation of a new interface, an intervention in the infrastructure of exchange itself. Rather than an incomplete capitalism being conceived of as a problem of purchasing habits, it had become a problem of creating new, non-leaky channels between the state, corporations and citizens. A World Bank blog post lays it out baldly: “Digital ID systems can help companies reduce operating costs associated with regulatory compliance (e.g., electronic know-your customer—eKYC), widen customer bases, generate new markets, and foster a business-friendly environment more broadly.”<sup>112</sup> As a technology that is capable of transforming the unbanked into the banked – by facilitating KYC – Aadhaar constitutes the category of the unbanked as the problem to be fixed through eradication.

While the proponents of financial inclusion argue that informality is a problem of visibility (globally, digital IDs are promoted as a way of formalizing the “invisible billion”<sup>113</sup>), the vast majority of people enrolled in Aadhaar already had some form of official ID and had been counted for over a century in India’s decennial census.<sup>114</sup> The

---

<sup>111</sup> Mazarella, *Shoveling Smoke*.

<sup>112</sup> World Bank, “Inclusive and Trusted Digital ID Can Unlock Opportunities for the World’s Most Vulnerable.”

<sup>113</sup> World Bank.

<sup>114</sup> In fact what appears informal has, like all aspects of modern Indian society, been shaped in profound ways by such technologies of governmentality. For more, see Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification”; Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation*.

rhetorical thrust of Aadhaar's attempted destruction of informality builds on widespread notions of informality as "a domain of survival by the poor and marginalized".<sup>115</sup> But as recent scholarship – especially of cities in the global South – reminds us, spaces of informal exchange are often sites of resistance, persistence and innovation with thriving commerce and entrepreneurship. Even in environments saturated with digitality, where access is not a problem of exclusion, informality continues to persist, often in ways that theorists find particularly hopeful.<sup>116</sup> Contrary to the rhetoric of financial inclusion, as James C Scott argues, informality itself is not necessarily a source of exclusion; rather, it is often a way of coping with inequality and uneven development.<sup>117</sup>

Rather than referring to an empirical condition, urban theorist Ananya Roy argues that informality is a designation of exception that suspends the normal order: "the state has the power to determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear".<sup>118</sup> The designation of vast parts of the population of India as "informal" is contiguous with a range of forms of exception that the state uses to legitimise various interventions, from slum clearances to digital identity projects. As Ananya Vajpeyi argues, "informal workers, landless peasants, casual labor, dispossessed farmers driven by new global trade régimes to mass suicide, tribals at the receiving end of ecocidal development, the slumdwelling urban poor, illegal immigrants from neighboring nations, riot survivors, 'oustees', 'detainees', and victims of insurgent and separatist movements forced to relocate within the country", all exist in

---

<sup>115</sup> Bhan, *In the Public's Interest*, 8.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*.

<sup>117</sup> Scott, *Seeing like a State*.

<sup>118</sup> Roy, "Urban Informality," 149.

states of exception against which formal society and economy are constructed.<sup>119</sup> But far from rescuing them from a state of precarity, the concrete processes of “financial inclusion” consecrate the informal as a new site for state-facilitated extraction.

By 2015, Nilekani was advocating the Aadhaar approach – where a “startup within a state” builds infrastructure and protocols for governmental and private use – as a way of reorganizing all domains of the country’s governance. In 2016, with the Modi government’s commitment to “Digital India” now well under way, this approach was formalized as “India Stack”. A set of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), India Stack was developed by the think tank Indian Software Product Industry Roundtable (iSPIRT), a relatively new industry body whose mission is to transform the Indian tech industry from a focus on services for overseas clients to consumer products for a new generation of internet-enabled Indians, turning India into a “Product Nation”. Its initial website promoted the creation of India Stack as “similar to the creation of the Internet”, enabling “private players [to] focus on building customer facing solutions that ride on India Stack”.<sup>120</sup> Among iSPIRT’s volunteers were many designers of Aadhaar and former UIDAI employees who were now cashing in on the system they had built. Vinod Khosla, the Silicon Valley venture capitalist who Forbes has called “one of the most influential people in business”, was at the forefront of opening Aadhaar up for commercial use.<sup>121</sup>

Recently, Nilekani has contrasted the Western model of the internet, which is fuelled by advertising and led to the emergence of Google and Facebook’s “surveillance capitalism”, with an Indian transaction-fuelled model that supposedly empowers “micro-

---

<sup>119</sup> Vajpeyi, *Prolegomena to the Study of People and Places in Violent India*.

<sup>120</sup> “IndiaStack.”

<sup>121</sup> Thaker, “The New Oil: Aadhaar’s Mixing of Public Risk and Private Profit.”

entrepreneurs”. “The West created monopolies, we democratised data”, he says in one interview.<sup>122</sup> Aadhaar had completed its transition from a technology to provide welfare more efficiently to the foundation of a state-led model for reconciling development and private profit. For Nilekani, entrepreneurialism and innovation is the promise of “democratization”, supposedly throwing open previously inscrutable techno-managerial systems that existed in the domain of experts to the people.

Despite the promise of financial inclusion and microentrepreneurship, the actors that have benefited the most from Aadhaar and the India Stack have been a small coterie of Bangalore elites, the country’s largest banks and telecommunications companies, and the odd startup. According to India Stack’s current, much glossier website, the use of Aadhaar for KYC, for example, drove down costs for onboarding new customers for banks from \$23 per customer to \$.15.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, Aadhaar enabled payments fuelled the rise of some of the country’s biggest startups, the micropayments apps Paytm and PhonePe. The combination of Aadhaar-enabled KYC and creative misreadings of regulations enabled mobile phone network Reliance Jio to enrol more than a million customers a day, making its parent company Reliance India Limited (already one of the country’s biggest corporations) the most valuable company in India and its director Mukesh Ambani the richest person in Asia.<sup>124</sup> Business journalist Harish Damodaran

---

<sup>122</sup> Jain, “The West Created Monopolies, We Democratised Data.”

<sup>123</sup> “India Stack.”

<sup>124</sup> Block, “How Reliance Jio Is Monopolising the Telecom Sector.” Mukesh Ambani may have even played a role in getting Modi to take up Aadhaar, which he had previously campaigned against because it had been an opposition project: “One knowledgeable observer speculated that, although Nandan Nilekani had contested the south Bangalore parliamentary seat as a candidate of the Congress party (he lost to his BJP rival in the election), this did not prevent a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, especially if a common friend, such as the multi-billionaire Indian business magnate Mukesh Ambani, had arranged it.” Sathe, “Managing Massive Change.”

points out that Indian capitalism after 2014 is characterised more than ever before by large conglomerates that align themselves with the state's policy goals.<sup>125</sup> And as he points out elsewhere, all these corporate houses continue to be owned and run by India's traditional business castes.<sup>126</sup> Journalist Aria Thaker characterises the enrichment of these actors through Aadhaar as a system that "mix[es] public risk and private profit".<sup>127</sup>

### **Targeting, or the Ontology of the Parasite<sup>128</sup>**

According to Aadhaar's proponents, the Indian government's welfare systems were corrupt, inefficient, and plagued by "leakages". As Aadhaar's semi-official biographer Shankar Aiyar puts it: "successive governments crafted public programmes for the needy but found benefits being cornered, if not captured by the politically muscular."<sup>129</sup> These "leakages" were identified as one of the main reasons that governmental welfare, the instruments of the tactically extended state, were failing to eradicate poverty. Devesh Kapur and his collaborators, for example, argued that as much as 70% of total benefits disbursed by the state were being lost to leakages.<sup>130</sup> According to Aadhaar's proponents, a form of unique identification was necessary in order to verify that welfare benefits were only going to their deserving, intended recipients. The use of biometrics – fingerprints and retina scans – which could definitively identify a body promised to put an end to

---

<sup>125</sup> Damodaran, "From 'entrepreneurial' to 'Conglomerate' Capitalism."

<sup>126</sup> Damodaran, *India's New Capitalists*.

<sup>127</sup> Thaker, "The New Oil: Aadhaar's Mixing of Public Risk and Private Profit."

<sup>128</sup> See Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy."

<sup>129</sup> Aiyar, *Aadhaar*, 5.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in Rajadhyaksha, Shah, and Hasan, *The Crisis of the Informational Subject: Overload, Creep, Citizenship*, 76.

fraud in the system and make it far more efficient and transparent.<sup>131</sup> The promise of biometric identification would afford the possibility of efficiently and effectively targeting benefits, so that welfare could be directly disbursed to intended beneficiaries and no one else.

Aadhaar's threat model has strong resonances with the mid-20<sup>th</sup> theory of communication that is foundational to modern computing. The mathematician and cryptographer Claude Shannon theorised communications systems where a message would be encoded into information to be sent and decoded upon receipt.<sup>132</sup> Though Shannon's most recognizable legacy may be his coinage of the words "bit" and "byte", his system simplified and codified how we understand information flows and enabled many of the innovations of the rise of computing. Shannon was obsessed with interferences that threatened the flow and fidelity of information. Communication was always in danger of being interrupted by noise or, in his work on cryptography in World War II, intercepted by an enemy agent. Under the reign of Aadhaar, government welfare is conceived of similarly, primarily as a communications infrastructure that creates a channel between state and citizen, a pipe that must be protected against outside factors.<sup>133</sup> Aadhaar offers the promise of differentiating between signal and noise, between the intended recipient of benefits and the enemy agent – or undeserving freeloader – who is waiting to intercept it.

---

<sup>131</sup> The identification and fixing of an unruly native subject has been central to the promise of biometrics since the very beginnings of fingerprinting in colonial India. For the longer history of biometrics in India and South Africa, see Sengoopta, *Imprint of the Raj*; Breckenridge, *Biometric State*.

<sup>132</sup> Shannon, "A Mathematical Theory of Communication."

<sup>133</sup> This broad disposition holds true despite claims of switching from "pipes" to "platforms". See Singh, "Give Me a Database and I Will Raise the Nation-State."

But even as Aadhaar afforded the ability to distinguish between the deserving recipient of welfare and an undeserving, corrupt “politically muscular” figure whose parasitism was supposedly a major drain on governmental finances, it also always afforded the possibility of making other distinctions. As Ashish Rajadhyaksha has argued the project of Aadhaar has always been co-produced with the far more invasive project of the National Population Register, which changes how citizenship is defined in postcolonial India.<sup>134</sup> And according to researcher Srinivas Kodali, Aadhaar’s promise of identification was simultaneously designed to assuage fears of the figure of the Muslim other that emerged as a threat after the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan as well as the Mumbai terror attacks of 2008.<sup>135</sup> Aadhaar, then, operationalizes a generalized fear of an interloper: its fundamental affordance is the exclusion of a threatening other, whether it is the undeserving welfare freeloader and the Muslim terrorist or the Bangladeshi migrant. This is well captured by the military self-description of one of Aadhaar’s early biometric contractors: “American and foreign military services, defense and intelligence agencies rely on L-1 solutions and services to help determine ally from enemy.”<sup>136</sup>

Philosopher Michel Serres builds on Shannon, among other sources, to argue that society is a cascade of parasitic relations. Enemy agents interrupt messages that were not intended for them, capitalists extract surplus value from the production of workers, and humans are parasitic upon the natural world for sustenance and resources. Parasitism –

---

<sup>134</sup> Rajadhyaksha, “Ambivalences of ‘Creep’: Citizenship, Personhood and the Second Digital Turn.”

<sup>135</sup> Rajadhyaksha. Researcher Srinivas Kodali’s investigative work has also been central to exposing the links between the putatively welfarist project of Aadhaar and the “national security” projects of the National Population Register and the National Register of Citizens, which Kodali traces to the aftermath of the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan. Kodali, “Digital India on Steroids.”

<sup>136</sup> Krishna, “NIAI Bill, Wikileaks, World Bank & L-1 Identities Solution.”

which can be either positive or negative depending on context – is both a “nocturnal”, hidden process as well as “the most common thing in the world”. It is a relation that enables transactions and translations across different orders of being: as Serres puts it, the parasite “obtains energy and pays for it in information. He obtains the roast and pays for it in stories”.<sup>137</sup> In claiming to interrupt the parasites in the existing welfare system, Aadhaar simply erects new relations of parasitism. In place of the leakage of welfare by the undeserving, Aadhaar substitutes the extraction of information in exchange for goods or services by the state and corporations. The promise of effecting the more efficient disbursement of benefits has led to the extraction of biometric data that is put to many other uses, whether it is private profit or the targeting of Muslims.

Even as Aadhaar used the threat of the leak to “onboard” the informal into the formal, and to distinguish legitimate citizen from dangerous interloper, it has not been successful in addressing the actual leakages in the system. A randomized-control trial run by the Jamal Abdul Latif Poverty Action Lab, a development research agency founded by Nobel laureates Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee, found that the introduction of Aadhaar led to no improvement in so-called leakages. The study concluded that “Aadhaar-based authentication of transactions had no measurable benefit”.<sup>138</sup> The strongest motivating factor in the uptake of Aadhaar-based micropayments was not the threat of leakage but so-called “demonetization”, when Modi announced without warning in November 2016 that the largest-denomination currency notes would be withdrawn

---

<sup>137</sup> Serres, *The Parasite*, 36. My reading of Serres and Shannon draws from Kockelman, *The Art of Interpretation in an Age of Computation*.

<sup>138</sup> The study came with the caveat that “the adverse effects of the reforms were due to the way the transition was handled, rather than the structural features of the reform itself.” Muralidharan, Niehaus, and Sukhtankar, “Identity Verification Standards in Welfare Programs,” 28. For a critique of this caveat, see Dreze, Khera, and Somanchi, “Balancing Corruption and Exclusion.”

from circulation, ostensibly to eliminate the untaxed cash circulating in the underground economy. Demonetization caused long lines at ATMs and currency shortages for months, reduced India's GDP growth rate by more than one percentage point and caused the loss of 1.5 million jobs. The Reserve Bank of India later found that the move had a negligible impact on black money.<sup>139</sup> But between December 2016 and September 2017, UPI-based transactions increased exponentially, from 2 to 30 million transactions per day.<sup>140</sup> In early 2017, after PayTM's traffic had tripled in the last three months, a video emerged of the startup's CEO dancing, swearing and gloating on stage at the company's annual party.<sup>141</sup> The cashless economy had arrived.

### **“Government will disappear”: Caste and citizen experience**

"For most people, interacting with the state is a stressful and arduous task. Standing in long queues, the lack of access to information, waiting endlessly for rations, negotiating with corrupt officials -- these are just some of the irritants, both major and minor, that people must deal with. Is there a way we can smoothen out these bumps, in effect rendering the state "invisible" to the people?" (Nilekani and Shah 289)

---

<sup>139</sup> Rajagopalan, "What The RBI Data On Demonetization Tells Us."

<sup>140</sup> Lele and Jain, "Demonetisation Effect."

<sup>141</sup> DNA Web Team, "High on Demonetization."

Nilekani's writerly persona is that of a man who has repeatedly come up against and been frustrated by the state, an effective basis for establishing solidarity with the middle-class reading public for books by business leaders. After his reforms, in his ideal world, "in effect, government will disappear from people's everyday lives; instead of taking the physical form of offices and bureaucrats, government will now be evident only through the delivery of its services and their outcomes."<sup>142</sup> The people and paper and buildings that make up the documentary state will be gone.

While this animosity towards the physical – and particularly towards the state – is a core part of a global tech discourse in general and of biometrics in particular, it also has strong casteist valences within in India. Since the Mandal Commission reforms of 1990, the Indian state has been the site of one of the strongest affirmative action (or "reservation") policies in the world, setting aside major quotas for people with marginalized caste backgrounds in public jobs and universities. While this has been an important development in delivering on the promise of Indian democracy, it has also led to a strong backlash from upper-caste groups. As historian Ajanta Subramanian demonstrates, the Indian Institutes of Technology, the postcolonial technical universities that are celebrated as the basis of India's IT revolution – where Nilekani and much of his coterie studied – were major sites in which strategies of casteist exclusion were developed. Central to upper-caste strategy is a discourse that positions marginalized caste people as unmeritorious, undeserving of the increasingly prominent positions that reservations have brought them in Indian politics, education and government.<sup>143</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*, 281.

<sup>143</sup> Subramanian, *The Caste of Merit*.

Both of Nilekani's books are peppered with disparaging references to marginalized caste politicians, who are portrayed as corrupt and self-serving, and to policies of reservations, which "transform us from a society into partisans of caste and minority".<sup>144</sup> Like many liberals whose normative view of democratic politics is based on a mythic Western Europe, Nilekani sees these instances of increasing equality as examples of "feudal" politics that hold India back from "a politics that is based on ideas."<sup>145</sup> Read against the history of reservations, which is co-emergent with the economic reforms of 1991, Aadhaar's promise of disappearing the government should be understood not only as classic pro-market neoliberal move but also as a rearguard action against the increasing – though still deeply lacking – empowerment of marginalized castes in India. In the chain of equivalences that characterises managerial populism, it does not take a great leap of the imagination to identify the undeserving beneficiary of the welfare leak with the undeserving marginalized caste beneficiary of government affirmative action programmes. Historian Ravinder Kaur sums up neatly: "The incessant calls for minimum government are rooted in this double edged anxiety of quota versus merit and government versus market."<sup>146</sup>

Nilekani argues that technology can make a dramatic intervention in this system, He writes,

"traditionally, government has bought and used technology simply as a tool to automate processes—maintaining electronic instead of paper records, for example—but *the citizen experience* remains largely unaltered. This is not what

---

<sup>144</sup> Nilekani, *Imagining India*, 284.

<sup>145</sup> Nilekani, 162.

<sup>146</sup> Kaur, *Brand New Nation*, 199.

we mean by a technology-enabled solution. We are talking about radically reimagining government, its purpose, its role and the way it carries out its functions, with technology at its core."<sup>147</sup>

Clearly drawing from the design idea of user experience, wherein effective interfaces are supposed to disappear to their users, “citizen experience” envisions a new way in which the state and citizens would relate. According to anthropologist Vijayanka Nair a new conception of time is central to this promise: “Aadhaar’s promise of state facilitated identity verification ‘anytime-anywhere’ undoubtedly seeks to alter the spatial characteristics commonly attributed to the state. ... [into] ... an entity that acquiesces to appearing and retreating ‘anywhere’, and at the behest of the Aadhaar holder.”<sup>148</sup> Yet messy reality is often not so cooperative with such visions of an smooth, overhauled citizen experience. Nair argues that “‘instantaneity’ is often a carefully orchestrated, laborious artefact whose production is invisibilised”.<sup>149</sup> The effortless citizen experience promised by Aadhaar is in reality often labourious and dysfunctional, a glossy veneer that is made possible by the everyday improvisations of the most precarious members of this order, lower bureaucrats and welfare recipients, like a local official in a village without mobile phone signal who makes welfare recipients accompany him to the top of a hill to seek out mobile data to validate their biometrics.

In cybertime, all but the most egregious failures are read by the system as successes. When a fingerprint fails to authenticate, people can be denied food or money that means the difference between life and death. In 2018, UIDAI claimed that the

---

<sup>147</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*, 285.

<sup>148</sup> Nair, “Governing India in Cybertime.”

<sup>149</sup> Nair.

authentication failure rates were 13%. However, this figure only counted failures as those events when authentication didn't take place even after repeated attempts. Independent surveys by activist and civil society groups have showed that failure rates are often as high as 60%, with cases where people have tried to scan their fingerprints 25 times before meeting with "success", with the entire process of accessing welfare taking many hours more hours than it had previously.<sup>150</sup> Working class people whose thumbprints are worn through manual labour have the worst of this system. In the worst of cases, these failed authentications have led to in deaths due to hunger, because welfare beneficiaries have been denied their monthly entitlement of food grains, with one tally counting half of all starvation deaths recorded in India between 2015 and 2018 being related to Aadhaar.<sup>151</sup> And under the Aadhaar model since most people involved in the "last mile" provision of welfare and services are not government servants but independent contractors who are not even nominally accountable to the public, there are few if any channels of redress.<sup>152</sup> When such situations occur, the invisibility of the state is a barrier to life. The smooth citizen experience of the rich and the middle-class are sources of "slow violence" to citizens who must take on the burden for a broken infrastructure.<sup>153</sup>

## Internationalizing Aadhaar

---

<sup>150</sup> Rethink Aadhaar, "Truth of Authentication Failures on Ground."

<sup>151</sup> "Aadhaar Linked To Half The Reported Starvation Deaths Since 2015, Say Researchers."

<sup>152</sup> "People's Tribunal on Aadhaar-Related Issues: Evidence Book."

<sup>153</sup> Hasan, "'Slow Violence' and Vacant Citizenship— The Legacies of India's Digital Governance," 117.

“I believe that we need uniform global standards so that cross-border transactions, collaborations and partnerships are not hampered. We need ultimately and I hope India can lead the way to a uniform UPI or a Uniform Payments Interface. India’s Aadhaar can lead the way to a Uniform Aadhaar for all the 7 billion people so that every person on this earth is uniquely identified and India leads the way and that’s the opportunity”

- Mukesh Ambani

“How India created the blueprint for the economies of the future”, declares the subtitle of an article written by two iSPIRT “volunteers”, comparing India Stack with blockchains and cryptocurrencies in their transformative potential.<sup>154</sup> In the last few years, attempts have been underway to export Aadhaar and the India Stack’s formula to reconcile development, profit and centralization to other locales in the global South. The development and promotion of the India Stack model has aligned with the rise of a global network promoting digital identification and “digital public goods” for development.

In 2014, the World Bank launched its Identification for Development (ID4D) project. The project, targeted at the “invisible billion”, has aggressively promoted the uptake of digital identity systems in the Global South as a panacea for development, having disbursed over \$1 billion in funding to set up new identity systems in over 45 countries. Some form of identification, in the form of civil registration, has been a United Nations human right since 1966, when the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted by the General Assembly. The Covenant held that “every child shall

---

<sup>154</sup> Vir and Sanghi, “The Internet Country.”

be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name”. Regimes of civil registration are the norm in the Global North and are also widespread in many countries in the developing world. Largely overlooked for a long time as a staid part of the state’s routine administrative work, civil registration was reanimated in the mid 2000s as the missing link in a model of development based on the arguments of Hernando de Soto, the Peruvian economist who advocated formalizing property rights as a pathway to development. In an influential article Cambridge historian Simon Szreter argued for civil registration’s centrality to proposals for financial inclusion and the formalization of capital:

“those who, like De Soto and the World Bank, are seeking to foster economic development and the expansion of market activity in countries like those of Latin America or Africa today through a ... need to start by empowering individuals with an accessible and secure system for registering their own identities. The machinery of civil, vital registration is a necessary practical complement to De Soto’s emphasis on the need for property title laws and agencies of enforcement to enable all in society—not just the rich—to mobilize their assets into capital.”<sup>155</sup>

The ID4D movement that has arisen since Szreter’s article and in the aftermath of Aadhaar exploits a blurriness between civil registration, which is a UN-recognized human right, and biometric identification databases, which is a specific way of

---

<sup>155</sup> Szreter, “The Right of Registration.”

implementing civil registration that, according to Nishant Shah create new forms of subjecthood that don't represent pre-biometric subjects so much as replace them.<sup>156</sup>

Unlike most programmes of civil registration, Aadhaar and its World Bank-funded clones have played out largely in the legal limbo that is characteristic of projects of “extrastatecraft”.<sup>157</sup> Between 2009 and 2017, when an Aadhaar Act was finally passed as a “money bill”, a legislative tool that exempted it from the usual parliamentary debates, the project functioned in the absence of a statutory or regulatory framework. India still has a weak legal framework governing the sharing, storage, sale and monetization of the kind of sensitive personal data that Aadhaar stores. Much of the activist opposition to Aadhaar in India consisted of attempts to bring it under legal oversight and have it declared unconstitutional by the courts. As similar systems are promoted across the world, they occasionally come up against a strong legal opposition, as in Kenya, where the Hudumba Namba ID system was struck down by the courts for its surveillance risk. Anticipating such setbacks, the World Bank has gone as far as to explicitly recommend implementing such projects in advance of legal foundations. The project assessment document for the West Africa Unique Identification for Regional Integration and Inclusion programme states: “The project does not want to risk unforeseen hindrances by ... legislating something prematurely.”<sup>158</sup> Even as they claim to

---

<sup>156</sup> Rajadhyaksha, Shah, and Hasan, *The Crisis of the Informational Subject: Overload, Creep, Citizenship*. Because systems like Aadhaar do not make a distinction between citizens and non-citizens, analysts have argued that does not in fact function as a system for civil registration. See for example, this polemical piece: van der Straaten, “Identification for Development It Is Not.”

<sup>157</sup> Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*.

<sup>158</sup> Cited in van der Straaten, “Identification for Development It Is Not.”

stamp out the illegal and the informal, most regimes of digital ID operate by design on the edge of formality and legality.

In 2019 a striking combination of states, an intergovernmental organization and an Indian thinktank – the governments of Norway and Sierra Leone, UNICEF and the iSPIRT, the developer of India Stack – founded the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA) to promote “digital public goods”, a new form of development intervention. Digital public goods were defined as “open-source software, open data, open AI models, open standards, and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable laws and best practices, do no harm by design, and help attain the Sustainable Development Goals”.<sup>159</sup> If Aadhaar was being used as a model by the ID4D movement, the DPGA sought to offer the entire India Stack package, along with similar projects from elsewhere, to the world as a complete model of development. Today the DPGA’s membership has grown to include international foundations like the Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and Omidyar; IGOs like the World Bank, UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization; the governments of Germany, Finland and Estonia; and Nandan Nilekani’s very own eGov Foundation. Meanwhile, a UN High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, chaired by Alibaba founder Jack Ma and global philanthropist Melinda Gates, has endorsed the DPGA’s approach in a report titled “The Age of Digital Interdependence”.<sup>160</sup>

The promotion of Aadhaar and India Stack as models for the developing world herald the emergence of what design theorist Benjamin Bratton calls a “hemispherical

---

<sup>159</sup> “Digital Public Goods.”

<sup>160</sup> United Nations, “The Age of Digital Interdependence.”

stack” of development in the Global South. Bratton uses the concept of a hemispherical stack to theorize the Balkanization of the internet that has been underway in the last 10 years. Like digital public goods, hemispheric stacks are composed of technologies, protocols and regulations, often promoted by states but also by large corporations, that are reordering geopolitics and sovereignty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are characterised by “a consolidation of computational networks into a handful of transnational blocs which in turn comes to define the external boundaries and internal governance of those blocs and their geopolitical positions.”<sup>161</sup> Bratton describes three hemispherical stacks: a US stack centred around Google Facebook and Apple, a Chinese stack outlined by state firewalls and a EU stack modelled by regulatory initiatives. Unlike these three, the hemispherical stack of biometric identity is addressed directly to concerns of development and the integration of new, previously unbanked and unconnected users into the fold of digital capitalism. Like other stacks, however, through the deployment of technical platforms and protocols, Aadhaar and India Stack are already becoming infrastructures to reorient sovereignty and the role of states and publics at a geopolitical level.

## **Out From the Zone**

At the beginning of Nilekani’s first book, a businessman from New York visits the Infosys campus in Bangalore. Impressed by Infosys but disappointed by the state of the rest of India the visitor asks “If you can have such good roads in the Infosys campus, why

---

<sup>161</sup> Bratton, Benjamin H., “On Hemispherical Stacks: Notes on Multipolar Geopolitics and Planetary-Scale Computation.”

are the roads outside so terrible?”<sup>162</sup> While the UIDAI is officially headquartered in New Delhi, Aadhaar’s spiritual home can be found in the Infosys campus and other similar spaces of exception that are ubiquitous in India and around the world. Special economic zones, free trade zones, education cities, software technology parks: these gated, segregated urban forms that have expanded rapidly since the 1980s have birthed Aadhaar and the aspirations of world class innovation that it hooks into. Keller Easterling calls such spaces “zones”, sites for a distinctive experiment in “incentivised urbanism” over the past half fifty-odd years<sup>163</sup>.

A converse to Ananya Roy’s characterisation of slums and villages as sites of calculated informality, the zone might be considered a site of calculated formality. Many zones are characterised by hyper-visibility yet are also spaces of covert and subterranean exemption: in zones, gleaming skylines legitimate the suspension of labour laws, tax regulations, and environmental protections. The Infosys campus has a “huge putting green”, a “resort-size swimming pool”, “multiple restaurants and a fabulous health club”; the smooth roads are a far cry from the potholed streets outside; and “glass-and-steel buildings seem to sprout up like weeds each week”<sup>164</sup>. Yet such zones depend on armies of precarious labour from the surrounding areas, and Infosys and its competitors haven’t paid any taxes on their overseas earnings in decades.<sup>165</sup>

This dynamic of visibility and invisibility, in which the high-tech artifacts of global modernity are rendered highly visible while the attendant state-legitimized

---

<sup>162</sup> Nilekani and Shah, *Rebooting India*.

<sup>163</sup> Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*.

<sup>164</sup> Friedman, *The World Is Flat*, 5.

<sup>165</sup> Parker, “The I.D. Man.”

precarity is rendered unnoticeable, is mirrored by the distinction between the hyper visible Little Aadhaar and the more shadowy Big Aadhaar. As William Mazzarella notes of older e-governance initiatives, projects for transparency produce corresponding opacities.<sup>166</sup> Through Aadhaar, the double dynamic which characterises the zone is being exported to the rest of the country and the world. Reflecting the site in which it was incubated, Aadhaar is a technology for making uneven extraction and its attendant violence not only legitimate but desirable. For its proponents, Aadhaar is supposed to extend the glossy high-tech modernity of the zone to the rest of the nation. Yet it also extends the zone's logics of uneven development into new ways of extracting data and capital and creating new forms of securitization.

Even as Aadhaar extends certain of the zone's logics, it signals a shift away from the clear segregations that characterise the zone. If the zone was the beachhead of a global capital that was always entering from elsewhere, Aadhaar turns citizens into addressable users to render the lives, habits and bodies of Indians as sites for targeting, extraction and selective exclusion without the need for the differentiated space of the zone.<sup>167</sup> As media theorist Nishant Shah has argued, in its promise to identify subjects, Aadhaar facilitated the creation of a new kind of subject as an assemblage of data.<sup>168</sup> It is this "data subject" and "quantified self", spread across various databases, rather than a body in the world, that is targeted by Aadhaar. This avatar of the human subject can be targeted not only as a deserving welfare recipient but also as a voter in elections, and as Muslim or a putative outsider to the nation-state. In the time of targeting, the blunt and

---

<sup>166</sup> Mazzarella, "Internet X-Ray."

<sup>167</sup> On addressing users, see Bratton, *The Stack*.

<sup>168</sup> Shah, "Identity and Identification."

blanket exclusions of the zone are replaced by Aadhaar's flexible, agile forms of exception, more efficient at enabling the extraction of capital, perhaps, but no less violent.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> The anthropologist Aihwa Ong describes some forms of flexible exception under neoliberalism in Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*.

## Index

“We don’t do this for World Bank’s sake, we do it for our sake. Because we are a very large country, we are bigger than twenty five countries of Europe. And therefore every state of India must become easy and simple. And therefore we started ranking our states.”<sup>170</sup>

-- Amitabh Kant, CEO, National Institution for Transforming India

Since 2014, the territorial divisions of the nation-state have been taken up as the site of a distinctive experiment in mediated governance. Projects such as the Aspirational Districts Programme, the Composite Water Management Index, the Sustainable Development Goals Index, the Agriculture Transformation Index, the India Innovation Index, and the Multidimensional Poverty Index use the index – a particular type of number that has been ascendant in global governance for the past decade – to score and rank states and districts on development outcomes. They combine the bland technocratic managerialism of World Bank-style good governance with narratives of an aspirational, innovative and transforming nation. Equal parts enumerative form and public relations apparatus, these indices are dramatized in publicly-accessible real-time dashboards, policy briefs, press reports, and social media posts as organs of “cooperative and competitive federalism”. In spite of their supporters’ claims, indices are far from neutral, transparent or objective measures of performance. Rather, they are infrastructures that render development as the site of a pernicious combination of state power and entrepreneurship.

---

<sup>170</sup> India Today, *NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant Opens up on Ease of Doing Business in India* | NewsMo.

The index (and the associated indicator) is a technology of enumeration that has proliferated rapidly around the world in the past twenty years. Indicators, anthropologist Sally Engle Merry and her collaborators argue, enable “the quiet exercise of power” which is largely undeclared but powerfully shapes policy.<sup>171</sup> They are part of a “new avalanche of numbers” that characterizes global governance based on the production and regulation of information.<sup>172</sup>

The BJP under Modi has been a particularly adept participant in this global indicator culture, aggressively pursuing international rankings such as the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index. More innovatively, the BJP has transposed the work of indices to the federal scale within India, creating alignments between actors, interests and infrastructures at global, national, and regional scales.<sup>173</sup> The rescaling of the global technology of the index to the domestic sphere attempts to give NITI Aayog a hold over states of this “very large country” in a way that is similar to the World Bank’s sway over nation-states, displacing existent institutional power structures and centralizing authority while promoting competitive and entrepreneurial forms of development.<sup>174</sup> The index reimagines federalism under the sign of Digital India: a nation-state composed of discrete territories in perpetual competition with each other under the watchful gaze of the central government.

---

<sup>171</sup> Merry, Davis, and Kingsbury, *The Quiet Power of Indicators*.

<sup>172</sup> Bhuta, Malito, and Umbach, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>173</sup> I draw on a rich literature on indices and indicators from the past decade, including: Bhuta, Malito, and Umbach, *The Palgrave Handbook of Indicators in Global Governance*; Kelley and Simmons, “The Power of Performance Indicators”; Merry, “Measuring the World”; Cooley and Snyder, *Ranking the World*.

<sup>174</sup> The index also appears to be waterfaling, being taken up at ever smaller scales, with states creating rankings of districts and districts creating rankings of tehsils. See for example Goyal, “How Performance-Based Rankings Are Shaking up the Rigid World of Government.”

These exercises in enumeration are largely orchestrated by the National Institution for Transforming India (better known by the awkward multilingual acronym NITI Aayog, meaning “policy commission”), the government body that replaced the Planning Commission shortly after the BJP’s 2014 election victory.<sup>175</sup> Officially a think tank, the Aayog is headed by a CEO, currently bulldoggish career bureaucrat Amitabh Kant who is best known for having led branding initiatives like “Incredible India!”<sup>176</sup> One of the NITI Aayog’s key tools for influencing policy, indices arbitrarily rank administrative units and place them in a competitive relationship with each other. The policies that will allow states and districts to improve their ranking on these indices tend to be deregulatory, promoting increased data capture and entrepreneurship in the work of development. Though they promise minimum government and competitive federalism, NITI Aayog’s indices empower the central government and weaken Indian federalism, realigning channels of authority as part of the BJP’s broader moves to restructure power in India<sup>177</sup>.

A crucial part of the broader apparatus of governance that is in formation in India today, indices are rewiring circuits of power between various actors within and beyond the state – the think tank in Delhi, the World Bank, civil servants in the districts, international consultancies, the entrepreneurial subject who is responsible for development, and a new sort of public, imagined as a receiver of publicity.<sup>178</sup> As a

---

<sup>175</sup> “Niti” also suggests policy as “conduct”, bringing to mind Foucault’s concept of governmentality, which he describes as “the conduct of conduct” Foucault, “Governmentality.”

<sup>176</sup> For more on the centrality of branding to this dispensation, see the excellent *Brand New Nation* Kaur, *Brand New Nation*..

<sup>177</sup> Ruparelia, “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance”; Gopal Jayal, *Re-Forming India*; Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*.

<sup>178</sup> Irani, *Chasing Innovation*; Kaur, *Brand New Nation*, 14.

governance interface, the index is symptomatic of a program of radical reform garbed in seemingly innocuous forms of management and visualization.

### **Framing competitive federalism**

A map of India with state-level divisions occupies the centre of the CWMI's online interface. The map uses three colours – the red, yellow, and green that are a clearly recognizable representation of performance – to render states' composite scores on the water management index. At a glance the viewer can make out three distinct groups of states: those that are doing well, average and not so well.<sup>179</sup> In a panel on the right, a table ranks the states by score.<sup>180</sup>

[Figure 2]

Clicking on the map opens a new panel displaying detailed numbers for the state, with a breakdown of how the scores are computed. In the CWMI, the twenty-eight indicators that make up the index are categorized into nine sectors. Most indicators are percentages out of hundred, for example “percentage of urban population being provided drinking water supply as on the end of the given FY [Fiscal Year]” or “area under rain-fed agriculture as a percentage of net cultivated area as on the end of the given FY.”

---

<sup>179</sup> Similar color-coded maps, though in static representations rather than computerized interfaces, are described by Neha Bhuta. Bhuta notes: “The effect of this aesthetic is striking: zones associated with poor governance and instability are marked with a colour connoting danger/threat/heat (red, orange), and zones associated with good governance and stability are marked with a colour connoting safety/ease/calm or cool (green, blue).” Bhuta, “Governmentalizing Sovereignty,” 157.

<sup>180</sup> While the CWMI ranks states according to their scores, other indices rank them according to “deltas”, or how much their scores have changed, so that they are judged on their improvement over time rather than their overall condition.

Others are binary yes/no statements, where “yes” corresponds to a score of one hundred and “no” corresponds to zero: “Has the state notified any law/legal framework to facilitate Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) through Water User Associations (WUA)?”, “Is electricity to tubewells/water pumps charged in the state?”<sup>181</sup>

Dashboards purport to be live, regularly updated representations of the current moment. Though usually advertised as real-time, index dashboards are in fact updated at the most every month (in the case of the Aspirational Districts dashboard) or in many cases annually (as in the case of the CWMI). Yet this sense of liveness creates the possibility of a state moving up or down in the rankings, change colour from red to yellow to green. Even when such periodicity does not make sense – for many of the indicators in the index are measures of structural or legal conditions that may take years to change<sup>182</sup> – the combination of ranking and liveness creates a sense of continual competition.

This basic interface design, pitting administrative territorial units against each other, appears in the NITI Aayog’s other index dashboards, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) index and the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) Champions of Change Dashboard.<sup>183</sup> Many of the Aayog’s indices don’t take the form of the dashboard, yet a similar aesthetic logic is repeated even when they are presented in reports and PowerPoint presentations. Sometimes there are variations: the Aspirational Districts Programme takes districts as its unit and the Sustainable Development Goals

---

<sup>181</sup> NITI Aayog, “Composite Water Management Index.”

<sup>182</sup> Thanks to Praharsh Patel for this insight. Private communication.

<sup>183</sup> The former, notably, is transparently a technology for measuring and incentivizing Indian states’ alignment with the international SDG regime.

Urban index takes cities, but the administrative unit – rather than, say, watersheds or linguistic communities – remains at the centre of the index. Repeated across various domains, these indices form a distinctive enumerative and aesthetic strategy for rendering development as a competitive terrain. Their proponents are quite transparent about this: Amitabh Kant repeatedly refers to indices as exercises in “naming and shaming,” and has suggested that in the future, central government funding will be tied to states’ performance on them.<sup>184</sup>

[Figure 3]

## Ranking Governance

The rise of indices as a key tool of global governance dates to the rise of what legal scholar Radha D’Souza has called post-Washington consensus “governance fundamentalism” in the 1990s.<sup>185</sup> Over one hundred and sixty “global performance indicators” existed by 2014, with eight new rankings created every year since 1999.<sup>186</sup> One of the best-known global indicators of this kind was the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index, which was discontinued in 2021 after a data-manipulation scandal.<sup>187</sup> The Ease of Doing Business index shares much of the tabular and

---

<sup>184</sup> Press Trust of India, “‘Name and Shame’ Helped Improve States’ Business Rankings”; CNBC-TV18, *Amitabh Kant On NITI Aayog’s National Health Index | CNBC TV18*.

<sup>185</sup> D’Souza, *What’s Wrong with Rights?*, 160–62.

<sup>186</sup> Kelley and Simmons, “The Power of Performance Indicators.”

<sup>187</sup> The index was discontinued in 2021 after an independent audit found that the Bank had doctored data to improve certain countries’ rankings in response to pressure (this occurred most flagrantly in the case of China). According to the investigation, the Bank’s CEO and President were both complicit in the manipulation Machen et al., “Investigation of Data Irregularities in Doing Business 2018 and Doing Business 2020.”

cartographic logic of information presentation outlined above and was a means by which the World Bank effected regulatory reform without having to provide loans or technical assistance, its traditional ways of exerting power.<sup>188</sup>

While several nation-states have bought into the project of such global rankings, few have pursued it with as much zeal as India under the BJP. Today various government bodies track India's performance on such rankings. When India's rankings on such indices drop, they make aggressive efforts to improve it.<sup>189</sup> When the nation does well, its performance is advertised at every opportunity, shared on social media and disseminated in the press in order to dramatize a "brand new India," where the nation is figured primarily as an investment destination.<sup>190</sup>

[Figure 4]

The Modi government's investment in such exercises enabled India to move from 142<sup>nd</sup> to 62<sup>nd</sup> place in the rankings between 2016 and 2020. Some of this change is a result of changes in the World Bank's methodology.<sup>191</sup> Many of these gains have come through gaming the system, targeting indicators that can most easily be improved but result in little substantive change on the ground, like reducing the amount of time it takes to acquire digital signatures.<sup>192</sup> Yet even if the ascent in the rankings is largely unrelated

---

<sup>188</sup> World Bank, "Assessment of State Implementation of Business Reforms"; Doshi, Kelley, and Simmons, "The Power of Ranking."

<sup>189</sup> See for example the outcry when India was downgraded from 67 to 71 on Freedom House's Democracy Index, moving from "free" to "not free". Dutta, "After 'Downgrade' Last Year, MEA Sent Speaker's Office Talk Points on Democracy, 'the Indian Way.'"

<sup>190</sup> Kaur, *Brand New Nation*.

<sup>191</sup> Wadhwa and Sandefur, "A Change in World Bank Methodology (Not Reform) Explains India's Rise in Doing Business Rankings."

<sup>192</sup> Kaur, *Brand New Nation*, 81; Deshmane, "Documents Show How Modi, Jaitley Gamed World Bank's Doing Business Rankings."

to concrete changes, the regulatory and legal shifts made in the name of “Ease of Doing Business” have come at a cost. Trade unions have consistently opposed the labor reforms for curtailing workers’ rights and benefitting the market.<sup>193</sup> Environmental activists point out that many of the reforms that have led to India’s improved rank have diluted Environmental Impact Assessment regulations and had an adverse effect on the environment.<sup>194</sup> Above all, with flagging economic growth even before the Covid-19 pandemic, India’s improvement in Ease of Doing Business rankings has failed to deliver the benefits it promised.

In 2014, shortly after BJP’s election to power in the central government, the World Bank was invited to produce an assessment of Indian states’ regulatory norms.<sup>195</sup> The resulting report evaluated all of India’s states on 98 different indicators in eight areas, ranging from “Setting up a Business” to “Enforcing Contracts.” The introduction to the assessment had already adopted the BJP’s new language of federalism, stating that the World Bank Group was “pleased to support the Government of India in undertaking this unique endeavor, because it takes a ‘competitive federalism’ approach to business reform.”<sup>196</sup> Now released every year, states hire international consultancies like EY and PricewaterhouseCoopers to work on improving their rank.<sup>197</sup> Its supporters among neoliberal thinktanks have celebrated this exercise in no uncertain terms. A senior advisor

---

<sup>193</sup> Sushmita, “Labour ‘Reforms’ More for ‘Ease of Doing Business’ than Labour Rights.”

<sup>194</sup> Kukreti, “Ease of Doing Business Comes at an Environmental Cost.”

<sup>195</sup> The main partner within the Indian state was the Department of Industry and Internal Trade Promotion (DIPP).<sup>195</sup> DIPP’s Secretary at the time was Amitabh Kant, who is named in the report’s acknowledgements World Bank, “Assessment of State Implementation of Business Reforms.”

<sup>196</sup> World Bank. It is suggestive that the “cooperative” part of Modi’s slogan has been dropped in this phrasing.

<sup>197</sup> Goyal, “How Performance-Based Rankings Are Shaking up the Rigid World of Government.”

at the Washington, DC-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies writes, “an ‘apples to apples’ review of the business environment of the states in 2016 gives savvy chief ministers an unprecedented level of information on how they stack up versus their competitors. The horses have definitely been taken to the water. And at least a few are starting to drink”.<sup>198</sup>

Celebrated as devolution in economic policy, “cooperative and competitive federalism” is altering the disposition of the relationship between the central government and the states. In the planning era before the economic liberalization of 1991, the central government tended to directly set policy goals for the states. Between 1991 and 2014, a period characterized by coalition governments at the centre and the strengthening of regional parties in the states, a “federal market economy” emerged, with states competing against each other for global investment and the centre playing a relatively light-handed role.<sup>199</sup> In contrast, today a single-party central government uses supposedly neutral indices to rank states on certain parameters, pushing certain policy and legislative outcomes.<sup>200</sup> Rather than telling states exactly what to do, NITI Aayog turns policy into a game where states can ostensibly do as they please, but the score is still kept according to its parameters.<sup>201</sup> And while they may not be binding, the rules of the game – the weightage of indicators on the index – effectively legislate the kinds of interventions that

---

<sup>198</sup> Rossow, “India’s Changing States.”

<sup>199</sup> Rudolph and Rudolph, “Iconisation of Chandrababu”; Tillin, *Indian Federalism*.

<sup>200</sup> This goes hand in hand with many efforts by the Modi government to centralize power which are described, for example, in Aiyar and Tillin, “‘One Nation,’ BJP, and the Future of Indian Federalism.”

<sup>201</sup> Legal theorist Radha D’Souza traces this dynamic to New Institutional Economics, which posits two classes of organizations: a small group that sets the rules of the global economy and another vast group that must play by them D’Souza, *What’s Wrong with Rights?*.

are necessary to improve one's ranking.<sup>202</sup> Far from increasing federalism, the project's aspirations tend towards despotism. Amitabh Kant recently shot to the spotlight for saying that India is "too much of a democracy" to implement the tough reforms that would make India more competitive,

## Displacing Statistics

The index's facilitation of competition can be understood through the forms of enumeration it seeks to displace. Even though India has a well-developed and deeply entrenched statistical apparatus, data for many indices are collected from scratch by states. For example, against the established expertise of the statisticians who already collect detailed data on many of the index's parameters, state bureaucracies collected and self-reported data that formed the basis of each of the indicators in the CWMI. This data was then validated by an international development consultancy, IPE Global.<sup>203</sup> The sidelining of decades of statistical expertise has practical consequences for the scores

---

<sup>202</sup> One of the most celebrated examples of "cooperative and competitive federalism" in India gives insight into the kinds of policy this slogan facilitates. The state of Rajasthan in 2014 introduced a slew of labour law reforms, amending the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947; the Factory Act, 1948; the Contract Labour Act, 1970; and the Apprenticeship Act, 1961. These amendments effectively reduced the strength of unions and reduced the coverage of labour protections in order to facilitate a better investment environment in the state. As the Mid-Year Economic Analysis puts it:

"successful experiments serve as both 'models' and 'magnets'. For example, Rajasthan's labour and land laws liberalization will elicit responses from others keen to emulate the Rajasthan model. But successful experiments will also force change elsewhere because they will serve as a magnet, attracting capital, labour, and talent away from unsuccessful states."

<sup>203</sup> Founded in 1998 as Infrastructure Professionals Enterprise Private Limited, IPE Global consults with government agencies and large development organizations on all aspects of development, including smart cities, health and nutrition, monitoring and evaluation and environment and climate change. It has grown rapidly in the last decade, from one hundred employees in 2007 to over a thousand employees today.

generated by the index. In the case of the ADP, for example, agricultural economists T Haque and PK Joshi have argued that the omission of conventional statistical measures ended up excluding many of the poorest districts in the country, which are arguably in greatest need of government intervention.<sup>204</sup>

The displacement of statistics is part of a larger conflict between the Modi government and the postcolonial state's statistical apparatus, and between ways of knowing and acting upon the world, which policy scholar Yamini Aiyar characterises as a shift from statistical data to administrative data.<sup>205</sup> After Modi's 2014 election, the economic statistics produced by the Central Statistical Office, an expert body closely linked to the Planning Commission that has collected economic statistics since the 1950s, have been suppressed to a great degree.<sup>206</sup> Notably, much of its survey data – when it was eventually released – cast the BJP's performance in a negative light, for example showing dramatic decreases in employment and increases in poverty.<sup>207</sup> By 2019, against established procedure, NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant was asserting the Cabinet's right to sign off on the CSO's data.<sup>208</sup> As economist Jayati Ghosh puts it “the aggressive attitude towards economic statistics – and indeed to all data that could provide some

---

<sup>204</sup> Haque and Joshi, “Agricultural Transformation in Aspirational Districts of India Comparative Analysis of Districts in Bihar.”

<sup>205</sup> Aiyar, “India's Data-Driven Governance Regime Is Not Foolproof.” This in turn is part of a broader “deinstitutionalization” of Indian democracy under Modi Jaffrelot, *Modi's India*. Sandeep Mertia suggests a somewhat parallel conflict between “big data” and postcolonial statistics in Mertia, *Lives of Data: Essays on Computational Cultures from India*. This might be understood as an example of what Bruno Latour calls an “agonistic” conflict between “immutable mobiles” Latour, “Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together.”

<sup>206</sup> For a historical approach to surveys as a form of knowledge production in postcolonial India, see Ghosh, “Accepting Difference, Seeking Common Ground.”

<sup>207</sup> Ghosh, “Hindutva, Economic Neoliberalism and the Abuse of Economic Statistics in India.”

<sup>208</sup> Gupta, “Experts Rubbish Niti Claim That NSSO Data Needs Centre's Nod.”

semblance of accountability for the government – has become one of the defining features of the government”<sup>209</sup>.

In place of data produced through sample surveys by a nominally independent, expert government body, NITI Aayog’s indices use data largely collected by state bureaucrats and “validated” by international consultancies, creating a “closed loop of compatible information” that is insulated from external critique.<sup>210</sup> It’s not that survey data is unimpeachable or cannot be manipulated. The Planning Commission indulged in its fair share of manipulation by, for example, vastly downplaying the magnitude of India’s poverty and hunger in its poverty estimates<sup>211</sup>. But while state statistics are regularly wielded against the state – this is how economist Utsa Patnaik used the Planning Commission’s own data to diagnose its “statistical trickery”, for example – the closed loop of the index and its manipulations are more resistant to exposure.<sup>212</sup> By concealing its data sources – and moving away from publicly accessible, independently collected statistics – the index, to borrow a phrase from media studies scholar Shannon Mattern, translates “perception into performance, epistemology into ontology”<sup>213</sup>.

Crucially, these different calculative regimes afford different ways of governing. The periodicity and scale of the CSO’s sample surveys produce data about industrial production or numbers unemployed people or statistics on consumer spending, a “realist”

---

<sup>209</sup> Ghosh, “Hindutva, Economic Neoliberalism and the Abuse of Economic Statistics in India,” 4.

<sup>210</sup> Easterling, *Medium Design*. Not all of NITI Aayog’s indices shirk the statistical apparatus. The Sustainable Development Goals Index, for example, uses data produced by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

<sup>211</sup> Patnaik, “Neoliberal Roots”; Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics*, 34–36.

<sup>212</sup> When they are exposed, the magnitude of the manipulations can be shocking, as was the case with the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business index.

<sup>213</sup> Mattern, “Mission Control.”

metrological account that purports to represent the world.<sup>214</sup> By contrast, though they also conceal their epistemology and claim realism, the NITI Aayog's indices produce percentages and ranked lists, "meta-measurements" that favor synchronic comparisons between territories and render development as an ongoing competition between states<sup>215</sup>.

### **"Composite water": the index as a source of authority**

"Composite water", "agriculture transformation", "India innovation", "aspirational districts": the measurements produced by these indices don't refer to concrete objects or quantities in the world. Though they proclaim their matter-of-factness, these are in fact arbitrary categories. As Sally Engle Merry puts it: "One of the critical ways an indicator produces knowledge is by announcing what it measures."<sup>216</sup>

The dramatic opening lines of 2018 NITI Aayog report that introduced the CWMI are instructive in how the index produces a new category:

"India is suffering from the worst water crisis in its history and millions of lives and livelihoods are under threat. Currently, 600 million Indians face high to extreme water stress and about two lakh [200,000] people die every year due to inadequate access to safe water. By 2030, the country's water demand is projected

---

<sup>214</sup> Desrosières, "How Real Are Statistics?" This approach has been critiqued in scholarship on statistics. See, for example, Porter, *Trust in Numbers*; Hacking, "Statistical Language, Statistical Truth, and Statistical Reason: The Self-Authentication of a Style of Scientific Reasoning"; Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers*.

<sup>215</sup> Power, "Counting, Control and Calculation."

<sup>216</sup> Merry, "Measuring the World," S84.

to be twice the available supply, implying severe water scarcity for hundreds of millions of people and an eventual ~6% loss in the country's GDP"<sup>217</sup>

The language of crisis is not new when talking about water in India.<sup>218</sup> Yet the report smoothly combines two crises that are usually treated separately, jumping from concerns of drinking water safety to diminishing water supply, which is a problem of groundwater overextraction that primarily affects irrigation. The groundwater crisis and the safe drinking water crisis align with two different uses of water with different histories. For better or for worse, in 2018 they were the responsibility of separate ministries: the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. The amalgamation of the two into a single “composite water” presaged a 2019 reshuffle in which the two ministries were combined to form a single ministry of Jal Shakti (or “water power”) that oversees both drinking and agricultural water.<sup>219</sup>

Most indices promise holistic, composite, or “multidimensional” measures. Despite the composite category announced by its title, the CWMI doesn't treat the complex problems of water management in a holistic manner. The CWMI's indicators remain separated by category such that there is no overlap between “groundwater” and “health and sanitation.” And the single, “information-poor” number into which they are combined gives little insight into water management practices in India.<sup>220</sup> A critique of

---

<sup>217</sup> NITI Aayog, “Composite Water Management Index: A Tool for Water Management,” 15.

<sup>218</sup> See, for example, Shah, *Taming the Anarchy*; Acciavatti, “The Ganges Water Crisis”; Amrith, *Unruly Waters*; Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought*.

<sup>219</sup> The fact that the new ministry has a Hindi name is a symptom of the creeping Hinduisation of technical governance.

<sup>220</sup> For more on this kind of “information-poor” design, see Keller Easterling's explanation of “closed loops” in Easterling, *Medium Design*. Much of the criticism of the CWMI has been in the fact that its broad-based indicators cannot account for the complexity of local conditions. See, for example, The Wire Staff, “Doubts Over NITI Aayog Claim That 21 Cities Face Groundwater Extinction by 2020.”

the CWMI that attempts to formulate a more holistic index points out that only 5% of the index is devoted to water quality, while geotagging water-management structures and creating a “water data center” account for more than seven percent. Effectively, implementing a system for data collection counts more towards a state’s score than taking steps to prevent deaths due to water-borne diseases. Furthermore, states are disproportionately rewarded for making legislative and regulatory changes while the actual outcomes of better water management – like reduced levels of water-borne diseases – are not measured.<sup>221</sup>

If the creation of composite water is unlikely to generate more holistic policy or better outcomes for the millions of Indians with impaired access to water, its constitution might be understood more fruitfully as a manoeuvre that enables the NITI Aayog, a new agency within the state, to accrue power relative to already existing actors. A highly publicized project reported on by various newspapers, the CWMI reorients the relationships between the existing stakeholders in these fields. By constituting composite water as a new – and apparently technical – policy category under which both drinking water and groundwater are subsumed, the index announces NITI Aayog’s authority over both. The value of composite water then is precisely in its arbitrariness and its appearance of technicality. By creating new standards on which states are ranked, NITI Aayog renders the problem of distribution, a political issue which involves power struggles at every level, as a technical question of resource allocation.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>221</sup> Ghosh and Patel, “Unravelling NITI Aayog’s Composite Water Management Index: Veering to a Pragmatic Approach.”

<sup>222</sup> On standards as a source of authority, see, for example, Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. and Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out*.. For a well-known take on development as “an anti-politics machine”, see Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*..

The NITI Aayog's indices are devices for apportioning responsibility. Since 2014, newspapers have been full of headlines about states' performance on NITI Aayog's indices. Often these headlines simply repeat government press releases about states' performance on the index. But in doing so they also exert pressure on bureaucrats and politicians, pushing them to take up these indices and their reconstituted categories as ways of orienting and measuring their performance. "Assam faces criticism for ranking last in NITI Aayog's SDG; CM [Chief Minister] Sarma hits back" reads one headline.<sup>223</sup> "Working to top Niti Aayog's devpt goals index: Goa CM Pramod Sawant" says another<sup>224</sup>. Such headlines show that far from disavowing its ownership of its indices, the NITI Aayog – and the central government – is a highly visible actor in the drama of development.

In contrast to the Planning Commission, which it replaced, NITI Aayog has no powers to allocate funding. Rather than producing five-year plans with targets tied to funding, it produces broad recommendations.<sup>225</sup> Borrowing from the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business playbook, in the absence of financial or legal backing to enforce its recommendations, the ranking of various states on indices becomes a key tool for the Aayog to give heft to its desired ends.

## Big Data and the Dashboard

---

<sup>223</sup> Singh, "Assam Faces Criticism for Ranking Last in NITI Aayog's SDG; CM Sarma Hits Back."

<sup>224</sup> TNN, "Working to Top Niti Aayog's Devpt Goals Index."

<sup>225</sup> For detailed research on the many differences – and similarities – between the NITI Aayog and the Planning Commission, see Mehrotra and Guichard, *Planning in the 20th Century and Beyond*.

The CWMI is the basis for a yearly report which makes explicit the policy outcomes the index facilitates.<sup>226</sup> It argues for the promotion of “market-based interventions,” “participatory irrigation frameworks,” and “the consolidation of state data centres into a central data platform with open APIs [to] allow entrepreneurs and researchers to lead innovation in the sector”<sup>227</sup>. The state’s role is to deregulate and make space for private actors – whether they are the NGOs of participatory approaches or the private entrepreneurs of market-based interventions – or to use its coercive apparatus to set up infrastructures for the collection and visualization of data.

This can be linked to a politics of austerity within which the index functions.<sup>228</sup> Like other NITI Aayog projects, the CWMI doesn’t grant any funding. The report qualifies the establishment of a new National Irrigation Fund by stating that “the cost of setting this up is expected to be low as existing funds can be consolidated into this structure”.<sup>229</sup> In the world of NITI Aayog, “existing funds” are always adequate, they are just being used poorly by a state mired in inefficiencies. The report pushes states to innovate in order to generate funding for themselves or to exploit “convergences” in existing funding.<sup>230</sup> As an Aayog report on the ADP puts it: “Surprising as it may sound,

---

<sup>226</sup> Notably, this report was only published for two years, 2017-18 and 2018-19. The current state of the CWMI is unclear. The report acknowledges global consultancy Dalberg for “commentary, data analysis and narration”. The wide sweep of this acknowledgement suggests that much of the report may have been authored by Dalberg consultants.

<sup>227</sup> Kant, “Composite Water Management Index (CWMI): A National Tool for Water Measurement, Management and Improvement.”

<sup>228</sup> On austerity and entrepreneurship in India, see Bear, *Navigating Austerity*.

<sup>229</sup> NITI Aayog, “Composite Water Management Index: A Tool for Water Management,” 72.

<sup>230</sup> Another manifestation of the coproduction of austerity and big data is the report’s repeated recommendations of impact bonds as a form of financing. A relatively new form of development financing that was first used in 2010 in the UK, impact bonds usually solicit investment from private companies or foundation. The investor receives their investment back (usually from the state) if the project meets certain

if the assistance ... from different sources is aggregated, and the principle of convergence is applied to a particular activity, there is no paucity of funds".<sup>231</sup>

Collecting and visualizing large amounts of data is one of the CWMI's most insistent recommendations. One of the best practice case studies presented in the report is of the Andhra Pradesh Water Resources Information and Management System (APWRIMS) This dashboard provides real-time data on rainfall, reservoir capacity, groundwater levels, soil moisture and more. The data sources combine numbers input by bureaucrats with satellite sources as well as data computed by algorithms. Built by the start-up Vassar Labs, the stated aim of the APWRIMS is to enable data-backed decision-making.<sup>232</sup>

[Figure 5]

Alongside indices, such data portals, or dashboards, are ubiquitous in India today. Unlike the aggregate numbers produced by indices, these data portals purport to track every instance of a given object: bodies (through the biometric identity database Aadhaar), vaccinated cows, cubic meters of water, streetlights, all are being accounted for on various data portals, often in close to real-time. Despite differences in the form and use of enumeration, data portals go hand in hand with the index and its drive for privatization and entrepreneurship. As the CWMI report puts it,

---

agreed-upon developmental outcomes. Conspicuously, a core requirement of this form of funding is the detailed collection of data in order to verify that the measurable outcomes have been satisfied.

<sup>231</sup> NITI Aayog, *Aspirational Districts: Unlocking Potentials*, 9.

<sup>232</sup> This Hyderabad-based start-up's logo also appears on the CWMI website, though its involvement in the project is not specified. Most of its clients are government agencies and it has an international office in Redmond, Washington.

“water data systems...can enable targeted policymaking by states in areas such as agricultural incentives, groundwater recharge, etc., and *can also enable innovative market interventions such as a groundwater impact bond and water markets...* since the data will be available on a public platform, researchers, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and policymakers can use it to create innovative products, provide value-added services, and design targeted policies and interventions.”<sup>233</sup>

While “management information systems” have been in use in Indian government since the 1980s efforts of the National Informatics Commission and the Ministry of Programme Implementation, the idea that these should be publicly accessible in the form of a dashboard is a more recent development.<sup>234</sup> In India, the use of the publicly accessible portal or dashboard in governance at the central level might be traced to the BJP’s adoption of Aadhaar in 2014. Although the BJP had campaigned against this project, upon winning the election the government began promoting Aadhaar even more aggressively than before. Just months after the election, Modi ordered that all central government employees be registered in the Aadhaar database. The fact of their existence on this database enabled an attendance dashboard that promised to track publicly and in real-time whether state employees were at work.<sup>235</sup> Like the index, though at a different scale, the data portal promises to make the state transparent and efficient through the “real-time” visualization of information.

---

<sup>233</sup> NITI Aayog, “Composite Water Management Index: A Tool for Water Management,” 132 my italics.

<sup>234</sup> Sharma, *The Outsourcer*. Another genealogy might look at experiments in planning in cities like Delhi and Bangalore, though like the Online Computerised Management Systems used by the state these were not usually publicly-accessible Sundaram, “The Postcolonial City in India. From Planning to Information?”; more generally Kitchin, Lauriault, and McArdle, “Knowing and Governing Cities through Urban Indicators, City Benchmarking and Real-Time Dashboards.”

<sup>235</sup> Aiyar, *Aadhaar*; Arora, “Is a Babu at Work? You Can Check in Real Time.”

Aadhaar has since become the basis for an ecosystem, described in chapter 1, where access to the biometric database of over a billion Indians is made available to private-sector organizations through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) collectively known as India Stack, covered in the previous chapter. The CWMI report holds India Stack up as a “best practice” model for how water data should be treated.<sup>236</sup> As with the index, the appeal to managerial efficiency covers for increased privatization of vital state functions and a discourse of a transformed India as a “start-up state”.<sup>237</sup> Geographer Kavita Dattani terms this “governpreneurism,” arguing that “Aadhaar and the India Stack, as new digital technologies of governmentality, reduce interactions between state and populations into digital transactions, enabling the weaving of corporate into government”.<sup>238</sup>

## Entrepreneurial State Apparatus

The NITI Aayog’s indices modify one of the central categories of the postcolonial state, development. According to architecture theorist Reinhold Martin, one of the defining features of infrastructures is that they enable the cultural production of distinctions, creating and sustaining the categories that order the world.<sup>239</sup> Under the reign of the index, development is constituted by participatory market approaches and systematic data collection. When states rank high on the index, they are celebrated; when they rank low,

---

<sup>236</sup> NITI Aayog, “Composite Water Management Index: A Tool for Water Management,” 85.

<sup>237</sup> Nair, “Governing India in Cybertime.” *Entrepreneur India* has given Amitabh Kant the unwittingly comical title “BFF of startups” Sabharwal, “Amitabh Kant.” For more on the notion of the state as start-up, see Singh, “Give Me a Database and I Will Raise the Nation-State.”

<sup>238</sup> Dattani, “‘Governpreneurism’ for Good Governance”; Hicks, “Digital ID Capitalism.”

<sup>239</sup> Martin, “Infrastructure and Mediapolitics.”

the index's recommendations prescribe the ways in which they can improve their performance, shaping what counts as development and how it should be achieved.

This version of development is opposed to older versions: the planned development identified with Nehru as well as the post-1991 Congress party's "inclusive neoliberalism".<sup>240</sup> In contrast to the perceived failures of planned, top-down, bureaucratic and corrupt Congress-led development (the consistent *bête noire* of the BJP), the index promises development that is transparent, efficient, and entrepreneurial. In previous periods, the numbers undergirding development were a matter for experts, debated by economists, planners and high-level bureaucrats. Today, the dramatization of the index suggests new protagonists in the "imagined economy".<sup>241</sup>

Communications scholar Lilly Irani argues that private profit and development are reconciled in the figure of an entrepreneurial citizen who is central to the new imaginary of the nation-state. Irani's entrepreneurial citizen is a middle-class, upper-caste urbanite who navigates a global network stretching from development consultancies to World Bank reports to Silicon Valley, continually innovating products and services that can both uplift and extract capital from the masses.<sup>242</sup> The entrepreneur is a less elite actor in political scientist Priya Chacko's account, a culturally-Hindu "virtuous market citizen" of the new consumer classes inaugurated by India's economic success in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Nilsen, "From Inclusive Neoliberalism to Authoritarian Populism: Trajectories of Change in the World's Largest Democracy."

<sup>241</sup> Deshpande, "Imagined Economies: Styles of Nation-Building in Twentieth Century India."

<sup>242</sup> Irani, *Chasing Innovation*.

<sup>243</sup> Chacko, "Marketizing Hindutva."

In the story of the index, bureaucrat-as-CEO Amitabh Kant may be the most entrepreneurial figure of them all, suggesting the centrality of the state in entrepreneurship in India. As historian Ravinder Kaur notes “the honorific CEO is now a form of recognition, even fulsome praise, of those who bring corporate style—as men of action—to the work of state administration”.<sup>244</sup> Yet for all the public appeal to entrepreneurship, the Indian economy since 2014 has become less open for new business opportunities, more financialized and fallen more into the grip of large conglomerates, which are “aligning their business strategies with the avowed policy goals of the Modi government”.<sup>245</sup>

It may be most fruitful to consider the entrepreneur, like the index, like “maximum governance,” as a purposely vague signifier. Art historian Pamela Lee describes the think tank, another player in this drama, as “an allover, ambient state – a sensibility – writ large, at planetary scale... an aesthetic.”<sup>246</sup> The index and its vision of entrepreneurial development go hand in hand with other glossy images of a transforming India: holograms of Narendra Modi, gigantic statues of Indian political figures and the glass architecture of “world-class” urban developments.<sup>247</sup> But it is also unlike these glossy images, for it is a technical abstraction, an apparently weightless and placeless node in a global techno-managerial culture. Though the index is a fairly low-tech number – simply composed of weighted averages – it is consistently performed as part of a high-tech Digital India. The global placelessness of technical standards undergirds the index’s

---

<sup>244</sup> Kaur, *Brand New Nation*, 36.

<sup>245</sup> Damodaran, “From ‘entrepreneurial’ to ‘Conglomerate’ Capitalism.”

<sup>246</sup> Lee, *Think Tank Aesthetics*, 267.

<sup>247</sup> Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy*; Kaur, *Brand New Nation*; Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics*.

aesthetic appeal and attests to a transforming India. Looking at slum clearances in New Delhi, urban geographer D Asher argues that the state's enumerative apparatus has been replaced by a focus on aesthetic markers of what appears to be "world-class". In the index, the state's calculative apparatus itself is rendered aesthetic, statistics is reborn as branding.<sup>248</sup>

Far from being sidelined by entrepreneurship, a new, more assertive, central government (which we encounter in other domains as increasingly violent) attempts to shape the conditions in which markets come to exist in the first place. Deviating from the conventional story of neoliberalism, entrepreneurship becomes a site for centralizing state power. The unruly territories of Indian federalism – racially, linguistically and culturally diverse, ruled by parties from across the political spectrum – are disciplined by the central government through numbers rendered as images. As an infrastructure that is simultaneously technical, aesthetic and media-political, the index reshapes the relation between politics, administration, publics and territory.

---

<sup>248</sup> This draws from but contrasts with D Asher Ghertner's account of "aesthetic governmentality", where aesthetic judgment replaces enumeration and calculation Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics*.. And where Irani sees a move away from 'model[ing] the nation as a statistical object', a focus on the index shows the continued importance of enumeration Irani, *Chasing Innovation*, 10..

## Central Vista

"India is the world's largest and oldest [sic!] democracy. Even as we speak, there is a *yagya* [a sacrificial act] that is underway to construct the temple of democracy... On India Today we have both the *swapna drishta* [dream visionary] or the one whose seen that big dream... and we also have the *swapna shrishta* [dream creator] somebody who turns that dream into reality"<sup>249</sup>

- India Today conclave

“A new Master Plan is to be drawn up for the entire Central Vista area that represents the values and aspirations of a New India – Good Governance, Efficiency, Transparency, Accountability and Equity and is rooted in the Indian Culture and social milieu”

- Notice Inviting Bids from National/International Design & Planning Firms for Consultancy Services for comprehensive Architectural & Engineering planning for the “Development/Redevelopment of Parliament Building, Common Central Secretariat and Central Vista at New Delhi”

Hours after he got off the plane from a five-day trip to the USA in September 2021, a hard-hatted Narendra Modi visited the site of the Central Vista Redevelopment, the vast project of demolition and construction currently underway in the heart of New Delhi. In the US, Modi had met Biden and other top officials, addressed the UN General Assembly, and conducted a meeting with the leaders of “the Quad”, the new geopolitical alliance between India, the US, Japan and Australia. His late-night visit to the construction site was reported as “unannounced” and the Prime Minister was supposedly

---

<sup>249</sup> India Today Conclave, *Central Vista Curtain Raiser*.

unaccompanied by his security detail.<sup>250</sup> The widely circulated photographs of the visit dramatized the Prime Minister as a tireless, hyper efficient and accountable figure, performing as the architect of maximum governance.

[Figure 6]

Meanwhile, at the India Today Conclave (“#ABetterNormal”), a yearly “thought platform” organized by one of the biggest media houses in the country, the project’s architect Bimal Patel, who has been called “Modi’s favourite architect”, is in conversation with the Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri, whose agency is overseeing the project. The event is introduced in a hyperbolic language that combines the self-congratulatory post-colonial trope of India as the “world’s largest democracy” with the epic Sanskrit of Hindu mythology. The suffusion of state and society with language and iconography from a mythic Hindu past has been a strong tendency under the Hindu right, often fueling communal violence and signaling a move away from post-colonial India’s official, though ever shaky, commitments to secular democracy.<sup>251</sup> But despite the use of this language in its framing here, the architecture of the Central Vista – and the technocratic domains of efficiency and transparency that it appears to inhabit – tend to disavow explicit links to Hindutva ideology.

Official media representations of the project, driven by aggressive state PR, have instead focused on the way in which the project signals the state’s willingness to undertake large infrastructure projects, to make highly visible changes at a new scale and

---

<sup>250</sup> Methri, “PM Modi Pays Unannounced Visit to Central Vista Project Site; Takes Stock of Work Underway.”

<sup>251</sup> . For an analysis of the BJP’s tendencies in this direction in an earlier, formative moment in the late 1980s, see Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*.

in the name of the people.<sup>252</sup> While even the project's staunchest critics tend to concede that the existing infrastructure is technically inadequate,<sup>253</sup> like all infrastructural projects the Central Vista redevelopment is not only technical – addressing a practical need for new infrastructure – but also aesthetic – symbolizing a New India of maximum governance.<sup>254</sup> In contrast to the old India, represented by the corrupt and inefficient opposition Congress party, the present government's approach is efficient and technocratic, getting done what needs to be done.<sup>255</sup> According to Patel, who has a PhD from UC Berkeley's prestigious urban planning department, his plans will “strengthen the Central Vista as an icon for governance, a grand public space and a treasured part of India's heritage.”<sup>256</sup>

This is visible in Patel's design choices. Rather than mobilizing Hindu symbolism, the buildings' facades attempt to blend in with the existing hybrid British architecture of imperial Delhi. And instead of using Hindu spatial configurations, Patel describes at length the way he is modelling the buildings on airports in Singapore and elsewhere, to maximize security and efficient circulation. To the occasional dismay of the more literally minded elements on the Hindu right, rather than functioning as a straightforward symbol of Hindu nationalist politics, the Central Vista's design operates in a managerial

---

<sup>252</sup> Mohan, Padmanabhan, and Kennedy, “The Shades of Populism in Narendra Modi's Politics of Infrastructure”; Oommen and Narayanan, “Democracy, Development and Identity.”

<sup>253</sup> Krishna Menon, “Behind Modi's Plans to Redevelop the Central Vista Is a Covert Political Agenda.”

<sup>254</sup> Larkin, “The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure.”

<sup>255</sup> According to Puri, previous governments have been aware, for example, that the existing parliament building was not earthquake-safe and that it didn't have enough seating for all the members of parliament. And in his slideshows, Patel regularly shows images of dilapidated interiors and poorly touched-up facades to argue for the new constructions. On account of bureaucratic sluggishness and corruption, a lack of imagination or an outright absence of concern of citizens, the Congress party has ignored this important task.

<sup>256</sup> Sreedharan, “The Master Urbanist.”

register that disavows its link to Hindutva.<sup>257</sup> One of the most persistent – and important – strains of criticism against the project dismisses the appearance of technocratic efficiency as a “mask”, and argues that the Central Vista is in fact a monument to Narendra Modi and Hindu nationalism.<sup>258</sup>

But this argument only works up to a point, for aspirations towards managerial governance are as real as the violence of Hindu nationalism, and both must be reckoned with together. In the aesthetics of governance that is compressed in the Central Vista project, maximum governance is certainly a mask for the increasing communal violence that has characterized the years since 2014. Additionally, however, it is an agenda for a neoliberal model of development and an aspirational populist register for a middle-class mass politics. It draws together the central public space of the capital, the optimization of the bureaucracy, a new relation between the state and citizens, and the Hindu nationalism of the BJP.

[Figure 7]

## The Project

“The Objectives of Central Vista Development/Redevelopment Master Plan include upgrading Parliament's space and facilities, consolidating, rationalizing and synergizing

---

<sup>257</sup> Pawariya, “Central Vista.”

<sup>258</sup> Dev, “Modi’s Folly”; See also Krishna Menon, “Behind Modi’s Plans to Redevelop the Central Vista Is a Covert Political Agenda.” Other critics of the project have attacked it from many fronts: on account of the number of trees that will be uprooted, for not following zoning regulations, because of the fact that the construction was designated “essential” and continued at full pace during the height of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. For a summary of these criticisms see Oommen and Narayanan, “Democracy, Development and Identity.”

government functioning, refurbishing and better equipping the Central Vista Avenue, strengthening cultural institutions in the Central Vista, providing adequate facilities for the Vice President and the Prime Minister, commemorating 75 years of India's independence and above all *showcasing strength and resolve of New India after Independence* to execute an historic national project in 6 years. In this endeavor, the Guiding Principles of the Central Vista Plan [sic] include conservation of Heritage, expanding public space, ensuring Transit Oriented Development, construction of accessible, energy efficient and green buildings with state-of-art construction technology and *efficient management practices, thereby create inspiring work spaces with modern technology & facilities.*<sup>259</sup>

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, in response to a critical article on independent news website Newslaundry

When it is complete, the Central Vista redevelopment will reorder the administrative and legislative heart of the Indian nation-state. The project involves demolitions and new constructions along the Central Vista, a two-kilometre-long ceremonial axis connecting Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President's Palace, and the triumphal arch of India Gate, a space built at the height of the British Raj as the seat of empire and later appropriated by the postcolonial nation-state.<sup>260</sup> As part of the \$2 billion project, new offices will be built for over 50,000 government workers, at least two new museums will be built in the North

---

<sup>259</sup> Team NL, "Government Responds to Newslaundry Article on Central Vista." My italics.

<sup>260</sup> The Central Vista is the name given to this axis by its architect, Edwin Lutyens. Once built, it was referred to as Kingsway. In 1955 it was renamed Rajpath, meaning Royal Way, which the modernist architect Habib Rahman pointed out was out of place in a democracy. For this history see Gupta, "From Kingsway to Rajpath: The Democratization of Lutyens' Central Vista."

and South blocks that currently serve as government offices, a new triangular Parliament building will replace the old circular one, the National Museum and the National Archives, with all their objects and collections, will be shifted into new premises, and the Prime Minister and the Vice President will both receive new homes.

The speed at which the project is unfolding is invoked as a sign of the New India. A limited design competition was announced by the government in September 2019. Just a month later, after a process that was widely criticized by the architecture community for its lack of transparency, the Gujarat-based architecture and planning firm HCP was announced as the winning bidder.<sup>261</sup> Construction began in January 2021, before much of the design was complete, continuing at breakneck pace even during the height of the second wave of the Covid pandemic in India. The landscaping of the central avenue was complete for the annual Republic Day parade in January 2022, while the new Parliament will be ready for the 2022 winter parliament session in November 2022. Construction on the Common Central Secretariat is slated to begin in 2022 and end by 2024, in time for the next general election. As befits an iconic project of the new India, the government reassures us, the Central Vista will not be delayed.<sup>262</sup>

## After Modernism

“Patel did not often speak about his architectural philosophy... Patel rarely, if ever,

---

<sup>261</sup> A good summary of the main “technocratic and processual” critiques from the architecture community – as well as a sophisticated architectural critique – can be found in Oommen and Narayanan, “Democracy, Development and Identity.”

<sup>262</sup> India Today Conclave, *Central Vista Curtain Raiser*.

discussed his aesthetic quest or his architectural style... Patel also never articulated his social or political philosophy... Patel himself never explicitly articulated what his architecture's ethical stance was"<sup>263</sup>.

- Bimal Patel on his father Hasmukh Patel

Hasmukh Patel was part of the first generation of postcolonial Indian architects, who were trained in the West and returned to India to build the postcolonial nation-state in the 1950s. While many of his colleagues threw themselves into the project of developmentalist nation-building in service of Nehruvian socialism, Patel's focus with HCP, the firm he founded and that his son Bimal inherited, was more regional and more focused on private sector and corporate clients. When real estate development replaced the state in the 1980s as the motive force behind organized construction, Bimal writes, "unlike many architects who high-mindedly refused to engage with this new mode of building production, Patel enthusiastically tackled many real estate projects"<sup>264</sup>.

The writing about his father reflects something of Patel Jr's own approach, steering clear of "high-mindedness" and strong ideological positions. Like many practitioner-intellectuals of the free market who peddle hard-nosed pragmatism, Patel portrays himself as a recovered Marxist. Though he toyed with Marxist approaches at Berkeley,<sup>265</sup> as a practicing architect and planner he realized that "Marxism offers the most penetrating and insightful diagnoses of the ills of capitalist societies. However, the solutions it provides are not only not workable, they are positively harmful."<sup>266</sup> In

---

<sup>263</sup> Desai, *The Architecture of Hasmukh C Patel*, 15.

<sup>264</sup> Desai, *The Architecture of Hasmukh C Patel*.

<sup>265</sup> At Berkeley Patel's advisor was the Marxist economic geographer Richard Walker

<sup>266</sup> Patel, "Democracy, Participation and Consultation," 85.

contrast to his PhD work, much of Patel's recent academic writing offers rationalized, market-based, and deregulatory solutions to a range of urban issues. In articles like "Building Regulations are a barrier to affordable housing in Indian cities", "Working with the market: new approaches to reducing slums in India" and "Emergence of sub-optimal land utilization patterns in Indian cities", he holds up the efficient and rational working of the market as the solution to the manifold problems that beset urban settlements in India. His co-authors are the quintessential agents of neoliberal globalization, researchers at the World Bank or big US think tanks like the Hoover Institute or the Brookings Institution.<sup>267</sup>

The turn to the market that took place through the 1980s in India was accompanied by a parallel but distinct a shift in the formal vocabulary of architecture. Emerging from the strict directives of modernism, starting in the 1970s architects had begun to rediscover indigenous motifs, materials and spatial configurations.<sup>268</sup> Ahmedabad, home to Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram and a key site for the emergence of an indigenous modernity, was a centre of this movement. By the 1970s, architects like Charles Correa and BV Doshi were breaking with their modernist training under Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier, the major Western modern architects who left a lasting influence on the architecture of the city and the nation. Both Doshi and Correa turned to Hindu cosmology and spirituality as a guiding motif in their practices, part of a global pushback against European modernism's universal pretensions that architecture critic Kenneth Frampton called "critical

---

<sup>267</sup> Annez et al., *Working with the Market*; Byahut, Patel, and Mehta, "Emergence of Sub-Optimal Land Utilization Patterns in Indian Cities"; Patel, Byahut, and Bhatha, "Building Regulations Are a Barrier to Affordable Housing in Indian Cities."

<sup>268</sup> For more on the history of modern architecture in India, see Lang, *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India*; Scriver and Srivastava, *India*.

regionalism” and which historians of Indian architecture have called “the search for identity”<sup>269</sup>. Notably, Doshi founded a university, the Centre for Environmental Planning and Technology (now simply known as CEPT) in 1962 to promote his distinctive approach to architecture. In the 1970s and 80s, Hasmukh Patel was one of the main administrators at CEPT and today the institution is run by Bimal Patel.<sup>270</sup>

A belated move away from modernist orthodoxies can be tracked in Bimal Patel’s architectural output. His early work in the 1990s, full of raw concrete facades interrupted by geometric shapes, openly bears the influences of Kahn and Corbusier. Though he retains a fondness for boxy massing, exposed brick and concrete and geometric shapes, his more recent work takes a chameleonic approach to design. An observatory at a “multi-developer, multi-facility and multi-beneficiary solar park” wraps an exposed steel structure around a central column. In the Surat Municipal Corporation Science Centre, the messy collision of the building’s three different programmes is ostentatiously dramatized: one section with large glass panels and rounded concrete houses an auditorium, another with a windowless black stone façade makes up galleries, a café and a shop, and a glass-and-concrete cube encases a spherical steel planetarium. A shiny steel art object that vaguely resembles a ship clings to the front of the Chennai Container Terminal’s concrete facade.

[Figures 8-9]

Patel’s idiosyncratic output reflects a varied client list, speaking to his unique positionality between politics and industry in India today. His unbuilt projects, in

---

<sup>269</sup> Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism”; Lang, Desai, and Desai, *Architecture and Independence*.

<sup>270</sup> Patel and Doshi notably had a spat after Patel extended some of Doshi’s buildings without consulting him, leading Doshi to publicly step down from the university’s board.

particular, expose faultlines in new India's much-vaunted and speculative entrepreneurialism. The Jio Institute, a new university founded by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani, which was embroiled in controversy before it opened, remains unbuilt. The Panchamrut Bhavan, a 23,000 square-metre museum complex designed to express the panchamrut (or "five ambrosia") approach to governance that Narendra Modi propounded during his time as Gujarat's Chief Minister, was put on hold after repeated environmental protests.<sup>271</sup>

Patel's practice is representative of a moment of massive transformation in India, emerging from broader shifts that have been afoot across India since the 1980s. Both stylistically and in its orientation to state and market, Patel's architecture is part of a wave of reactions to the decades of Nehruvian socialism. He is, then, a skillful player of the strong neoliberal and sectarian order that has emerged after the free market reforms of 1991, which brought an end to the planned economy, and the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992, which heralded the emergence at the national level of a cultural and religious nationalism rooted in upper-caste Hinduism.<sup>272</sup>

## Neoliberal High Modernism

Even if Patel's work in many ways represents a break with modernism, it inherits what political theorist James C Scott has analyzed as "Le Corbusier's love (mania?) for simple,

---

<sup>271</sup> Referencing the ritual mixing of five natural foods – milk, ghee, curd, honey and jaggery – panchamrut has strong Hindu connotations. In Gujarat the five components of panchamrut were knowledge, water, energy, security and people. Modi recently resurrected the panchamrut, but with very different content, to refer to India's climate commitments at the CoP26 talks at Glasgow.

<sup>272</sup> Rajagopal, *Politics after Television*.

repetitive lines, and his horror of complexity”.<sup>273</sup> Proposals for converting Ahmedabad’s Sabarmati riverfront from a shifting monsoonal water body with a floodplain occupied by squatter settlements into a perennial river with promenades on fixed banks have been tabled since the 1960s.<sup>274</sup> But it was only in 1998 that Environmental Planning Collaborative, a not-for-profit consultancy headed by Patel, put forward a practicable plan.

[Figures 10-11]

On the riverfront, Patel not only provided a master plan for a “world-class” leisure space, but produced a comprehensive formula that addressed many different aspects of urban development to make the project possible. As Ahmedabad-based public policy scholar Navdeep Mathur put it, “from aligning abstract neo-liberal elements with the needs of the different populations in the city - open spaces for the middle classes, better housing for the poor, flood management, better transportation for all, etc, his proposal crafted entirely new modernist imaginaries into the realm of possibility”.<sup>275</sup> The riverfront was redefined as an ecologically vulnerable space that was being destroyed by the poor people who were squatting on its banks. In a departure from the rigid approach of classic high modernists, the project was pitched not only as an opportunity to clean up the river, but also to resettle the poor in formal housing where they would be given land title, a skillful appeal to a range of stakeholders. Furthermore, the project served a

---

<sup>273</sup> Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 107.

<sup>274</sup> For a critique of the epistemology that underlies such projects – and a proposal for seeing monsoonal rivers in particular as “rainscapes” – see Cunha, *The Invention of Rivers*.

<sup>275</sup> Mathur, “On the Sabarmati Riverfront.”

symbolic function: Gujarat under Chief Minister Narendra Modi was in search of an iconic project that would stand for its development successes.

Such methods harnessed and produced new ideas of the public.<sup>276</sup> On the banks of the Sabarmati, according to Patel, the poor had privatized public land. In a moment of unusual candidness, Patel has referred to the traders of a 600-year old informal market with over 100,000 weekly visitors as “crooks who don’t pay taxes”.<sup>277</sup> The project cost of \$300 million was financed by selling 21% of the reclaimed land to private developers. Watersports facilities, luxury housing and floating restaurants would take the place of the squatter settlements on the riverfront. Meanwhile, 14,000 households were evicted officially, and many more unofficially, and resettled to distant areas with no running water where they had to build their own shanties. Many of these people lost their jobs, children dropped out of schools and suffered adverse health effects. Patel’s professed goal was to “return the river to the public”.<sup>278</sup>

Under the combined gaze of Modi and Patel, the riverfront was characterized by the inscrutable congestion and chaos of the informal and must be removed.<sup>279</sup> As James Scott reminds us, high modernism is an aesthetic project, where for the architect Le Corbusier the appearance of “formal order was the precondition of efficiency”, even if one did not in practice follow from the other.<sup>280</sup> Urban geographer D Asher Ghertner

---

<sup>276</sup> For the broader rise of new urban middle class publics in India, see Bhan, *In the Public’s Interest*; Srivastava, *Entangled Urbanism*.

<sup>277</sup> Quoted in Mathur, “On the Sabarmati Riverfront,” 72.

<sup>278</sup> Mathur, 66.

<sup>279</sup> The conflation of old cities and slums is particularly visible in the case of Delhi, where the entire old city was officially designated a slum in the postcolonial period. Bhan, “Housing and the ‘Failure’ of Planning in Delhi: 1947-2010.”

<sup>280</sup> Scott, *Seeing like a State*, 106.

refers to this dynamic as one of “aesthetic governmentality”.<sup>281</sup> According to Ghertner, under constraints of urgency and in the face of an increasingly complex system of statistics and maps, aesthetics came to replace enumeration as the principle that determined people’s legitimate habitation in a locality. How well an area matched up to the image of the world class determined its fate.

A formula combining privatisation, images of a "world-class" leisure space, and income-generation for the municipality, the riverfront redevelopment generated a public of middle-class consumers of world-class leisure facilities. Its fallout was the violent exclusion and displacement of the poor. The project combined aspirations for middle-class leisure with the project of slum clearances and the creation of a hard-banked, largely privatized river. This combination of a high-modernist gaze with a distinctly neoliberal flexibility is characteristic of Patel’s work.

## **Efficiency**

“Improving productivity and efficiency by building a new secretariat is the key objective of this project... it's not to build buildings but that's the larger level objective... this is not the glamorous part of architecture, but it’s serious business”<sup>282</sup>

- Bimal Patel

---

<sup>281</sup> Ghertner, *Rule By Aesthetics*.

<sup>282</sup> Bimal Patel, “Transforming Central Vista, New Delhi.”

[Figure 11]

One of the central components of the Central Vista project is the construction of a Common Central Secretariat, ten new government buildings that will line the leafy central avenue that stretches from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate. The ministries and departments that will be shifted to these buildings are mostly housed in the North and South Blocks, the two buildings designed by Edwin Lutyens which flank Rashtrapati Bhavan and in various buildings from the 1950s and 60s that occupy the site of the new secretariat, as well as in other offices around New Delhi. The consolidation of all these ministries and departments into purpose-built structures is central to the project's promise of efficiency and productivity. The estimate of how many employees will work here ranges from 50,000 to 70,000 and each of the buildings will have a floor area of over 400,000 square metres.<sup>283</sup> The move from the "present scatter of inadequate offices" to the new buildings is visualized simplistically in Patel's slides as increasing both efficiency and productivity in a linear fashion.

Patel's Central Vista buildings combine an architecture of management and circulation with a conservative façade borrowed from the Raj-era buildings of central Delhi to mask the ideology of the ruling party. In *Enduring Innocence*, Keller Easterling describes the buildings that litter the office parks of Bangalore in the 1990s (including those of the Infosys campus, covered in chapter 1 of this thesis) as fantastical glass edifices that perform a high-tech, sci-fi futurism.<sup>284</sup> The buildings of the Central Vista,

---

<sup>283</sup> Bimal Patel. By comparison, the world's largest single office building, the Pentagon, has a floor area of around 600,000 square metres.

<sup>284</sup> Easterling, *Enduring Innocence*.

being offices of the central government, display more restraint. But even so, the contrast from the futuristic placelessness of the Bangalore tech parks is instructive of the distance that has been travelled since the 1990s. Unlike the Bangalore tech parks, which strived towards an architecture shorn of visible markers of tradition, the Central Vista buildings represent a reterritorialization, via colonial heritage, of the architecture of efficiency and modernity in India. This can be seen in the evolution of the design of the Parliament building. The first glimpse of the design showed the new Parliament topped with a shiny gilded spire thrusting up into the sky. More recent designs have replaced the ostentatious spire with a lion capital, the symbol of postcolonial India that Nehru appropriated from the ancient Buddhist king Ashoka.<sup>285</sup>

[Figures 12 and 13]

Patel's plans for the Common Central Secretariat combine the architecture of airports, which are calibrated to maximize circulation and security, with the ideals of productive office spaces, where design has the capacity to increase worker efficiency. The Secretariat buildings will be connected by a dedicated underground people carrier, which Patel models on the internal transit systems at the airports of Singapore and Dubai. The circulation within the buildings will be "simple and straightforward", unlike the mazelike setup that characterizes existing government buildings.<sup>286</sup> In a five minute segment of a presentation where he describes the secretariat, Patel uses the word "efficiency" or variants thereof no fewer than 20 times. Patel's main reference, to which he repeatedly returns in his presentations, is Francis Duffy's *The New Office*, a book published in 1997 that is a sort of how-to manual for managerially-oriented architects.

---

<sup>285</sup> On Nehru's adoption of the Ashokan lion capital see Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic*.

<sup>286</sup> Bimal Patel, "Transforming Central Vista, New Delhi."

Swinging from analyses of Edward Hopper paintings to innovations in cable management, the case studies in Duffy's book are glass office buildings belonging to Japanese and American multinational firms. These offices eschew the "hierarchy of space and furniture related to status" in favour of "multiple shared group work and individual task-based settings... [that are] geared to work process and its tasks". The design logic of the new office is based on "dens", "clubs", "hives" and "cells"<sup>287</sup>.

These spaces epitomise what sociologist Manuel Castells has described as a shift "from vertical bureaucracy to horizontal organization"<sup>288</sup>. One of Patel's teachers at Berkeley, Castells theorized the network society as an ambivalent diagnosis of the state of affairs under neoliberal globalization. Patel has taken up such descriptions as prescriptions for how space should be organized. His practice uses architecture's modernist promise of reforming subjects through spatial reconfiguration to create a world in the image of the corporation. Geographer Nigel Thrift argues that Duffy's spaces are symptomatic of neoliberal capitalism's continued attempt to extract value by creating "buildings which could encompass many modes of social interaction by encouraging both concentration and dispersion simultaneously"<sup>289</sup>. The goal is to produce innovation, now a guiding principle not only for private entrepreneurs seeking to maximize profits but also for government servants responsible for their agencies' bottom lines.<sup>290</sup>

---

<sup>287</sup> Duffy, *The New Office*, 58.

<sup>288</sup> Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*.

<sup>289</sup> Thrift, "Re-Inventing Invention."

<sup>290</sup> Mathur, *Recasting Public Administration in India*.

## Hindu Managerialism

With his grey hair, thick-rimmed glasses and black shirt, Bimal Patel plays the part of the architect as global managerial professional, immersed in discourses of efficiency and governance. Yet despite the appearance of placeless globalism and his disavowal of any strong Hindu identity, Patel's religious and caste ties deeply root him in the communal politics that define contemporary India. Scholar of public policy Navdeep Mathur points out that Patel's position as a member of one of Gujarat's dominant castes facilitated his selection as the consultant on the Sabarmati project.<sup>291</sup> And Patel is one among many Gujaratis whose careers have followed Modi's ascent from Ahmedabad to Delhi.

While many critics have made the connection between the BJP's Hindu nationalist politics and the Central Vista project, concrete architectural evidence of this connection is hard to come by. Rather, because the architecture and the architect disavow the Hindutva ideology of the ruling party, such arguments tend to be historical or circumstantial or based on slips of the architect's tongue. This has been lamented by the more literally-minded elements among the Hindu right, who argue that "a great opportunity to revive Hindu architecture has been missed".<sup>292</sup>

At one point in a presentation on the Central Vista Redevelopment, Patel discusses the "forms and symbolism" that are to be used in the new parliament building. He is less enthusiastic here than when talking about circulation and technology. He begins by explaining the building's triangular footprint. "I say the plot is triangular ... this that, it doesn't help," he says, performing the classic frustration that architect has with client.

---

<sup>291</sup> Mathur, "On the Sabarmati Riverfront."

<sup>292</sup> Pawariya, "Central Vista."

“Well, you know, it’s a sacred geometry, triangles and trinities”, he continues exasperatedly. The slide behind him shows examples of such sacred geometries. Two of the examples, of a Sri Yantra and rock carvings of Hindu gods, are clearly Hindu. A third image, of a traditional jali, or latticed screen, is labelled simply “jali patterns”. Patel points the pointer at it. “In case you’re worried, that’s Humayun’s Tomb, so...” he says, trailing off elliptically.<sup>293</sup> The audience titters with laughter. Patel is referring to the 16th-century tomb of the Mughal emperor Humayun, a member of a dynasty that is regularly attacked by the Hindu right as “Muslim invaders”, and a major example of Islamic architecture in India. The humour is in the distance between what is said and what remains unspoken but is known to everyone in the room.

[Figure 14]

Between what’s said and unsaid Patel leaves room for a range of interpretations: Clearly, the slideshow will travel and be seen by various parties within the Hindu nationalist government who might not be amenable to the use of “Muslim” patterns in the buildings of their new capital. Yet Patel is also pitching it to the audience of (presumably liberal) architects and architecture students gathered for his talk as a sort of inside joke, to assuage their “worries”. Under the YouTube video, Patel’s “in case you’re worried” is read by one commenter as “shade thrown at pseudo seculars”.<sup>294</sup> Meanwhile, the brief and hurried way in which he treats forms and symbolism buries these aspects of the buildings under a global discourse of efficiency and governance that pitches India as a good investment destination and a paradigm of good governance. This heteroglossia —

---

<sup>293</sup> Bimal Patel, “Transforming Central Vista, New Delhi.”

<sup>294</sup> Bimal Patel. “Pseudo-secular” is a Right-wing talking point, invented by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, implying that those who claim to be secular are in fact anti-Hindu and often pro-Muslim. Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*.

the ability to speak in a way that can simultaneously service a range of constituencies — is one of the main strengths of Patel and other such experts who implement the technocratic visions of the BJP.

A similar heteroglossia crops up in the Kashi Viswanathan project, another of the vast government commissions that Patel is working on. The project creates a 50-foot wide, 300-metre long pathway between the holy ghats on the Ganga in Banaras and the Kashi Vishwanath temple in the city, easing access for the millions of devotees who visit it each year. The construction of the corridor, currently underway, will expand the space around Kashi Vishwanath temple from 3,000 square feet to 50,000 square feet and has resulted in the demolition of more than 270 houses and 15 neighbourhoods. In his usual fashion, Patel describes the existing dense urban fabric as a “congested” space that needs to be cleaned up and opened up. But the project that Patel describes in purely technical terms of efficiency also supports very different readings. Banaras is the holiest city in Hinduism and the parliamentary seat from which Modi contests national elections. Laying the foundation stone of the corridor, Modi explained that it enabled the “liberation” of Lord Shiva, the deity of the temple, who had been feeling “suffocated” due to the lack of space around the temple.<sup>295</sup>

The phrase “soft Hindutva” has been used by many on the left to describe centrist opposition politicians – especially upper-caste Hindus who officially espouse secularism – who profess Hinduism to appeal to voters.<sup>296</sup> Televised visits to temples, the peppering of speeches with Sanskrit phrases, the chanting of Hindu prayers by opposition

---

<sup>295</sup> Srivastava, “From Kashi to Kedar, Divine Intervention.”

<sup>296</sup> Bal, “Opinion | The Troubled Rise of Rahul Gandhi.” As such, it is complementary and opposite to the “pseudo-secular”.

politicians are all part of a politics of appeasement that accedes to the Hindu nationalist framing of India as a Hindu country and contributes further to establishing Hinduism as the grounds for politics in India. Soft Hindutva is described as a symptom of the gradual rightward shift of the discourse and symbolism of electoral politics in India. As the most lucid critics have pointed out, the problem with soft Hindutva is not simply that Hinduism is being used tactically by certain politicians, but rather that it expresses the underlying casteist Hindu disposition of the nation-state at large, even among professedly secular elements.<sup>297</sup>

The aesthetics of governance under Modi is the neoliberal analogue of soft Hindutva in the economic realm. Here the forces of Hindutva use the language of technocratic managerialism – developed in large part by the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party<sup>298</sup> – to screen their more rabid politics such that the state’s projects remain palatable to the Indian corporate elite and the global forces of capital from which the BJP craves recognition. Just as governance can be fungible with soft Hindutva, so too can the latent violence of soft Hindutva be translated into more spectacular and open forms of violence. For example, more is at stake than meets the eye in the clearing of congestion, the liberation of Shiva in Banaras. Journalist Sushil Kumar argues that the creation of an open space around the temple paves the way for the violent destruction of the Gyanvapi mosque, which shares a boundary wall with the temple. According to the Kumar the project, which is being carried out in the name of decongestion and modernization, is laying the ground for a repeat of the 1991 demolition of the Babri Masjid by a Hindu

---

<sup>297</sup> Bal.

<sup>298</sup> Until Modi’s rise, the BJP and the Hindu right were broadly in favour of protectionist, nation-first economic policies. For the BJP’s adoption of neoliberal economic policy and discourses of governance see Chacko, “Marketizing Hindutva”; Chatterjee, “The Movement against Politics.”

mob under Modi's mentor and BJP leader LK Advani.<sup>299</sup>

The Central Vista may not directly be paving the way for bloody acts of violence, but here too any charges that architecture expresses Hindu ideology is defused by the claim that the project is “merely infrastructural”.<sup>300</sup> In fact, the problem is both ideological and infrastructural. Like soft Hindutva, the language of technocratic efficiency is not simply a tactical move. It also expresses the underlying disposition of Indian politics, one where maximum governance has middle-class mass political appeal. The innocence of the managerial register affords plausible deniability.<sup>301</sup> This heteroglossia turns the Central Vista into an empty signifier, making it easy for the BJP's supporters to see the Central Vista as a symbol of Hindutva but harder for its critics to attack on this count.

## **A Bureaucratic Counter-Environment**

At the same time as they are transformed into more efficient and productive workers, the users of the Central Vista are to be increasingly insulated from territory they govern.

Historian Narayani Gupta has evocatively described the informal urban environment and economy that supported the existing Central Vista buildings :

---

<sup>299</sup> Kumar, “How Modi's Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Is Laying the Ground for Another Babri Incident.”

<sup>300</sup> Oommen and Narayanan, “Democracy, Development and Identity.”

<sup>301</sup> It is for this reason that most critiques of the Central Vista project, including this one, have had to approach it in a roundabout fashion. The most glaring example of this is in an article by well-known architect AGK Menon, who argues that the project has a “covert political agenda” because its construction will be completed in 2024, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the RSS, the BJP's ideological parent organization. Krishna Menon, “Behind Modi's Plans to Redevelop the Central Vista Is a Covert Political Agenda.”

“The Indian Champs Elysees is coming to life-in a way very different from what Lutyens intended. Foodstalls and eateries are normal ancillary developments whenever an office complex is built. The architectural snobbery of the Secretariats is maintained by banishing all these stalls from the facade and allowing them to proliferate at the rear. The Bhavans are hemmed in by these, as well as by innumerable vendors enticing the officegoers with temptations, mounds of handkerchiefs, shiny pens, wallets, aphrodisiacs. In recent years the items aimed at women have increased, with arrays of atomizers and handbags. Thus a sizable area of the Vista is a miniature bazaar, with its complement of dhabas (makeshift eateries).”<sup>302</sup>

All this informality is to be banished by Patel, who speaks with horror of “ad hoc vending”.<sup>303</sup> If the existing government buildings had a severe front that faced the grand Central Vista, their backs were hives of informal activity. The new Secretariat buildings will be surrounded on all sides by a moat of approach roads and high-security perimeter walls, rendering the bazaar impossible. Organized around large central courtyards, the new buildings will be characterized by a relation of inside to outside rather than front to back. Mimicking Lutyens’ architecture, all four faces of each building will take on an austere sandstone cladding, perforated by small louvred windows. The courtyard-facing walls, however, will be covered in floor-to-ceiling glass windows, giving a view of the tree-canopied courtyard. In effect, the external face will retain a conservative governmental façade, while the internal face will fully perform the architecture of high-

---

<sup>302</sup> Gupta, “From Kingsway to Rajpath: The Democratization of Lutyens’ Central Vista,” 263.

<sup>303</sup> Bimal Patel, “Transforming Central Vista, New Delhi.”

tech management.

The Indian subcontinent has a long history of courtyard houses, a form that largely fell out of favour in the colonial era but was revived in the 1980s. Charles Correa, one of the foremost postcolonial proponents of courtyards, found in the typology a clear statement of the “great lyricism in the Indian temperament”.<sup>304</sup> For the spiritually-inclined Correa, courtyards represented a climate-appropriate, “open-to-sky” architecture in which “the boundaries ... between room and verandah and terrace and courtyard ... are blurred and casual, so that one passes easily from one to another”.<sup>305</sup> Though they may at first glance echo Correa’s postcolonial appropriation of the courtyard, the climate-controlled Secretariat buildings, sealed off from their environment, more closely resemble what Correa called the “closed box”. Indeed in an uncanny echo of midcentury American architect and designer Eliot Noyes, who called courtyards “squared doughnuts”, Patel refers to his Secretariat plan as consisting of “doughnut-shaped buildings”.<sup>306</sup>

[Figures 15-17]

Architecture historian John Harwood characterizes the squared doughnut, replicated by Noyes in buildings around the world for the IBM corporation, as “courtyard-fortress architecture”. According to Harwood, the hard externality and inward orientation provided by courtyards rendered each of the multinational corporation’s buildings as a “counterenvironment”, “an enclosure organized over and against the surrounding, disorganized environment.”<sup>307</sup> In India, where informal bazaars cluster around office

---

<sup>304</sup> Correa, “Architectural Expression.”

<sup>305</sup> Correa, “A Place in the Sun,” 330.

<sup>306</sup> Harwood, *The Interface*; Bimal Patel, “Transforming Central Vista, New Delhi.”

<sup>307</sup> Harwood, *The Interface*, 13.

buildings, the high-modernist imperative to keep out the chaotic outside is even stronger than it may be in suburban New York. According to Harwood, the courtyard-fortress form is “a large-scale realization of the computer”: it is because of the carefully managed space of the counterenvironment, segmented off from the territory that surrounds it and connected to each other through underground cables and satellite infrastructure, that “a global view of interconnected data-processing centers became possible”.<sup>308</sup>

Just as IBM’s architecture expressed its ambitions of global, interconnected data-processing, the design of the Secretariat buildings sublimates the aspirations of digital India. In order for the state’s access to the nation to be primarily digital, through NITI Aayog’s indices or the cybertime of Aadhaar, the interface between the state and its territory can no longer remain one of direct, face-to-face interaction where anyone might walk in and out of the government building into the city. Like information carried through cables, bureaucrats, remade into innovating knowledge workers, will travel through underground pipes and enter and exit the buildings from below. Everything takes place out of sight and instantly. The exterior facades relate to the city as pure ceremonial surface. In the hermetically networked Central Vista Secretariat, dreams of maximum governance find their architectural form. It is one thing for a corporation selling computers to dramatize turning away from the surrounding environment and into the network; it is a different matter altogether for a state that is accountable to its citizens to do so.

---

<sup>308</sup> Harwood, 99.

## An Icon of Governance

What then is the relationship between governance, of which the Central Vista is an icon, and government, which it is built to house? Governance, the promise goes, is to be maximized, while government is to be minimized. What to make of the paradoxical situation when both inhabit the same house? An earnest answer might suggest that when he says “minimum government” Modi is only referring to certain parts of the government, to the many state-run enterprises that are quickly being divested (as another of Modi’s slogans puts it “government has no business being in business”), to the bureaucratic procedures that are being pared down. In fact, one might say in Modi’s defence, despite the gigantism of these new buildings, they are minimizing the old-fashioned, bureaucratic, corrupt old government that we’ve known and hated. Or, more critically, one might say that the size of the new buildings is the symbol of the sovereign – and violent – power of an executive that is increasingly unaccountable to the public.<sup>309</sup>

But a more cynical answer would be that in spite of its newfound architectural form, or perhaps because of it, the pair of “maximum governance, minimum governance” is more slippery than ever. It is at the same time extraordinarily difficult for its critics to find purchase on and a potent site for the projection of various aspirational nationalist fantasies. Maximum governance will not cause government to disappear, as Aadhaar’s architect Nandan Nilekani promised it would, or to become “minimum”, as Modi promises. Rather, governance and government are empty signifiers, exist in a shifting relationship, sometimes in opposition to each other, sometimes reinforcing the other’s

---

<sup>309</sup> For shifts in power within the government see Gopal Jayal, *Re-Forming India*. For scale in the new India see Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy*.

worst qualities.

## Conclusion

## Dissent and Democracy in Postcolonial India

The history of postcolonial India can be thought of as a succession of forms of visualization, enumeration, construction and identification. Citizens have been regularly counted and periodically issued a range of identity documents, including ration cards, voter IDs and permanent account numbers. New architectures have animated political capitals around the country, from modernist tabula rasa projects in Chandigarh, Bhubaneswar and Gandhinagar in the 1950s and 1960s to the fantastical neo-Buddhist interventions that remade Lucknow in the 2000s. Sophisticated and unsophisticated techniques have been used to measure economic and social progress since at least the 1950s.<sup>310</sup> Seen historically, the projects that are being carried out in the name of governance are the latest developments in a lineage of techno-social projects that have been central to postcolonial statecraft.

Yet something new is also at work here. Replacing “good governance” with “maximum governance” has turned bland managerial projects into programmes of public relations, ways of attracting investment as well as components of the BJP’s “state of quasi-permanent mobilization and spectacle”.<sup>311</sup> Governance in contemporary India no longer refers only to the technical content of interventions but also their form.<sup>312</sup> The innovation under Modi’s BJP is not in the invocation of ideals of good governance,

---

<sup>310</sup> For the history of identification documents in India, see Sriraman, *In Pursuit of Proof*. Ravi Kalia covers the history of new state capitals in India in. The history of postcolonial statistics lacks a general scholarly text but aspects of it are addressed in Ghosh, “Accepting Difference, Seeking Common Ground”; Mertia, *Lives of Data: Essays on Computational Cultures from India*.

<sup>311</sup> Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*, 44.

<sup>312</sup> If there is an earlier moment in postcolonial India when technocratic politics – and politics generally – were expressed so strongly in an aesthetic register, it was the early Nehruvian period, when five-year plans were a national spectacle and a topic for dinner-table conversations, and the new national capitals involved a similarly vast imagination.

transparency or efficiency so much as the way they have been performed as part of an aesthetic project of managerial populism.

Today many liberals are nostalgic for the Congress' technocratic orientation towards managerial values in the mid-2000s. That was a form of government for which, despite its excesses and injustices, there existed a coherent and powerful critique and opposition, and which largely remained within the checks and balances of postcolonial democracy (if only due to sustained pressure from people). In other words, it was a form of power that was, by and large, predictable within the coordinates of postcolonial liberal democracy. It is increasingly questionable whether it is possible to return to that form of government. Even in the unlikely chance that an opposition party were to win the national elections, it would have little reason to undo a project like Aadhaar, which grants the state vast powers over its citizens. And even if a return to that form of government was desirable – and it is not at all clear that it is, only that it is preferable to the current situation – the most important question is one of method: how to challenge, subvert, or destroy the changes that the managerial populism has introduced to Indian state and society?

Until 2014, shying away from radical social upheavals, civil society activists engaged with the institutions of the state to effectively impose limits on its power. Since the 1980s, the courts – and the Supreme Court in particular – have been a major site for civil society interventions at the national scale, from major environmental movements to movements for the rights of squatters. But the aestheticisation of governance under Modi has led to an interesting paradox: techno-managerial performances of governance often undercut the rule of law, which is globally considered a major component of the good

governance agenda. For example, in blatant violation of democratic procedure, the laws and regulations that govern Aadhaar were passed using a legislative form called the “money bill”, which enabled it to bypass parliamentary scrutiny. In other words, rather than acting as a check on the state (which is one of good governance’s main aims as expressed by the World Bank), governance in the time of managerial populism has become an open expression of the sovereign power of the executive. Meanwhile, the courts have increasingly been an ineffective site for redress: legal challenges against both Aadhaar and the Central Vista project have failed dramatically. As anti-caste scholar Anand Teltumbde writes, “Given the pace with which the forces of darkness are scaling the ramparts, to persist in believing that technicalities such as constitutional barriers will prove any hurdle to them would betray monumental naivete.”<sup>313</sup>

Alongside the spaces of civil society, Indian politics has been characterised by a modality of action that postcolonial theorist Partha Chatterjee calls “political society”.<sup>314</sup> Unlike civil society, which is characterised by reasonable debate and discussion within the norms of liberal democracy, political society is a domain of subaltern mass protest and electoral movements aimed at gaining concessions from the state within the state’s frameworks of enumeration and distribution. As such, groups that use political society have shaped themselves to fit the identity categories of the postcolonial state. Its greatest successes have been in various agitations by caste communities to gain reservations, or affirmative action, in educational and state institutions. Because it is predicated on the state’s own categories, political society too appears to be unable to respond to the

---

<sup>313</sup> Teltumbde, *Republic of Caste*, 45.

<sup>314</sup> Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation*. The reading of political society as a modality of action rather than an empirical space of protest is Nivedita Menon’s. Menon, “Introduction.”

initiatives of maximum governance. This is encapsulated by the broad public response to Aadhaar, which was in almost all cases to immediately enrol in the programme, and for good reason, as nobody wanted to risk exclusion. As activist lawyer Usha Ramanathan argues, it is difficult to expect subaltern resistance to technocratic infrastructures when they are also the key to welfare that can be the difference between life and death.<sup>315</sup>

### **Making Failure Stick**

In a recent book, Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander point out that failure is a collective judgement rather than an empirical condition.<sup>316</sup> Some actors, some ways of organizing the world, are incredibly adept at avoiding its taint. Civil society assessments of the BJP's promises repeatedly reveal failure, even by the government's own measures: policies like demonetization – the overnight withdrawal of the 500-rupee note from circulation – and the introduction of a new Goods and Services Tax have failed to materialize the promised growth in GDP, instead dampening economic growth. Despite all the promotion around it, Aadhaar failed to reduce leakages in the welfare delivery system, even causing starvation deaths among groups who previously received food subsidies. The destructive second wave of the covid-19 pandemic was utterly mismanaged and resulted in millions of deaths. Yet the ruling party has been extremely

---

<sup>315</sup> Private conversation. As such, Aadhaar in particular, but also governance infrastructures more broadly, can be considered, after philosopher Achille Mbembe, infrastructures of necropolitics, which determine who gets to live and who must die. Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

<sup>316</sup> Appadurai and Alexander, *Failure*.

adept at shrugging off these failures and retooling them as successes, necessary sacrifices or feedback to improve the system.

In large part this has been accomplished through an aggressive PR machinery and the systematic erosion of the free press and the capitulation of large sections of the corporate media. But it is also an emanation of the BJP's Hindu managerialism. The BJP's projects of maximum governance have borrowed the tech world's orientation towards failure – one of “perpetual beta”, where failures are continually made productive, absorbed as learnings into new designs.<sup>317</sup> This is, according to Irani, one of the chief signs of the entrepreneurial. It also draws from a Hindu notion of sacrifice, where failure is rendered in moral terms. This ruthless cocktail turns the BJP into a perfect “machine of broken promises aimed at denying or dismissing the existence of failure”.<sup>318</sup> Even so, managerial populism, thoroughly aestheticized and seemingly immune to failure, is resulting in new forms of dissent, new distributions of the sensible. What do these look like, and where are they already taking place?

The continuing work of exposing the BJP's failure to live up to its promises with facts and figures is crucial, as is the exposure of its failures to follows the norms and procedures laid down by the law. But demystification – which is the province of a usually elite civil society – cannot be restricted to the bloodless language of truth and reason. Transparency and efficiency are simultaneously epistemic virtues – forms of organizing technical processes, which are often aesthetic – as well as political virtues – ideals that politicians and bureaucrats seek to embody.<sup>319</sup> A project like Land Conflict Watch, for

---

<sup>317</sup> Irani, *Chasing Innovation*. See also Halpern and Günel, “FCJ-215 Demoing unto Death.”

<sup>318</sup> Appadurai and Alexander, *Failure*, 11.

<sup>319</sup> The notion of an epistemic virtue is from Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*.

example, composed of a national network of reporters, mobilizes a digitally savvy interface that aestheticizes numbers to track instances of violence and dispossession in corporate and government land grabs around the country. A “data research agency” plugged into global networks of data journalism, the organization plays the game of managerial governance, contesting the government’s monopoly on world-classness in order to expose the depredations of the state and large corporations.

The BJP sells a miraculous vision in which techno-managerial systems of governance can be both transparent and efficient, where both these virtues are left ambiguous and undefined. In the past – and in other countries – transparency and efficiency have often been seen as conflicting principles. Calls for increased transparency are often countered with the argument that the procedures for increased oversight will reduce the state’s efficiency. As such, ongoing efforts that centre different notions of transparency and efficiency are also potent sites of exposing the BJP’s contradictions. In electoral politics, opposition parties especially at the regional level have contested the BJP’s self-promoted image of transparency, for example after Modi instituted a covid fund, the PM CARES fund, that collected billions of unaccounted for dollars that is exempt from Right to Information legislation, though again Modi has largely remained immune to these charges. At the more grassroots level, organizations like the MKSS, which used India’s right to information legislation to audit government programmes in public fora, in a form known as “social audits”, for example, pioneered a people-centred form of transparency that still exists at the local level.

It is precisely when the infrastructures of efficiency, by now well entrenched, are put to particularly violent, exclusionary or extractive ends – and formalized in law – that

the most powerful forms of dissent have emerged. The introduction of three new agricultural laws in 2020 that, among other things, would institutionalize contract farming and end state agricultural markets led to a massive farmers' movement across North India. And the BJP's moves to disenfranchise Indian Muslims through the Nationwide Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 led to large protests and occupations of public space across the country. In these cases, dissent has turned to an aesthetic and ethical project that has been somewhat successful at making BJP's failures stick. In a rare move, the BJP was forced to backtrack on its agricultural laws, though notably without admitting failure.

The emergence of a popular form of constitutionalism may be hopeful, for it wrenches law, and its claims to justice, out of the courts and into the public.<sup>320</sup> During the wave of protests against the CAA that took place in 2019 and 2020, the constitution emerged as an important symbolic and ethical anchor. Straddling civil and political society, public invocations of the constitution to challenge Hindu nationalism dramatized law in a way that may yet be more effective than the courts. This is a novel emergence in contemporary India, a symptom of what theorist Ajay Gudavarthy calls "post-civil society".<sup>321</sup> Its effects were not only restricted to the protests but are visible in other domains as well. The Right to Information request, a means of accessing government information, for example, has become a mediatized genre on social media, where such requests are routinely shared, often with state refusals to divulge information. The effects

---

<sup>320</sup> De and Ranganathan, "Opinion | We Are Witnessing a Rediscovery of India's Republic."

<sup>321</sup> Gudavarthy, *Politics of Post-Civil Society*.

of this popular constitutionalism, which Kalpana Kannabiran has called the “constitution-as-commons” are still emerging.<sup>322</sup>

The protests have also shown that contesting the BJP’s monopoly on nationalism has been effective and necessary. National symbols were strategically and – disarmingly for liberals and leftists – enthusiastically taken up by protestors. As journalist Shivam Vij has argued, “nationalism is the masala that can make any food tasty... The only way to reclaim secularism is to first reclaim nationalism. If secularists are uncomfortable with nationalism, they should be ready for the declaration of India as a de facto Hindu nation-state very soon.”<sup>323</sup> If anything is clear, it is that there is little room left for the certainties and pieties of the well-worn models of dissent in India, particularly those of civil society. Many tactics and vocabularies are necessary to expose the violence, absurdity and injustice of the BJP’s managerial infrastructures for what they are: failures of Indian state and society.

## **The Violence of Maximum Governance**

This thesis has tried to describe a part of the story of the new India that is often treated as a self-evident matter of fact. Hindutva – albeit in a new, hypermediated form – is implicitly treated as key to Modi’s electoral appeal while the managerial face of his appeal is assumed to face more towards middle-class and corporate India. But governance is slippery, it takes on different meanings for different actors, a remarkable

---

<sup>322</sup> Kannabiran, “Constitution-As-Commons.”

<sup>323</sup> Vij, “How Indian Secularism Could Still Be Saved.”

shared vocabulary that provides both a common playing field and plausible deniability for its users. If Modi's appeals to "minimum government, maximum governance" are less studied, it is for a very good reason: lives are not directly at stake here in the way they are with Hindutva. But the fuzzy, ambiguous, latent violence within these infrastructures is fungible with more bloody forms of violence.<sup>324</sup>

In some cases, these infrastructures have required events of hardship that are disproportionately felt by the poor, as in the demonetization that was the coercive catalyst for the uptake of Aadhaar's digital payments ecosystem. In others, they lay the grounds for increasingly genocidal violence against Muslims and minorities, as in Bimal Patel's Kashi Viswanathan project in Banaras. In Ahmedabad, Patel's supposedly efficient and rationalist urban planning has resulted in the displacement and impoverishment of tens of thousands of families. Sometimes, such infrastructures are actively complicit in deregulation and privatization that has led to increased precarity around the country. Surveying Aadhaar's biggest beneficiaries reveals that it facilitates the selective enrichment of corporate capital in the name of anti-poverty. In another variation, the Central Vista masks the government's genocidal Hindu nationalism by aestheticizing efficiency and transparency. And increased efficiency can and is being used to better target Muslims and the poor for exclusion and violence. Everywhere we look, these infrastructures are leading to dispossession, extraction and accumulation; in many cases, to genocidal violence. The hope of this thesis has been to illuminate these violences and the slippery systems that produce them.

---

<sup>324</sup> On the notion that different forms of violence are convertible, see Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." My account of violence also draws from, but does not directly cite, Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. And Rodgers and O'Neill, "Infrastructural Violence."

## References

- Aadhaar FAIL! “Aadhaar FAIL!” Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://aadhaar.fail/>.
- HuffPost. “Aadhaar Linked To Half The Reported Starvation Deaths Since 2015, Say Researchers,” September 26, 2018. [https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/09/25/aadhaar-linked-to-half-the-reported-starvation-deaths-since-2015-say-researchers\\_a\\_23539768/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/09/25/aadhaar-linked-to-half-the-reported-starvation-deaths-since-2015-say-researchers_a_23539768/).
- Abraham, Itty. “From the Commission to the Mission Model: Technology Czars and the Indian Middle Class.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 3 (August 2017): 675–96. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911817000146>.
- Acciavatti, Anthony. “The Ganges Water Crisis.” *The New York Times*, June 17, 2015, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/18/opinion/the-ganges-water-crisis.html>.
- Agamben, Giorgio. “*What Is an Apparatus?*” *And Other Essays*. Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Aiyar, Shankkar. *Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India’s 12-Digit Revolution*. Chennai, [India]: Westland Publications Ltd, 2017.
- Aiyar, Yamini. “India’s Data-Driven Governance Regime Is Not Foolproof.” *Hindustan Times*, March 27, 2019. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/india-s-data-driven-governance-regime-is-not-foolproof/story-6qkdDIYFUUxnPaiMv4zjGP.html>.

Aiyar, Yamini, and Louise Tillin. “‘One Nation,’ BJP, and the Future of Indian Federalism.” *India Review* 19, no. 2 (March 14, 2020): 117–35.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2020.1744994>.

Amrith, Sunil S. *Unruly Waters: How Rains, Rivers, Coasts and Seas Have Shaped Asia's History*. First edition. New York: Basic Books, 2018.

Annez, Patricia Clarke, Alain Bertaud, Bimal Patel, and V. K. Phatak. *Working with the Market: A New Approach to Reducing Urban Slums in India*. Policy Research Working Papers. The World Bank, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-5475>.

Appadurai, Arjun, and Neta Alexander. *Failure*. Cambridge, UK ; Medford: Polity, 2020.

Appleby, Paul H. “Public Administration In India: Report Of A Survey.” New Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1953. <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.276309>.

Arora, Kim. “Is a Babu at Work? You Can Check in Real Time.” *Time of India*. October 8, 2014, Electronic edition. <https://advance.lexis.com/document?crd=a906cc30-62a9-496c-82a2-49757c88e312&pddocfullpath=%2Fshared%2Fdocument%2Fnews%2Furn%3AcontentItem%3A5D9R-HY41-JB3N-T0XX-00000-00&pdsourcgroupingtype=&pdcontentcomponentid=382891&pdmfid=1516831&pdisurlapi=true>.

Bal, Hartosh Singh. “Opinion | The Troubled Rise of Rahul Gandhi.” *The New York Times*, December 15, 2017, sec. Opinion.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/15/opinion/rahul-gandhi.html>.

- Basu, Prahlad K. "Strategic Issues in Administrative Reorganisation: Developing Countries' Perspective." *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, no. 22 (1992): M46–58.
- Bear, Laura. *Navigating Austerity: Currents of Debt along a South Asian River*. Anthropology of Policy. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Bear, Laura, and Nayanika Mathur. "Introduction: Remaking the Public Good." *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (January 1, 2015).  
<https://doi.org/10.3167/ca.2015.330103>.
- Bhan, Gautam. "Housing and the 'Failure' of Planning in Delhi: 1947-2010." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 24 (2013): 13.
- . *In the Public's Interest: Evictions, Citizenship and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi*, 2016.
- Bhuta, Nehal. "Governmentalizing Sovereignty: Indexes of State Fragility and the Calculability of Political Order \*." In *Governance by Indicators*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199658244.003.0006>.
- Bhuta, Nehal, Debora Valentina Malito, and Gaby Umbach. "Introduction: Of Numbers and Narratives—Indicators in Global Governance and the Rise of a Reflexive Indicator Culture." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Indicators in Global Governance*, edited by Debora Valentina Malito, Gaby Umbach, and Nehal Bhuta, 1–29. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62707-6\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62707-6_1).

- , eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of Indicators in Global Governance*. 1st ed. 2018. Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62707-6>.
- Bimal Patel. “Transforming Central Vista, New Delhi.” CEPT University, January 24, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXbvc3oLIBk>.
- Block, Daniel. “How Reliance Jio Is Monopolising the Telecom Sector.” *The Caravan*, February 1, 2019. <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/government-helping-reliance-jio-monopolise-telecom>.
- Bornstein, Erica, and Aradhana Sharma. “The Righteous and the Rightful: The Technomoral Politics of NGOs, Social Movements, and the State in India.” *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1 (2016): 76–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12264>.
- Bowker, Geoffrey C., and Susan Leigh Star. *Sorting Things out: Classification and Its Consequences*. First paperback edition. Inside Technology. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2000.
- Bratton, Benjamin H. “On Hemispherical Stacks: Notes on Multipolar Geopolitics and Planetary-Scale Computation.” In *As We May Think: Feedforward: The 6th Guangzhou Triennial*, 77–85. Guangdong Museum of Art, 2018.
- Bratton, Benjamin H. *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*. Software Studies. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015.
- Breckenridge, Keith. *Biometric State*. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Buščíková, Lenka, and Petra Guasti. “The State as a Firm: Understanding the Autocratic Roots of Technocratic Populism.” *East European Politics and Societies: And*

*Cultures* 33, no. 2 (May 2019): 302–30.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418791723>.

Byahut, Sweta, Bimal Patel, and Jignesh Mehta. “Emergence of Sub-Optimal Land

Utilization Patterns in Indian Cities.” *Journal of Urban Design* 25, no. 6

(November 1, 2020): 758–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2020.1752646>.

The Economist. “Cagey,” February 10, 2014.

<http://www.economist.com/banyan/2014/02/10/cagey>.

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Information Age, v. 1. Malden, Mass:

Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Chacko, Priya. “Marketizing Hindutva: The State, Society, and Markets in Hindu

Nationalism.” *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (March 2019): 377–410.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000051>.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical*

*Difference*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, N.J: Princeton

University Press, 2000.

Chambers, Thomas. “‘Lean on Me’: Sifarish, Mediation & the Digitisation of State

Bureaucracies in India.” *Ethnography*, July 16, 2020, 1466138120940755.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138120940755>.

Chatterjee, Partha. “Development Planning and the Indian State.” In *State and Politics in*

*India*, edited by Partha Chatterjee. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

———. *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press,

2010.

- . *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today*. Columbia University Press, 2019.
- . “The Movement against Politics.” *Cultural Critique* 81 (2012): 117–22. <https://doi.org/10.5749/culturalcritique.81.2012.0117>.
- Chaudhry, Praveen K, Vijay L Kelkar, and Vikash Yadav. “The Evolution of ‘Homegrown Conditionality’ in India: IMF Relations.” *Journal of Development Studies* 40, no. 6 (August 2004): 59–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022038042000233803>.
- Chhachhi, Amrita. “Neoliberalism, Hindutva and Gender: Convergence and Contradictions in the Provision of Welfare.” *Feminist Dissent*, no. 5 (December 31, 2020): 50–93. <https://doi.org/10.31273/fd.n5.2020.759>.
- CNBC-TV18. *Amitabh Kant On NITI Aayog’s National Health Index | CNBC TV18*, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOD-7tabroo>.
- Cohn, Bernard S. “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification.” In *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, 224–54. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Cooke, Bill. “The Managing of the (Third) World.” *Organization* 11, no. 5 (September 2004): 603–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508404044063>.
- Cooley, Alexander, and Jack L. Snyder, eds. *Ranking the World: Grading States as a Tool of Global Governance*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Correa, Charles. “A Place in the Sun.” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 131, no. 5322 (1983): 328–40.

- . “Architectural Expression.” In *Seminar On Architecture*, edited by Achyut Kanvinde, 48–50. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi, 1959.
- Cowan, Thomas. “Uncertain Grounds: Cartographic Negotiation and Digitized Property on the Urban Frontier.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 45, no. 3 (2021): 442–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.13016>.
- Cunha, Dilip da. *The Invention of Rivers: Alexander’s Eye and Ganga’s Descent*. 1st edition. Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018.
- Damodaran, Harish. “From ‘entrepreneurial’ to ‘Conglomerate’ Capitalism.” *Seminar*, October 2020. [https://www.india-seminar.com/2020/734/734\\_harish\\_damodaran.htm](https://www.india-seminar.com/2020/734/734_harish_damodaran.htm).
- . *India’s New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern Nation*. Hachette India, 2018.
- Daston, Lorraine, and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2007.
- Datta, Ayona. “Postcolonial Urban Futures: Imagining and Governing India’s Smart Urban Age.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 37, no. 3 (June 2019): 393–410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775818800721>.
- Dattani, Kavita. “‘Governtrepreneurism’ for Good Governance: The Case of Aadhaar and the India Stack.” *Area* 52, no. 2 (June 2020): 411–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12579>.
- De, Rohit, and Surabhi Ranganathan. “Opinion | We Are Witnessing a Rediscovery of India’s Republic.” *The New York Times*, December 27, 2019, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/27/opinion/india-constitution-protests.html>.

- Desai, Catherine. *The Architecture of Hasmukh C Patel: Selected Projects 1963-2003*. 1st edition. Ocean, NJ: Grantha Corporation, 2017.
- Deshmane, Akshay. “Documents Show How Modi, Jaitley Gamed World Bank’s Doing Business Rankings.” *HuffPost India*, November 20, 2018, sec. Business.  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/11/20/how-modi-and-jaitley-gamed-the-world-banks-doing-business-rankings\\_a\\_23594375/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/11/20/how-modi-and-jaitley-gamed-the-world-banks-doing-business-rankings_a_23594375/).
- Deshpande, Satish. “Imagined Economies: Styles of Nation-Building in Twentieth Century India.” *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, no. 25–26 (December 1993): 5–35.
- Desrosières, Alain. “How Real Are Statistics? Four Possible Attitudes.” *Social Research* 68, no. 2 (2001): 339–55.
- . *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Dev, Atul. “Modi’s Folly.” *The New York Review of Books* (blog), May 10, 2021.  
<http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2021/05/10/modis-folly/>.
- Digital Public Goods Alliance. “Digital Public Goods.” Accessed May 4, 2022.  
<https://digitalpublicgoods.net/digital-public-goods/>.
- DNA Web Team. “High on Demonetization: Paytm CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma Gloats, Dances and Swears on Stage!” *DNA India*, January 18, 2017.  
<https://www.dnaindia.com/business/report-high-on-demonetization-paytm-ceo-vijay-shekhar-sharma-gloats-dances-and-swears-on-stage-2293749>.
- Doshi, Rush, Judith G. Kelley, and Beth A. Simmons. “The Power of Ranking: The Ease of Doing Business Indicator and Global Regulatory Behavior.” SSRN Scholarly

Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, January 12, 2019.

<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3318360>.

Dreze, Jean, Reetika Khera, and Anmol Somanchi. "Balancing Corruption and Exclusion: A Rejoinder." *Ideas For India* (blog). Accessed March 5, 2022.

<http://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/balancing-corruption-and-exclusion-a-rejoinder.html>.

D'Souza, Radha. *What's Wrong with Rights? Social Movements, Law and Liberal Imaginations*. London: Pluto Press, 2018.

Duffy, Francis. *The New Office*. London: Conran Octopus, 1997.

Dutta, Anisha. "After 'Downgrade' Last Year, MEA Sent Speaker's Office Talk Points on Democracy, 'the Indian Way.'" *The Indian Express*. February 22, 2022.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/express-exclusive/after-downgrade-last-yr-mea-sent-speakers-office-talk-points-on-democracy-the-indian-way-7784569/>.

Easterling, Keller. *Enduring Innocence: Global Architecture and Its Political Masquerades*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005.

———. *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. London: Verso, 2016.

———. *Medium Design: Knowing How to Build the World*. New York: Verso, 2021.

Erkkilä, Tero, and Ossi Piironen. "(De)Politicizing Good Governance: The World Bank Institute, the OECD and the Politics of Governance Indicators." *Innovation: The*

*European Journal of Social Science Research* 27, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 344–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2013.850020>.

- Ferguson, James. *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. "Governmentality." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, 87–104. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- . *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. 1st American ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.
- Frampton, Kenneth. "Towards a Critical Regionalism." In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, 16–30. New York: New Press, 2002.
- Friedman, Thomas L. *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. Further updated and Expanded; Release 3.0. New York: Picador [u.a.], 2007.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "What Is Governance?" *Governance* 26, no. 3 (2013): 347–68.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12035>.
- Galison, Peter. "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision." *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (1994): 228–66.
- Galtung, Johan. "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167–91.
- Gandhi, Rajiv. *Rajiv Gandhi Selected Speeches 1984-1985*. Vol. 1. 4 vols. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1987.

- Ghertner, D. Asher. *Rule By Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi*. 1st edition. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Ghosh, Arunabh. “Accepting Difference, Seeking Common Ground: Sino-Indian Statistical Exchanges 1951–1959.” *BJHS Themes* 1 (ed 2016): 61–82. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bjt.2016.1>.
- Ghosh, Jayati. “Hindutva, Economic Neoliberalism and the Abuse of Economic Statistics in India.” *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, no. 24/25 (December 15, 2020). <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.6882>.
- Ghosh, Kuhelika, and Praharsh Patel. “Unravelling NITI Aayog’s Composite Water Management Index: Veering to a Pragmatic Approach.” *India Water Portal* (blog), June 14, 2019. <https://www.indiawaterportal.org/articles/unravelling-niti-aayogs-composite-water-management-index-veering-pragmatic-approach>.
- Gopal Jayal, Niraja. “Introduction.” In *Re-Forming India: The Nation Today*, edited by Niraja Gopal Jayal. Gurgaon: Penguin/Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2019.
- , ed. *Re-Forming India*. Gurgaon: Penguin/Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2019.
- Gopalakrishnan, Shankar. “Neoliberalism and Hindutva – Fascism, Free Markets and the Restructuring of Indian Capitalism.” *Radical Notes* (blog), October 29, 2008. <https://radicalnotes.org/2008/10/29/neoliberalism-and-hindutva-fascism-free-markets-and-the-restructuring-of-indian-capitalism/>.
- Goyal, Malini. “How Performance-Based Rankings Are Shaking up the Rigid World of Government.” *The Economic Times*, January 28, 2018.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/how-performance-based-rankings-are-shaking-up-the-rigid-world-of-government/articleshow/62674879.cms>.

Gudavarthy, Ajay. *Politics of Post-Civil Society: Contemporary History of Political Movements in India*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013.

Gupta, Narayani. "From Kingsway to Rajpath: The Democratization of Lutyens' Central Vista." In *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, edited by Catherine B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf. New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi, Swadharma Swarajya Sangha, Madras, and Oxford & IBH Pub. Co, 1994.

Gupta, Surojit. "Experts Rubbish Niti Claim That NSSO Data Needs Centre's Nod." *Times of India*. February 1, 2019.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/experts-rubbish-niti-claim-that-nssso-data-needs-centres-nod/articleshow/67782174.cms>.

Hacking, Ian. "Statistical Language, Statistical Truth, and Statistical Reason: The Self-Authentication of a Style of Scientific Reasoning." In *The Social Dimensions of Science*, edited by Ernan McMullin. Studies in Science and the Humanities from the Reilly Center for Science, Technology, and Values, v. 3. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

Halpern, Orit, and Gökçe Günel. "Demoing unto Death: Smart Cities, Environment, and Preemptive Hope." *The Fibreculture Journal*, no. 29 (July 31, 2017).

<https://doi.org/10.15307/fcj.29.215.2017>.

Haque, T, and PK Joshi. "Agricultural Transformation in Aspirational Districts of India Comparative Analysis of Districts in Bihar." *Economic and Political Weekly* 53,

no. 51 (December 29, 2018). <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/51/review-rural-affairs/agricultural-transformation-aspirational.html>.

Hartikainen, Ilana. “Authentic Expertise: Andrej Babiš and the Technocratic Populist Performance During the COVID-19 Crisis.” *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021). <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpos.2021.734093>.

Harwood, John. *The Interface: IBM and the Transformation of Corporate Design, 1945/1976*. A Quadrant Book. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Hasan, Nafis. “‘Slow Violence’ and Vacant Citizenship— The Legacies of India’s Digital Governance.” In *The Crisis of the Informational Subject: Overload, Creep, Citizenship*, 2022.

Havlík, Vlastimil. “Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 6 (November 2, 2019): 369–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1580590>.

Hicks, Jacqueline. “Digital ID Capitalism: How Emerging Economies Are Re-Inventing Digital Capitalism.” *Contemporary Politics* 26, no. 3 (May 26, 2020): 330–50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1751377>.

Hood, Christopher, and David Heald, eds. *Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?* British Academy, 2006.

Hookway, Branden. *Interface*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014.

“India Stack,” May 4, 2022. <https://indiastack.org/>.

India Today. *NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant Opens up on Ease of Doing Business in India | NewsMo*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1IDE7tDRag>.

India Today Conclave. *Central Vista Curtain Raiser: Unveiling Democracy's New Face* | Hardeep Singh Puri & Bimal Patel, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxW52cym488>.

India Today Web Desk. "PM Modi Explains Minimum Government and Maximum Governance." *India Today*, April 27, 2019.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/pm-modi-explains-minimum-government-and-maximum-governance-1511278-2019-04-27>.

"IndiaStack," February 21, 2016.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160221103019/http://indiastack.org/>.

Irani, Lilly. *Chasing Innovation: Making Entrepreneurial Citizens in Modern India*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691189444>.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton University Press, 2009.

———. *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Translated by Cynthia Schoch. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.

<http://muse.jhu.edu/book/85097>.

Jain, Kajri. *Gods in the Time of Democracy*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.

Jain, Sunil. "The West Created Monopolies, We Democratised Data: Nandan Nilekani, Co-Founder, Infosys." *Financial Express*, May 21, 2021.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/the-west-created-monopolies-we-democratised-data-nandan-nilekani-co-founder-infosys/2225178/>.

- Kannabiran, Kalpana. "Constitution-As-Commons: Notes on Decolonizing Citizenship in India." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 232–41.  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-8795890>.
- Kant, Amitabh. "Composite Water Management Index (CWMI): A National Tool for Water Measurement, Management and Improvement." June 14, 2018.
- Kaur, Ravinder. *Brand New Nation: Capitalist Dreams and Nationalist Designs in Twenty-First Century India*. South Asia in Motion. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Kelley, Judith G., and Beth A. Simmons. "The Power of Performance Indicators: Rankings, Ratings and Reactivity in International Relations." SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, 2014.  
<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2451319>.
- Khera, Reetika, ed. *Dissent on Aadhaar: Big Data Meets Big Brother*. Hyderabad, Telangana: Orient BlackSwan, 2019.
- Khilnani, Sunil. *The Idea of India*. Reprint. with a new introduction. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004.
- Kitchin, Rob, Tracey P. Lauriault, and Gavin McArdle. "Knowing and Governing Cities through Urban Indicators, City Benchmarking and Real-Time Dashboards." *Regional Studies, Regional Science* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 6–28.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2014.983149>.
- Kockelman, Paul. *The Art of Interpretation in an Age of Computation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Kodali, Srinivas. “Digital India on Steroids: How Aadhaar Infra Enables the NPR and the NRC.” *The Wire*. Accessed April 11, 2021. <https://thewire.in/tech/aadhaar-infra-npr-nrc>.

Krishna, Gopal. “NIAI Bill, Wikileaks, World Bank & L-1 Identities Solution.” *Counter Currents* (blog), January 22, 2011. <https://www.countercurrents.org/krishna220111.htm>.

Krishna Menon, AG. “Behind Modi’s Plans to Redevelop the Central Vista Is a Covert Political Agenda.” *The Wire*, May 23, 2020. <https://thewire.in/urban/behind-modis-plans-to-redevelop-the-central-vista-is-a-covert-political-agenda>.

Kukreti, Ishan. “Ease of Doing Business Comes at an Environmental Cost.” *Down to Earth* (blog), November 2, 2017. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/governance/the-environmental-cost-of-making-business-easy-59001>.

Kumar, Sushil. “How Modi’s Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Is Laying the Ground for Another Babri Incident.” *The Caravan*, April 27, 2019. <https://caravanmagazine.in/religion/how-modi-kashi-vishwanath-corridor-is-laying-the-ground-for-another-babri-incident>.

Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. London ; New York: Verso, 2005.

Landry, Julien, ed. “An Introduction to Critical Studies of Think Tanks.” In *Critical Perspectives on Think Tanks: Power, Politics and Knowledge*. Advances in Critical Policy Studies Series. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021.

Lang, Jon T. *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India*. Orient Blackswan, 2002.

- Lang, Jon T., Madhavi Desai, and Miki Desai. *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity--India 1880 to 1980*. Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Larkin, Brian. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–43.
- Latour, Bruno. "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together." In *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, 6:1–40. Jai Press, 1986.
- Lee, Pamela M. *Think Tank Aesthetics: Midcentury Modernism, the Cold War, and the Neoliberal Present*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020.
- Lele, Shekhar, and Arushi Jain. "Demonetisation Effect: Digital Payments Gain New Momentum." *PwC* (blog). Accessed May 1, 2022.  
<https://www.pwc.in/industries/financial-services/fintech/fintech-insights/demonetisation-effect-digital-payment-gain-new-momentum.html>.
- Machen, Ronald C, Matthew T Jones, George P Varghese, and Emily L Stark. "Investigation of Data Irregularities in Doing Business 2018 and Doing Business 2020." WilmerHale, September 15, 2021.
- Martin, Reinhold. "Infrastructure and Mediapolitics." In *The Urban Apparatus: Mediapolitics and the City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Masiero, Silvia. "Digital Governance and the Reconstruction of the Indian Anti-Poverty System." *Oxford Development Studies* 45, no. 4 (December 2017): 393–408.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1258050>.

- Mathur, Kuldeep. *Recasting Public Administration in India: Reform, Rhetoric, and Neoliberalism*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199490356.001.0001>.
- Mathur, Navdeep. "On the Sabarmati Riverfront: Urban Planning as Totalitarian Governance in Ahmedabad." *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 47/48 (2012): 64–75.
- Mattern, Shannon. "Mission Control: A History of the Urban Dashboard." *Places Journal*, March 9, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.22269/150309>.
- Mazzarella, William. "Internet X-Ray: E-Governance, Transparency, and the Politics of Immediation in India." *Public Culture* 18, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 473–505.  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2006-016>.
- . *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Translated by Steve Corcoran. Theory in Forms. Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Mehrotra, Santosh, and Sylvie Guichard, eds. *Planning in the 20th Century and Beyond: India's Planning Commission and the NITI Aayog*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108859448>.
- Menon, Nivedita. "Introduction." In *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Merry, Sally Engle. "Measuring the World: Indicators, Human Rights, and Global Governance." *Current Anthropology* 52, no. S3 (April 2011): S83–95.  
<https://doi.org/10.1086/657241>.

- Merry, Sally Engle, Kevin E. Davis, and Benedict Kingsbury, eds. *The Quiet Power of Indicators: Measuring Governance, Corruption, and the Rule of Law*. Cambridge Studies in Law and Society. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Mertia, Sandeep, ed. *Lives of Data: Essays on Computational Cultures from India*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2020.
- Methri, Gloria. “PM Modi Pays Unannounced Visit to Central Vista Project Site; Takes Stock of Work Underway.” *Republic World*, September 27, 2021.  
<https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/pm-modi-pays-surprise-visit-to-construction-site-of-new-parliament-building-see-pics.html>.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne. *A War on Global Poverty: The Lost Promise of Redistribution and the Rise of Microcredit*. Princeton University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691219974>.
- Mitchell, Timothy. “Fixing the Economy.” *Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 82–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095023898335627>.
- Mohan, Deepanshu, Abhinav Padmanabhan, and Kensiya Kennedy. “The Shades of Populism in Narendra Modi’s Politics of Infrastructure.” *The Wire*. Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://thewire.in/politics/populism-modi-central-vista-covid-19>.
- Morozov, Evgeny. *To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, Solutionism, and the Urge to Fix Problems That Don’t Exist*. Penguin, 2013.
- Mukhopadhyay, Amitabh. “Foregrounding Financial Accountability in Governance.” In *Rethinking Public Institutions in India*, edited by Devesh Kapur, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, and Milan Vaishnav, 1st ed. Oxford University Press, 2017.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199474370.001.0001>.

- Muralidharan, Karthik, Paul Niehaus, and Sandip Sukhtankar. “Identity Verification Standards in Welfare Programs: Experimental Evidence from India.” Working Paper. Working Paper Series. National Bureau of Economic Research, February 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26744>.
- Nair, Vijayanka. “Governing India in Cybertime: Biometric IDs, Start-Ups and the Temporalised State.” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 519–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1598122>.
- Knowledge@Wharton. “Nandan Nilekani on What It Takes to Build the World’s Biggest Social Inclusion Program,” November 4, 2010. <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/nandan-nilekani-on-what-it-takes-to-build-the-worlds-biggest-social-inclusion-program/>.
- Nilekani, Nandan. *Imagining India: The Idea of a Renewed Nation*. 1st American ed. New York: Penguin Press, 2009.
- Nilekani, Nandan, and Viral Shah. *Rebooting India: Realizing a Billion Aspirations*. New Delhi: Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books, 2015.
- Nilsen, Alf Gunvald. “From Inclusive Neoliberalism to Authoritarian Populism: Trajectories of Change in the World’s Largest Democracy.” In *State of Democracy: Essays on the Life and Politics of Contemporary India*, edited by M Ray. Delhi: Primus Books, 2019.
- NITI Aayog. *Aspirational Districts: Unlocking Potentials*. NITI Aayog, 2018.
- . “Composite Water Management Index.” Accessed April 15, 2021. <https://cwmi.niti.gov.in>.

———. “Composite Water Management Index: A Tool for Water Management,” June 2018.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Ong, Aihwa. *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2006.

Oommen, Thomas, and Nipesh Palat Narayanan. “Democracy, Development and Identity: Notes on the Central Vista Project.” *Architexturez* (blog), 2020.

Parker, Ian. “The I.D. Man.” *The New Yorker*, September 26, 2011.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/10/03/the-i-d-man>.

Patel, Bimal. “Democracy, Participation and Consultation.” *Landscape: Journal of Landscape and Architecture*, 2020.

Patel, Bimal, Sweta Byahut, and Brijesh Bhatha. “Building Regulations Are a Barrier to Affordable Housing in Indian Cities: The Case of Ahmedabad.” *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 33, no. 1 (March 2018): 175–95.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10901-017-9552-7>.

Patnaik, Utsa. “Neoliberal Roots.” *Frontline*, March 28, 2008.

<https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article30195068.ece>.

Pawariya, Arihant. “Central Vista: A Great Opportunity To Revive Hindu Architecture Has Been Missed.” *Swarajya*, December 17, 2020.

<https://swarajyamag.com/politics/central-vista-a-great-opportunity-to-revive-hindu-architecture-has-been-missed>.

“People’s Tribunal on Aadhaar-Related Issues: Evidence Book.” New Delhi: Rethink Aadhaar and Article 21 Trust, March 29, 2020.

Peters, B Guy. “The Changing Nature of Public Administration: From Easy Answers to Hard Questions.” *Viesoji Politika ir Administravimas*, no. 5 (2003).  
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/changing-nature-public-administration-easy/docview/1426690973/se-2>.

Porter, Theodore M. *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Power, Michael. “Counting, Control and Calculation: Reflections on Measuring and Management.” *Human Relations* 57, no. 6 (June 1, 2004): 765–83.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726704044955>.

Prahalad, C. K. *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing, 2005.

Prashad, Vijay. *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South*. London ; New York: Verso, 2012.

Press Trust of India. “‘Name and Shame’ Helped Improve States’ Business Rankings: Amitabh Kant.” *Business Standard India*, January 24, 2018.  
[https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/name-and-shame-helped-improve-states-biz-rankings-amitabh-kant-in-davos-118012401150\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/name-and-shame-helped-improve-states-biz-rankings-amitabh-kant-in-davos-118012401150_1.html).

PTI. “People Should Be Allowed to Eat Beef If They Want to: Amitabh Kant.” *The Economic Times*, February 3, 2016.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/people-should-be-allowed-to-eat-beef-if-they-want-to-amitabh-kant/articleshow/50836339.cms>.

Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. “Ambivalences of ‘Creep’: Citizenship, Personhood and the Second Digital Turn.” *India Forum*, October 2, 2020.

Rajadhyaksha, Ashish, Nishant Shah, and Nafis Hasan. *The Crisis of the Informational Subject: Overload, Creep, Citizenship*, 2022.

Rajagopal, Arvind. *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public*. Transferred to digital print. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005.

———. “The Emergency as Prehistory of the New Indian Middle Class\*.” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 5 (September 2011): 1003–49.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000314>.

Rajagopalan, Shruti. “What The RBI Data On Demonetization Tells Us.” *Mint*, September 3, 2018, sec. Opinion.  
<https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/IV1Bpucd2N6SkJaetRrzCP/Opinion--What-the-RBI-data-on-demonetization-tells-us.html>.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Pbk. ed. London ; New York: Continuum, 2006.

Rao, Ursula, and Graham William Greenleaf. “Subverting ID from above and below: The Uncertain Shaping of India’s New Instrument of e-Governance.” *Surveillance & Society* 11, no. 3 (December 1, 2013): 287–300.

<https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v11i3.4496>.

Rethink Aadhaar. “Rethink Aadhaar.” Accessed May 3, 2022. <https://rethinkaadhaar.in>.

- Rethink Aadhaar. "Truth of Authentication Failures on Ground." *Rethink Aadhaar* (blog), March 30, 2018. <https://rethinkaadhaar.in/blog/2018/3/30/truth-of-authentication-failures-on-ground>.
- Rodgers, Dennis, and Bruce O'Neill. "Infrastructural Violence: Introduction to the Special Issue." *Ethnography* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 401–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138111435738>.
- Rossow, Richard M. "India's Changing States." *Center for Strategic & International Studies* (blog), February 19, 2016. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/india%E2%80%99s-changing-states>.
- Roy, Ananya. *Poverty Capital: Microfinance and the Making of Development*. New York: Routledge, 2010.
- . "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (June 30, 2005): 147–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360508976689>.
- Rudolph, Lloyd I., and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. "Iconisation of Chandrababu: Sharing Sovereignty in India's Federal Market Economy." *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 18 (2001): 1541–52.
- Ruparelia, Sanjay. "'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance': The Restructuring of Power in Modi's India." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 755–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.1089974>.
- Sabharwal, Punita. "Amitabh Kant: The Man of Action." *Entrepreneur India*, November 19, 2021. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/397877>.

Sainath, P. *Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*.

New Delhi, India ; New York, NY, USA: Penguin Books, 1996.

Sathe, Vijay. "Managing Massive Change: India's Aadhaar, the World's Most Ambitious

ID Project (Innovations Case Narrative: Project Aadhaar)." *Innovations:*

*Technology, Governance, Globalization* 9, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2014): 85–111.

[https://doi.org/10.1162/inov\\_a\\_00204](https://doi.org/10.1162/inov_a_00204).

Schwittay, Anke F. "The Financial Inclusion Assemblage: Subjects, Technics,

Rationalities." *Critique of Anthropology* 31, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 381–401.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X11420117>.

Scott, James C. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human*

*Condition Have Failed*. Yale Agrarian Studies. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ.

Press, 2008.

Scriven, Peter, and Amit Srivastava. *India: Modern Architectures in History*. Modern

Architectures in History. London: Reaktion Books, 2015.

Sengoopta, Chandak. *Imprint of the Raj: How Fingerprinting Was Born in Colonial*

*India*. First Printing edition. London: Pan Macmillan, 2003.

Serres, Michel. *The Parasite*. Translated by Lawrence R. Schehr. 1st University of

Minnesota Press ed. Posthumanities 1. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Press, 2007.

Shah, Nishant. "Identity and Identification: The Individual in the Time of Networked

Governance." *Socio-Legal Review* 11, no. 2 (2015): 22–40.

- Shah, Tushaar. *Taming the Anarchy: Groundwater Governance in South Asia*. Washington, DC : Colombo, Sri Lanka: Resources for the Future ; International Water Management Institute, 2009.
- Shannon, C. E. “A Mathematical Theory of Communication.” *Bell System Technical Journal* 27, no. 3 (1948): 379–423. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-7305.1948.tb01338.x>.
- Sharma, Aman. “Big Governance Reform: From Next Month, No File to Pass More Than 4 Hands.” News18, October 27, 2021. <https://www.news18.com/news/india/exclusive-big-governance-reform-from-next-month-no-file-to-pass-more-than-4-hands-4372304.html>.
- Sharma, Dinesh C. *The Outsourcer: The Story of India’s IT Revolution*. History of Computing. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015.
- Siegert, Bernhard. *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. Fordham University Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt14jxrmf>.
- . “Introduction.” In *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. Fordham University Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt14jxrmf>.
- Singh, Bikash. “Assam Faces Criticism for Ranking Last in NITI Aayog’s SDG; CM Sarma Hits Back.” *The Economic Times*, June 18, 2021. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/assam-faces-criticism-for-ranking-last-in-niti-aayogs-sdg-cm-sarma-hits-back/articleshow/83644129.cms?from=mdr>.

- Singh, Ranjit. "Give Me a Database and I Will Raise the Nation-State." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 501–18.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1602810>.
- Smith, R. F. I. "Governance." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 323–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2017.1294236>.
- Solanki, Aakash. "Management of Performance and Performance of Management: Getting to Work on Time in the Indian Bureaucracy." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 588–605.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1603262>.
- Sreedharan, Seema. "The Master Urbanist." *Architecture + Design*, October 12, 2021.
- Sriram, MS. "Identity for Inclusion: Moving beyond Aadhaar." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 28 (2014): 148–54.
- Sriraman, Tarangini. *In Pursuit of Proof: A History of Identification Documents in India*. First edition. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Srivastava, Piyush. "From Kashi to Kedar, Divine Intervention." *The Telegraph*. 8 March 19. <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/from-kashi-to-kedar-modi-s-divine-intervention/cid/1686469>.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. *Entangled Urbanism: Slum, Gated Community, and Shopping Mall in Delhi and Gurgaon*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198099147.001.0001>.
- Stiglitz, Joseph E. "More Instruments and Broader Goals: Moving toward the Post-Washington Consensus," 1999.

Straaten, Jaap van der. "Identification for Development It Is Not: 'Inclusive and Trusted

Digital ID Can Unlock Opportunities for the World's Most Vulnerable.' - a

Review." SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research

Network, November 30, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3742736>.

Subramanian, Ajantha. *The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India*. Cambridge,

Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Subramanian, C. R. *India and the Computer: A Study of Planned Development*. Delhi ;

New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Sundaram, Ravi. *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism*. Asia's Transformations.

London: Routledge, 2010.

———. "The Postcolonial City in India. From Planning to Information?" *Techniques and*

*Culture*, 2017, 16.

Sushmita. "Labour 'Reforms' More for 'Ease of Doing Business' than Labour Rights."

SabrangIndia, July 29, 2019. [https://www.sabrangindia.in/article/labour-reforms-](https://www.sabrangindia.in/article/labour-reforms-more-ease-doing-business-labour-rights)

[more-ease-doing-business-labour-rights](https://www.sabrangindia.in/article/labour-reforms-more-ease-doing-business-labour-rights).

Szreter, Simon. "The Right of Registration: Development, Identity Registration, and

Social Security—A Historical Perspective." *World Development* 35, no. 1

(January 1, 2007): 67–86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2006.09.004>.

Team NL. "Government Responds to Newslaundry Article on Central Vista."

*Newslaundry*, June 2, 2021.

[https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/06/02/government-responds-to-newslaundry-](https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/06/02/government-responds-to-newslaundry-article-on-central-vista)

[article-on-central-vista](https://www.newslaundry.com/2021/06/02/government-responds-to-newslaundry-article-on-central-vista).

- Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2018.
- Thaker, Aria. “The New Oil: Aadhaar’s Mixing of Public Risk and Private Profit.” *The Caravan*, May 1, 2018. <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/aadhaar-mixing-public-risk-private-profit>.
- The Wire Staff. “Doubts Over NITI Aayog Claim That 21 Cities Face Groundwater Extinction by 2020.” *The Wire*, June 29, 2019. <https://thewire.in/environment/doubts-over-niti-aayog-claim-that-21-cities-face-groundwater-extinction-by-2020>.
- Thrift, Nigel. “Re-Inventing Invention: New Tendencies in Capitalist Commodification.” *Economy and Society* 35, no. 2 (May 1, 2006): 279–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140600635755>.
- Tillin, Louise. *Indian Federalism*. First Edition. Oxford India Short Introductions. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- TNN. “Working to Top Niti Aayog’s Devpt Goals Index: Goa CM Pramod Sawant.” *The Times of India*, November 20, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/goa/working-to-top-niti-aayogs-devpt-goals-index-says-sawant/articleshow/87807554.cms>.
- Trivedy, Shikha. “Parliament to Kashi Vishwanath: Why Modi Always Hires Architect Bimal Patel for Pet Projects.” *ThePrint* (blog), December 4, 2019. <https://theprint.in/features/parliament-to-kashi-vishwanath-why-modi-always-hires-architect-bimal-patel-for-pet-projects/329968/>.

- Unique Identification Development Authority of India, Planning Commission. “Creating a Unique Identity Number for Every Resident in India,” April 2010.
- United Nations. “The Age of Digital Interdependence.” United Nations, June 2019.
- Vajpeyi, Ananya. *Prolegomena to the Study of People and Places in Violent India*. New Delhi: WISCOMP, 2007.
- . *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Vij, Shivam. “How Indian Secularism Could Still Be Saved.” *ThePrint* (blog), August 12, 2019. <https://theprint.in/opinion/how-indian-secularism-could-still-be-saved/275745/>.
- Vir, Aaryaman, and Rahul Sanghi. “The Internet Country.” Newsletter. Tigerfeathers!, January 14, 2021. <https://tigerfeathers.substack.com/p/the-internet-country>.
- Wadhwa, Divyanshi, and Justin Sandefur. “A Change in World Bank Methodology (Not Reform) Explains India’s Rise in Doing Business Rankings.” *Center For Global Development* (blog), February 5, 2018. <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/change-world-bank-methodology-not-reform-explains-indias-rise-doing-business>.
- World Bank. “Assessment of State Implementation of Business Reforms,” September 2015.
- . *Governance and Development*. The World Bank, 1992.  
<https://doi.org/10.1596/0-8213-2094-7>.
- . “Inclusive and Trusted Digital ID Can Unlock Opportunities for the World’s Most Vulnerable.” *World Bank* (blog), August 14, 2019.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2019/08/14/inclusive-and-trusted-digital-id-can-unlock-opportunities-for-the-worlds-most-vulnerable>.