

The actual Gujarat model: Authoritarianism, capitalism, Hindu nationalism and populism in the time of Modi

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Abstract

Gujarat is Indian PM Modi's home State and training ground. Modi's 'Gujarat Model' is projected as growth and development oriented. I show the actual Gujarat model as top-down, favouring big business, and undergirded by violently practiced Hindu nationalism. The cult of the strongman leader-- directly attuned to his people, and above the corruption of politics as usual-- rounds off the authoritarian populist playbook. While the antecedents of this playbook are found in recent history, natural and political crises entrenched the Gujarat model under Modi. The leader and his New Gujarat have since been popularised across scale. The paper traces aggressively promoted business, and violently repressed dissent, in a sub- sub-national district. Then in the village hinterland, I engage those who witness and occasionally participate in the politics and economics of the Gujarat model. Yet here, capitalist development built on

precarious labour and jobless growth, as also the much-feted Hindu nation that is riven by contradictions of caste, class, region and gender, reveal deep fissures. Despite such cracks, deepening state authoritarianism, and the populist connect with a larger than life leader endure—for now-- in the absence of political alternatives.

Introduction

Authoritarian politics is visible in many parts of the world today. In Bolsonaro's Brazil, Erdogan's Turkey, Orban's Hungary, Putin's Russia and Modi's India's among many such examples, the state is increasingly centralising its authority. It is also allying ever more closely with big capital. For the bulk of the population, centralised authority is being exercised in a top-down, often repressive manner. To tighten this authoritarian hold, social control is being practiced via technologies of surveillance; powers of policing; and the skewing of institutions such as the courts, media, the armed forces, and regulators, in the service of the state. We are also witnessing a heightened nationalism around questions of blood and soil; and in many cases a politics of populism. Here a state that is controlled by, and beneficial for the few, reaches out to the many. It engenders a rhetoric that pitches a seemingly decadent old ruling elite, and the 'others' it has sheltered, e.g. immigrants and religious minorities, against the mass of the people. Authoritarian strongmen who undertake to deliver the homogenised people from the old order, tend to helm authoritarian states. The strongman demands unquestioned loyalty, and the power to clamp down on rights and liberties in exchange for the restoration of order, pride and security (Scoones et al 2018; Gokariksel et al 2019).

A growing literature outlines India's authoritarian turn (Kumar 2017; Chacko 2018; Chacko and Jayasuriya 2018; Nilsen 2018; Ahmad 2020). Scholars have pointed to India's right wing, Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the flagbearer of an increasingly authoritarian state, and of the populist politics that sustains it. Modi came to power in Delhi in 2014, leading his Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) to its largest ever victory in a national election. He fought on a pro-development, anti-corruption platform. His prime target was the centrist Congress Party, which has ruled India for much of its independent history. Modi successfully projected the leaders of the Congress, the mother-son duo of Sonia and Rahul Gandhi as rich and corrupt dynasts, who 'appease' Muslims, practice Christianity, and are anti-Hindu. In contrast, Modi was the Hindu Hriday Samrat (King of Hindu hearts),

who began life as a humble tea seller. Modi's 2014 campaign can be summed up in the aspirational slogan *acche din aane waale hain*, or good days are about to come. In 2019, despite declining economic development indicators, Modi led the BJP to an even bigger victory (Palshikar, Kumar and Shastri 2019). The party's vote share improved by 6 percentage points. Nilsen (2018) reminds us that the Modi narrative was never just about development or *acche din*. It was about 'drawing a line between true Indians and their enemies, and rallying popular support for a crackdown on those enemies.' Such a repressive, state-led crackdown has been visibly ratcheted up in Modi's second term (Ahmad 2020). It has been further unleashed on political dissidents; liberal universities; lower castes and labour making demands of the state; Muslims portrayed as dirty in their consumption of beef, and disloyal in their adherence to a religion that originated outside India; and in the Muslim-majority province of Kashmir.

Advancing extant scholarship, this paper explores the making of Indian authoritarianism in a multi-scalar manner. While much of the literature takes a macro view of authoritarian politics, I offer an inter- and multi-disciplinary analysis based on research in an important Indian State, and an administrative district, infrastructure zone, and villages within it. Gujarat is home to Prime Minister Modi. He was its Chief Minister from 2001-14. Modi used the success of his 'Gujarat model' to make a pitch for prime ministership. In glitzy campaign material, the Gujarat model is defined by high growth, development-oriented governance, and for making people active partners in the development journey (narendramodi.in 2014). Many have pointed to the flaws of the Gujarat model, which achieved growth without adequate job creation, or in which human development indicators suffered (Sood 2012; Sood and Kalaiyarasan 2014). Dreze (2017) goes so far as to call it the 'Gujarat muddle' pushed by PR exercises and big business, which have benefited from state largesse and subsidised infrastructure at the cost of the poor. Without getting into debates on high growth with, or versus, human development, I interrogate the infrastructure that made the Gujarat model possible. To me, this is the actual Gujarat model. In this, centralised, top-down, business-friendly development was undergirded by violently practised Hindu nationalism. Like on the national stage, Mr Modi set himself apart from the typical privileged politician, and directly reached out to '5 crore Gujaratis' in the popular term he coined (Sud 2012). It is this actual Gujarat model of authoritarianism, capitalism, Hindu nationalism and populism that has now gone national.

In Section 1, I connect a global trend towards authoritarianism, with the recent history of the Indian and Gujarati state. I delineate Gujarat's tryst with supreme leaders, as also the

converging projects of economic liberalisation and Hindu nationalism in the years preceding Modi. In Section 2, I turn to Modi's Gujarat. I show how Modi and the State were forged as brands with emotional and politico-economic resonance in the aftermath of rallying crises. Section 3 scales further down to the sub- sub-national, focusing on the administrative district of Kachchh. I explore the re-making of a supposed wasteland via capitalism and Hindu nationalism under a top-down state and its tough leader. Section 4 takes us to a large capitalist project nurtured in this Vibrant Kachchh. We also visit villages adjacent to this capitalist project to demonstrate how the actual Gujarat model is reproduced at the micro scale. Finally in Section 5, I am also able to interrogate cracks in the façade, by tracing the playing out of the model among the lives and struggles of ordinary people. The value of this paper lies in illuminating the hold—albeit not an invincible one—of the Gujarat model, right down to the small town and village. The model as we know it was built painstakingly over years. The same is the case for the national scale today. Behind the headline-grabbing events taking place in Modi's India lies a quotidian model-creep; ripe for further fine-grained and multi-scalar study.

In terms of method, the paper draws on a total of two years of qualitative field research. This has been conducted over time in Gujarat, western India since 2002. I have returned to Gujarat to understand its politics and governance, state-society relations, and state-business relations for different academic projects (Sud 2007a; 2012; 2014; 2020; forthcoming). Fieldwork lasting a few weeks, to a year has been conducted in 2002, 2003-04, 2008 and 2015. In this time, I have interviewed around two hundred civil servants, politicians, political intermediaries, industrialists, farmers, farm workers, those being dispossessed by development projects, NGO workers, journalists, activists and academics. In addition, I have conducted archival research, and examined policy, media and judicial documents. I have also closely observed some sites of study featured in this paper via ethnographic observation. When not in Gujarat, contact has been maintained with key informants online. Similarly, documentary and online sources have been followed from 2002 till date. Interviews have been conducted, and research material accessed in Hindi, English and Gujarati, which are languages I speak and read. For particular regions of Gujarat such as Kachchh, which have their own language, I have been able to communicate quite comfortably with key stakeholders in Hindi or Gujarati. The paper draws on this breadth of understanding to comment on a big theme of our times, but with the depth of sustained, multi-method research.

How did we get here? Authoritarian states in recent history, and the Indian case

The infrastructure that underlies authoritarianism is the close and mutually engendering alliance between the state and big capital. The state and capital have a longstanding association (Miliband 1969; Poulantzas 1973; Offe 1984; Jessop 2001). Yet as several scholars tell us, authoritarianism is an exceptional form of the state in the service of capital (Hall 1979; Poulantzas 2014; Ahmad 2020). The authoritarian turn in the capitalist state is attributed to moments of crisis, such as the crisis of Fordist production in the West in the 1970s and 80s (Chacko and Jayasuriya 2018). The *in situ* mass production for mass consumption of Fordism was replaced by more flexible arrangements of labour, production, marketing and consumption in the 1990s. This was made possible by the heightened temporal and geographical mobility afforded by globalisation, and by neoliberal market reform facilitated by states in the 1980s and 90s (Harvey 2003).

As states opened their markets to globalised trade and competition, they reduced taxation and welfare budgets, and undertook public sector disinvestment. In an increasingly competitive environment, they faced backlash from constituencies such as labour. It is in this churning that parts of the world witnessed an earlier phase of the phenomenon that we are discussing in this paper. Writing for Thatcherite Britain, Stuart Hall coined the term ‘authoritarian populism’ (1979). He identified the Conservative Thatcherite state quashing the rights of labour, while openly siding with the interests of big capital. State authority was arrogated and exercised via expanded policing, and the further control of media and education. Collectives such as ‘class’ and ‘unions’ were sought to be displaced with rallying discourses around ‘the people’ and ‘nation’. In Hall’s reading, the authoritarian, capitalist, populist state retained most though not all representative formal institutions. It also tried to maintain active popular consent around itself through a moral syntax of good versus evil, civilisation versus the uncivilised, and the choice between anarchy and order. The ‘need for authority’ was underlined to build consensus around the authoritarian capitalist complex.

The economic and political regimentation of Fordism did not apply to much of the Global South, which continued to have an economy that was largely unregulated by the state (Harriss-White 2003). Yet by the 1990s, globalisation, accompanied by neoliberal market reform was re-shaping states in the South, much like in the North. In the Indian case, we see unprecedented economic growth in the 1990s and 2000s, underpinned by a deepening state-business alliance (Sen and Kar 2014). The ‘business-friendly’ state as Rodrik and Subramanian (2004) and Kohli (2012) put it was also having to contend with reduced taxation and cuts to public spending,

discontent due to jobless growth, and a burgeoning informal sector. In this context, Chacko (2018) points to the state's ability for 'political incorporation' or accommodation of constituencies such as labour, and the asset-less poor in welfare programmes, being further undermined.

A decade and a half after initiating liberalisation in 1991, the Congress Party did implement a slew of welfare measures for 'inclusive growth'. These comprised among others the world's largest rural employment guarantee scheme, which goes by the acronym NREGA (Government of India 2005). Some scholars have indicated that these measures were also for building legitimacy for neoliberal reform and the deepening state-capital complex (Vasavi 2012; Jayal 2013). Drawing on Poulantzas (2014), Chacko (2018) categorises post-liberalisation India as turning towards 'authoritarian statism'. Here even as those left behind by neoliberal reform were being weakly incorporated, or not quite incorporated, the state was tending towards more technocratic and depoliticised forms of governance. The unelected National Advisory Council headed by the Congress Party President, which ran parallel to the Prime Minister's Office and commanded massive power, is an example of this (ibid.; Baru 2014).

The post-liberalisation state's concentration of power, and its undermining of democratic politics is also visible in the handling of a Far-Left insurgency in central and eastern India. Then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called this the 'single biggest internal security challenge ever faced' by India (Press Trust of India 2010). To counter this challenge, Singh's government deployed unprecedented security forces in insurgent regions. It also propped up a vigilante army of local indigenous peoples to fight the guerrillas on the ground. Scholars are critical of these measures for increasing the coercive powers of the state, and for bypassing legislative and participatory modes of governance (Sundar 2016). The point being made here is that well before Narendra Modi took over, India had embraced a form of neo-liberalisation that privileged big business (Kohli 2012), and that weakly incorporated the poor. Crises of welfare and politics were dealt with in a manner that further centralised state power in executive, non-democratic decision-making. From this point, and building on the crony capitalist crises of corruption that this far from democratic or consultative system generated (Sen and Kar 2014), India entered an even more authoritarian era under the BJP in 2014. The failures of the Congress-led government-- its seeming tendency of being cut-off from the masses, its apparent reaching out to them via welfare 'handouts', its business-friendly corrupt

dealings, and the elitism of its leadership-- all fed into the current stage of India's authoritarian turn under the strongman, populist rule of Narendra Modi.

Gujarat's trajectory to authoritarian capitalism: supreme leaders, business-friendly liberalisation, and the appeal of Hindu nationalism

Like India, Gujarat shows an increasing centralisation of power in contemporary times. This is expressed in repressive authority and the undermining of democratic checks and balances in the post-liberalisation period, and especially since Modi's ascendance to power as Chief Minister in 2001. I will say more about this below. At the same time, like India, it would be hard to argue for a steady state of democratic or participatory governance in any period of Gujarat's post-independence history. The politics of independent Gujarat from 1947 reflected the legacies of the freedom movement. In that movement, the figure of the disciplined and idealistic leader or *sarvocch neta* had commanded respect and authority. While *netā* means leader, *sarvocch* tellingly translates to tallest, or highest, with a veneer of unquestionability around himⁱⁱ. It is the *sarvocch* who directed people towards civil disobedience against the British, say by non-payment of farm taxes (Yagnik and Sheth 2005; Chaturvedi 2007). While M.K. Gandhi is the most prominent leader of the movement for Indian independence to originate from Gujarat, his attention was trained largely on the national stage. In the region, it is Vallabhbhai Patel who held the mantle of the *sarvocch*. Patel is idealised by Narendra Modi and the BJP machinery today.

Vallabhbhai Patel was a Congressman all his adult life, but the BJP has tried to constantly colour him as having lost out to Jawaharlal Nehru in the race for India's prime ministership after independence. The figure of Patel, the son of the soil Gujarati compared to Nehru's Harrow and Cambridge educated patrician figure, has been in play in contemporary elections. Modi has even avenged Patel's purported belittling by Nehru and the Indian political elite by building a 182-metre statue of the 'iron man' in Gujarat. This statue, the tallest in the world as media and promotional material keeps informing us, is revealingly called the Statue of Unity. It is meant to rally Indians around what Patel may represent, but also around the figure of the man under whose watch the idol was built. In a later section, I will return to the statue's role in the politics around my village field site. In the discussion here, I wanted to point to the continuities between pre- and post-independence Gujarat, and the present. Narendra Modi's masterful weaving of this continuity into a narrative that is of advantage to him is worth noting.

Just as tall, ‘iron’ leaders who command the politics of the state go across the periods of Gujarat’s history, so does a close relationship between the state and business. As a mercantile society with the longest seacoast in India, manufacturing and trading capital has been prominent in the history and politics of Gujarat (Mehta 1990; Haynes 1991). Big business, especially in the textile sector, supported and funded the independence movement. They continued having significant clout in post-independence policy making (Chibber 2003). Thus, even as the post-independence period is seen as one of state-led development, it was also one of state-capital engagement (Vanaik 1990). This is visible in the post-independence Gujarat state’s attempts to redistribute land from large semi-feudal landholders to tenant tillers and the landless. Land reform was aimed at efficiency, agricultural productivity, and social justice — in that order (Shah and Sah 2002). Gujarat’s early state was able to carry out land reform in favour of tenant farmers, thus laying the base for the ‘green revolution’ of cash cropped, irrigated and chemically fertilised agriculture. Yet this same state was unable to make land reach landless agricultural labour. Its early interventions were pro-capital but not pro-labour—in agriculture and industry (Sud 2012).

The post-independence state tended to comprise elites who worked for economically powerful groups in society. It was also a ‘state above society’ as Alavi (1972) astutely put it. It ruled from above, in often technocratic ways—say via the regime of planning. Yet the state’s ‘command’ politics was interspersed with ‘demand’ politics (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). These demands were made vociferously by groups in society that were not quite incorporated in state initiatives such as land reform. When land reform did not achieve its redistributive ends, a series of anti-poverty measures were initiated for those without permanent assets. Starting in the late 1960s, this was the origin of nation-wide anti-poverty programmes, with Gujarat as a prominent participant (Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Guhan 2001; Sud 2007a). NREGA is a millennial version of a long line of poverty alleviating measures. All such initiatives are the state’s attempt at reaching different sections of the population, especially those left out of direct linkages to capitalist development.

Gujarat’s state’s ability to try and reach a cross-section of the population weakened after liberalisation. This is reflected in policy priorities, as also in budgetary allocation for the social sector. With regard to policy, we see a decisive shift towards attracting capitalist investment into large scale infrastructure and industry in the period of liberalisation. I will turn once again to the example of land, as it anchors the economic, spatial and political shift the state was trying

to bring about. In attempting land reform in the post-independence period, the state promoted the slogan ‘land to the tiller’. As we have seen, in practice, this ended up being land for the tenant tiller and ‘bullock capitalist’ (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987), rather than for the landless labourer. However in the 1990s, the ruling consensus was that even the pretence of land for peasant agriculture had to be done away withⁱⁱⁱ. Land had to decisively move to the service of big capital. It is in this context that throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Gujarat’s state undertook far-reaching measures that can be termed the liberalisation of land (Sud 2007b). Among these were removing residential restrictions on the buying and selling of land, so that individuals or firms not local to an area could invest in it. Conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes was made smoother in the mid-1990s, with little regulatory oversight for industrial plots under 10 hectares.

The opening up of land for big capital has been steady, and has gone across ruling party and leadership regimes. Yet, under Narendra Modi’s chief ministership, the scale of what was being attempted amplified significantly. This is in the form of the land mass that the state was willing to shift to private industry and agriculture. It also includes the will of the state to get behind its chosen economic players. Thus in its Industrial Policy of 2003, the state had undertaken to invoke the emergency clause of the Land Acquisition Act to acquire land speedily for industry (Government of Gujarat 2003). The Land Acquisition Act of 1894, and its successor Act of 2013 allow the state to take over private land for an ostensibly public purpose, including the establishment of private infrastructure or industry, provided these serve ends such as employment generation. This Act has been widely used and mis-used in the post-liberalisation period in the service of capital (Lobo and Kumar 2009; Sud 2014).

By 2005, the state had opened up 4.6 million hectares of its so-called wasteland, including pasture, to private industry and infrastructure development (Sud, forthcoming). Around the same time, Gujarat’s state preceded the Indian union in promulgating a Special Economic Zone Act, 2004. SEZs are trade and manufacturing capacity development tools, defined by policy incentives aimed at encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), technology innovations and exports. A developer anchors an SEZ. The developer is responsible for all necessary approvals from governments across scale, for acquiring land and setting up infrastructure like power, water, waste disposal, etc. Once an SEZ starts taking shape, it can invite manufacturers into the facility for a rental. SEZs, whether they are single or multi-product, tend to cover vast areas and have thus proved controversial for their use of resources, including land and water, to the

detriment of local populations (see Jenkins et al 2014). Gujarat's SEZ Act gives the Special Economic Zone Authority, helmed by the senior-most bureaucrat in the State, the power to acquire land for an SEZ, or transfer government land to it (Government of Gujarat 2004). Under the auspices of this Act, India's largest SEZ measuring several thousand hectares has been set up in Gujarat. I will return to this point in a later section.

The Gujarat state's ambitions around the liberalisation of land have only grown over time. In 2009 it declared a Special Investment Region Act (Government of Gujarat 2009). SIRs are meant to be much larger than SEZs in size, and more flexible in scope. They can produce for the domestic market, and are mixed-use spaces, with substantial provision for townships and related use. While other parts of the country have also initiated SIRs, Gujarat was quick to announce the largest SIR first off the mark. Initial plans were for a landmass of 903 square kilometres (Phadnis 2013). While the SEZ Act of 2004 has a senior state bureaucrat heading the relevant regulatory authority, the 2009 SIR Act is governed by a Regional Development Authority (RDA) with a Chair and Vice-Chair 'appointed by the State Government'. These appointees are not specified as government employees, though in addition 'two officials of the State Government' are nominated on to the RDA. Further representatives 'from industry and [the] business sector' are invited to the RDA (Government of Gujarat 2009a: 7-8). This mixed body of individuals from the state, and from the corporate sector, have the power to 'undertake the management and planning of land' and infrastructure in the SIR. While setting up the SIR, it is this authority that is able to acquire land in the SIR, as also use powers of 'sale, lease, grant, allocation, donation, or consent' to aggregate land for the project (Government of Gujarat 2009a: 10). Not only has Gujarat's state gone decisively from ideas of land to the tiller, to rampant land liberalisation in the post-1991 period, this state has also allowed private interests to regulate how land is used for projects of capital accumulation. In amalgamating these private interests into regulatory authorities that control vast space and therefore power, the state has encouraged a further technocratisation and privatisation of governance. This form of governance takes the state, and quasi-state of private interests, above society and beyond legislative, democratic politics. Such developments are ripe for the manipulations of strongman rule from above, tied in to the agendas of capital.

As Gujarat's state has inched closer to capital under its big business friendly policies and practices of liberalisation, its budgetary allocation towards social spending has also been reduced. We see this throughout the 1990s and beyond. In official statistics, social sector

spending covers a range of activities including social housing, health and education, rural and urban development, labour welfare, warehousing and food storage, and expenditure on natural calamities among others (Reserve Bank of India 2006). Allocation for these activities was 36.4% of the total budget in 1990-91. By 2001-02 it was 35.2%, further falling to 29% in 2004-05 (Reserve Bank of India 2006: Statement 50). While declining budgets affected the state's ability to carry out anti-poverty measures, such measures did continue. I have argued elsewhere that under financial constraints, the competition for benefiting from the state's social spending was intense. In this context, the state decidedly favoured Hindu groups over others (Sud 2007a). This is no coincidence. Mass outreach via economic redistribution was no longer possible even as an idea, let alone in practice. Yet the state and those in power still had to engage publics beyond private industrialists or infrastructure builders. The biggest such umbrella group was Hindus, the majority religion of Gujarat. In 2001, Gujarat had 45 million Hindus. Muslims, the second largest religious group were significantly behind at 4.5 million people (Census of India 2001). Hindu nationalism had been politically ascendant in Gujarat from the 1990s, as I trace below. By the early 2000s, its effects were even being felt on thinned down poverty alleviation measures. In field research, I found state officials describing Hindus such as themselves as a '*qaum*', or community^{iv}. This *quam* was Gujarati, whereas those belonging to other religions were 'non-Gujarati' (Sud 2007a). While Gujaratis, i.e. Hindus deserved to benefit from state measures, non-Gujaratis, i.e. non-Hindus were undeserving outsiders.

The convergence of Hindu nationalism and the workings of the Gujarat state has been written about extensively elsewhere (Sud 2007a; 2012). In brief, the upper caste Hindus of Gujarat 'revolted' (Corbridge and Harriss 2000) against the umbrella or incorporating politics of the Congress party in the early to mid-1980s. They were in particular repelled by that Party's attempt to incorporate lower castes and Muslims in its leadership structures, in order to keep its electoral constituencies broad. The upper caste Hindus were emboldened by the rise of the newly created BJP in that decade. The BJP won its first local election in Gujarat in 1987, and formed a coalition government against the Congress in 1990. From 1998, the Party has held unbroken power in Gujarat. From being a largely upper caste party, it has tried to construct umbrella Hindu support around its slogan of 'one nation, one culture, one people'. Throughout the 1990s, the Party has made every attempt to fill state executive as well as legislative positions with personnel with Hindu nationalist leanings. In 1999, the then BJP Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel even lifted a longstanding ban on government employees joining the RSS.

The RSS is the far-right ideological parent of the Hindu nationalist movement that draws inspiration from Hitler's ideas, for its own propounding of a pure nation of Hindus (Basu et al 1993; Hansen and Jaffrelot 2001). Mr Modi's BJP is the political arm of the RSS. In fact, Modi began political life as a member of the RSS, and went on to become a full-time proselytiser or *pracharak* for that organisation.

Throughout the 1990s and certainly in the new millennium, the Gujarat state's outreach to the masses has taken on Hindu nationalist overtones. This mass outreach has been coterminous with a growing closeness to capital, and porosity between the agendas and workings of the state and those of capital. The coming together of business-friendly liberalisation, Hindu nationalism, and the state has been striking. However, what makes this trajectory extraordinary is a moment of crisis. In this moment, seized upon by a strongman, lies the tipping over of Gujarat from a polity dominated by Hindu nationalism and business-friendly capitalism, to one that is also in the grip of a populist, authoritarian strongman. Authoritarianism has allowed for the continuation of unequal, unjust capitalist development, and further whipped up religious nationalist fervour in the name of the hard done by 'people'.

Brand Modi and Brand Gujarat

Till he became the State's Chief Minister in 2001, Narendra Modi had never fought an election (Chatterjee 2017). Stunningly, in a country that prides itself on being the 'world's largest democracy', a man could become the head of government of a State of 50.7 million people, i.e. roughly the population of South Korea or England, without even having fought a city or village council election. Modi's ideological mentors in the top-down, upper caste, all-male RSS had deployed him to various roles in the BJP machinery in the 1990s. It is they who designated him as Gujarat's head of government. Mr Modi was parachuted into his new role at a delicate time. A massive earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter Scale had hit the State in January 2001. The epicentre was in Kachchh district, Gujarat's westernmost administrative region. Kachchh shares a border with Pakistan across the Rann of Kachchh desert. It is also open to maritime movement from Pakistan and further afield thanks to a long coastline along the Arabian Sea. Mr Modi's predecessor Keshubhai Patel had come under a lot of flak for botching up post-earthquake rehabilitation in Kachchh (Yagnik and Sheth 2005). This was reflected in falling election figures in local body elections like city councils (Yagnik and Sud 2004). Mr Modi was given the charge of resurrecting the BJP's declining fortunes in a bellwether State.

Soon after Modi came to power, Gujarat witnessed one of the worst instances of ethnic violence in the history of independent India. Gujarat had experienced violence aimed largely at lower castes, Christians and Muslims in the past. Yet ‘Gujarat 2002’ was unprecedented. There were approximately 2,000 deaths, the majority being of Muslims (Human Rights Watch 2002). Around 150,000 people were displaced. Property worth Rs 38 billion was destroyed, as were 272 Muslim places of worship. Hindus also suffered, and the BJP led by Mr Modi has held on to the theory that Muslim aggression initiated the violence. Irrespective of trigger, Mr Modi has been widely blamed for failing to contain the violence that happened under his leadership. Independent reports from former judges, media organisations and international organisations like Human Rights Watch have charged Mr Modi’s administration for commission, not just omission (Human Right Watch 2002, Concerned Citizens Tribunal 2002). Uncomfortable with conflict, even big business that had for long been attracted to Gujarat, threatened to take flight (Guzder 2002; Times of India 2002). The powerful Confederation of Indian Industry publicly reprimanded the Gujarat administration for the events of 2002 (Das Gupta, Das and Chatterjee 2013).

Despite national and international criticism, many sections of society, business and politics supported Mr Modi for upholding the pride of Hindus against real or imagined Muslim aggression. He was incarnated by these sections as a Hindu Hriday Samrat or King of Hindu Hearts. He did much to underline this image, taking out a Gaurav Yatra, or March of Pride, when Gujarat was being criticised for its human rights record with regard to religious minorities. In the midst of this opposition and proposition around the figure of Mr Modi, a group of Gujarati industrialists stood by Mr Modi. They publicly applauded his leadership, and promised to support Gujarat’s efforts to emerge from the violence and reputational damage of 2002, as also from the material damage of the 2001 earthquake. Known as the ‘Resurgent Group of Gujarat’ (Financial Express 2003), this collective from Gujarat’s big business threw its weight behind Mr Modi (Jaffrelot 2019). This is also the time that he was anointed as ‘Chote Sardar’, or a younger version of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the sarvocch neta of the freedom movement from Gujarat. Modi’s supposed iron handling of ‘Muslim-initiated disorder’ had handed over the mantle of Gujarat’s modern iron man to him. It also linked him quite conveniently to the morality and authority that the Gujarati leadership of the independence movement commanded in the minds of present day Gujaratis^v.

With large sections of Hindu Gujaratis supporting Mr Modi, as also Gujarati big business, he led the BJP to its biggest ever victory in State elections in December 2002. From this point onwards, we see Modi forging a 'New Gujarat'. The New Gujarat of Chief Minister Modi was a potent mixture of aggressive Hindu-Gujarati pride, and business-friendly liberalisation. The state, centralised in the unquestioned control of the Chief Minister's Office, was the flag-bearer of Hindu nationalism, as also capitalism that openly favoured big business (Sud 2012; Mukhopadhyay 2013). What set this dispensation further apart was the cult of the strongman leader. With branding consultancy provided by top international firms like Mott Macdonald and APCO Worldwide, Modi actively transformed his image from the tainted leader of Gujarat 2002 to the 'Number 1 Chief Minister of India'. Billboards, newspaper advertisements, books, films, and comic strips extolling the virtues of Mr Modi flooded Gujarat. It was impossible to open a government website without having his images and achievements beamed at you. In reinventing himself, Modi sought to form a direct connect with Gujaratis. He spoke to 5 crore Gujaratis as his people. He also set up mechanisms for direct interaction between the chief minister and the populace—including a designated e-mail address. Later on, this direct contact shifted to web platforms like Twitter, on which Modi commands a formidable following. In his own projection as the sarvocch leader who is above all, and directly connects to the people, Modi has undercut the state machinery, and the BJP party organisation. If the state or party were not working directly with him, or according to his bidding, they were projected as being against the interests of Gujarat.

One point where we see the coming together of the BJP machinery, and the state administration in the service of 5 crore Gujaratis and their leader Modi, is the business summit Vibrant Gujarat. Vibrant Gujarat was Modi's idea to rebrand the tainted image of Gujarat after the violence of 2002. It was a business summit started in January 2003 to coincide with the Hindu Gujarati festival of Utrayan. In the days the bi-annual summit was being held, the state and political machinery was deployed in its service. Micro-managed by Modi, senior bureaucrats would be given charge of making summit arrangements, feeding top business delegates from India and abroad, or escorting them around the city and State. In the newspapers the next day, Gujaratis and India would see pictures of Mr Modi, shaking hands and signing MoUs with major industrialists. By 2007, one of India's top industrialists Ratan Tata was the Summit's chief guest. In images flashed across India, we see him warmly shaking Modi's hand after announcing, 'it's stupid if you are not in Gujarat' (Sud 2012). India's richest man, the billionaire business conglomerate Mukesh Ambani indulgently looks on as this public

spectacle unfolds^{vi}. Tata eventually set up a state-of-the-art facility for manufacturing India's smallest and cheapest, 'people's car' in Gujarat. He was personally welcomed to the State, and given a range of facilities by CM Modi (Sud 2008). Other major business houses from India and abroad also flocked to Gujarat, attracted by huge incentives in the form of cheap land, environmental and tax concessions, and soft loans among others. Often, their dealings were directly with the Chief Minister's Office, or with the highest officials in the state, handpicked and micro-managed by the Chief Minister's Office.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that Modi's post-2002, aggressively developmental 'New Gujarat' was a brand. Vibrant Gujarat was just one of the associated brands in Modi's repertoire. Brands are product marketing tools that seek a direct and emotional connect with their audience. Brands evoke feelings; they elevate a product above its commodity use to the realm of emotions, passion, and loyalty. With market liberalisation, it is not just goods and services that have been increasingly branded. States (van Ham 2001) and political leaders (Kaur 2015) have sought brand status. Brand campaigns such as Incredible India have been used to aggressively market territory for global private investment (Kaur 2020), with leaders like Mr Modi being integral to the making of the brand. Brand Modi's appeal lay in his energy and innovation, say in coming up with a business summit like Vibrant Gujarat which took the idea of a business-friendly, modern Gujarat to key national and international stakeholders. Simultaneously, his appeal lay in his connect with the people. It is to evoke feelings of unquestioned loyalty, and to almost elevate himself above personhood—which can be human and therefore flawed—that Mr Modi inculcated the habit of referring to himself in the third person in speeches and written communiques. Modi in the third person would remind his fans and followers that unlike mere mortals in dirty politics, who were in it for fame or fortune for themselves and their progeny, he was a celibate bachelor. He had no desire for worldly possessions or fame; he was totally dedicated to 'the people'. Just as new products are often accompanied by innovative and aggressive branding campaigns, post-2002 Modi as also post-2002 Gujarat were innovatively and aggressively marketed. A new Chief Minister, unblemished by the old ways, would forge a New Gujarat.

Even as the post-liberalisation, branded cult of Modi was being intertwined with the narrative of the New Gujarat model of capitalist development, the spectre of the Muslim terrorist was growing. From 2002, there was a spate of 'encounter' or extra-judicial killings carried out by the police machinery. The National Human Rights Commission of India recorded 22 such

encounters till 2006 (Katakam 2016). Many were linked to a purported threat to the Chief Minister's life. For instance, in a much-publicised case from 2004, a young Muslim girl was among those gunned down by the police on a highway in Gujarat. Apparently Ishrat Jahan and her three male companions were on their way to assassinate the CM (Dhara 2018). As a pliant media made much of the threat from the 'other' to the Hindu Hriday Samrat and his subject populace, the Gujarat Assembly passed the draconian Gujarat Control of Organised Crime Bill 2003. This Bill gives the state overwhelming powers to ostensibly control terror. In practice, critics fear the state would use the Bill to persecute its detractors and those it construes as 'the other'. For instance the Bill allows the state to use intercepted telephone conversations as evidence in court. The state can also institute special courts, and appoint special public prosecutors for tackling terrorism and organised crime. Again, legislation such as this undercuts existing institutions and sets up a parallel machinery to meet the agenda set by a centralised, aggressive and partisan leadership. Today such draconian Acts are being used against minorities and dissenters across India.

The making of New Kachchh

In this section, I will scale down from sub-national Gujarat and its authoritarian, populist, capitalist and Hindu nationalist mix. I will now show the latter convergence playing out at the sub- sub-national scale. How is the defining politics of contemporary Gujarat received and reproduced, or refracted, at scales beyond the immediate domain of the authoritarian populist leadership? After all, focusing on the macro scale does not tell us why the New Gujarat model of Modi has held over time, and space. As the rise of Modi became synonymous with the rise of a New, assertive and overtly Hindu Gujarat, one district or administrative sub-region came to symbolise this dispensation. Kachchh is Gujarat's largest district. It is to the extreme west of the State, and shares a long coastal and desert border with Pakistan. In a way, Kachchh was responsible for the boost to Modi's career. He was elevated to chief ministership to sort out the BJP's declining fortunes in the aftermath of an earthquake, and criticised rehabilitation efforts. From 2001-02, the district has been re-forged as New Kachchh in New Gujarat under Mr Modi.

The aggressive, branded and New under an authoritarian, populist strongman seeks the erasure of the old. The 'disruptive' earthquake of 2001 was opportune for the deployment of a new vision (Simpson 2013). I argue that this vision is capitalist, Hindu nationalist, and promoted through loyalty, obedience and acquiescence with the populist leader. In promoting the new, the old has been set aside, even denigrated. Take Kachchh's territorial geography for instance.

Just as ‘Gujarat’ the post-2002 brand was being sold via business development summits (Bobbio 2012), post-earthquake, post-2002 Kachchh too was being newly branded and marketed. A Dalal Mott Macdonald report on the ‘potential’ for development of Kachchh highlights its ‘extreme richness’ of untapped mineral wealth, underused agricultural strengths, and ‘underdeveloped’ industry (Gujarat Infrastructure Development Board 2005). This untapped, underdeveloped region is displayed to business investors through summits like ‘Vibrant Kachchh’ (Desh Gujarat 2017). These summits showcase the ‘untapped’ *terra nullius*-like potential of Kachchh, and inform prospective investors about the incentives the state is willing to lay out for them to attract them to this site. The tagline of some of these summits, tellingly, is ‘Kutch Goes Global’.

In this context of the branding and making of a New Kachchh, Simpson (2013) points to a ‘hyperbolic’ capitalist imaginary. Today the industrial and infrastructural landscape of Kachchh is littered with factories and related facilities that come with overstated taglines of ‘ultra mega’ power plants, ‘major players’, ‘five star’, the ‘world’s largest coal import terminal’, ‘India’s largest commercial port’, ‘leading’, ‘superior’, ‘commanding position’, ‘state of the art’, etc. However to get to this place of bigger, better, faster, more, the high state centred on the Chief Minister’s Office has had to work closely with big business. To kickstart the transformation of Kachchh, the Government of Gujarat announced a Kachchh Package under the stewardship of Chief Minister Modi. Between 2001 and 2009, 102 new industries were provided tax and other incentives to the tune of INR 5840.71 crores (INR 58.41 billion, or USD 0.8 billion). These industries were dedicated to the manufacture of iron and steel, export-quality industrial pipes, glass, televisions, refrigerators and other large consumer electronics, billets, chemicals, construction material, agricultural machinery, food products, consumer goods like detergents, etc. (Government of Gujarat 2009b). A new infrastructure of ports, railway lines, high-tech internet connectivity, highways, power plants, Special Economic Zones and industrial parks would support the manufacturing economy, and convey its products to global markets. Reconstructed and new settlements in industrial townships, and expanded urban and rural sites would house the workers and managers of the transforming economy.

Interestingly, in this context of making capitalist value out of so-called waste, the rich maritime and commercial past of Kachchh is sought to be erased. This region has been at the heart of Indian Ocean trade for centuries. Historians have recorded its thriving port towns (Saxena 2014), and longstanding tradition of boat building and seafaring (Simpson 2006). Muslim

rulers, merchants, seafarers, craftspeople and others are central to this history (Sheikh 2010). In the new branding of Gujarat and Kachchh, a pastiche of tradition is indeed sold to investors and tourists. But this is in the form of vast deserts, glistening salt pans, women in ‘traditional’ ‘tribal’ costumes doing embroidery and dancing to folk tunes^{vii}. A 2010 advertising campaign titled *Khushboo Gujarat Ki*, or the *Fragrance of Gujarat*, headlined by India’s Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan, lingers on vistas from Kachchh. These veer towards the ‘natural’ and ‘wild’, or the Hindu traditional. The advertisements centered on Kachchh focus on the Hindu festival of Navratri, and the simplicity of an untapped land that the superstar himself terms ‘barren’^{viii}. This barrenness is to be celebrated via state-sponsored extravaganzas such as Rann Utsav, or the Festival of the Rann (Desert) of Kachchh. At the same time, the barrenness is to be nurtured into vibrance by capital.

The Hindu-isation of Kachchh has been accompanied by the propping up of new icons that suit the new leadership and party in power. We have seen the deification of Vallabhbhai Patel in a previous section. In Kachchh, the BJP has tried to resurrect further icons, local to the area. Simpson (2013) suggests this projection of alternate heroes seeks to displace Gandhi as the father of India’s freedom movement, and then of an independent nation. Apart from being a Congressman and close to Nehru, Gandhi is seen as effete and too tolerant of India’s religious diversity. The BJP is built around a muscular nationalism where sons of Mother India (Bharat Mata) will protect her from enemies within and without. The enemy is often the Muslim as we have seen, including in neighbouring Muslim-majority Bangladesh and Pakistan. There is a long history of Hindu nationalists projecting Muslims as virile, and lusting after Hindu women to grow their numbers and take over India demographically. Modi often calls himself a son of Mother India, and underlines his masculine power with references to his 56 inch chest (Sandhu 2014). While Modi is the masculine son of India today, he seeks to associate his politics with other icons of masculinity from the past. In this context, a son of Kachchh, the hitherto little known Shyamji Krishna Verma has been resurrected (Simpson 2013). Verma was a lawyer who practiced in Europe, but advocated vociferously for Indian independence. His methods were not shy of violence, and included the advocacy of political assassination and use of weaponry. In 2003 Chief Minister Modi himself received the ashes of Verma that were reclaimed by the Government of Gujarat from Geneva. These were taken through Kachchh in a cavalcade over 12 days, and housed in what is now a much-visited museum dedicated to Verma. Subsequently, the international airport and a major public university were named after him (Simpson 2013).

Today when admirers of the Gujarat model pushed by Mr Modi speak in awe about the ‘transformation of Kachchh’, or the ‘totally changed face of Kachchh’, they are referring to the new, hyperbolic capitalism^{ix}. They are also likely referring to a new, more Hindu region of a Hindu Gujarat with a changed iconography pushed by the state and muscular, populist strongman leader from above.

A Zone of capital in New Kachchh, and its hinterland

One of the symbols of the rapid transformation of Kachchh in the new millennium is the Zone as I pseudonymously call it. The Zone began life in the early 1990s with a lease of 3000 acres of coastal land from the state. By 1998, this land was hosting a private jetty for export. With the announcement of the State SEZ Policy in 2004, the Zone was converted into an SEZ, and also expanded into a waterfront development project, with multiple ports. By the time I visited the Zone in 2008, its officials cited its surface area covering 32,000 hectares^x. This was also the time of the international financial crisis. As the export market took a hit, the Zone morphed again. Its influential Gujarati developer converted part of the Zone for servicing domestic manufacturing and logistics. More recently, government figures list the officially notified SEZ area of the larger Zone as under 6500 hectares (Government of Gujarat 2019). The remaining area hosts ‘ultra mega’ coal-based power production^{xi}, land for industrial lease, and a proposed copper refinery and renewable energy producing site.

A huge and nimble Zone of multiple purposes and regulatory framings creates shock and awe in New Kachchh. It symbolises the aggressiveness and will of the Modi-led state to renew Kachchh and Gujarat through globally competitive big business and infrastructure projects. Yet, a great deal of privilege and closeness to state power has allowed the ever-changing Zone to reach its place of dominance. As an employee of the Zone told me in an interview a decade ago, the Zone’s developer maintains a “*ghar jaisa*”, homely or family-like relationship with key officials and politicians in the state administration^{xii}. The key relationship is with the all-powerful, highly centralised Chief Minister’s Office. To my possibly naïve question about the Chief Minister’s interest in the Zonal project, the latter employee laughed and told me the senior-most politician in the land had visited the Zone often. In fact he travelled to the Zone in the Company’s airplane. “Huge”^{xiii}, all-encompassing projects like the Zone which don’t hide their closeness to power, are categorised in telling ways by the local population. For the former headman of a village that lies adjacent to the Zone, the Zone and its controlling Company are

now the biggest *zamindar* or landholder of the area. This has been possible because of their clout in the region and Gujarat more broadly. “They have a say in all big political matters in Gujarat”. Relatedly, they are also one of the biggest donors to the party in power^{xiv}. In a similar vein, a journalist who has covered the Zone for many years underlines the influence the Zone enjoys. It has a “hotline” to the state. “Government documents are even made in the Zone and sent to the government to sign”^{xv}.

In their many interactions, capital represented by the Zone, and the highest echelons of the state of Gujarat represented by the Chief Minister’s Office, seem more and more proximate. Through the circulation of talk, perception and even rumour, the proximity between the CM’s office and the private developer of the Zone is reaching legendary status in my site of research. I will shortly turn to how the populace that lives around the Zone engages with this symbol of hyperbolic, state-promoted capitalism. Here, I want to point to how the Zone itself engages with the larger populace, and with the Hindu nationalism that drives its ruling structures.

As indicated above, Kachchh has a long coastline that is easily accessible from neighbouring Pakistan. The district also shares a substantial land border with Pakistan along the Rann (Desert) of Kachchh. Newspapers and rumour in Kachchh regularly publicise border crossings over land and sea, stories of arrests and escapes of Pakistani terrorists, sometimes in the garb of traders, itinerants, fishworkers, etc. (Ibrahim 2009). In this fraught context, as the area is undergoing ‘development’ via the Zone, its business promoters also profess to make it more secure. The security concerns of a sensitive border region are taken very seriously by Zone officials that I interviewed. Unsurprisingly, the border, with The Zone as the vanguard, has an ‘other’—Muslim fishworkers, who are also land and livelihood losers, and occasional challengers to the project. My interviewees question the territorial presence, and even national belonging and citizenship of the fish workers. They tell me with theatrical flourish,

... where are the fisherfolks’ colonies? Do you smell any fish in the villages here? Some [fish workers] even have Pakistani links. How does one stop terrorism? If we try to expand [the Zone] *hara jhanda dal ke baith jata hai* [they will install a green flag (representing Islam) and settle here]... they will say there is a dargah [mausoleum, usually built in the tradition of Sufi mysticism within Islam] here...

- Zone officials, interviewed in the Zone, 22/12/2008

My interviews at The Zone were conducted a month after the 26/11 attacks on Bombay, in which terrorists are believed to have entered the city in boats. Referring to these attacks, my informants went on:

... Look at the terrorism in Bombay... to stop [it], we could block Pakistan from Gujarat. But how to help it when they look like us, and can get help from people here. [For example] the fisherfolk you are talking about, only some may be genuine fisherfolk. How do we know what the others do?

- Two Zone officials, interviewed on site, 22/12/2008

While some communities and religious artefacts are to be reviled and highlighted as dangerous and illegitimate in and around the Zone, others are to be celebrated. Thus guarding the coast within the Zone is a temple to the Hindu god Hanuman. My informants proudly tell me “Hanuman is *pawan putra* [son of the wind god], he controls winds and storms”.^{xvi} Ignoring environmental caution, the Zone is built in a cyclone-prone area. The spirit of the wind god is thus being invoked to protect the Zone, its workers and promoters from the furies of nature. Through their speech and actions, the makers and managers of the Zone are also invoking protection from the real or imagined furies of the Muslim-Pakistani other. The Kachchhi fishworkers of this area have been designated the anti-national other, as have any activists, media persons etc. who question the resource-heavy model of Kachchh’s development^{xvii}.

The material, but also cultural, moral and discursive landscaping of the Zone affirms the control of its new owners over a potentially contentious territory. It also aligns them visibly, and repeatedly, with the powers that be in the State. In its own territory, by building the temple to Hanuman in the face of supposedly aggressive Muslim and Pakistani others, the Zone is aligning with the nation-wide narrative of reclaiming Hindu pride. With its actions, the Zone is also deepening its alliance with the Hindu nationalist ruling party, and its model of business-friendly governance in Gujarat. Interestingly, in the Hindu epic Ramayan, Hanuman is Ram’s devoted servant. In the religio-capitalist iconography of contemporary Gujarat, the Zone too is in service to the larger Hindu nationalist, developmental project led by the Ram-like leader Mr Modi. It is no coincidence that Modi’s mentor organisation the RSS has adopted Ram’s saffron flag as its own. Members of the RSS and BJP have been known to categorise Modi as a modern-day incarnation of Ram (NDTV 2018). A longstanding Hindu nationalist project to build a temple to Ram at his birthplace in Ayodhya popularised the BJP and its affiliates across India in the late 1980s and 90s. The temple is to be built at a spot where a mosque once stood. It was

destroyed by Hindu nationalists during a concerted attack in 1992. But it is only in 2019 that a drawn-out court case on the matter was settled in the Supreme Court in favour of the temple movement. That this case came to fruition under the leadership of Modi has not been lost on his followers. Once again, he stands out for them among a panoply of Hindu leaders. The Zone of my study has done well to recognise Modi-as-Ram's unique powers, and align with him in terms of political economy, as also symbolism.

At this juncture, it is important to ask how the tea-seller who relates to the masses via populist distancing from the elite, reconciles with the god-like, awe inspiring imagery surrounding the leader cosy with big business. There are several points of accord in this apparent contradiction. One, many in the Resurgent Group of Gujarati industrialists have taken pains to showcase their own 'humble' origins. For instance, much is made of the Zone developer's rags-to-greatness story that further situates him with Modi. Secondly, that Modi, and those he closely associates with, have reached an exalted status in a relatively short time is highly attractive to an aspirational, largely young populace. We meet some from the latter group in the following pages, as they jump on to the Gujarat model bandwagon through participation in local business and politics. While Modi's origins were looked down upon among established upper castes and classes in the early 2000s (Sud 2012), his rise and rise has halted this social dithering. The populist persona holds in these conditions. Admittedly, the political Opposition in Gujarat and Delhi has attacked a government in the service of millionaires ('Dani, Adani, Nathwani'; a reference to big BJP donors, and two of the largest business houses in the State). The Opposition has also poked fun at the Leader's penchant for expensive suits and branded watches. These contradictions don't seem to bother diehard fans yet. They too want to go from rags-to-riches, flaunting expensive accessories and friendships with important people. Perhaps they are also lulled into a sense of security by Modi constantly underlining his 'fakeeri' ^{xviii} (mendicant, famillially unattached life); and his willingness to sacrifice everything for the people and nation.

In the legendary partnership between a top-down, Hindu strongman-led state, and an increasingly powerful and politically wily Zone management, the local populace must arrange itself around a politico-economic behemoth. People who live in nearby towns and villages are in varying relationships with the Zone. They are the dispossessed; resisting it in court and the streets for better compensation for land bought or taken over by the Zone with the assistance of the state. Elsewhere I have written in detail about a longstanding movement against the Zone

(Sud 2020). Farmers, fishworkers, pastoralists and others have been fighting the Zone since its inception. That the project has by and large gone ahead is a further testament to its influence. One of the ways in which resistance to the Zone has been countered is via recourse to the powers of the authoritarian state. Thus we know that when the Sarpanch (headman) of a village that lies adjacent to the Zone organised popular protests against the takeover of common land, and also filed petitions in the courts, the state jailed him under the extremely repressive Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act (PASA)^{xix}. PASA allows for the preventive detention of those seen as a threat to *public* order. In this case, a local politician's democratic right to protest was curtailed by the state on behalf of the Zone. The state with its increasingly authoritarian ideas of order was imposing these on its own citizens, and in favour of a close capitalist ally.

One could assert that those who resist the Zone are dismissed by the state and its capitalist allies as 'anti-development', and harmful to the pride of Gujarat, i.e. to the Gujarat model itself. Dissenters, be it from NGOs, or from communities that have questioned the Gujarat model for its resource intensity, are labelled anti-Gujarat, even 'anti-national'^{xx}. But what about those who do not oppose the Zone, and even seek absorption into the economy it has generated? I suggest in the paragraphs below that those seeking incorporation into the Gujarat model as represented in and around the Zone are essential for its purchase on the ground. To elaborate, unlike the headman discussed above, another who heads a village near the Zone is a strong supporter. He and his energetic young backers—mostly in their 20s and 30s-- have taken on the job of convincing others of the benefits of privatised infrastructure and industry in their neighbourhood. They advocate for incoming business projects informally. They also vocally defend projects like the Zone and related businesses. This is most visibly done at state instituted public hearings.

At a public hearing, a majority in the village has to give permission for a business to be set up in their midst^{xxi}. Describing one such hearing for a Factory that supplies the Zone, a farmer told me: '...the Sarpanch was with them. The Talati [Local Revenue Officer] was also involved. Two public hearings happened. You could see how much people have changed their side in these two hearings. People making noise in the first were with the Company in the second.'^{xxii} By siding with business projects that are being pushed by the state, local elites like the Sarpanch position themselves for contracts and jobs in these new businesses. They also ingratiate themselves with the state via officials who are at these public hearings. Unlike the

disorderly headman who was punished by the state, the compliant Sarpanch and his cronies ‘run contracts’ for the Zone and ancillary businesses^{Sxxiii}. They are also involved in sand and other materials contracting, transport contracting, the provision of cheap housing for labour, and the disciplining of labour that works in nearby businesses^{Sxxiv}.

During field research, I found the community advocates of the Zone and related businesses keen to demonstrate their closeness to the ruling party and its ideology. The compliant headman for instance, is a staunch BJP man and an upper caste Rajput. Paraphernalia related to elections can be found in his office, and he actively campaigns for BJP candidates in local, district, sub-national and national elections. Photographs of these campaigns adorn his office. It was quite common to come across the village powerful hanging around the Panchayat (village council) office along with the headman. They would be discussing Modi’s speeches as Chief Minister and Prime Minister, his actions while in power, his “teaching of a lesson” to Muslims in 2002 and beyond, and even his radio show called Mann Ki Baat, or ‘from the heart’^{xxv}. At election time, these same young men, including the Sarpanch and his supporters, will wear T-shirts or other clothing with pro-Modi slogans. Some among them will also wear the now-famous Modi masks: masks with Mr Modi’s face. My interviewees, like many of Modi’s followers, admire him enough to actually embody him and his politics (Ghassem-Fachandi 2019; Michelutti 2013). For them, Modi is a strongman leader, with a direct connect with ‘the people’ down to village level. His politics unifies and inspires his people, albeit selectively and with ethno-religious undertones.

While publicly demonstrating their devotion to Modi, and to the Party he belongs to, the compliant headman and his supporters also elevate their public image through acts of *seva*, or community service. In public posts on social media, they can be seen organising and participating in blood donation camps, mosquito eradication campaigns, school textbook donation drives, and the organisation of patriotic functions. One such function is a Unity Pledge that was taken in the headman’s village, around the time Modi inaugurated the Statue of Unity dedicated to Vallabhbhai Patel. As urged by Modi on audio-visual and social media, the headman made school children repeat the following, which saluting a replica of the Patel statue:

I solemnly pledge that I dedicate myself to preserve the unity, integrity and security of the nation and also strive hard to spread this message among my fellow countrymen. I take this pledge in the spirit of unification of my country which was made possible by the vision

and actions of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. I also solemnly resolve to make my own contribution to ensure internal security of my country.

- Personal communication, Village politician, Lahiyaria, October 2019

In addition to the village populace that is professing, and therefore deepening the agendas of a securitised state keen to push ‘iron’ idols, others who witnessed and encouraged the Unity function belong to local wings of the RSS and affiliated Hindu nationalist organisations and sects. Scholars including Simpson (2013) have noted the heightened hold of these organisations in post-earthquake Kachchh, as the state outsourced welfare and rehabilitation functions to them. Certainly, the RSS organises regular programmes in the villages I researched near the Zone. That organisation routinely collaborates with headmen like the compliant sarpanch, including to organise welfare events, or do election canvassing.

In these vignettes from my field villages, we see the playing out of the Gujarat model of capitalist development facilitated by an authoritarian state, the deepening hold of a Hindu nationalist party and its ideological affiliates, and the popularity of a populist strongman leader. That the Gujarat model finds purchase on the ground is worthy of note. At the same time, this multi-scalar Gujarat model is not without cracks.

A cracked model

One obvious crack is the Gujarat model is its inability to carry along everyone—people it reviles as ‘the other’—be they religious others, or activists and dissenters of various sorts. As we have seen, Modi has gained political capital out of elevating himself above such obvious others. They are anti-development, anti-Gujarat, and anti-Modi. The politics of ‘us’ versus ‘other’ could thus be seen as strengthening the Gujarat model that thrives on discontent with the other, and even hatred. But another crack in the model-- possibly a more painful and damaging one-- lies within. This relates to the model’s capitalist base that is able to engage its local intermediaries only in part. Linked to this is the coterminous project of Hindu nationalism that is not as unified a Hindu social umbrella as its key promoters would like to project. I look at each of these fault lines in turn through the person of a small time political worker MB, who hangs out with the compliant Sarpanch discussed above.

The compliant Sarpanch and MB belong to the same caste. MB considers the Sarpanch a friend and brother. MB’s family owned less land than many other upper castes in the area, and MB

has studied only till Class 8. At the time of fieldwork in 2015, MB was driving trucks or cars for a factory that supplies the Zone—but only when other drivers were not available. He also had the contract for receiving sand supply trucks from a bigger contractor. His job was to facilitate quality checks of the sand at the factory. If the checks were unsuccessful, MB was tasked with discretely dumping tonnes of sand in the sea, or on local commons. Finally, MB helped labour colony owners who are his Rajput caste friends check “*dhamaal*”, rowdiness in these spaces. Labour colonies are makeshift or more concrete residences for immigrant workers, that have come up around MB’s village, and also in the vicinity of the Zone. The lowest quality accommodation is for manual labour. The latter pay around 2000 rupees per shanty-room, with each room being shared by up to 4 workers. Toilet facilities, if they exist at all, are shared. Typically, these colonies have been set up by entrepreneurial village residents, often upper castes, after selling part of their agrarian land. The factory management is aware of these colonies. Labour contractors for the factory work with local strongmen to regulate and discipline labour in these spaces^{xxxvi}. In this context, MB is a useful labour colony interlocutor. He is on hand on payday to ensure order. He also ferries labourers to the hospital in case of injury, and before any health cases escalate into wider unrest^{xxvii}.

So far, MB has managed a commission-based model of earning a living around the factory. He has done this by assiduously “keeping” relations with factory officials, and with the local BJP machinery. He is often on his phone with them, or is found hanging out at the factory gate. For his socially and politically networked labours, he earns up to Rupees 50,000 a month (USD 706 at current rates). This is much more than the maximum of Rupees 3000 to 20,000 a month he earned as a full-time shopkeeper in Gandhinagar and Mumbai, before he headed home to Kachchh in the post-earthquake, Modi year^{xxxviii}. However, none of this income or contract-based work is guaranteed. To keep it going, MB must participate actively in local Party politics and project himself as a Modi-like, local strongman. However, in a precarious economic context, the strongman cannot promote an all-inclusive Hindu nationalism. His politics, like his economic situation, is caveated.

One of the many tasks MB takes on is to participate in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity initiated by the factory. Among this activity is the distribution of cattle fodder, which is routinely undertaken. That the factory is partly built over erstwhile common, grazing land makes this form of CSR ironic. But as the factory-friendly Sarpanch says, the factory may have taken over grazing land, but it “gives Rupees 5 lakh annually for cattle”^{xxix}. This money goes

towards a cow shelter, and towards the careful allocation of fodder. Fodder takes on casteist and Hindu nationalist undertones in my research context. The cow is sacred in Hindu nationalist iconography. It is revered as a mother. The businesses in and around the Zone donate fodder to this sacred mother, to the exclusion of buffaloes that are common to the area_{xxx}. There is a clear social division in the keepers of cows versus buffaloes in my field sites. Upper caste farmers who keep cows are more likely to benefit from this Hindu nationalist version of *gau seva*, or service to the cow that is being performed by local businesses. Semi-nomadic, Adivasi Maldharis who are the keepers of hardy, indigenous Banni buffalos are unlikely to benefit from the *chaara* (fodder). Interestingly, the Banni buffalo has more claim to indigeneity and belonging in the Hindu nation than the hybrid cows that end up being revered as *matas* (mothers) in MBs village and well beyond.

Just as MB's service-based Hindu nationalism is riven by the fault lines of caste (also Sud 2007a; Simpson 2013), it is also truncated on the anvil of gender, class and region. In the Zone, we saw a performed Hindu nationalism that others the Pakistani and Muslim. However, in the more economically and socially fraught context of MB and friends, the competition for money, power and influence is closer to home. MB and other local Rajputs assert their we-ness in the fast-changing social context of the village which has seen a new, migrant other. This migrant other, who tends to be contract labour doing manual jobs in the factory and Zone is not high up in the hierarchy to be housed in the management quarters that big business provides. Instead, as seen above, this labour must make do with privately provided, slum-like housing in labour colonies. MB the local strongman practices his power of discipline in these colonies as we have seen above. He and his caste-brethren also attempt to etch new social rules in a changing spatial order. One such local strongman tells me,

We have *soch* [thinking] that we will not keep non-Gujaratis in this *gaon* [village]. That is why these colonies are important. We have a high Rajput culture, which we don't want spoiled by others. You will see there is no non-veg [food] in this village. Our women vomit at just the thought of it.

- Landed Rajput, interviewed in the Village, 22/8/2015

The purity of the Hindu upper caste is maintained through territorial exclusivity, and ritual and cultural practices of food, dress and residence. This purity is also maintained via the bodies of supposedly vulnerable, to-be-protected Rajput women. In the fissured Hindu-ness of the everyday, Hindu women are not just to be protected from the Muslim man as the BJP and its

affiliates would tell us. They also have to be protected from other Hindu men, especially those from other castes, classes and regions of India.

Conclusion

This paper has interrogated India's authoritarian turn by focusing on a hotbed region. Gujarat in western India is the home State and training ground of India's current Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Importantly, Gujarat is the progenitor of a politico-economic model that is now being scaled up across India. Mr Modi has projected the Gujarat model as one of high growth and participatory development. Others have questioned the potential for human development in this Gujarat model. I suggested that the actual Gujarat model underlies these debates of growth versus development. This model combines an authoritarian, or centralised and repressive state, in partnership with big capital. Hindu nationalism and a populist strongman leader provide the rallying, unifying glue for holding together the majority of the population in this model.

The paper furthers scholarship that suggests that authoritarianism emerges in contexts of crisis, and when previous state regimes' ability to accommodate varying constituencies weakens. Certainly the Gujarat model took shape with the decline of the centrist, umbrella-like Congress Party, and with the inauguration of liberalisation and a growing Hindu nationalist movement. Yet what provided the essential fillip to the model was a disastrous earthquake which pushed a strongman, populist leader into power, as also mass violence against Muslims that was initiated soon after Modi's inauguration.

A key contribution of the paper has been to study the coming together, and playing out of the Gujarat model in a multi-scalar manner. Multi- and inter-disciplinary, field based, long term research in Gujarat has allowed me to undertake this investigation. Going past the macro, national scale, I began at the sub-national scale and traced the coming together, and entrenching of the Gujarat model in a sub- sub-national district. I then scaled down further to a set of villages around a Zone of capitalist production that has been promoted by the authoritarian state in the latter district. I found the state selectively sponsoring big business, and punishing dissenters who protest resource grabs being undertaken by or for capital. In return, I detailed capital performing its allegiance to the state by complying with its Hindu majoritarianism. As part of the latter, I explored the production of Hindu religious artefacts, and the consistent marginalisation of the Muslim and dissenting 'other'. Together, a Hindu nationalist and

authoritarian state, and capital that this state pushes and benefits from, were shown to be clamping down on freedoms of expression, dissent and difference in contemporary Gujarat.

Interestingly, while a lot has been written-about the business-friendly state, this paper has also highlighted the reciprocal phenomenon of the state-friendly business. This friendliness is not just in terms of kickbacks, or funding of political parties. The two-way relationship I have highlighted also demonstrates an ideological and political proximity. The punishing of the religious or dissenting other, or the furthering of certain politically aligned contractors and brokers—goes across state and business in my study. A future study of authoritarianism, capitalism, Hindu nationalism and populism could explore how these elements that define today's India play out over time, scale and space, with each propping up the other.

In its multi-scalar argument, the paper insisted that the Gujarat model cannot remain successful as a mere top-down and elite project. It must also be received and reproduced in the wider populace. To investigate this assertion, I undertook the study of villages around the Zone to show the uptake of the model among influential castes and local leaders. These leaders perform their Hinduness, support the BJP, idolise Mr Modi, and vociferously build support for big capitalist projects in New Gujarat. In return, they gain political clout and contracts in upcoming businesses. Yet, the paper demonstrated that this cascading, multi-scalar Gujarat model is not without cracks. It may have come into being when the Congress Party and the state it dominated lost their ability to be widely accommodating umbrellas—be it via the provision of welfare, economic inclusion, or via political incorporation. At the micro, village scale of this study, I found similar dis-incorporations playing out, even among the most vociferous supporters of the Gujarat model. In agreement with the literature on India's jobless growth, I showed that capitalist growth in Kachchh, Gujarat is not able to offer secure employment, even to the locally powerful. Contracts are hard fought for, and precarious. In any case, a trickle down of precarious contracts, and even more paltry Corporate Social Responsibility-centric welfare, quickly revealed fault-lines of caste, class, gender and region. Even among a largely Hindu populace, I showed migrant labour being reviled and othered, women being oppressed, and lower castes and indigenous groups side-lined.

A detailed and multi-scalar study such as this suggests that the Gujarat model is holding up for now. This is because of the continued popularity of Modi's larger than life leadership. Importantly, as has been suggested by many commentators, the model also holds because of a

lack of viable political alternatives. Current opposition has acted as a B Team for the Gujarat model— it has criticised elements like the high state- big business alliance, or the religious nationalism that others minorities. Yet, the opposition has also emulated elements of the model in its own closeness to big business, and through an overt show of religiosity at election time. This is clearly not a valid alternative, as the main progenitor Party and leadership of the Gujarat model, i.e. Team A is preferred over Team B. For the people of Gujarat, and India, an alternative would need to offer the hope of growth with economic redistribution; inclusivity instead of ‘othering’; liberal and constitutional freedoms instead of the repression of rights; and importantly, a politics that percolates democratically downwards and across diverse populations, rather than centralising around the personality and aura of a single leader or political family. Till such alternatives are visible and pushed in Gujarat and India, a wide-reaching if precariously balanced authoritarian populist model is set to hold. What is more, as increasing state repression in contemporary Gujarat and India shows—a model that recognises its precarity will deepen its authoritarianism to stay in power. The curtailment of freedoms, the demonising of Muslims and other minorities, war-like rhetoric, cosyng up to big capital, and the cult of the strongman leader will only grow in this context.

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i I use State with a capital 'S' to denote the federal units of the Indian union. The state apparatus is depicted in lower case.

ii Interview with activist and scholar, Ahmedabad, November 2004

iii Former industries department official, interviewed in Gandhinagar, December 2008

iv State village level worker (VLW), interviewed in Gandhinagar, July 2004

v Interview with local activist and political commentator, Ahmedabad, July 2004

vi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z56qGvLfJK8>

vii [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDac2mcduNY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDac2mcduNY;); https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ur_rL9n8bPg accessed 20/11/2019

viii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN3x9YVz2wk>, accessed 20/11/2019

ix Field notes, December 2008

x SEZ executives, interviewed December 2008

xi <https://powermin.nic.in/en/content/ultra-mega-power-projects>

xii Zone employee, interviewed on site, December 2008

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- xiii Wording of a state official, who has consulted with big infrastructure projects after retirement, interviewed in Gandhinagar, August 2004
- xiv Interviewed near the Zone, August 2015
- xv Interviewed in local newspaper office, August 2015; phone conversation in December 2008
- xvi Zone officials, interviewed in The Zone 22/12/08
- xvii NGO workers, interviewed near the Zone, 21/12/2008; journalist, personal communication, 30/3/2020
- xviii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyJE99wGa5M>, accessed 25/6/2020
- xix Skype interview with activist, November 2018; High Court of Gujarat, PIL No. 21 of 2013;
- xx Activists, interviewed near the Zone, December 2008
- xxi Interviews with local BJP notable, August 2015; Rajput farmer August 15
- xxii Interview, August 2015, Lahiyaria
- xxiii Ibid.
- xxiv Field notes, August 2015
- xxv Field diary, August 2015; interview with Village BJP politician, August 2015
- xxvi Rajput landowner, and labour colony owner, interviewed at the colony, August 2015
- xxvii MB, interviewed in his house, August 2015
- xxviii Ibid.
- xxix Interviewed at the Panchayat, August 2015
- xxx Field diary, August 2015