

Muzaffarnagar: The Politics of Post-truth and Hindu Nationalism

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Abstract

The following paper is an attempt to explore the dynamics and power of the rhetoric of post-truth, keeping the Muzaffarnagar riots as the locus of discussion. Tracing the communal history of western Uttar Pradesh through incidents such as the Ayodhya–Babri Masjid issue, the paper discusses the manner in which communal conflicts were concocted through a post-truth rhetoric in post-Independence India in an attempt to create an ‘imagined Hindu community’ within the larger framework of a Hindu national consciousness. Punctuated by narratives of the victims displaced by the riots, the paper attempts to investigate the ramifications of post-truth for the displaced population that is now restrained within the space of a ‘need economy’. Within a framework of electoral politics of Uttar Pradesh, the paper attempts to understand how post-truth leads to the proliferation of discourses of power that controls subjects for the purpose of ‘effective governance’ and securing a vote bank.

Keywords: post-truth, Hindu nationalism, electoral politics, communal riots, rehabilitation, need economy

Introduction: Muzaffarnagar Riots and the Politics of Post-Truth

Muzaffarnagar, a district in western Uttar Pradesh, witnessed the most significant riot of the last decade in September 2013. On 27 August 2013, an altercation between Shahnawaz (a Muslim youth from Kaval village) and two brothers, Gaurav and Sachin (Jats from Malikpura), turned violent after Gaurav and Sachin stabbed Shahnawaz on grounds of eve-teasing a girl related to Sachin. Subsequently, a crowd gathered in the area and started using sharp-edged weapons on the two youths, ultimately leading to their death. Even though the state government authorities stated that there was no clear evidence of eve-teasing, the local media reported the incident along those lines. Soon after, to instigate communal sentiments further, a video was circulated on social media platforms by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Sangeet Som that portrayed the murder of a Hindu youth by the hands of two Muslims (Anhad 2013). Even though the Akhilesh Yadav-led state government was slammed on social media for having blamed the video for perpetuating the riots, it was later discovered that the video was from several years ago,

of an incident that happened in Sialkot. Instead of exploring the veracity of the video, public meetings were organised by both the communities soon after, followed by a bandh being organised by the BJP on the 5 September. While the local leaders were being pitted against one another, the Khap Panchayat, aided by the local BJP unit, organised a “beti-bachao” rally, in which communally provocative speeches were delivered by the local Hindu leaders. The mahapanchayat, held on 7 September, was organised in Nagla Mandaur village, not too far from Kawal village, where the situation was already tense and pre-episodes of “communal” violence had already taken place. It is reported that Jats¹ from Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, Bagpat, Budhana, Ghaziabad, District Bijnor, and Haryana reached the location on 7 September, by and large in tractor trolleys ((Rao et al 2014). The mobilisation was mainly of Baliyan Jats (corroborated by the fact that no violence took place north of Muzaffarnagar, where these two Jat communities are not dominant)

We had been hearing rumours of attacks for some time, but on the 7 September, we received a phone call from my relative, who told us to run. And, we did not think of anything further. “*Bhag nikle hum to, ghar, gebne samaan sab kuch chorke, kuch bhi nabin le aye hum; chappal bhi nabin pehne,*” (We just fled, left our homes, valuables everything; we were not even wearing our slippers) says one of the victims² a resident of the village of Kakra.

“*Hum toh kaisey bhi jaan bacha ke bhag nikle, piche piche sarey Jat chaku aur rod le ke bhag rabe the; humara ek lorry hain, use mein uthke nikal gaye,*” (Somehow, we managed to save our lives and run, we were being chased by Jats carrying knives and rods; we have a lorry, we just got onto it and ran away) elaborates another Muslim victim.

“*Jaise hi humko dange ke barein mein khabar mili, hum samaan band ke nikal parein. Chalte chale piche se goli ki awaaz ayi. Piche murke dekha toh meri saas ko goli lagi thi or who niche gir gaye the. Baccho ki zindagi ke barein mein soch ke hum wapas nahi ja paye unke liye.*” (As soon as the news about the riots reached us, we packed our bags and left. While on our way, we heard gunshots and turned around to see that my mother-in-law had been shot. Thinking about our children, we couldn’t go back for her) states a Muslim woman from Kutba.

¹ It should be pointed out that the conflict that took place in Muzaffarnagar can be called a Jat–Muslim conflict. The Jats are a dominant Hindu caste in the area having a great hold over the agrarian resources. However, in the context of the Muzaffarnagar riots, caste and culture differences were subsumed under the larger umbrella of Hindu identity and hence, Jat–Muslim conflict, in this context, resonates with Hindu–Muslim conflict (Ahmed 2013).

² The narratives of the victims cited in the paper are primary data that has been gathered by the author, with consent from the respondents during the process of a fieldwork for the purpose of a fellowship.

Drawing from his ethnography of communal riots in Aligarh, Brass (2003) elaborates that the occurrence of riots is almost never accidental; in retrospect, what emerges is the complicity of the State and political actors in engineering riots, especially as a vote-consolidating mechanism in the face of upcoming elections. In this instance, the immediate incident at hand could be understood as an attempt by the local wing of the BJP to instigate nationalist sentiments premised on a Hindu community identity in order to gain electoral incentives. Wilkinson (2004) argues that parties representing the dominant community in a region invariably make use of polarising anti-minority events in an effort to persuade fellow members of their community to identify with their party.

While the above narrative points to the fact that the principal precipitant of large-scale riots is the political manipulation of local conflicts in an attempt to transform them into a fledged communal conflict (Brass 2003), this paper will attempt to explore and explain the manner in which the political manipulation of the objective reality occurs to instigate and arouse communal sentiments, with the aim of consolidating a Hindu national identity. With the above incident as a starting point, the paper will outline the manner in which rumours, fake news, and provocative speeches have been used over the years in western Uttar Pradesh to create a communal divide while attempting to create an imagined community that resonated with Hindu ideas of nationalism.

The word “post-truth” was introduced in the Oxford dictionary in 2016 to denote circumstances in which the objective facts are less influential in shaping circumstances as opposed to emotions and personal belief. The idea of post-truth is premised in a Machiavellian ideologue in which “politics” and “truth” interact with one another differently than in a society governed by a rhetoric having its foundation in reason and objective facts. In the post-truth era, alternative narratives are often created and disseminated through the use of media and rumours. Following McComiskey (2017), such alternative narratives are an insidious form of post-truth that offer meaningful and attractive interpretation of situations irrespective of however far-fetched, factually incorrect, or empirically biased they are. What is more significant in this regard is not the use of unethical rhetoric but the ready consumption of that rhetoric by the masses.

Be it the incident in Kawal that was grounded on unverified claims of eve-teasing or the circulation of the fake video from Sialkot (in which a Hindu youth was being murdered at the hands of the Muslim youths), the representation of the matter at the “beti-bachao” mahapanchayat points to a re-legitimation of arguments based on emotional appeal and symbolic value grounded in an idea

of a Hindu nation and its dominant community identity pitted against that of the minority identity. The conjecture that can be drawn from the same is that the public that is a part of the ‘post-truth’ discourse does not seek information on the basis of which it would form its beliefs; it seeks information that supports its beliefs. The significance of social media in this regard is immense as it helps generate an alternate truth, albeit without a logical epistemological premise, alongside facilitating widespread dissemination of the same. Ahmed (2013) points out the manner in which technology was used in the Muzaffarnagar riots as an instrument to reinforce community stereotypes. The use of live and still images of alleged ethnic conflict in such a context triggered community sentiments premised in arguments of emotional appeal.

However, the incident at Kawal cannot be regarded as an isolated incident that attempted to stir communal sentiments in the process of awakening a Hindu national consciousness. While the power of post-truth is significant, the occurrence of such a large-scale ethnic violence can only be understood in its entirety once we delve into the history of communal violence in western Uttar Pradesh, the origins of which can be traced back to the rise and consolidation of Hindu nationalism in postcolonial India.

Post-truth Imaginings through a Brief History of Western Uttar Pradesh

The history of communal conflict in post-Independence India began with the dispute over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, situated in western Uttar Pradesh. The Ayodhya–Babri Masjid dispute rested on the belief that a temple that existed to commemorate the birth of the Hindu God Ram was demolished by the Mughal Emperor Babur to construct the Babri Masjid in the ruins of the temple. While a controversial debate still continues about the archaeological evidence of the existence of the temple, the Ayodhya–Babri Masjid issue has become a matter of contention for the Muslim and the Hindu communities, over the years following Independence.

The roots of communal divide were sown as early as December 1949, when some Hindu Pandits smuggled an idol of Lord Ram inside the Masjid, which was at that time a place of regular worship for the Muslim community. The incident was portrayed as one of divine intervention, in which the idol had magically appeared one night inside the temple. The power of rumour and media was such that with the circulation of the news, a crowd gathered outside the temple the next morning to see the appearance of Lord Ram inside the mosque. Needless to say, the objective facts premised in the veracity of events were of little importance here, as opposed to emotions and belief.

McComiskey (2017) identifies how, in instances governed by a post-truth rhetoric, any linguistic reference to facts or truths are disregarded in the face of “ethos” and “pathos”; the “logos” no longer remain important.

Even though it was subsequently revealed that the idol had been purposefully placed inside the mosque by some Hindu priests, the seeds of communal divide premised in a post-truth rhetoric had already been laid. Even though the gates of the mosque were closed off by the police under instructions of the state government, District Magistrate K.K. Nayar refused to remove the idol from inside the mosque, working on orders of the chief secretary of Uttar Pradesh. While the situation awaited legal decision, no further initiative was taken on the local level in fear of instigating the majority community. The political climate changed in the 1960s, with the birth of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organisation that aimed to consolidate and strengthen Hindu solidarity. The VHP did not gain much ground until the 1980s, but in 1986, they started a procession to Ayodhya from Sitamarhi (the birthplace of Sita), under the banner “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” (Hail Mother India). The procession gained ground in Lucknow, but by the time it reached Delhi, the issue receded to the background as the national attention became focused on the murder of Indira Gandhi. Nevertheless, the VHP kept on pressuring the district court of Faizabad for opening the temple, resulting in the biggest communal protest in India, staged by the Muslims in New Delhi in 1987 (Van der Veer 1992). It would be incorrect to say that the Babri Masjid issue did not receive support from the Congress prior to the elections of 1989, but the BJP made it their central agenda, making their political alignment with the VHP obvious. September 1989 saw the VHP engaging in the worship of “bricks of Lord Ram” in several North Indian villages, from where processions of people carried them to Ayodhya for the construction of the Ram Mandir from different parts of the country.

The following year, the fateful march to Ayodhya was initiated by the BJP leader L.K. Advani, with the aim of constructing the Ram Mandir by the end of the year. The subsequent arrest of Advani by the Mulayam Singh Yadav government, as soon as the procession entered Uttar Pradesh, did not stop the kar-sevaks (religious volunteers) from marching to the temple, even in the face of police firing. The BJP utilised the incident to continue its campaign, this time, through the use of video and audio cassettes that claimed that thousands of “martyrs” had been killed wrongfully by the police fire, and that their ashes were being carried through the country in asthi-kalashas (ritual pots) for immersion in sacred waters (Van der Veer 1992). The march to Ayodhya was the watershed incident that turned the BJP from a peripheral right-wing party to a powerful electoral

force and the primary opposition of the Congress. An analysis of the Babri Masjid situation takes us back to the argument about post-truth rhetoric premised in ‘ethos’ rather than facts, fostering community sentiments.

There have been several debates among scholars about the present-day Ayodhya being the Ayodhya of the Ramayana, with Sanskrit scholar Hans Baker arguing that the present-day Ayodhya was actually called Saketa and was renamed by a Gupta king as Ayodhya in order to establish a link between his rule and that of the mythical Hindu ruler (Van der Veer 1992). Such was the strength of Hindu consciousness premised in emotional appeal that the time appropriate casting of the televised version of Ramayana in 1987, was met with extremely popularity and devotion. Inevitably, the telecasting at that point was yet another attempt to reassert the rightful claim of the Hindus over the Babri Masjid, using narratives traceable to myths rather than verifiable truths. While, rhetoric, part of an epistemological continuum, constitutes facts, realities and truths as epistemic counterparts, (McComiskey 2017), in a post-truth scenario, facts, realities, and truth lose their significance and no longer form a part of the epistemological continuum. Devoid of the foundational premise, the post-truth rhetoric becomes an empty signifier, where language assumes the role of strategic medium without reference to anything, other than itself. The rhetoric of post-truth manifests itself through a de-establishment of “truth” and resonates with extremist ideologies that find a voice within such contexts.

The incident in the winter of 1949 was simply the beginning of a long history of communal strife in western Uttar Pradesh. Fuelled by the consistent efforts of the VHP campaigning for the liberation of Ram’s birthplace, western Uttar Pradesh saw a series of communal troubles in the latter half of the 1960s. One of the most prominent instances of conflict triggered by the Babri Masjid dispute would be the Hashimpura Massacre that occurred in May 1987, where Meerut in western Uttar Pradesh was wrecked by communal violence (Mander 2018). The Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the army were launched to bring the situation under control, but instead they rounded up 40–45 Muslim men from the Hashimpura locality and under the pretext of taking them to the police station, took them to a canal near Ghaziabad, where they were shot dead by the police. Thirty-eight people died, while 11 bodies were identified (Ashraf 2018). The accused were acquitted in 2015 by the trial court on account of lack of evidence and it was only in 2018 that the Delhi High Court overturned the judgment of the trial court and convicted the accused on charges of murder and conspiracy (Rashid 2018).

The mass murders in Maliyana, Uttar Pradesh, that happened a day before the Hashimpura Massacre were one of the largest instances of custodial killing, where 72 Muslims were killed by the PAC when they opened fire in a locality in Maliyana after closing off five exit points. Following a report by the Times of India, 106 out of 214 houses were burnt down at a time, when Meerut was strife with communal riots premised on the Babri Masjid dispute (Rai 2015). The custodial killings of Muslims in both the instances point to the utter disregard for the lives of the minority community who were trapped in the wrong side of the power conflict.

The communal tensions in western Uttar Pradesh after Independence can be understood as a step towards strengthening the identity of the Hindu community in order to build and consolidate an idea of nationalism that resonated with a Hindu nation. Following Van der Veer (1992), the only narrative that appealed to the Hindu nationalists was one that reflected notions of community identity built within the framework of a Hindu nation.

Hindu Nationalism and the Creation of the “Imagined Hindu Community”

Hindu nationalism could roughly be categorised into two phases: the first is a transition from an inchoate Hindu world without boundaries to one with a sense of unified nationalism in the context of unified integrative communication, administration, etc. The second transition that occurred roughly in the mid-1920s attempted to crystallise an aggressive Hindutva ideology. As noted by Menon and Nigam (2007), the second phase of Indian nationalism, which began in 1925 with the formation of the political organisation known as the Sangh Parivar, with the RSS at the centre, served as the ideological fountainhead of Hindutva politics.

Territoriality was a starting point in Hindutva ideology: A Hindu, as understood by Savarkar, was one who considered the Hindu nation as their pitribhumi (holy fatherland). The Hindutva ideology aimed at a complete restructuring of the nation followed by a reconversion and subsequent assimilation under the Hindu fold. Only Hindus could therefore, be true patriots of their fatherland. Thus, following Sarkar (1996), the entire discourse of Hindutva attempted to discretely use culture as an intermediate term invested with Hindu religious meanings and associations.

Sarkar's notions find resonance with Gellner's theory of nationalism, where Gellner ([1983] 2006) describes nationalism as a force that attempts to homogenise cultures, striving to establish political boundaries congruent with cultural boundaries. Gellner ([1983] 2006) notes that the formation of nations is simply the result of nationalist propaganda founded on a fallacious belief of nationalist

mythologies. Anderson (2006), critiquing Gellner, points out that while Gellner understands the creation of nations through falsity and fabrication, the foundation of nations can also be imaginary. The nation, according to Anderson (2006: 7), is an “imagined political community” of “deep horizontal comradeship”, wherein the imagined community exists to define a distinction between “us” and “them”. Nationalism in such a context entails patriotic sentiments for one’s own imagined community. Anderson associates the rise of nationalism with the advent of print capitalism and the calendrical coincidence of events in newspapers. The newspaper reader, while reading the news and carefully observing that exact replicas are being read by other readers around him/her, is assured of the veracity of the imagined world that is essentially rooted in his everyday life. By reading the same news that millions of other readers of his/her community are also reading, the reader feels a sense of belonging with his/her community, one that is not premised in territorial proximity.

Even though Anderson (2006) understands the creation of an imagined community within the framework of print capitalism, this paper assumes that the creation of an “imagined political community” can occur by the dissemination of a narrative/news through any medium that has a significant reach. The narrative or news in question need not have its premise in objective facts and may very well be a post-truth rhetoric that finds its way to a large segment of the population, becoming the basis for the formation of their imagined community. Let us for instance go back to the incident of Muzaffarnagar, where the fake video of two Muslim youths lynching a Hindu youth was circulated widely. That incident can be regarded as an instance of re-assertion of an imagined political community that is solely based on an argument having as its epistemological counterpart emotional appeal, rather than facts. Thus, in my opinion, electronic media can be regarded as an instrument that perpetuates the creation of an imagined community by ensuring access to the same video/audio content by people across the country, through the use of different social media platforms. The fact that an imagined community presupposes a horizontal comradeship, ensures a fool-proof post-truth rhetoric that does not have its basis in objective facts. However, the instance of communal conflict in Muzaffarnagar can be understood as a call for the re-assertion of the community identity rather than the creation of it.

The rise and consolidation of Hindu nationalism through the creation of an imagined Hindu community can be traced back to the Babri Masjid dispute: the rumours of the appearance of Ram, the consistent attempts of the VHP to liberate “Ramjanmabhoomi” (birthplace of Ram) never let Ayodhya become the news of yesterday. The call to liberate this site rested on the VHP’s motive

of destroying or moving the mosque so that a new temple could be constructed on the site to house an enlivened image of Ram. Posters announcing a rath yatra (journey of a chariot) in Delhi referred to this programme in condensed imagery with two illustrations of the bow-wielding deity and an architectural model of the proposed temple (Davis 1996). The fact that such a large crowd from all parts of the country turned up for the march to Ayodhya in 1990 was again a proof of the existence of the imagined Hindu community that the protestors felt that they are a part of.

The march to Ayodhya, which received a wide range of support, was the culmination of successful mobilisation and adept manipulation of cultural symbols that hinted at an imagined Hindu community. Anderson (2006) also points out the importance of signs that help create and unite the political community, i.e., the nation, through the use of language and signs. Following Erwin Panofsky, Richard Davis (1996) elaborates on the motifs and symbols that form the premise of the Ayodhya narrative in an attempt to elucidate on the underlying principles that reveal the basic attitudes of a nation, a period, a religious persuasion, etc. Davis (1996) understands the Ayodhya narrative as a cultural performance of great emotional appeal, one that evoked intense nationalistic sentiments. During the rath yatra to Ayodhya, several images, such as that of the lotus, weapons and Ram himself, became points of interpretive contention. The images circulated were more strategic than representational. Davis (1996) stresses on the performative character of those involved in the yatra in addition to their conscious agency. In selecting a heterogeneous assortment of Hindu symbols previously not put together before, they were creating a language for the imagined Hindu nation, which the members of the community understand and associate with. Following Anderson (2006), this was the manner in which languages of power were created, with certain signs and signifiers being associated with the idea of the nation and, subsequently, nationalism. The language created lacked any reference to facts, truths, or realities; it became a purely strategic medium to generate the desired result. The creation of such a language only makes sense within the post-truth rhetoric. The desired result was the creation and consolidation of the imagined Hindu community that operated within a discourse of post-truth.

Once the formal model of the Hindu nation was imagined, the same was easily exploited in a Machiavellian spirit, as the communal conflicts in the following years signify. The aim of Ayodhya and subsequent retrieval of temples in North India were carried out with the aim of constructing a unified nation: one that operates on a singular Hindu ideology, one that is intolerant of the “other”, the Muslim. Following Sarkar (1996), communalism could be understood as a labelling exercise on part of secular nationalists to brand community identities. Communal politics, with the

rhetoric of post-truth, thus helped consolidate a Hindu national consciousness. In the context of Muzaffarnagar, such a rhetoric came at the cost of large-scale death and displacement for the Muslim minority living in the area.

Conclusion

The re-assertion and consolidation of the imagined Hindu community through the use of a post-truth rhetoric in the context of Muzaffarnagar had a far-reaching impact in terms of electoral politics. While the BJP was using rumours and fake news to consolidate a Hindu vote bank, the Samajwadi Party was reeling under the pressure of ensuring their place in the upcoming general elections of 2014. Following an article by Srivastava (2013), the electorate in the district consisted of 52 per cent Jat voters and 22 per cent Muslim voters. The reaction of the Samajwadi Party to the occurrence of the riots hinted at the fact that the state government did not want to lose out on the support from the Jat population, which was a significant proportion of the electorate. Following an article by Kirpal (2013), after the incident on 27 August, senior bureaucrats and police officials in the district and in Lucknow had a very clear sense of the direction that things could take if the situation was not brought under control. When the situation started getting tumultuous, the District Magistrate slapped Section 144 in the area, preventing the assembly of people. However, between 31 August and 7 September, no action was taken by the Samajwadi Party government to prevent the mahapanchayat from happening (Kirpal 2013). As noted earlier, the situation turned into one of a full-fledged riot post the occurrence of the mahapanchayat.

Civil society reports state how the villagers ran for their lives as the violence spread to the rural areas. Women have narrated how they had to carry their little children and run, with no police personnel in sight (Rao et al 2014). Even during the occurrence of the riots that led to the displacement of so many victims, the Samajwadi Party government did not do much to prevent or control the riots. While the area was overwhelmed by communal strife, the senior superintendent of police of Muzaffarnagar was changed five times. The fact-finding report by Rao et al. (2014) states that throughout the occurrence of the riots, mobile patrols and static pickets were absent, even when the probability and extent of the violence was known post the mahapanchayat. The absence of police in areas of violence was particularly striking since the situation was already being controlled from Lucknow by then.

What emerges is the complicity of the state government in the ethnic cleansing of the Muslim-populated Hindu villages in the area. The Samajwadi Party government has been vehemently criticised on social media for not being able to deal with the violence better. But as Wilkinson (2004) has very rightly pointed out, electoral incentives happen both at the level of local constituency as well as level of government. The reaction of the Samajwadi Party to the riots points to the fact that the only way in which the state would have intervened and stopped the ethnic cleansing, that led to the subsequent displacement of Muslims, was if they were not dependent on Jat votes to secure a large percentage of the 80 seats from Uttar Pradesh at the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Additionally, the Samajwadi Party has always been in a political tassel with the Bahujan Samaj Party, and a conjecture can be drawn at this point that given the rising power of the BJP in the area, they did not want to lose out completely on the votes from the Jat community so close to the elections.

As a direct result of the state government's indirect compliance to the rhetoric of post-truth that instigated the riots, 40,000 people (most of them Muslims) were displaced from their homes, along with damages to property and livelihood. The official death toll stood at approximately 52 people, out of which only a very small percentage of people were from the Jat community (Rao et al 2014). The impact of the riots was however not uniform across villages. While members of some villages like Kutba and Kuthbi primarily faced casualties, members of other villages such as Kakda and Lisadh faced indirect impacts, whereby the residents ran away in fear of the impending consequences of the riots. Inadvertently, an atmosphere of great despair, grief, and loss clouded the lives of the many who survived. Majority of the people who died were from the Muslim population.

"Is bacche ka ma baap mar gaye dange mein, ab hum isko kaise akele pale batao?" (This child's parents died in the riots, how will I bring the child up by myself, tell me?) states the grandmother of a five-year-old grandchild, after being displaced by the riots from their village in Lisadh.

"Humara ghar, humara gao sab humse cheen liya gaya. Ab hum kitne din iss baalath mein rabe iss basti mein," (Our home, our village was taken away from us. How long do we stay in this condition, in this camp?) laments a Muslim woman from Kakra.

Coming out of the village was a compulsion for them. *“Hum to darr ke maare bhaag aaye.”* *Pehle toh sab acha tha,*” (We were so scared that we were forced to leave our village. Earlier, everything was fine [between Jats and Muslims]) elaborates a respondent on being asked why they left.

The Muslim minority that was displaced in the camps, however, had no option but to turn to the Samajwadi Party-led state government. Following a fact-finding report by Rao et al (2014), the victims had been living in refugee camps under very difficult conditions: winter had set in, and mothers with babies were entirely dependent on the goodwill of those around for milk and medical facilities. There was neither any doctor in the camps nor any police official found at the site of any of the camps. The local community and civil society organisations were the ones providing food, bedding, clothes, etc. to the victims, even though the District Magistrate stated that the district administration had been arranging for relief facilities.

“Humare bacche khaane ke liye rote rehte hain, aur hum kuch nahi kar pate,” (Our children keep crying for food and we can’t do anything) laments a young mother of 3 children.

“Humare bacche khauf se so nahi pate. Allah kabhi inhe maaf nahi karega,” (Our children can’t sleep at night out of fear. Allah will never forgive them) narrates another young mother from Kutba.

However, given the fact that the District Magistrate shared a dais with Muslim leaders right before the mahapanchayat, the Samajwadi Party government did not really have the confidence of the Jat population post the riots (Kirpal 2013). Therefore, in October 2013, the state government declared a one-time compensation of INR 5 lakh to the families displaced by the riots (Agarwal 2013). A conjecture can be drawn at this point that such a step was taken to appease the Muslim minorities, who, at the end of the day, did constitute 22 per cent of the electorate. Once the riots were over, the Samajwadi Party government felt the need to pacify the displaced Muslim population, since they knew that they could never simply win only with the Jat votes against the BJP in the picture. However, the manner in which the compensation packages were rolled out by the Samajwadi Party government was also problematic. The victims who were deemed eligible for the same had to sign documents stating that they would never return to those villages (Agarwal 2013). Following a news article by Khan (2017), the state government defined a family as a group of people who use one common kitchen and constitute one household. However, in several cases, even members of large families who were able to prove through legitimate verification that they lived in different households did not receive any compensation from the government, even after showing different

address proofs. In addition, villagers were forced to leave every possession they owned in their villages once they signed the documents. Further, the state government conveniently categorized the population into two distinct halves of those directly affected³ and those indirectly affected by the riots, a factor that determined the amount and kind of compensation that the refugees would be able to avail. The displaced population was further rehabilitated in such a way that it does not have access to alternate means of livelihood and is forced to be dependent on the government for its subsistence. The compensation packages were meagre, a means of temporary sustenance.

So, on the one hand, the primary producers such as peasants and craftspeople lost their lands and means of production, while on the other hand, they were not rehabilitated by the government in a manner that would enable them to find alternative means of subsistence making them part of the capitalist system of production. Sanyal, in his reimagining of the unification of capital, speaks of a scenario whereby all those who are dispossessed do not find a place within the capitalist system of production. These people exist within the system of capitalism but beyond the purview of capital (Sanyal 2007). The inhabitants of the wasteland are stuck in a space between the traditional subsistence economy and modern commodity economy that Sanyal (2007) refers to as “need economy”. These people exist within the system of capitalism but beyond the purview of capital (Sanyal 2007).

Following Chatterjee (2008), this process can be understood as a reversal of the effects of primitive accumulation where on one hand, the members of the political society⁴ are restricted from participating in the process of primitive accumulation while on the other hand, they are offered help in the form of anti-poverty programmes that are allegedly initiated for their benefit (Chatterjee 2008). The government keeps the population in check by ensuring their distance from processes of primitive accumulation, throwing in subsistence packages from time to time to ensure the minority votes from them. This resonates with “art of principality” practiced by the Machiavellian

³ Directly affected implied those whose families have suffered casualties on account of the riots. This information was gathered on the ground while conducting fieldwork by the author.

⁴ “Political society” is a term introduced by Chatterjee (2004), which he uses to refer to a target population for welfare schemes, a space of political management of the non-corporate capital. Political society, within the space of Muzaffarnagar refers to the Muslim population, given that the Jat community is a wealthy dominant caste in the region. However, it is essential to point out that “political society” is not a homogenous category. It has inherent heterogeneity in the form of multiple religions, caste, etc. Such heterogeneity has been used as an instrument by the political parties in this instance to create fragmentations and mobilise different religious communities against one another. The above instances of reference to the members of the political society as victims of primitive accumulation primarily refer to the Muslim population who were displaced and marginalised on account of the riots.

prince, where the objective of the exercise of power was to protect the territoriality of the prince at all costs. Following Foucault (1991), the art of governing in this regard entailed the introduction of economy into political practice. Governing a State subsequently implied setting up an economy at the level of the entire State, where the behaviour of the subjects would be under constant surveillance. Such surveillance was ensured through the instrument of sovereignty where the common welfare was guaranteed in return for obedience of the laws of the State.

Thus, the post-truth rhetoric, in the context of Muzaffarnagar, led to the creation of multiple discourses of power, engendering subjects through the use of language, emotional appeal, and violence. While on the one hand, the response to the post-truth rhetoric created a right-wing discourse that led to the reassertion and consolidation of the imagined Hindu community, on the other hand, the response to the same post-truth rhetoric (within the large structure of electoral politics) led to the creation of a discourse of need economy for the Muslim population, whereby they were left at the mercy of the government for their means of sustenance. Thus, post-truth could also be attributed to the proliferation of discourses at the local level of governance, wherein, its weaponized information, leading to the creation of subjects through a practice of separation and distinction (Foucault 1978).

For the displaced Muslim population, the discourse of post-truth was inflicted in such a manner that they were transformed into powerless victims stuck within the space of a need economy playing the only kind of politics known to the governed. This facilitated the Samajwadi Party government's agenda of consolidating the Muslim electorate for the upcoming general elections of 2014.

In conclusion, the reaction of the Samajwadi party to the occurrence of the riots can be interpreted as their response to the post-truth rhetoric- perpetuation for the sake of larger electoral politics. The Samajwadi Party government did not want to lose out on the votes from the Jat community, neither did it want to risk losing out on the 22 per cent Muslim voters in the area. Additionally, the government thought it best to restrain them within the space of a need economy, so that the displaced population could be kept in check while also being dependent on the government for livelihood opportunities. Thus, this paper has tried to outline how the post-truth rhetoric was a means to locate the forms of power and the channels it takes, creating discourses in its wake to control the subjects for whom "truth" is the narrative produced within the discourse.

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