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Title: The New Experts: Populism, Technocracy and Politics of Expertise in Contemporary India

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The New Experts: Populism, Technocracy and Politics of Expertise in Contemporary India

Abstract: Over the last five years, the Indian right-wing has been discrediting left-liberal experts, and encouraging pseudo-scientific religious knowledge systems. Yet, crucially, it has also cultivated its own institutional networks of (those it considers to be) intellectuals and experts: an ostensibly anti-colonial alternative authority to challenge the "hegemony of the progressives" and the "erstwhile custodians of discourse." In this article, I examine the evolution of a shifting network of experts and elites, interrogating what is considered to be expertise in the context of governance. Through a study of Indian think tanks, I show how Prime Minister Modi's government is constructing an ideology that combines populist anti-intellectualism with new forms of technocratic expertise to produce a distinct nationalist agenda. I argue that two forms of political legitimacy govern contemporary India: 1) *populist politics*, which appeals to the masses/majority by defining nationalism through rigid boundaries of caste, class, and religion; and 2) *technocratic policy*, which produces a consensus of pragmatism and neutralises charges of hyper-nationalism. I emphasise the relational dynamic between the two: they function through different, often contradictory, logics and content yet are able to work towards the same goals in key moments of mutual reinforcement. Using data from participant observation and over 50 interviews in New Delhi, before and after the BJP's election victory in 2019, this article argues that the BJP's style of populism is distinct from others in its marriage of ultra-nationalism and economic pragmatism.

Keywords: Technocracy; Populism; Ideological transformation; Expertise; Knowledge production; India; Think tanks

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“Scream Fascism”

In the following excerpt from a national newspaper, Swapan Dasgupta, a staunch conservative intellectual, scathingly mocks the “progressive intelligentsia” accusing Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister, of authoritarianism. Drawing a clear binary between the pedigreed intellectuals of the university elite and “raw,” spirited voices of the “people,” he celebrates the empowered intellectual leadership of new Alt Right thought.

> A section of the progressive intelligentsia and activist media have created an impression — not least among Indian students and academics in campuses overseas — that India is sliding towards authoritarian rule.
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> First, this government has made no attempts to co-opt ‘public intellectuals’ into the power structure, as was the practice during Congress rule. Modi has focused single-mindedly on his mission of transformation without bothering about campus and press club angst. In effect, he has ended their role as arbiters of thought. Finally, the advent of Modi has coincided with the creation of an Alt Right that, while lacking in pedigreed upbringing and academic respectability, has spiritedly challenged the hegemony of the progressives, quite independent of state patronage. Ponderous intellectualism has been met with raw passion. With their exalted status in jeopardy, the erstwhile custodians of discourse have fallen back on the oldest trick in the trade: scream “fascism” (Dasgupta 2018).

Here, Dasgupta is characterising what he understands to be a new “Alt Right”[1] as a counter-hegemonic mass of young, disenfranchised supporters of Modi. He is not entirely mistaken. As a recent plethora of scholarship indicates, BJP supporters from villages, small towns, and urban centers across caste and class barriers have found new forms of community both in person and through social media. A rise in what Udupa (2018) calls “enterprise Indians” and Chaturvedi (2016), less generously, describes as “internet trolls” indicates that these young Indians find a sense of offline belonging and community through engaging in extreme Hindutva rhetoric online.

Dasgupta’s contention that the “raw passion” of the new right lacks pedigree, however, is not accurate. They do, in many cases, claim academic respectability, high stature in bureaucratic or military services, corporate or civil society experience and expertise, or political influence. Dasgupta, for example, was a Research Fellow at Oxford University, and a prominent journalist. Regardless, Dasgupta’s declaration of this socio-political change symbolises a clear break in the status quo of how expertise is treated and understood. On the one hand, this moment can be characterised as anti-intellectual. Over the last five years, the

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[1]Notes

The term “alt-right” was coined by Richard Spencer, a leader of the American white supremacist movement, to refer to an alternative right-wing movement comprised of anti-establishment politics that centers itself on white superiority and rejects egalitarianism and universalism (Southern Poverty Law Center). Similar to white nationalism, Hindu nationalism’s version of the alt-right argues that Hinduism as an identity, practice, and national foundation is under attack by multicultural forces.

Indian right-wing has been discrediting left-liberal academics and experts, and encouraging pseudo-scientific religious knowledge systems. Yet, the Alt Right has also been forging its *own* institutional networks of anointed intellectuals and experts: an ostensibly anti-colonial alternative authority to challenge the "hegemony of the progressives" and the "erstwhile custodians of discourse."

In this article, I examine the evolution of a shifting network of experts and elites, interrogating what is considered to be expertise in the context of governance. Through a study of Indian think tanks, I show how Prime Minister Modi's government is distinct from others in its marriage of ultra-nationalism and economic pragmatism, including an embrace of neoliberalism and aspects of globalisation over economic protectionism. Such a study of policy organisations can explain how they channel dominant policy debates in certain directions, enable particular classifications of target groups, and legitimise certain policy solutions while marginalizing others (Wedel et al. 2005). I argue that two forms of political legitimacy govern contemporary India: 1) *populist politics*, which appeals to the masses/majority by defining nationalism through rigid boundaries of caste, class, and religion; and 2) *technocratic policy*, which produces a consensus of pragmatism and neutralises charges of hyper-nationalism. I emphasise the relational dynamic between the two: they function through different, often contradictory, logics and content yet are able to work towards the same goals in key moments of mutual reinforcement. Rather than mapping a causal analysis of the impact of think tanks on government policy, this article uses think tanks to present a discursive analysis of the contradictory character of techno-populist politics and policy in India.

I explore the nature of technocratic policy-making in an age of heightened populism to reveal underlying tensions between populist demands of "the people," and elite policy making experts (Jennings 2011; Bickerton and Accetti 2017; Newman and Clarke 2018; Buštíková and Guasti 2019). Scholars and political commentators have often offered populism and technocracy as antidotes or correctives to one another. As Bickerton and Accetti (2015) highlight, Laclau (2005) proposes populist mobilisation as a solution to an increasingly administrative mode of governance, while Rosanvallon (2011) advocates for impartial independent authorities to provide complexity to the simplification of democratic legitimacy often brought by populist governments. While technocracy and populism contradict one another in several ways, they share an important characteristic: "they are both forms of anti-pluralism...technocrats hold that there's only one correct policy solution; populists claim that there is only one authentic will of the people (and only they represent it); whoever disagrees with them, reveals themselves as traitor to the people" (Müller 2018).

Think tanks are not inherently anti-pluralist institutions. Yet, a growing alignment between a majoritarian right-wing government, an increasingly deracinated technocratic class, and supposedly "independent" liberal institutions, is changing the distribution of expertise they offer. How do we understand think tanks in a new age of majoritarian liberal democracy? A majoritarian political bloc may have democratic legitimacy, yet liberal democratic systems claim to have bodies independent of electoral representatives to act as

correctives to political power and democratically legitimate missteps. By this, I am referring to the judicial, legislative, and executive separation of powers: particularly the process outlined by Ambedkar (1991) in the post-Independence Constitutional debates, arguing in favour of making India a constitutional democracy that prioritises liberty, equality and fraternity.[2] This, in its idealised form, allows for minority protection, constitutional rules to be upheld, and for independent thought to build and contribute to a politically diverse public. In the absence of credible opposing political parties - in the Indian context, the decimation of the political Left is significant - these institutions become necessary to counter a majoritarian democratic state. This process, however, is increasingly fraught by a shifting nexus of power between political leadership, an alternative authority of valued "expertise," and corporate technocratic interests.

To make my argument, I first give an overview of the political and politico-economic context in which Modi, the BJP and a particular paradigm of policy discourse and governance arises. Using data from in-depth interviews with politicians and policy makers, I then examine three key discourses in policy expertise. Firstly, several interviews reveal a deep division between policy making as a rational, technical exercise, and political representation as an irrational, instrumental, and heightened emotional practice. I show how this vision of politics erases the fundamental democratic importance of pluralistic representation or accountability, and furthers the production of insular pragmatism in policy making. Secondly, technocratic policy makers make appeals to credibility by positioning themselves as "post-ideology." They pride themselves in abiding by a rational truth, distinct from instrumental self-interest or ideological bias. The latter part of this discourse becomes further complicated with Hindu-nationalist policy makers who intrinsically argue for an ethno-centric civilisational superiority. While these new Hindu-nationalist "intellectuals" also see their policy making work as distinct from the self, they reason that it moves them towards a higher cause of nationalist unity. Thirdly, I show how the contradictions between technocratic and populist future imaginaries can, in fact, resolve themselves through hybridised discourse and practice. Through a discussion of the relationship between the two, I show how they can work together to legitimise an overarching push of Indian global ascendance grounded in a Hindu nationalist consciousness. In this way, the Indian interaction between extremist nationalist ideology and neoliberal economic policy is in stark contrast to other contemporary right-wing populist regimes, such as the Trump administration, that has coupled economic protectionism with ethno-nationalism (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Bimantara 2019).

As such, I build on scholars who have recently theorised the nebulous "diffuse logic" of Hindutva's[3] influence (Reddy 2011). This literature argues that Hindu nationalist rhetoric can be drawn on by a range of hardcore ideologues, critics, sympathisers, affiliates and so on, to strategically make claims that may be disconnected from Hindutva's ideological core. Rather than reconciling the BJP's different messages, such as that of secular moderation with

[2] This includes supposedly independent bodies of knowledge production like universities, research organisations, and advisory bodies, and ideally independent knowledge dissemination bodies like the media.
[3] The Hindi term for Hindu nationalism.

majoritarian nationalism, or state intervention with economic liberalisation, I find that the Hindu nationalist "family" of organisations builds legitimacy through a varied set of persuasive tactics that are able to coexist despite maintaining a tense dissonance. The BJP can thus remain engaged with a network of both Hindu nationalist think tanks and economically pragmatic think tanks by opportunistically mobilising Hindu nationalism as a political force in popular politics, while at other times relegating it to mere apolitical or fringe cultural practice in technocratic policy discussions. This contradictory approach follows Hansen's (2018) characterisation of anti-politics: as a form of politics based in opposition to the prevailing order grounded in secular ideals, to "denounce *rajkaran* (politics), to separate the nation and its cultures from the realm of rational statecraft, and to adopt a moral, anti-political critique of political leaders" (Hansen 2018, 229). Rational statecraft in the form of economic pragmatism, then, exists in parallel to an Hindu nationalist movement that oscillates between being projected as political, and at other times anti-political.

The New Experts: Economic Liberalisation and Changing Government Priorities

There is no general consensus on what constitutes populism. As an amorphous concept, it is used across ideologies, discourses, and political and economic strategies. Across the ideological spectrum, it can be attributed to both far left and far right actors. These actors can incorporate elements of technocratic discourse, build loose networks, or tight party discipline. The archetypal cases of populism might show some agreement about its features (particularly constructions of the people vs. the elite), yet the categories that are often used to conceptualise the phenomenon - such as ideology, logic, discourse, or strategy - are blurry (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Indeed, scholars have argued (Kelly 2017) that the history of modern populism and the history of modern popular sovereignty are coterminous, simply because modern democratic politics is premised upon claims of the history of popular sovereignty. The BJP and the RSS, the BJP's grassroots military social organisation, have meticulously risen to power through an "unconditional public commitment" to liberal democratic institutions, while still effectively using organised mob violence as a tactic to gain popular support (Ahmad 2016). The RSS-BJP machinery infiltrates several social spheres. By claiming itself to be a cultural organization, the RSS is under no imperative to be accountable to the public or the state and uses liberal protections to its own secretive purposes (Ahmad 2016). It believes its duties to encompass political guidance, participation, and the all-encompassing expression "of the religion of the race" (Ahmad 2016). However, contrary to studies (Moffitt 2016; Richards 2017) which note that populist leaders come from outside the system, both Modi and the BJP-RSS network have worked within and out of the system.

The BJP claims a stronghold over liberal democratic ideals yet, over the last three decades, has continuously undermined those to gain popular support and authority. Its fronts on the ground are countless, scattered through community organizations, *shakhas*, local political and economic bodies, and varied by language, caste, occupation, location, and religious sect. The RSS has long presided over a larger *Sangh Parivar* (literally translating to the RSS family): a diverse network of institutions that share core ideological overlaps with RSS and a social Hindutva imagination (Siddiqui 2017; Jaffrelot 2007; Anderson and

Longkumer 2018). The exact relationships between these organisations is unknown, and the extent to which they acknowledge their affiliation with the RSS varies (Anderson and Longkumer 2018). Nevertheless, the diversity of organisations at play comprise a broader Hindutva family and, as Anderson and Longkumer argue (2018), in part exemplify the *heterodoxy* of Hindutva: whether by design (as what Jaffrelot (2005) called a "division of labour" of influencing different facets of social life), or by unresolved and persistent internal dispute. A core contradiction within the Hindutva family is the vast number of economic and social ideologies within the BJP, the RSS, and their supporters. In a BJP press release from 2004 entitled "Tasks Ahead," the BJP describes its vision as a clear combination of nationalism and development:

> The BJP's Vision has two focal points: Nationalism (Rashtravaad) and Development (Vikas). We believe that both are a precondition for realizing our dream of a Resurgent India (Bharatiya Janata Party 2004).

In trying to balance contradictory normative notions of nationalism and development, internal strands of organizations in the BJP-RSS network have vastly differing ideological roots. Whether these internal disputes about economic policy serve to undermine or advance the Parivar's core ideology of Hindutva nationalism is a matter of debate. While certain commentators see the BJP moving further to the center in its embrace of globalisation and slogans of development, others argue that such a mainstream economic stance has only served to make the party as a whole, including its ethno-centric nationalism, more palatable (Chacko 2018). By oscillating between periods of moderation and polarisation, the BJP's ethno-nationalist views have become more normalised, and moved the center of gravity further to the right (Ruparelia 2006; Jaffrelot 2013; Chacko 2019; Varshney 2014). Periods of moderation have allowed for democratic coalition building and wider resonance (Jaffrelot 2013), while periods of polarisation have led to further anti-Muslim, Hindu majoritarian radicalisation. As such, the BJP's strategies to build support are varied and incongruent. At times, the BJP benefits from working within procedural systems of government, while at other times it works outside legality through its networks with the RSS. Although one tactic of persuasion might involve personalising Modi as a leader through targeted technological tools, another, such as in their think tanks, relies on de-personalising the BJP's knowledge to make it seem objectively authoritative. Policy rhetoric may emphasise statist paternalism to appease protectionist RSS supporters and rural constituencies demanding agricultural support, electricity, and water, while weakening labour laws and easing land acquisition laws to please big business communities.

Historically, a post-independence India strived to build a self-reliant economy, where economic development was largely driven by the state. The government's general suspicion of both foreign and private interests pervaded the internal advisory process for decades after independence. However, while lobbying as such is stigmatised, the lines between lobbying, advisory capacity, and advocacy are blurry. As such, chambers of commerce and domestic business groups that represent big business interests influenced major decisions within economic planning (Chhibber and Verma 2018). Several state advisory groups were set up to

oversee state planning and allocate budgets to further industrial development and social development. However, the global economic crisis, along with the tensions manifested through the Cold War in the 1980s, led to a shift in dominant paradigms of the state and the private sector (Sanyal 2007). In the 1980s, Sudipto Kaviraj (1988) argued that a coalitional strategy between the bureaucratic-managerial-intellectual elite, landed elite, and monopoly bourgeoisie gave these groups dominance over state-directed processes of economic growth, and the "allocational necessities indicated by the bourgeois democratic political system" (Kaviraj 1988, 1230). Chatterjee (2008) argues that since economic liberalization in 1991, this balance of power in India has shifted. The rise of influence of the corporate class in comparison to the landed elite, and the opening up of a range of sectors to foreign and private control has changed the nature of "monopoly" houses. In addition, the managerial elite, or the urban middle classes, have largely disavowed the state as a corrupt, politically opportunistic entity and shifted from supporting state-driven developmental intervention to a consensus amongst on the priority of socio-economic growth through the professional, and corporate private sector.

A key symbolic moment demonstrating this shift from central state planning to consultant-driven, think tank oriented governance is the disbanding of the Planning Commission in 2014. Soon after India's independence, the first Prime Minister set up a Planning Commission (PC) consisting of industrialists, technocrats, and economists to oversee state planning and industrial development. For the majority of the last seven decades, this elite body of intellectuals and technocrats has played a formative role in Indian policy making (Kaviraj 2010): "bringing the expertise of modernity, engineering, and technology to repair the ills of society and to fix the economy" (Mitchell 2002, 15). As Chatterjee (1993) notes, this group was meant to rise above "the squabbles" (Chatterjee 1993, 202) of petty politics to innovate and develop for the "needy masses" (Irani 2019, 8). When Modi became Prime Minister in 2014, his administration disbanded the PC and replaced it with the Niti Aayog, a self-described think tank-like organisation stripped of its budgetary powers and essentially made up of development and management consultants. Effectively, this shift showed the government transitioning it's support from an already-watered down version of centralised planning by the intellectual elite, to a "diffuse entrepreneurship", handing power to those entrepreneurs and innovators who saw development as a market "opportunity" (Irani 2019, 10; Elyachar 2012).

Parallel to this change in the composition of technocrats and experts, the rise of populist discontents played a significant role in BJP's rise. Fatigue and distrust of the previous political regime, the Congress government, paved the path for deep anti-incumbent sentiment. At the same time, Modi and the BJP built an image in opposition to the Congress' corrupt and elitist political bloc: transparent and accountable, putting the country's well-being above himself, while at the same time being the only person capable of leading it to its full potential. In a million to one chance, he is both the million and the one. He became known as the bringer of development (the *vikas purush* [development man]), promising economic progress, an influx of jobs, and financial security. In capitalizing on a discourse of corruption,

the BJP effectively presented itself as the only alternative: able to fix the state *through* the state.

Ostensibly, Modi's win became a move towards demos and away from technos.[4] Yet at the same time, Modi has represented not only being one of the people, but also a grassroots technocrat: owing to his role in transforming his home-state Gujarat into a haven for business investment during his tenure as Chief Minister. From within the Gujarat state government, Modi favoured large businesses and allowed them access to land and real estate to attract private investment (Sud 2012). His history of presiding over and fueling the Gujarat pogrom in 2002 that killed almost a thousand Muslims was erased, accepted, or rationalised away (Dhattiwala and Biggs 2012). Indeed, as Sud (2012) argues, during Modi's rule, the state in Gujarat steadily worked towards economic liberalisation, anti-Muslim fervour, and building a personality cult to appeal to upper middle classes, upper castes, and the sub-nationalist Gujarati voter (Jaffrelot 2008).

As such, Modi crosses both worlds of demos and technos, while allowing the creation of a new, alternative intellectual base to flourish and replace the old elite. The BJP's ideal market citizen is thus tied up in distinctive forms of cultural, Indian, and Hindu pride. For instance, the Kumbh Mela in 2019 was widely touted as the largest Hindu spiritual gathering in the world, and used to publicise not only India's cultural strength, but also India's infrastructural progress and development. The national and Uttar Pradesh state government administrations spent $40 billion, and hired a global management consulting firm, Ernst and Young, to manage its large-scale proceedings, offering luxury tents, digital guidance apps, river transport, artificial intelligence crowd control, and less than a thousand special trains (Thacker et al. 2018). The Kumbh Mela effectively sought to make Hindu pride synonymous with Indian national progress.

Methods

The findings here are based on several years of participant observation (between 2016-2020) in three prominent New Delhi think tanks, and 51 semi-structured interviews with politicians, policy makers, government officials, consultants, and other socially anointed intellectuals. All of the experts I interviewed carry some weight in public and policy discourse, including a wide range of public intellectuals who have some semblance of academic, government, or industry credibility and experience. They are former or current government bureaucrats, politicians, researchers qualified (mostly) with PhDs, academics, retired military personnel, Members of Parliament, and prominent journalists. To gain access to these elite actors and organisations, I did purposive targeted sampling, helped by an existing network I had developed from previously working in the policy sector between 2013-15. I made a list of approximately one hundred leaders of influential policy making organisations, political

[4] Here, I use the Latin "demos" to refer to a collective People: ranging from a village, an assembly, and a body of citizens, as in early forms of Athenian democracy (Blackwell 2003). "Technos" refers to the Latin suffix of "technocracy", a word coined in 1919 by W.H. Smyth as a name for a new system of government by technical experts who could best advise us how to live, realise our "individual aspirations and national purpose" (Atherton 1922, 29).

parties, government ministries, business lobbies, consulting firms, and think tanks. I then approached them to request an interview through publicly available contact information: email, calling their office, or social media (Twitter/LinkedIn), and was able to arrange meetings with about a quarter of those I approached. I asked each of my interviewees to direct me to people they consider to be influential actors in policy making and political spheres, allowing me to follow threads of how different actors subjectively conceptualise "influence."

This “snowballing” was crucial in two regards: first, as the overlapping network of the old and new elite remains insular, gaining access to this web was possible only by politely, but persistently, asking those who I interviewed to direct, or introduce me to others in their network. Secondly, this method of access gave me insight into precisely who particular members of this network understood as influential, an often intangible and subjective assessment, that gave me access to various offshoots of this larger policy elite. My own positionality as an upper-caste, Hindu woman with prior experience working in the think tank field and a family in the civil services allowed me to move through these interviews as a (partial) cultural insider, where I was able to negotiate between critique and questions by building a relationship with my interviewees.

While conducting these 51 interviews, I worked as a research affiliate in three prominent think tanks in New Delhi to conduct participant observation, giving me the opportunity to attend public events, private meetings, and gain access to more experts in the field. I was thus able to triangulate data from interviews by cross-referencing perceptions, political motivations, and narratives of policy priorities over time. My semi-structured interview questions asked about processes and agents of policy making, the change over time in dominant policy ideas, substantive moral inflections of proposed development policy, and the legitimation of a unified discourse of the right-wing. I transcribed my interviews and promised anonymity to those of my interviewees who requested it, following up with interpretive data analysis and thematic coding. Rather than attempting to ‘solve’ theoretically, I used interpretive interviewing to access an emotional and political landscape within a broader social dimension of individual motivation (Pugh 2013).

Think-tanks as Custodians of New Discourse

Qualifying the Impact of Think Tanks

Social scientists have examined the influence of right-wing think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute in American politics since the 1980s, yet the cloaked and centralised nature of policy making culture in India, combined with the relatively recent entry of think tanks as a medium of political influence, makes it challenging to qualitatively define their impact. A key to answering this question, both theoretically and methodologically, is understanding “to what extent” I can demonstrate the discursive relevance of studying think tanks. Scholars studying think tanks in Europe (Desai 1994; Plehwe 2014, 2006) and the US (Rich 2005; Domhoff 2010; Medvetz 2012; Fischer 1993) argue that such organisations have the ability to form “discourse coalitions”

that mainly serve corporate, elite or government interests far from notions of public interest. Elitist perspectives on think tanks state that they constitute ruling class/top-down dominant knowledge creation (Domhoff 2010), whereas pluralist perspectives (Polsby 1983) claim that they are just one in a wide variety of interest-group organisations. While these analyses have their merit in tracing international communities of knowledge production, an institutionalist perspective (Medvetz 2012) understands think tanks as creating and reifying "epistemic communities." Instead of getting stuck in a tautological argument narrowly delineating what a think tank is or does, I follow this perspective to study think tanks as creating epistemic communities. As such, this article understands them as a heterogeneous array of organisations with a range of effects, including building influential networks, shaping a political agenda, contributing to policy formation and assisting in policy implementation (Abelson and Carberry 1997). They bring together political elites, media, corporate leaders, and academics, and through their blurred duality of autonomy and heteronomy are able to transcend the barriers of practical knowledge legitimation given to these other fields.

As primarily elite organisations in a vast and diversely impoverished country, a study of Indian think tanks begs several questions about the nature of knowledge dissemination. Primarily, it leads us to ask whether knowledge produced in relatively narrow elite circles seeps through to a popular consciousness; and, indeed, if not, what purpose it serves in understanding ideological transformation. In my discussion, I do not claim a causal relationship between elite think tanks and popular consciousness, nor try to assert the primacy of top-down channels of political mobilisation above others. Many scholars have shown that the BJP-RSS network, for example, functions both from bottom-up forms of mobilization and relies on grassroots intellectuals (Jaffrelot 2005; Hansen 2018), as well as more recent technological forms of top-down party organisation (particularly through social media and the NaMo app, an app that allows the BJP's top leadership to directly communicate with its workers and supporters) (Singh 2019). While the RSS and the BJP instill a more hierarchical and disciplinary party structure than the Congress party, the RSS has a strong grassroots base that also works independent of the BJP's political elite. Instead, I am offering an alternative to tracing the directional causality of think tanks, by studying them as a site through which to understand the contradictions between populist demands and technocratic policy making. Bourdieu's (1986) field theory provides a compelling framework for this, arguing that various variables and elements that are related to one another aren't necessarily related through linear or transitive causality (Hilgers and Mangez 2015). That is, a change in one does not necessarily lead to a change in another, yet they carry with them a web of "philosophical doxa" that bleeds into constituting commonsense of an intellectual generation and moment.

This analytical framework of understanding impact highlights the *relational* part of influence - the supply chain of ideas, conversations, and people that gain legitimacy moving through these spaces that filter through (both upwards and downwards) to political elites, media influence, social media groups, and other kinds of religious and civic associations. I am gesturing to discursive causality rather than positivist or linear causality. While there is plausibly influence to the extent that these organisations operate in networks of the elite, they have not necessarily been active long enough to observe a pattern of linear causality that

would be irrefutable. In arguing for discursive influence, my argument fundamentally counters think tanks' claims of neutral pragmatism in policy solutions, as discourse itself imposes "categories and paradigms onto the world of experience" (Tribe 1972, 76; Foucault 1979). Indeed, I trace the categories of expertise and intellectual output that are gaining increased relevance to reveal shifts in notions of elite democratic representation.

The BJP's anti-intellectual majoritarianism, for example, discredits existing (i.e "Old Elite") elite intellectuals as irrelevant and detached, while building alternative forms of credible knowledge and expertise (Fischer et al. 2015; Newman and Clarke 2018). The following quote from an interview with the head of a leading think tank explicates the BJP-RSS's two-armed socio-cultural agenda: to build both populist support and technocratic expertise.

> What is the BJP's larger or the RSS' socio-cultural agenda? It is to build a new elite into the system. So, the world of universities, academic institutions, think tanks - these are all elite institutions where they want to place their version of elites. So... even though the RSS has a much, much, much stronger front line and grass-roots connect and there could be a pipeline through which the ideas could actually go from the bottom to the top, in effect, the world of ideas essentially operates in the landscape of elites. And these elites are either the Old Elite which is the Congress World, or the New Elite which is the RSS World. And the New Elites too are trying to build institution spaces for them to continue to influence in precisely the same modes and transactions that the Old Elite had (Interview with leading member[5] of the Centre for Policy Research, May 2019).

The "Old Elite" is seen to consist of pedigreed, English-speaking, and Western-educated groups of left-liberal academics and public intellectuals with socio-cultural capital. As this interviewee notes, the BJP is trying to shift notions of expertise by ousting this "Old Elite." Yet, rather than calling on their grassroots network to develop a bottom-up approach to policy making, they are simply replacing one elite with another. The New Elite they offer consists of broadly two types of experts: Hindu-nationalist intellectuals who harken to Hindu civilisational superiority, and former military Chiefs/retired bureaucrats who stand by a highly patriotic, if Hindu nationalist, idea of India; and technical professionals, such as engineers, business managers, and consultants. The former are in favour of the BJP's Hindu-nationalist agenda, while the latter pride themselves on being largely apolitical, but tend to fall in line with the ruling administration's sense of pragmatic rationalism. While the BJP seeks to replace the Old Elite in the name of ostensibly democratising centres of power, they are instead reproducing the elite insularity of policy making.

While this article critiques such emerging forms of expertise, I do not mean to suggest that the *attempt* towards democratising anointed authority in the realm of policy making is without merit, or that there are no other challenges to the (new or old) elite bastion of experts in India. Rather, I am arguing that the shift in *who* are considered the experts is heightening rather than democratising the elite inwardness of policy making processes. Indeed, the current

[5] Anonymous by request

political climate in India has led to an intensification of the long-existing[6] chasm between political representation and policy making, such that authoritative voices of experts continue to operate within structures of power at the root of "democratic deficits" (Fischer et al. 2015). In particular, the last decade has seen an increased outsourcing of the democratic process: an outsourcing of bureaucratic governance to think tanks and global management consulting firms (Shrikanth 2019), such as McKinsey, Boston Global Consulting, and Ernst and Young, to name a few; as well as an outsourcing of election campaigns to political consulting firms that use big data to effectively manipulate voters (Singh 2019). An interview with Sachin Rao, the head of training party workers within the Congress party, reveals the growing alienation of policy making from popular consciousness:

> In India, our core problem is the inadequacy of politicisation and equity of participation. This scares me. It's inhuman. It's a travesty of humanity to leave people without agency and outside of conversations. So the problem to me is not how we design a better school, to me the problem is, how do we make the voice of the person who's sitting in that village, an effective instrument of change. Now, rather than working on this, we've made our focus on think tanks - our class's cop out of using our prestige and our degrees to produce ideas that we inject at very high levels of the execution space. As opposed to investing, building a polity and fraternity - we bypass the whole thing, even as we pay lip service to the constitution….Now because polity itself has shrunk towards electioneering, brand management, it's a gameshow kind of space with very little depth and people connect. So in that gap, you have all kinds of people who are selling all kinds of products. From think tanks who are selling ideas, to brand managers who are selling perceptions, to execution managers who are actually outsourcing the entire process of elections. So in a sense, polity has abdicated its responsibility of mass politicisation, of representing people. So in those gaps, and the weakening process of fraternity, [and] exchanging ideas and conversation - that's where all of these think tanks have come about (Interview with Sachin Rao, Training in Charge of Congress party).

I use Indian think tanks as a focal point to understand the diverse sites where authoritative knowledge of various kinds is produced and, to use Rao's terminology, how such ideas are sold (Forgacs 2000). What I characterise as "think tanks" are, in effect, organizations that house old and new experts. These people and organizations fit into a supply chain of ideas at a crucial level. They build affective ties between various parts of the old and new elite, marking the stamp of expertise onto certain ideas that are then mobilised to propagate certain concerns more than others. As such, they lend a "technical mystique" to ideas, masking underlying power dynamics by enveloping experts with an aura of objective rationality (Fischer et al. 2015). Historically, the glorification of elite technocratic expertise has transcended the traditional left-right divide (Bustikova and Guasti 2019). This allows

[6] Indeed, this chasm is not new, I instead argue that it is being deepened and legitimates in new ways. In a speech delivered to the All-India Trade Unions Workers Camp in 1943, Ambedkar (1991) said: 'All political societies get divided into two classes—the Rulers and the Ruled. This is an evil. If the evil stopped here it would not matter much. But the unfortunate part of it is that the division becomes stereotyped and stratified so much so that the Rulers are always drawn from the Ruling Class and the class of the Ruled never becomes the Ruling class. People do not govern themselves, they establish a government and leave it to govern them, forgetting that it is not their government.'

proponents of this expertise to claim a non-partisan, apolitical pragmatism. My interviews show that experts' ideological underpinnings become increasingly muted as they build networks and reinforce one another's basic assumptions. Ideology, in this case, seeks to "masquerade as analysis, deriving a power it could never justly claim from the garb of neutrality it has at times contrived to wear" (Tribe 1972, 66). One interviewee who is a key member of the Vivekananda International Foundation points at the "intermingling" at the core of elite knowledge networks:

> The other interesting thing is that there's a large intermingling of the think tanks that sit - the same people are circulating, we know each other, we've worked together in the government, and in the end everybody wants good for India. As a group, even though we haven't organised ourselves as a group, we attend each other's meetings and seminars and in that way harmonised coordinated positions occur. So very often you will find if you discuss the same issues in a few iterations over the years, most think tanks will start thinking in a similar way… (Interview with representative[7] from Vivekananda International Foundation, a BJP affiliated think tank, May 2019).

As this quote demonstrates, the events held by think tanks tend to bring together a range of old and new influential elites - political, bureaucratic, and corporate. In creating spaces that allow for this flow of relationships and knowledge, they tend to build a consensus that leads certain ideas to make more "sense." Particular paradigms of commonsense become written into their meeting grounds with shared assumptions about what is "good for India" (that is, a Bourdieusian technocratic doxa). Even if some measure of dissensus persists, the ambit of topics that are discussed and the range of opinions that people express becomes limited (what Palshikar (2020) describes as an ideological hegemony of governance). An interviewee from within the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council argued that "unlike in the West, deep ties between people in India are not transactional." Their ties become stronger when they attend events together and interact at a personal level. These strong ties then evolve into stronger social kinships that make it more likely that ideas that are shared in these spaces will "feel" right. This is particularly where the distinction between formal processes of politics and policy-making and informal, intangible influence become essential (Schildt, Mantere, and Cornelissen 2019; Medvetz 2006).

BJP's Expanding Policy Network

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) landslide wins in 2014 and in 2019 were a result of several immediate and accumulated events that resulted in building a strong coalition of support. The BJP promises widespread social mobility, financial independence, and job growth. It mobilises a rhetoric of self-reliance and Hindu strength to promote aggressive national security in the face of external and internal threats (Jaffrelot 2015). However, the BJP is not a monolith. Its political strategies to build support are varied and at times incongruent, but crucially interspersing Hindutva and economic development. Part of its political strategy has been putting together its own ecosystem of policy-makers in think-tanks. The former Vice President of the BJP called this their tactical shift from being

[7] Anonymous by request

seen as action-oriented, to solidifying their ideological underpinnings in a policy framework (Hebbar 2017). The following excerpt from an interview with a BJP leader of knowledge production exemplifies how they attempt to build ideological support through policy networks.

> One [of our tasks] is to analyse, interpret and disseminate it to a larger intelligentsia... For us the work is amongst people, we do a lot of political ideological work as well as policy work. We also have round tables and controlled programs, but we also have bigger programs, where you want to make an ideological political point but through the route of policy (Interview with Anirban Ganguly, head of the Shyama Prasad Mookerji Foundation, a BJP-affiliated think-tank, March 2019).

In 2014, the BJP won by a majority, and members of their think-tanks assumed key positions within the Central Government. This conjuncture of events suggests a deliberate strategy towards ideological hegemony in Delhi's policy world, but also raises broader theoretical questions about institutions affecting political change: Is it mass consumption of ideas that leads to political shifts, or rather the deliberate and strategic channeling of them towards a legitimating confluence of powerful ears? In the Indian case, think tanks attempt to use both: they channel their ideas through convening events and roundtables with powerful politicians, bureaucrats, and industrialists; present briefs to Ministers in private, informal gatherings; and hold public events with the media to disseminate their ideas to a larger group of people. However, the demographic that is able to access the research output of these think tanks is limited to an English-speaking, middle-class elite. As such, they most fruitfully disseminate their ideas through strategically building networks with influential members of the political elite, who are then able to target these messages to a broader audience. An interview with Ram Madhav, the General Secretary of the BJP, reveals that the BJP uses their think tanks to build channels of influence within elite networks of the policy making ecosystem:

> In India that conscience is growing - thinking, intellectual conferencing. It helps us, reaching out to them, then slowly bringing them closer to BJP thinking, what we think. That's also, it is useful for us. We get so many new people who connect with our party and our government through our think tanks (Interview with Ram Madhav, General Secretary of BJP & Head of India Foundation, February 2019).

Types of Indian Think Tanks and Claims to Knowledge

While think tanks have become an established part of policy making in the US and Europe, Indian think tanks are still in their early stages. Research organisations have existed for several decades as far back as the 1960s, yet they were rarely called "think tanks". The use of this term is borrowed from the American context and has only become a more popular descriptor in the last decade. In fact, many of my interviewees objected to their older, more established research organisations being called think tanks, as they see think tanks as pursuing a superficial networking and event-planning role rather than one of core academic

research. While this is a somewhat peripheral semantic issue, it reflects a wider professionalisation of the policy research space. In this vein, think tanks have been mushrooming over the last decade, making India the country with the second largest number of think tanks in the world (second only to the US). As evident from the graph below, while there were approximately 100 think tanks in 2008, they rose to more than 500 in 2018. The number of think tanks briefly dropped in 2014 (soon after Modi was elected, the BJP government cracked down on civil society organisations with foreign funding), but have risen dramatically between 2016-2018.

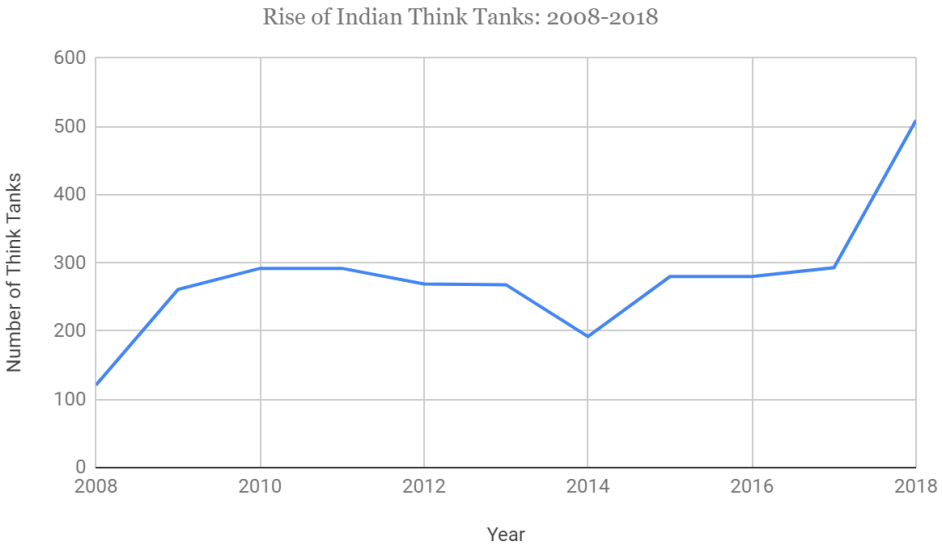

Figure 1
Source: Think Tank Initiative (University of Pennsylvania)

There are broadly three types of think tanks that are considered to have a seat at the decision-making table: 1) government-funded/affiliated to Ministries; 2) privately-funded; 3) think tanks attached to political parties (these may not identify themselves as think tanks but serve the purpose of external research-based advisors). Government-affiliated think tanks tend to play with their heteronomy and autonomy, varying the nature of research they produce. These think tanks are often funded partly or wholly by the government and develop research agendas in consultation with the Ministry to which they are attached. The think tank's research specialisations play a role in its output: there is, across the political spectrum, a hawkish tendency to most foreign policy think tanks that argue from the point of view of uncompromising patriotism, whereas economic policy think tanks tend to rely on the legitimacy of technocratic expertise, and purposely distance themselves from political or ideological partisanship.

The second type, the corporate, privately funded think tanks, most emphasise a rationalist division between the self and their research output, relying on notionals of fiscal pragmatism and technocratic logic. A key example here is the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), India's largest think tank funded by Reliance Industries and Mukesh Ambani, the richest man in Asia. ORF was established after India's economic liberalisation in the 1990s

and serves, primarily, to hold convening events for the country's most prosperous and influential industrialists, politicians, and bureaucrats. As such, its intellectual output is marginal in comparison to its relational, network-building machinery. The third kind of think tank refers to Vivekananda International Foundation and India Foundation, both BJP-affiliated think tanks, established mainly between 2008-2011. These think tanks claim to have no defining ideology, but ride on the professed mentality that "India First" is their driving motivation. Here, the "self" is considered transcended when representing the interests of the entire nation - or rather, what the BJP perceives to be in the nation's interest. An interview with Ram Madhav, the leader of India Foundation and General Secretary of the BJP, reflects this allegiance:

> Essentially the party's ideology is very important. For example, our party stands on the strong ideology of Nation First, we call it nationalism, call it patriotism, whatever name you give it. So everything we develop into a policy, is looked at from this prism, what is beneficial to the country at large. So on that basis, we also function when we look at think tanks. We look at national interest first, not even at the party interest, but we are looking at the national interest. Then we make certain important interventions (Interview with Ram Madhav, General Secretary of the BJP, February 2019).

Scholars have traced how think tanks can build and mobilise ideas to resonate with different groups (Medvetz 2012). They do this through a balance of building democratic legitimacy, claiming expert authority, and constructing discursive frameworks about what knowledge "matters" (Newman and Clarke 2018). An interview with a founding member of India Foundation shows how the hallowed ground of intellectual credibility permeates notions of authoritative knowledge, regardless of political partisanship.

> Everyone wants to sit with the wise man. *Toh India ke andar think tank toh inke DNA mai hai. Iss desh ke DNA mai think tank hai.* [India has think tanks in its DNA.] He's taking you beyond your current existence. So ideas, the power of ideas. And the power of ideas in this country is very fertile so it is but natural... and it is also good because it goes with the natural grains of this country (Interview with representative[8] from India Foundation, May 2019).

Think tanks disseminate their ideas through the media, and through formal and informal meetings with influential politicians and policy makers. These ideas, then, build a certain level of consensus amongst networks of elites who spread them through top-down movements of echo chambers. In an ostensibly-independent think tank, this can build the perception of a space that exists outside of ideology and political party affiliation. Regardless of accusations (and occasional ownership) of bias, think tanks claim a certain sacralization of research and of truth. These claims to credibility are structured differently: whether as moral claims, technical claims, and/or evidence-based claims, which tend to resonate differently based on how different kinds of so-called expertise are valued (Irani 2019). My interviewees presented key distinctions between their evidentiary claims - techno-scientific; activist-political; scholarly-intellectual; moral-ideological; and party-partisan.

[8] Anonymous by request

Economic policy think tanks tend to stake claim to "truth" and rational choice, where "crucial choices are essentially technical in character" (Tribe 1972, 66) towards a set of largely agreed settled ends. In this case, that tends to be economic growth, what is understood within the ambit of development, and technologically-oriented global ascendance. Think tanks and political parties, then, can use contradictory claims together to target different groups of people through different means. Think tanks provide authority and credibility to policy ideas, while the political party can frame them in a way to appeal to popular demands, even when these demands contradict the offered policy solution. For example, claims towards efficiency and delivery, particularly in a developing nation like India, have been coupled with welfare schemes to sell contradictory promises: both state patronage and neoliberal ideals of individualism (Siddiqui 2012). While escalating the privatisation of public goods, the BJP's rhetoric paradoxically sells these shifts as an increase in state welfare and paternalism. A single policy project uses multiple forms of claims to target different groups: for example, several welfare programmes channel popular demands (such as universal healthcare) to provide democratic legitimacy to policies that enable a continued dominance of political and economic elites (i.e promising universal healthcare through incentivising private insurance companies).

The BJP has messaged these shifts strategically, tapping into resonant feelings of state patronage, individual empowerment, and aspirational entrepreneurship. Previous social welfare policies have been replaced by Innovate India, StandUp India, and Skill India (a number of entrepreneurial programs), while demands for better healthcare have resulted in the Ayushman Bharat scheme, a health insurance program to incentivise the building of private hospitals in rural areas. In turn, this allows the private sector to participate in the delivery of each of these goods while the state messages them through a narrative of semi-patronage. Thus, while the BJP may be "populist" to the extent that it attempts to build a rigid, and unified ethno-nationalist sense of "us" to take down the "them" who have led the country astray, their economic policy paradigms are not that different from the Congress party before them. They follow a largely similar path towards the provision of services and welfare through incentivizing the private sector. As such, while the BJP may be changing dominant notions of expertise and instating their own intellectuals, the new authoritative experts continue to reinforce neoliberal economic visions.

"Post"-ideological Policy

Policy making elites often think of Indian politics as irrationally ideological and self-interested, but lacking coherent ideological frameworks, since the economic policies of the major national parties do not significantly differ (Kohli 2013; Chhibber and Verma 2018). Despite the BJP having pockets of protectionist and anti-globalization philosophies (for example, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, an internal faction, promotes "national self-reliance" and fights "economic imperialism"), the outward policy representation of both major national parties has primarily supported the push towards market intervention in the last few decades (Chhibber 2018). In an interview, a senior Congress MP suggested that we are now in a

“post-ideology” era of political mobilization. He noted that “mobilization happens in poetry, whereas governance happens in prose” and that these are two distinct modes of building resonant narrative. The latter, in particular, is where an upper-level of bureaucrats, policy-makers, and policy-influencers participate. The following excerpt illuminates the lines of ideology he draws between politics and policy.

> JR: You know, there is no doubt in my mind that there has been a shift in the dominant consensus. Now why this shift has taken place, it's more problematic. We know it has taken place, but why it has taken place and what are the channels by which it has taken place, that...it’s not a Thatcherite kind of [moment] where somebody came and said, I'm gonna demolish [public institutions]...Mr. Modi's language today is the language of the state, you know, state intervention. So I think we're in a post-ideology world.
>
> Researcher: What do you mean by that?
>
> JR: Where ideologies do not drive political parties. That's over. That era is over. Ideology drove Thatcher. Ideology drove Reagan. After that, finished. Ideology drove the Labour Party. Ideology drove Nehru. Indira Gandhi was not an ideologue - from 67-77, she was leftwing. From 1980-1984, she was right wing. She was no ideologue.
>
> Researcher: So what do you think drives it, if not ideology?
>
> JR: Pragmatism, you know, the sense that...I mean, people are less ideological today. Ideology doesn't drive discourse, the time that used to happen in the 40s and 50s - ideological fears, ideological divides. I wonder whether it could be the collapse of the Soviet Union that has something to do with it. I think ideologically we're all very elastic...we keep using the phrase 'party ideology', but I don't see ourselves [that way]. I see us having a dominant social ideology, but I don't see us having a dominant economic ideology. Our economic ideology is a little more pragmatic, you know. So I think the ideological divides in Indian political discourse now are not economic. The ideological divide is social (Interview with Jairam Ramesh, former Minister and MP of the Congress party, January 2019).

This dynamic relationship between politics and policy-making makes starkly clear the distance between popular representation and policy making. Indeed, it emphasises the legitimacy given to discourses of rationally calculated and purely technical policy decisions as “pragmatic,” while casting aside the role of politics and pluralistic representation beyond reductive notions of “ideology.” Yet, the clear distinction Ramesh draws between social and economic policy, and the ensuing technocratic neutrality of “post”-ideological economic policy, is itself an ideological accomplishment. The technocratic legitimacy given to notions of pragmatic policy making is rooted in a growing dependence of the Indian state on the private sector. This has catalyzed the entry of foreign and private participation in the economy, and paved the path for private expertise to gain greater value in the public domain (Corbridge and Harriss 2013). This form of “post-ideology” borrows from Swyngeduow’s conception of “post-politics” as “marked by the predominance of a managerial logic in all aspects of life, the reduction of the political to administration where decision-making is increasingly considered to be a question of expert knowledge and not of political position”

(Swyngedouw 2010, 225). Over the last few decades, a strong "home-grown" technocracy has emerged that allies itself with capitalist endeavor and economic growth through paradigms of private business and a sturdy state-business alliance (Kohli 2013). A leading member of a think tank noted:

> In India, the public-private partnership story was part of this global narrative where private provisioning was seen as a way of streamlining, cleaning up; was legitimised basically by saying that the state capacity to deliver is limited and therefore privatization or adopting private sector principles is the best way in which you can get the state to function better and therefore, even for core public services (Interview with leading member[9] of Centre for Policy Research, May 2019).

As such, private, technical expertise began to be seen as a "cleaner" alternative to state-sanctioned experts. As the Director of a leading economic policy think tank argues, the government has moved from providing goods and services to facilitating the private sector, and so has a greater need for more technical expertise:

> I think the role of the government in India is changing. And therefore it needs a lot more advice. It needs policy. Because, we are no longer the public sector dominated economy that we were, in the 70s and the 80s. Now, along with that the shift towards the private sector means that the role of the government from being a producer of goods and services...has changed. And given that they have to do strategic thinking of managing the economy here and now, they need a lot more technical expertise (Interview with Rajat Kathuria, Director of Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, May 2019).

Kathuria's insistence that the economy needs more private and technical expertise is reflected in the changing actors who shape forms of pragmatic policy making. Increased globalization and a growing perception of the complexity of technology, governance, and global security challenges have led to the state outsourcing its policy making to external, private organisations. Studying how policy organisations can draw frontiers of inclusion and exclusion, Howarth (2010) argues that think tanks can build as well as naturalise dominant hegemonic forms of social relations and knowledge. In India, think-tanks, global consulting firms and chambers of commerce are being hired to provide stagnating bureaucrats and new political leadership with innovative policy ideas. The hyper-technocratic participation of think tanks and management consulting firms, when articulated at the level of governance, threatens to replace, or rather, obfuscate politics itself: " "conflict" and "struggle" over imbalances of power and structural inequalities and those between competing ideologies - the essence of politics - are eschewed, in the belief that everything can be reduced to "what works best" " (Andrews 2003). An interview with the conservative intellectual I quote at the beginning of this article, Swapan Dasgupta, shows that this shift towards policy as an unquestioned technocratic exercise is being actively perpetuated by the BJP:

[9] Anonymous by request

> SD: You know it's becoming more and more that people seem to think the technocratic expertise is really what is needed, and the manner in which these civil services examinations are being structured. There's a great emphasis on that.
>
> Researcher: Do you think that's a shift? Or do you think it's always kind of been that way?
>
> SD: There's been a shift. There's been a shift, and there's a sort of suspicion of generalists...you're getting people out of college and molding them and developing their expertise, it may not be articulated as such, but that's what's happening (Interview with Swapan Dasgupta, BJP MP, February 2019).

Dasgupta talks about "molding" young graduates, referencing how many influential think tanks attempt to foster young policy makers through frequent summer internship programmes and youth workshops. The India Foundation, for example, runs the Kautilya Fellows program: a ten day workshop on public policy that primarily attracts science, engineering, and management graduates from regional and national universities. Prominent academics (including Swapan Dasgupta), ministers, and bureaucrats feature on the Academic Council, and the workshop involves a pilgrimage to the Kumbh Mela - the largest Hindu religious congregation in India. The Kautilya Fellowship runs in association with the Ministry of External Affairs. Here, while the India Foundation think tank is clearly a BJP-affiliated one, it uses government funding to align itself to a universal, national interest.

Legitimating Hindu-Nationalist Expertise

While some think tanks are explicit about their political and ideological leanings, others claim neutrality, yet practice their bias in euphemisms and coded language. Their key is to effect a change in thinking by normalizing it. Part of the BJP's rhetoric is to replace an old pedigreed elite with what they consider as more grounded expertise: both in terms of policy, as well as culturally i.e. who understands the needs of the people and is an 'authentic' nationalist (Newman and Clarke 2018). Praveen Chakravarty, the former head of Data Analytics in the Congress party, justifies the BJP's opposition to "ivory tower" intellectuals:

> I think the disdain is because of this ivory tower kind of discourse of intellectuals that we've seen...I don't think anyone disagrees with the need for expert opinion, but before we get that, I can understand why the BJP wants to do what it's doing, which is that, 'none of these guys get India' according to them. I don't know if you've seen the cabinet note that led to the formation of NITI Aayog, it actually says a western economic principle does not work for us, we need our own (Interview with Praveen Chakravarty, former head of Data Analytics in the Congress Party, February 2019).

The discrediting of the old elite as isolated from the "people" marks the way for the entry of a new set of leaders who are seen by the establishment to "actually understand" the country. Indeed, technocratic policy professionalization is taking over government ministries. For example, when the BJP came to power in 2014, the government disbanded the Planning Commission and replaced it with the Niti Aayog, an advisory council consisting mainly of

former employees from management consulting firms and private industry. As Swapan Dasgupta notes,

> Niti Aayog is a combination of a think tank and a McKinsey - it's a problem solver. Here is an issue: we go in there and, like what McKinsey does, we study the issue, and we give you a set of recommendations, do this, [and] this. So the Niti Aayog, at least as it was envisaged, is less to do with macro ideas, and more to do with actual project or scheme management (Interview with Swapan Dasgupta, BJP MP, February 2019).

This, then, has become the primary paradigm of thinking about governance: policy is seen as being "post-ideology," which claims to have no culture, ideology, or bias apart from pragmatically "what works best." Yet this discursive emptiness, as such, allows political leaders to align a rhetoric of glorified technocratic expertise with hyper-nationalist sentiments of indigenous (Hindu) strength. For example, Modi's push towards India having a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025 is tied into a larger narrative about India's superior economic 'strength' and glory on the global stage. This heightened nationalist pride aligns with the identity politics of the BJP's Hindu India.

While historically, right wing movements have accompanied highly technological advances, I am not implying that technocratic post-ideology policy and Hindu nationalism are inherently tied together, nor that the former is entirely a tool for the latter. These two discursive worlds are not inherently entwined; indeed, in some sense they are contradictory. The latter focuses primarily on culture, caste, and religion, attempting to build a rigid national identity, whereas the former claims to have no culture. Hence it can be used in the service of the latter, as bolstering claims to a grand national and technological future, diagnosing concerns and solutions as neutral and "post-ideological." As research has shown, technocratic primacy is able to reinforce nationalist claims to future glory, global standing and efficient delivery systems (Centeno 2010). At the same time, the BJP's ethno-centric nationalism has solidified the majoritarian population's trust in the central leadership, allowing for a deeper integration of technological systems in citizens' lives. This is often (but not necessarily) in the form of surveillance, and can only be achieved if the (majority of) the population places speculative trust in the ruling party's ability to govern them.

Paradoxically, while an acultural discourse of technical expertise claims credibility through its distance from political ideology, Hindu civilizational expertise is also gaining legitimacy in policy discussions. Hindu-nationalist think tanks follow the BJP's populist rhetoric by professing to decolonise knowledge, yet instead, they merely transfer knowledge-making power from a set of English-speaking post-colonial elite, to a largely upper-caste, Hindu elite. An interview with the head of the Vivekananda International Foundation offers that Indian culture and policy need to harken back to their strong civilisational roots in order to succeed:

> India was so advanced at a point of time, and then for 1000 years there's nothing. Why did that happen? Because we forgot about Indianness. You look at Russia, they still speak in Russian, you and I speak in English. You look at Germans, they speak in

> German, you look at Americans, they have hardly any history but look at how they talk about American exceptionalism. Look at the Chinese. So it is very important to develop an Indian narrative or being Indian.
>
> That doesn't mean that you shut yourself off, even if you look at Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, Gokhale, Tilak, Savarkar, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Radhakrishnan, all these people were at heart deeply Indian and very concerned that Western values and culture were becoming too dominant and driving away our own creativity...And you'll realise, many of us have written many essays etc., you'll realise that India has a very rich thinking starting from Vedas, scriptures, Ramayan, epics, etc., contribution to science, technology, advanced thinking, literature, philosophy, music, and even skills. If you look at the Veda there are 74 skills listed there. So this thing was all forgotten. Then you had a strong influence of the leftist historians who said all this was hocus pocus. What is this *maathe pe tilak laga diya* [putting a *tilak* (mark) on your forehead to indicate religious membership], you do this *puja* [prayer], all this is material forces, and Indians never really had that greatness, there is no historical record of any of this, it's all mythology. This kind of thinking which was encouraged by the British generated a lot of inferiority complexes in Indians and still exists (Interview with member[10] of Vivekananda International Foundation, a BJP-affiliated think tank, May 2019).

Our interviewee is expressing a specific discourse of anti-imperialist and nationalist pride. Indian nationalism has several forms, yet this quote animates and anchors a Hindu civilisational, ethnocentric trope. There is a potential contradiction here in future visions of national imaginaries: one as wholly culturally Hindu, eschewing modern forms of Western progress, including technological advancement; and the other as wholly technical. However, the BJP glosses over these contradictions through forms of political discourse that are strategically targeted to resonate with different normative moral and political concerns. Both the production of pragmatism in technocratic economic policy, and the emotive power of nationalism, allow for parallel forms of emotional and cognitive resonance. The ideological goal here is twofold: to unite the population with a dominant nationalist conception of the "authentic Indian," and to simultaneously bolster forms of development to claim technological glory. The two world-views often function independently too: the technocratic turn has been growing since liberalization, and the nationalist imaginary of India as a Hindu civilization has brought about a majoritarian state. Indeed, as Anirban Ganguly, the head of a BJP policy organisation notes, the notion of "Indian exceptionalism" strengthens the discourse of the BJP's rule:

> It's very emotionally resonant, and the people in general get to know - it's part of our cultural policy, it's a reflection of our aspiration to see India emerge as a great power, and also a reflection of our conviction that India is a civilizational power. So...all these things fall into that larger rubric where you change the discourse and the narrative largely alters. This concept of Indian exceptionalism - what Modi has done in the last five years in terms of a cultural narrative is to release the thought that as Indians we are exceptional. Just this thought (Interview with Anirban Ganguly, head of the Shyama Prasad Mookerji Research Foundation, March 2019).

[10] Anonymous by request

These otherwise contradictory narratives of technical expertise and populist, Hindu-nationalist sentiments are able to persist by avoiding confronting their contradictions, as well as reinforcing one another when necessary. As different narratives target particular constituencies, the discursive points of unity require suppressing parts of each narrative. In certain situations, an ethnocentric hyper-nationalism is partly coded through a rhetoric of development that requires technical and technocratic expertise. For example, the sentiment in favor of Modi rose after the Balakot incident in early 2019, when Indian warplanes dropped bombs on a Pakistani province across the Kashmiri border. Billboards were plastered across the city saying "If Modi loses, terrorism will win." The following Indian occupation, enforced curfew, and communication blackout of Muslim-dominated Kashmir from August 2019 has been justified through a claim towards bringing long-awaited economic development to the region. In this case, the argument to spread economic, technocratic development is used to justify a Hindu-nationalist desire for global ascendance and the occupation of contested territories. At the same time, as my interviewees demonstrate, not everyone sees economic pragmatism as being married to Hindu nationalism. In fact, one of the key attributes of this form of "diffuse" and apolitical neo-Hindutva (Reddy 2018) is that Hindu nationalism and its offshoots are often seen as apolitical, anti-political and primarily cultural such that it becomes a universal form of nationalism.

Conclusion: Demos and Technos

Since its overwhelming victory in 2014, the BJP has combined an ideology of Hindu and Indian superiority and self-reliance with discourses of empowerment through global capital. To use Desai's (2016) term, there is a "danse macabre" of hybridised discourse and practice. Discourses of national economic strength geared towards a protectionist framework are mobilised towards bolstering participation in international trade, global finance, deregulation, fewer labor protections and presented as being towards "development for all," to protect India's interests and build India's prominence on the global stage. The effort is viewed as a profoundly moral endeavor to protect the integrity and identity of India – an India where the collective "we" is coded as indigenously Hindu, and proud. Rhetoric that may have previously been mobilised to support a protectionist and self-reliant economy, is re-contextualised to support and bolster further global participation. As such, the ruling administration has simultaneously channelled anti-elite popular discontent towards policies that heighten neoliberal economic policies.

As this article has argued, when conversations become framed as the "administration of things by rational judgement" (Bell 1976), this tends to leave out conversations around alternative political visions in liberal democratic frameworks: minority protection, constitutional rights, varied political publics, the democratic process, and the potential pitfalls of a democratic majoritarianism. Often-repeated paradigms of technocratic thought valuing the same tools of measurement, outcome, and results, cease to be perceived as ideological. In many ways, the transfer of advisory positions from an older rule of experts to a new rule of different experts simply exacerbates a "post-ideological" rule from above. The BJP is able to mobilise its political base through ethno-nationalist promises, while simultaneously appealing

to a range of more moderate demographics through its emphasis on pragmatic economic policy. As such, it practises its heterodox form of incongruent techniques of governance. In some cases, such as with its occupation of Kashmir in the name of development, and its projection of the Kumbh Mela and Yoga Day as signs of infrastructural progress, it is able to marry both imperatives. In other cases, it allows for a diffuse posturing of an anti-political Hindutva that gains its strength from infusing everyday forms of citizenship towards a generalisable national ethos (Anderson and Longkumer 2018).

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