

**THE RESURRECTION OF DURGA:
INDIRA GANDHI'S SPECTACULAR POLITICS IN THE 1980s**



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Abstract

Thesis title: The Resurrection of Durga: Indira Gandhi's Spectacular Politics in the 1980s

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The cult of personality around Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has traditionally been explained with reference to her role in the Bangladesh War, the Emergency, and Operation Blue Star. Moreover, historiographical narratives woven around these episodes largely portray her as a champion of 'socialism' and the poor. Going beyond these characterisations, this thesis is organised around four 'state spectacles' that captured Indian middle class imagination in the early 1980s – the Asian Games in New Delhi (1982), the launch of the Maruti-Suzuki 'family car' (1983), the Festival of India in Britain (1982), and the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in New Delhi (1983). The production and reception of these spectacles is analysed against the context of the Emergency imposed by Mrs Gandhi in 1975. During this period, public opinion swayed against the incumbent Congress Party and Mrs Gandhi, who was consequently ousted in the 1977 elections.

In certain ways, Mrs Gandhi's 'political resurrection' in January 1980 reaffirmed her position as a popular national leader. However, she was conscious of the fragility of her dominance, and her dented image in public and the media. The primary objective of this thesis is to examine how Mrs Gandhi, through the visual medium of the 'spectacle', sought to remake her image from a 'dictator' of the Emergency days to a symbol of stability, aspirations, and national pride upon re-election. Additionally, it questions the success of this political project by turning its gaze toward the spectator-consumer – in this case a pre-liberalisation, urban middle class in India.

Consulting a range of textual and visual archives, the thesis argues that the above 'mega-media-events' and their carefully constructed associations with consumption, leisure, and entertainment enabled Mrs Gandhi to secure legitimacy amongst established and emerging categories of the middle class in India. In doing so, it seeks to portray another dimension of Mrs Gandhi's constructed image as a leader of this influential demographic in 'the long 1980s', a period which brought enduring shifts in the Indian socio-economic landscape a full decade before the era of liberalisation.

Long Abstract

This thesis is organised around four ‘state spectacles’ that captured Indian middle class imagination in the early 1980s – the Asian Games in New Delhi (1982), the launch of the Maruti-Suzuki ‘family car’ (1983), the Festival of India in Britain (1982), and the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in New Delhi (1983). The production and reception of these spectacles is analysed against the historical context of the Emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1975. The twenty-one-month long Emergency is remembered as a watershed in India’s democratic history due to its ban on political dissent, suspension of constitutional rights, press censorship, and the controversial twin programmes of family planning and slum demolitions in cities. During this period, public opinion swayed against the incumbent Congress Party and Mrs Gandhi, who was consequently ousted in the 1977 general elections.

In certain ways, Mrs Gandhi’s ‘political resurrection’¹ in January 1980 reaffirmed her position as a popular national leader – as the ‘only one who stood between chaos and order’² in the country. However, she was conscious of the fragility of her political dominance, and her dented image in public and the media which had led to her downfall only three years prior. The primary objective of this thesis is thus to examine how Mrs Gandhi, through the visual medium of the ‘spectacle’, sought to remake her image from an authoritarian ‘dictator’ of the Emergency days to a symbol of stability, aspirations, and national pride upon re-election. Additionally, it questions the success of this political project by turning its gaze toward the spectator-consumer – in this case a pre-liberalisation, urban middle class in India.

¹ I. Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (London, 1989), p. 11.

² B. Wariavwalla, ‘Indira’s India: A national security state?’, *The Round Table*, 72/287 (1983), p. 274.

The thesis argues that the above ‘mega-media-events’ and their carefully constructed associations with consumption, leisure, and entertainment enabled Mrs Gandhi to secure legitimacy for her leadership amongst established and emerging categories of the middle class in India. This was aided by media campaigns that effectively utilised visual technologies to project Mrs Gandhi, and the Indian nation, as ‘modern’ yet rooted in centuries-old cultural ‘traditions’. In a way, these spectacles can also be analysed as some of the earliest commercialised programmes of ‘nation-branding’ in India. Indeed, various ideas of ‘Indianness’ were exported to global markets as spectacular visuals and commodities, a phenomenon primarily associated with the liberalisation period (1991 and later). The development of new advertising techniques sponsored by private corporations was certainly welcomed by Mrs Gandhi who employed them to enhance the reach and effect of her own spectacles.

The 1970s had witnessed the production of a curious mix of ‘mass spectacles’ and exclusively middle class-oriented staged performances by the state. Populist sloganeering such as ‘*Garibi Hatao*’ (‘Remove Poverty’), the abolition of privy purses, and the nationalisation of the banking sector were important demonstrations which portrayed Mrs Gandhi as a champion of ‘socialism’ and the poor. At the same time, the internationalised victory of the Indian Armed Forces in the Bangladesh War of 1971, the testing of India’s first nuclear facility in 1974, and various aspects of the Emergency itself were spectacular with regards to alleviating the often fabricated anxieties of the middle class provoked by threats to national security.

The cult of personality around Mrs Gandhi has traditionally been explained in the literature with particular reference to these episodes, and, indeed, existing narratives of

her career contain exhaustive accounts of the above which continue to portray her as a populist and strong-willed, but ruthless leader. Similarly, the post-Emergency narratives primarily highlight the victory of the Janata Party in 1977, and the severity of the ‘Punjab problem’ in 1983-84. However, the premature dissolution of the Janata government in 1980, the consequential return of the Congress, and the popular acceptance of Mrs Gandhi’s leadership by the middle class immediately after the contentious experiences of the Emergency have not been given due attention. This thesis attempts to address the latter as a crucial historiographical gap on Mrs Gandhi’s political life as well as in the cultural mapping of ‘the long 1980s’, a period which brought enduring shifts in Indian economic and social life a full decade before the era of liberalisation.³

The ‘spectacle’ in the subcontinent has been critically analysed by scholars such as Carol Breckenridge, Bernard Cohn, and Tapati Guha-Thakurta whose works focus on curated and ritualistic representations of the imperial regime in nineteenth and early twentieth century India at museum exhibitions, world fairs, and magnificent *durbars*, whilst the production of the ‘postcolonial’ spectacle has variously been the subject of Srirupa Roy’s rich reading of the developmental nation-state under Jawaharlal Nehru, or Clemens Six’s study of religion and nation-building in modern India.⁴ Moreover, the exponential growth in mass media technology from the 1980s onwards, which in recent years has led to the adoption of more sophisticated and targeted modes of political

³ A. Punathambekar and P. Sundar, ‘The Time of Television: Broadcasting, daily life, and the new Indian middle class’, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 10 (2017), p. 402.

⁴ See C. A. Breckenridge, ‘Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at world fairs’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31/2 (1989), pp. 195-216; B. S. Cohn, ‘Representing Authority in Victorian India’ in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi; New York, 1987); T. Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-colonial India* (New York, 2004); S. Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham, N.C., 2007); and C. Six, *Spectacular Politics: Performative Nation-building and Religion in Modern India* (New Delhi, 2010).

communication, has been captured in several brilliant studies that further map the resulting transformations in state-society relations, for instance by Arvind Rajagopal, Arjun Appadurai, Leela Fernandes, William Mazzarella, Christophe Jaffrelot, and Thomas Blom Hansen to name a few.⁵ However, the significance of imagery and spectacular politics, i.e. the practice of ‘stateliness’ as ‘statecraft’ in a politico-performative context, evident during Mrs Gandhi’s years in office is yet to receive scholarly attention.

In this thesis, I also refer to Guy Debord’s seminal work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, and his concept of the ‘integrated spectacle’ or the ‘ultimate condition of the integration of state and economy’ to understand Mrs Gandhi’s changing visual strategies of communication in her final years in office.⁶ Mrs Gandhi’s partial abandonment of her past populist rhetoric for a more middle class-friendly narrative in the early 1980s witnessed the ‘marketing’ of the state in various forms – as the magnificent urban architecture constructed for sporting spectacles (Chapter 1 ‘Asian Games’), as the ‘driver’ of progress symbolised via the family friendly passenger car (Chapter 2 ‘Maruti 800’), as a cultural commodity exhibited at international festivals (Chapter 3 ‘Festival of India’), and even as the manifestation of middle class prestige during diplomatic summits (Chapter 4 ‘Non-Aligned Movement Summit’).

⁵ See A. Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge, 2001); A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis; London, 1996); L. Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minnesota, 2006); W. Mazzarella, *Shovelling Smoke: Advertising and Globalisation in Contemporary India* (Durham, NC; London, 2003); W. Mazzarella, *Censorium: Cinema and the Open Edge of Mass Publicity* (Durham, 2013); C. Jaffrelot, ‘Narendra Modi and the Power of Television in Gujarat’, *Television & New Media*, 16/4 (2015), pp. 346-53; and T. B. Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton; Oxford, 2001).

⁶ G. Debord and W. Self, *The Society of the Spectacle* (London, 2013), p. 8.

The continuities and points of departure between centrally-planned ‘concentrated’ and market-enabled ‘diffuse’ forms of the spectacle as outlined by Debord are of special interest to this thesis.⁷ In this context, Lieven de Cauter notes how the spectacle is ‘located in necessity’ for a number of reasons: ‘national prestige, political manoeuvres to withdraw attention from a precarious local state of affairs, the stimulation of international commerce, the opening of new markets, promotion of export, the self-promotion of towns, giving creditability to imperialistic and colonial aspirations and so on’.⁸ Still, he adds that the ‘most urgent’ motivation for this exercise ‘seems to be the desire to visualise progress itself’.⁹

However, the state does not merely impose the idea of progress upon its spectators as ‘top-down’ propaganda. Indeed, with the deliberate use of interactive media (such as the television or the Internet) to enhance its spectacular effects, political communication ceases to be ‘monologic’,¹⁰ and rather seeks to engage with a number of spectators in the process. I thus challenge the notion of passivity of the spectator-consumer by exploring the ways in which the spectacle is consumed and reproduced by various audiences that include civic institutions such as schools and museums as well as individual viewers and public commentators. In doing so, I draw upon arguments put forward variously by Sandra Freitag, Christopher Pinney, and Carol Breckenridge amongst others who moreover suggest that the ‘very ambiguity of the visual mode of communication, the very ability of the viewer to bring to his or her gaze individual

⁷ See A. Broudehoux, ‘Images of Power: Architectures of the integrated spectacle at the Beijing Olympics’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63/2 (2010), p. 55.

⁸ L. de Cauter, ‘The Panoramic Ecstasy: On world exhibitions and the disintegration of experience’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 10 (1993), p. 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ W. Willems, ‘Risky Dialogues: The performative state and the nature of power in a postcolony’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27/3 (2015), pp. 356-69.

interpretations and contextualisations’ provides room to critique the spectacle, and thus negotiate their relationship with the state.¹¹

The sheer size and heterogeneity of the Indian spectatorship makes the task of studying the overall impact of spectacles on a national audience challenging. Delimiting the scope of this thesis, I focus on four state spectacles that were directed at the Indian middle class, and in many instances an increasingly participative Indian diaspora. For the purpose of my research, I deliberately make use of a ‘fluid’ interpretation of the middle class. It is acknowledged that the heterogeneity and diversity which fundamentally characterises this ambiguous ‘category’ in turn produced diverse understandings of the spectacle. By attempting to locate and study the middle class in the early 1980s in India, I do not seek to map an all-encompassing middle class identity, but rather to identify specific state-produced images and claims, the consumption and assertion of which came *to be seen* as particularly middle class in India. Leela Fernandes describes this as the ‘new’ middle class culture:

‘Policies of economic liberalisation since the 1990s have been accompanied by an array of visual images and public discourses that have centred on a shifting role of the middle class and their attitudes, lifestyles, and consumption practices. For example, popular stories, advertising images, and news reports that detail the spread of consumer items such as cell phones, rising wage levels for the managerial staff of multinational companies, and expanding consumer choice for goods such as cars, washing machines, and colour televisions have produced an image of the rise of an emerging middle class culture in India.’¹²

Consulting a range of textual and visual sources from official planning documents and letters to the editor, to newspaper advertisements and government publicity material, this thesis attempts to identify and examine the markers of a pre-liberalisation middle

¹¹ S. Freitag, ‘Visions of the Nation: Theorising the nexus...’ in R. Dwyer and C. Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (New Delhi, 2001), p. 67. Also see C. Pinney in this edition (‘Introduction’), and A. Appadurai and C.A. Breckenridge in C.A. Breckenridge ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian world* (Minneapolis, 1995), pp. 1-20.

¹² Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class*, p. xv.

class culture in India which developed into the visual forms, practices, and subjectivities outlined above. Indeed, as Punathambekar and Sundar argue, the 1980s have traditionally been regarded ‘as a minor interlude in the nation’s shift from one imaginary (Development) to another (Globalisation)’.¹³ Alternatively, existing histories overwhelmingly focus on the Rajiv Gandhi years as the beginnings of state-sponsored middle class flirtations with liberalisation and ‘modernisation’. This thesis fills a crucial historiographical gap by locating its beginnings to the early 1980s, and placing the state under Mrs Gandhi at the centre of its making. Finally, in doing so, it seeks to portray another dimension of Mrs Gandhi’s constructed image as a leader of this influential demographic in her final years.

¹³ Punathambekar and Sundar, ‘The Time of Television’, p. 402.

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List of Abbreviations

AGSOC	Asian Games Special Organising Committee
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
BLA	British Library Archives
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSA	Contemporary South Asia (Journal)
EPW	Economic and Political Weekly (Journal)
FOI	Festival of India
GOI	Government of India
HT	Hindustan Times (Newspaper)
JAS	The Journal of Asian Studies (Journal)
IAS	Indian Administrative Services
I&B	Information and Broadcasting
IIPO	Indian Institute of Public Opinion
IT	India Today (Periodical)
IWI	The Illustrated Weekly of India (Periodical)
LSD	Lok Sabha Debates*
MAS	Modern Asian Studies (Journal)
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
MSIL	Maruti Suzuki Indian Limited
MTFDA	Margaret Thatcher Foundation Digital Archives**
MUL	Maruti Udyog Limited
NAI	National Archives of India
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NRI	Non-Resident Indian
PBD	Pravasi Bhartiya Divas
PM	Prime Minister
PMS	Prime Minister's Secretariat
PSU	Public Sector Undertaking
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Rupee/Rs.	Indian rupee valued at 9.67 to 1 US Dollar or 16.14 to 1 Pound Sterling between 1982-83***
SMC	Suzuki Motor Corporation
TOI	Times of India (Newspaper)
UK	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	The United Nations
US	The United States of America
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

* India, Lok Sabha Debates (New Delhi: Parliament Secretariat); Debates consulted and cited in this thesis are from the seventh series, and can be found at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

** 1979 – 1990 digitised archives are available on the Margaret Thatcher Foundation website, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/archive/default79on.asp> (September 2018)

*** Reserve Bank of India, ‘Publications’ (16 September 2013), <https://www.rbi.org.in/scripts/PublicationsView.aspx?id=15268> (September 2018)

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Introduction

The year 1980 was significant in India. It heralded a new era, a break from the tumultuous seventies that saw the unprecedented rise and fall of one of India's biggest political personalities, 'extra-constitutional' misuse of the judiciary and the presidency, and institutionalisation of new forms of political patronage. The seventies also witnessed a transition from the misgovernance of the Emergency years to the chaos of a short-lived non-Congress government at the Centre.¹ Socio-economic policies were implemented that swung across the political spectrum from chants of '*Garibi Hatao*' ('Remove Poverty') in 1971 to early attempts at liberalisation in 1978. Indeed, by 1980 the founding myths of the modern Indian state started to be called into question.²

The eighties, in contrast, marked India's emergence from the 'waiting room of history'.³ By 1991, breaking away from the rest of the 'Third World', India had finally 'arrived on the global stage'.⁴ It was no longer a symbol of poverty and deprivation, but of a new world signified by spectacular techno-mobility and consumption.⁵ Leading this transition was third-time elected Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and an emerging 'new' middle class aligned with global regimes of consumer-citizenship. This thesis examines the production and reception of four 'state spectacles' that enabled Mrs Gandhi to project herself as the leader of this influential demographic in her final years in office between 1980 and 1984.⁶

¹ F. R. Frankel, 'India's Promise', *Foreign Policy*, 38 (1980), p. 55.

² S. Corbridge and J. Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 92.

³ Dipesh Chakrabarty quoted in R. Kaur and T. B. Hansen, 'Aesthetics of Arrival: Spectacle, capital, novelty in post-reform India', *Identities*, 23/3 (2015), p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ The prefix 'Mrs' is used for Indira Gandhi throughout the thesis following historiographical convention, and to avoid confusion with 'Mahatma' Gandhi, Sanjay, and Rajiv Gandhi.

* * *

‘My public life started at the age of three. I have no recollection of games, children's parties, or playing with other children. All my games were political ones – I was, like Joan of Arc, perpetually being burned at the stake.’

Indira Gandhi⁷

‘Saint Joan of India [is] born again.’

Observer (13 January 1980, p. 11)

Historiographical narratives of Mrs Gandhi's political career have centred around her involvement in three major 'events': leading the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Forces) to victory in the Bangladesh War of 1971 (which gave her the title of 'Durga' – the invincible Hindu goddess), declaring the Emergency in 1975, and the 'Punjab problem' culminating in Operation Blue Star and her assassination in 1984. The twenty-one-month long Emergency, in particular, is remembered as a watershed in India's democratic history due to its ban on political dissent, suspension of constitutional rights, press censorship, and imprisonment of leaders in the opposition. The period witnessed Mrs Gandhi's attempts to address socio-economic issues that were perceived to be the cause of several domestic crises at the time. She devised a 'Twenty Point Programme' of reform encompassing land redistribution, housing for the poor, and higher wages for workers amongst other things, using the Emergency's 'discipline of the graveyard' to compel economic growth. But the Emergency quickly and infamously became associated with Mrs Gandhi's younger son, Sanjay Gandhi. Sanjay, leader of the Congress Party's youth wing at the time, formulated a social programme that included slum demolitions in cities, and family planning which assumed its most exploitative form in sterilisation camps concentrated in the northern States of Uttar Pradesh,

⁷ Quoted in L. Charlton, 'Assassination in India', *New York Times* (1 November 1984), <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1119.html> (11 July 2018).

Haryana, Punjab, and Delhi.⁸ Whilst the Indian press was strictly regulated, the ‘dark days’ of the Emergency invited sharp criticism of Mrs Gandhi’s government in foreign media. ‘Indira Gandhi’s Dictatorship Digs In’, read the headline in an article in *TIME* magazine in 1975.⁹

Mrs Gandhi’s ill-advised decision to announce elections in 1977 whilst the Emergency was still in effect can be viewed as a desperate attempt at damage control. She wished to regain her credentials as a democratic leader, which she had arguably lost. More importantly, she was concerned about her place in history, and did not wish to be remembered as having destroyed the democratic foundations of the Indian nation-state to which her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, had utmost attachment. ‘The ghost of Nehru haunted her’, remarks former editor of the *Times of India*, Girilal Jain, as she ‘sought legitimacy in being seen as not only the daughter but legitimate successor to Nehru, which meant sticking at least to the form, if not the substance, of democracy’.¹⁰

Although Mrs Gandhi was genuinely convinced of her own democratic allegiances, she perhaps overestimated the opposition’s fractiousness whilst greatly underestimating the backlash to press censorship and family planning. Diego Maiorano, in his book *Autumn of the Matriarch: Indira Gandhi’s Final Term in Office*, argues that as the bureaucracy and local Party leaders grew increasingly fearful of Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay in particular,

⁸ Recent scholarship suggests that sterilisations and slum demolitions were equally widespread in other parts of the country although they did not receive the same media attention as the north, which was Sanjay’s stronghold. The loudest opposition to Mrs Gandhi and the Emergency also came from the northern belt where the Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) Movement had been most active. See P. Clibbens, “‘The destiny of this city is to be the spiritual workshop of the nation’”, *Contemporary South Asia*, 22/1 (2014), pp. 51-66.

⁹ ‘INDIA: Indira Gandhi’s Dictatorship Digs In’, *TIME* (14 July 1975), <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,917627,00.html> (7 January 2016).

¹⁰ In M. Tully and Z. Masani, *From Raj to Rajiv: 40 Years of Indian Independence* (London, 1988), pp. 123-4.

they too became unreliable as a source of public opinion on the ground.¹¹ In March 1977, the Congress suffered its first electoral defeat since Independence. In a way, this established an important democratic precedent for Indian politics even though the victory of the Janata Party coalition at the time was viewed more as a personal defeat of Mrs Gandhi than a victory for the new leadership.¹²

However, Mrs Gandhi's immediate acceptance of the result, her apology for the Emergency's 'excesses', and a trial where she was arrested on petty charges earned her the sympathy of the public. The arrest, in particular, was seen as pure vendetta as her 'prosecution turned into persecution', appalling even those who insisted that she be held accountable in accordance with the Shah Commission verdict.¹³ Soon after, as the Janata government struggled with internal disputes alongside a worsening economy, Mrs Gandhi began touring the country, reaching over 300 constituencies and addressing over 1,500 meetings to mobilise the support of different groups.¹⁴ She publicly asked the opposition to stop its malicious 'smear campaign and character assassination', and instead focus on the atrocities committed against '*Harijans*', and the economic hardship faced by millions.¹⁵ Notably, international media also reported the unstable domestic situation:

'The past five months of accelerating inflation and crime under the non-government of Mr Charan Singh wiped out any modest credit earned by its predecessor [Morarji Desai] in the preceding two years. They also revived selective memories of the Gandhi era, when the country was ruled by a firm, if not always benevolent, hand. The choice for the average voter seemed to be between order and

¹¹ D. Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch: Indira Gandhi's Final Term in Office* (London, 2015), p. 8.

¹² Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, p. 89.

¹³ I. Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography* (London, 1989), p. 201; The Shah Commission was a commission of inquiry appointed by the Janata government to probe into the 'excesses' committed during the Emergency. It produced a three-volume report in 1978 implicating Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay on multiple grounds.

¹⁴ Weiner cited in Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, p. 46.

¹⁵ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 204.

anarchy. So with cross-continental consistency, Indians invited their one-time dictator back.¹⁶

The 1980 election campaign was indeed highly personalised. Mrs Gandhi's personal message overshadowed the publicity for the Congress candidate in each constituency.¹⁷

The decisive factor in the election was arguably a combination of her direct relationship with the masses as well as the fact that she was the only alternative to the Janata rule.

As she was perhaps aware, a strong anti-incumbency sentiment helped bring her back in the public gaze.

Pupul Jayakar, in her biography of Mrs Gandhi, describes her introspective journey to Varanasi towards the end of the successful election campaign. As she bathed in the holy Ganges in 'a symbolic gesture of all impurities washed away',¹⁸ she broke from the old to embrace a new, visibly Hindu-ised Indira.

Research Questions and Arguments

This thesis takes Mrs Gandhi's re-election in January 1980 as its starting point. The research questions and arguments are organised around four 'state spectacles' that captured Indian middle class imagination in the early 1980s – the Asian Games in New Delhi (1982), the launch of the Maruti-Suzuki 'family car' (1983), the Festival of India

¹⁶ 'A lesson learnt?', *Economist*, (12 January 1980), p. 14; As early as in 1978, a survey conducted by the Indian Market Research Bureau amongst 1,213 urban dwellers revealed that 56% of respondents wanted Mrs Gandhi back as PM. Support for her was strongest in Delhi (75%), followed by Madras (57%), Calcutta (51%), and Bombay (50%). C. Karadia, 'After 15 months in political wilderness, Indira Gandhi...', *IT* (updated 23 February 2015), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19780630-after-15-months-in-political-wilderness-indira-gandhi-fiercely-on-the-comeback-trail-823277-2014-04-04> (23 August 2018).

¹⁷ Wallace cited in Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, pp. 46-7; Mrs Gandhi's Congress (Indira) Party (henceforth Congress) won 353 out of 529 seats, capturing 42.69% of total votes. Election Commission of India, 'Statistical report on general elections, 1980, Vol. 1' (New Delhi, 1981), p. 83.

¹⁸ P. Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 357. Several scholars have noted the religious bent in Mrs Gandhi's public actions in her final years. See footnote 119 on p. 230, and pp. 321-22 of this thesis.

in Britain (1982), and the Non-Aligned Movement summit in New Delhi (1983).¹⁹ The production and reception of these spectacles is analysed against the historical context of the Emergency. In certain ways, Mrs Gandhi's comeback reaffirmed her position as a popular national leader – as the 'only one who stood between chaos and order' in the country.²⁰ However, she was conscious of the fragility of her political dominance, and her dented image in public and the media which had led to her downfall only three years prior. The primary objective of this thesis is thus to examine how Mrs Gandhi, through the visual medium of the 'spectacle', sought to remake her image from an authoritarian 'dictator' of the Emergency days to a symbol of stability, aspirations, and national pride upon re-election. Additionally, it questions the success of this political project by turning its gaze toward the spectator-consumer – in this case a pre-liberalisation, urban middle class.

The thesis argues that the above 'mega-media-events' and their carefully constructed associations with consumption, leisure, and entertainment enabled Mrs Gandhi to secure legitimacy for her leadership amongst established and emerging categories of the middle class in India. This was aided by media campaigns that effectively utilised visual technologies to project Mrs Gandhi, and the Indian nation, as 'modern' yet rooted in centuries-old cultural 'traditions'. In a way, these spectacles can also be analysed as some of the earliest commercialised programmes of 'nation-branding' in India. Indeed, various ideas of 'Indianness' were exported to global markets as spectacular visuals and commodities, a phenomenon primarily associated in current scholarship with the

¹⁹ The usage of the term 'middle class' is discussed in later sections. At this stage, it is acknowledged that treating the middle class as a 'bounded' socio-empirical category is problematic given its inherent diversity and 'fluidity'. It is perhaps even more challenging to locate *the* middle class in the 1980s in India when its composition, practices, and politics were in a state of transition.

²⁰ B. Wariavwalla, 'Indira's India: A national security state?', *The Round Table*, 72/287 (1983), p. 274.

liberalisation period (1991 and later). The development of new advertising techniques sponsored by private corporations was certainly welcomed by Mrs Gandhi who employed them to enhance the reach and effect of her own spectacles.

Notably, the 1970s had witnessed the production of a curious mix of ‘mass spectacles’, and exclusively middle class-oriented staged performances by the state. Populist sloganeering such as ‘*Garibi Hatao*’, abolition of privy purses, and nationalisation of the banking sector were important demonstrations which portrayed Mrs Gandhi as a champion of ‘socialism’ and the poor. At the same time, the internationalised victory of the Indian Armed Forces in the Bangladesh War, the testing of India’s first nuclear facility in 1974, and various aspects of the Emergency itself were spectacular with regards to alleviating the often fabricated anxieties of the middle class provoked by threats to national security.

The cult of personality around Mrs Gandhi has traditionally been analysed in the literature with particular reference to these episodes whilst existing narratives continue to portray her as a populist and strong-willed, but ruthless leader. Similarly, post-Emergency studies highlight the victory of the Janata Party in 1977, and the severity of the ‘Punjab problem’ in 1983-84. However, the premature dissolution of the Janata government, the consequential return of the Congress, and the acceptance of Mrs Gandhi’s leadership by the middle class immediately after the contentious experiences of the Emergency have not been given due attention. This thesis attempts to address the latter as a crucial historiographical gap on Mrs Gandhi’s political life as well as in the

mapping of ‘the long 1980s’, a period which brought enduring shifts in Indian economic and social life a full decade before the era of liberalisation.²¹

Literature Review

I

‘Thought plays very little part in my perceptions. It is as if I feel with the pores of my skin.’²²

Inder Malhotra, in his excellent ‘personal and political’ biography, remarks that Mrs Gandhi’s phenomenal rise to power followed by a fantastic fall, and a remarkable ‘political resurrection’ thereafter produced a wide range of material written about her in extreme revelry or revile.²³ The Bangladesh victory inspired adulatory biographies wherein she was ‘praised to the skies, judged to be free from fault, and extolled as Durga’.²⁴ In contrast, the post-Emergency period witnessed accounts that ‘tarred Mrs Gandhi with the darkest of dark brushes depicting her as irredeemably evil’.²⁵ This vast literature contains several studies on her childhood and personal life, her entry into politics as the Congress Party President and Minister of Information and Broadcasting, and finally her long and controversial career as Prime Minister. A recurring theme in these works is a comparison of ideology, leadership style, and personal character with her father, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Mrs Gandhi once remarked, ‘My father was a statesman, I am a political woman. My father was a saint who strayed into politics. But I am not of the same stuff’.²⁶ The extent

²¹ A. Punathambekar and P. Sundar, ‘The Time of Television: Broadcasting, daily life, and the new Indian middle class’, *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 10 (2017), p. 402.

²² Indira Gandhi quoted in Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 430.

²³ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Y. K. Malik and D. K. Vajpeyi ed., *India: The Years of Indira Gandhi* (Leiden, 1987), p. 10.

to which she differed from her father who enjoyed nothing more than to contemplate and articulate his thoughts on India's past, present, and future is noteworthy.²⁷ Nehru was a man of ideas whereas Mrs Gandhi was self-admittedly non-intellectual. As Corbridge and Harriss point out, both Mrs Gandhi and her successor, Rajiv Gandhi, were 'leaders with points of view rather than a coherent ideology...leaders that responded to events rather than defining a course'.²⁸ In other words, both favoured pragmatic over philosophical considerations in their world-view and decision-making. Indeed, Sudipta Kaviraj notes that Mrs Gandhi was first nominated as a contender for Prime Minister in 1966 by the Congress leadership precisely because she 'appeared to have a set of paradoxical political qualifications, most significantly, of indistinctness and ambiguity'.²⁹

At the same time, Mrs Gandhi's 'socialist' leanings, or spectacular demonstrations of it, were amply visible in the 'adroitly conceived publicity'³⁰ of her '*Garibi Hatao*' campaign, nationalisation of banks in 1969 and 1981, and abolition of privy purses in 1971. During the Emergency, she ostensibly sought to introduce socialist reforms such as the establishment of minimum wages, implementation of land ceiling acts, and increased public spending on health and education. More symbolically, the words 'socialist' and 'secular' were also added to the Preamble of the constitution during her time. In fact, socialism was a word she invoked freely and frequently in speeches and interviews. However, her interpretation of it was neither original nor insightful. Once when asked to explain her 'socialist' thought, Mrs Gandhi was quick to respond:

²⁷ Z. Masani, *Indira Gandhi: A Biography* (London, 1975), p. 274.

²⁸ Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, p. 94.

²⁹ S. Kaviraj, 'Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics', *EPW*, 21/38-39 (1986), p. 1697.

³⁰ A. Rajagopal, 'The Emergency as Prehistory of the New Indian Middle Class', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45/5 (2011), p. 1011.

‘I don’t think my socialism is of a very dogmatic kind. I have never thought that we should nationalise everything or do many things that go with the...official view of socialism. But I have always felt very strongly about equality...economically and also socially, especially because here one could not help but be aware of all the evils of the caste system and social hierarchy.’³¹

On another occasion, she remarked, ‘Democracy implies equality and therefore it implies socialism’.³² In practice, as Nayar observes, Mrs Gandhi was committed to equality and the upliftment of the poor rather than promoting any particular brand of socialism.³³ Maiorano and Malhotra further suggest along similar lines that one of Mrs Gandhi’s greatest achievements was bringing poverty to the fore of Indian political debate.³⁴ Although many dismiss her pro-poor proclamations as populist rhetoric, it is indisputable that Mrs Gandhi shared a special relationship with the masses who often addressed her as ‘Mother’ – a conspicuously gendered title of adoration and admiration reserved for a protective female figure.

In reality, no major changes were implemented in land ownership, nor did the state significantly expand its productive capacity.³⁵ Mrs Gandhi’s socialist rhetoric lost

³¹ Masani, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 280.

³² I. Gandhi and E. Pouchpadass, *My Truth* (New Delhi, 1982), pp. 95-6.

³³ B. R. Nayar, *India’s Mixed Economy: The Role of Ideology and Interest in its Development* (Bombay, 1989), p. 258; Ironically, on more than one occasion, Mrs Gandhi expressed the importance of adhering to the ‘official ideology’ of the state. For instance, on bank nationalisation, she said: ‘Mere nationalisation will make no difference. And with all due respect I would say I do not think that even removing industrialists and putting bankers makes any difference. It does not matter if the person is an industrialist, a banker or a peasant or a businessman. What matters is what his ideology is. Does he believe in what we want to do? That is the question. What his profession is, is immaterial. What his wealth is, is quite immaterial. The people whom we are putting in charge of various things, are they committed to our programme...committed to the public sector?’. I. Gandhi, ‘Address of the AICC session, Bangalore, 12 July 1969’ in *Revitalising Congress: Recent Speeches and Writings of Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi, 1969), p. 27.

³⁴ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, p. 217; and Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 307; It is noteworthy that Mrs Gandhi’s emphasis on agriculture and rural poverty in the 1970s reveals her quiet acknowledgement of the limits to Nehru’s rapid industrialisation strategy of the 1950s and 1960s. The unequal benefits of Nehruvian ‘high-developmentalism’ furthered several peasant revolts across rural India, and an urban-rural divide within the Congress Party which compelled Mrs Gandhi to partially stray from her father’s policies, and instead project a left-leaning version of populism in her personalised appeals to ‘the people’. See C. Jaffrelot and L. Tillin, ‘Populism in India’ in C. R. Kaltwasser, P. A. Taggart, et al. ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 181-3.

³⁵ Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*, p. 72.

fervour as inflation levels reached an all-time high in the mid-1970s, fuelling nationwide agitations which were a prelude to the Emergency. Khilnani notes that Mrs Gandhi did not have an independent analysis of the economy, and relied primarily on the expertise of her advisors on economic matters.³⁶ Instead, she saw her difficulties as overwhelmingly political, requiring political solutions. It is therefore unsurprising that ideological oscillation was very much characteristic of her politics, and she employed that to her advantage. As she candidly admitted to a journalist in 1971, she spoke of socialism because ‘that was what people wanted to hear’.³⁷

Keeping this in mind, it is interesting that one of the foremost challenges confronting Mrs Gandhi upon returning to power in 1980 was the growing discontent and disillusionment of the Indian middle class. Rajagopal argues that up until the Emergency, Mrs Gandhi had not considered public opinion to be of much import, nor did she take the press seriously, both of which she saw ‘quite reasonably, as representing but a small fraction of society’ – the intelligentsia or broadly the middle class.³⁸ Her assessment was perhaps also shaped by the low levels of literacy, and the generally small readership of newspapers at the time which served as an indicator of an informed intelligentsia.³⁹ Here, it is worth pointing out that although the press was strictly regulated during the Emergency, Mrs Gandhi’s government trebled the number of its own newspaper advertisements, improved advertising rates, and used these ‘improvements’ to reward compliant newspapers that carried pro-Emergency

³⁶ S. Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (London, 2003), p. 90.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁸ Rajagopal, ‘The Emergency as Prehistory’, p. 1011.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

messages.⁴⁰ In fact, statist propaganda was even reproduced as consumer goods advertisements targeting the middle class, as Rajagopal's study demonstrates.

The critical response of the middle class to press censorship in particular revealed the extent of public dissatisfaction with Mrs Gandhi's government at the time. Thereafter, she found it prudent to offer members of the press, and the urban middle class in general greater incentives to cooperate 'on the assumption that the seat of public opinion lay with these segments of society'.⁴¹ This argument is supported by Mazzarella in his study of the middle class:

'Politicians who choose to ignore the middle classes may not always lose a crucial vote bank. But they will...make themselves vulnerable to punishment from the institutions that the middle class elites dominate and control: the judiciary, the civil service, the election commission and the media.'⁴²

Kasbekar observes that with Mrs Gandhi's return in 1980, 'the Indian press suddenly came to life'.⁴³ A number of political and lifestyle magazines were also introduced during this period which catered to a growing middle class readership in subjects ranging from politics, crime, and sensational violence to film, tourism, and consumer goods.⁴⁴

In his recent work, Maiorano offers several convincing arguments that further explain the significance of this demographic in shaping Mrs Gandhi's final term in office. First, as noted above, part of the middle class broadly and the intelligentsia in particular had

⁴⁰ A. Kasbekar, *Pop Culture India? Media, Arts, and Lifestyle* (Santa Barbara, 2006), p. 114.

⁴¹ Rajagopal, 'The Emergency as Prehistory', p. 1012.

⁴² Sahgal cited in W. Mazzarella, 'Middle Class' in R. Dwyer ed., *Keywords in South Asia* (London, 2004), p. 4.

⁴³ Kasbekar, *Pop Culture India*, p. 116.

⁴⁴ The circulation of newspapers and periodicals increased from 34.08 million in 1976 to 50.92 million in 1980, to 64.05 million in 1986, representing a 100 percent increase in ten years. Rajagopal, 'The Emergency as Prehistory', p. 1018.

not forgiven Mrs Gandhi for the Emergency.⁴⁵ Second, an urban, upper-caste Hindu middle class had started feeling alienated from the late 1970s, fuelled by the perception that the Congress was primarily working with lower caste and class communities.⁴⁶ Additionally, this group was unhappy with the unemployment and law and order situation during the Janata years. To make matters worse, the Janata government under Prime Minister Charan Singh notoriously adopted an anti-urban, anti-middle class stance as it sought to mobilise resources by taxing consumer goods and services.⁴⁷ In response, Mrs Gandhi's populist sloganeering was quickly replaced with pragmatic proclamations of the Congress as the 'government that worked'. Furthermore, in the run-up to the elections, Mrs Gandhi announced a set of policies that had at its core the urban middle class and private businesses. This, however, did not entail a rejection of her past socialist garb entirely.

At this juncture, it is noted that middle class identity today, as was then, is crucially shaped by the circulation of 'images' – images of itself, its leaders, and the nation-state which represents it in a globally competitive economy of performances. Moreover, these images can be positively or negatively spectacularised by various forms of the media such as newspapers, television, and more recently the Internet whose prime users are also identified as 'belonging' to the middle class. In this thesis, I suggest that the important place of imagery in shaping middle class perceptions of self-worth, and consequently in determining middle class opinion was not unknown to Mrs Gandhi.

⁴⁵ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, p. 97.

⁴⁶ This spurred several 'sons-of-the-soil' movements across the country. See, for instance, Hansen's excellent study of the rise of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra in T. B. Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton; Oxford, 2001).

⁴⁷ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, p. 87.

Indeed, her political career can be uniquely analysed as a series of spectacles aimed at different audiences at different points in time. As Hansen eloquently writes:

‘Politics is a performative process that seeks retroactively to fix and stabilise identities, to invent constituencies and audiences, to create state effects by making the state visible, and to narrate and represent ‘society’ through speech and public spectacles...The state is constantly forced to reinvent itself and present itself anew through a series of spectacles.’⁴⁸

The following sections delve deeper into a discussion of the urban middle class that became the prime ‘spectator-subject’ of Mrs Gandhi’s reinvented spectacles in the early 1980s.⁴⁹

II

On the Spectacle

‘But the barbaric festivals of the ancient East and even the gorgeous splendours of ancient Rome pale into insignificance before the colossal spectacle organised by Lord Curzon to celebrate the coronation of our present King. The Delhi Durbar is probably the most gorgeous pageant that has ever been devised by the imagination and ingenuity of mortal man...It is, therefore, as an act of supreme public solemnity, demonstrating to ourselves our union, and to the world our strength, that we regard the Delhi Ceremonial.’⁵⁰

The above passage taken from a compilation of essays on the Delhi Durbar of 1902 – 03 aptly reflects the sentiment underlying ceremonial ritual in colonial India. The Durbar was a dazzling display of pomp and power meticulously supervised by Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, to celebrate the succession of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra as Emperor and Empress of India. In the months leading up to the ‘colossal spectacle’, the deserted plains of Delhi were transformed into an elaborate tented city fit for royal reception. Its magnificence was intended to celebrate the

⁴⁸ Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, pp. 232-3.

⁴⁹ Monteiro examines the usefulness of the concept of ‘spectator-subject’, rather than ‘target’ or ‘subject’, which emphasises the ‘constitution of identity with the act of seeing’, and where ‘every subject wields power and resists power’ to some extent. See A. Monteiro in A. Nandy ed., *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema* (London, 1998), p. 204.

⁵⁰ V. Steer, *The Delhi Durbar 1902-03* (Madras, 1903), pp. 3, 5.

coronation of the new King, but more significantly to ‘demonstrate to ourselves our union, and to the world our strength’.

The ‘spectacle’ in the colonial subcontinent has been critically analysed by scholars such as Carol Breckenridge, Bernard Cohn, and Tapati Guha-Thakurta whose works focus on curated and ritualistic representations of the imperial regime at world fairs, exhibitions, and magnificent durbars.⁵¹ Borrowing from Milton Singer’s influential study on ‘cultural performance’ in India, these spectacles were symbolic *events* that ‘had a beginning and an end, an organised programme of activity, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance’ (emphasis added).⁵²

In his seminal work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord introduces the concept of the modern day spectacle as:

‘essentially tautological, for the simple reason that its means and its ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire globe, basking in the perpetual warmth of its own glory’.⁵³

In the framework of nation-states (and ‘post-colonies’) where the ruling class seeks to enhance its visibility as a spectacular ‘object of awe’⁵⁴, similar public performances, parades, and rituals become the spectacular means to this end. The significance of the spectacle derives from the very act of staging it,⁵⁵ or to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan’s

⁵¹ See C. A. Breckenridge, ‘Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at world fairs’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31/2 (1989), pp. 195-216; B. S. Cohn, ‘Representing authority in Victorian India’ in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi; New York, 1989); and T. Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-colonial India* (New York, 2004).

⁵² M. Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernises* (London, 1972), p. 71.

⁵³ G. Debord, ‘The Society of the Spectacle’ (1994), http://www.antiworld.se/project/references/texts/The_Society%20Of%20The%20Spectacle.pdf (10 July 2018), thesis 13.

⁵⁴ S. Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham, N.C., 2007), p. 19.

⁵⁵ N. Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48/1 (2014), p. 231.

memorable coinage, the *medium* of the spectacle is itself the intended *message* (emphasis added).⁵⁶ Indeed, the spectacle understood as an ‘event’ can also be examined as a particularly visual form of mass media that carries images and ideas, whilst *working with* other media to enhance its spectacular effects. By focusing on the visuality of the spectacle, Debord traces the development of modern society in which authentic social life is replaced by its representation – ‘All that once was directly lived has become mere representation’ – and explores themes of human alienation where ‘unreal images supplant genuine human interaction’.⁵⁷ The spectacle then is not just a collection of images but a social relationship between people that is *mediated* by images (emphasis added).⁵⁸

Writing in the 1960s, Debord differentiated between the ‘concentrated’ spectacle which characterised centrally-planned statist regimes that often employed violence such as the Soviet Union, and the ‘diffuse’ spectacle which was ‘a particularly American brand of the spectacle’ associated with commodity abundance and the market.⁵⁹ A third kind of ‘integrated’ spectacle emerged from the late 1960s onwards in Italy and France representing ‘the form of spectacular consumer society that has imposed itself globally’ as an ‘ultimate condition of integration of state and economy’.⁶⁰ In contemporary times, the integrated spectacle signals ‘the eventual triumph’ of the diffuse over the concentrated spectacle, most vividly in the image of ‘neoliberal globalisation’.⁶¹ It is

⁵⁶ McLuhan’s original phrase ‘the medium is the message’ first appeared in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1994).

⁵⁷ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1994), thesis 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, thesis 4.

⁵⁹ A. Broudehoux, ‘Images of Power: Architectures of the integrated spectacle at the Beijing Olympics’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63/2 (2010), p. 55.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ C. L. Chu and R. Sanyal, ‘Spectacular Cities of our Time’, *Geoforum*, 65 (2015), p. 400.

this underlying logic of state-market ‘collaboration’, and in some cases ‘collusion’ that informs my analysis of the production of state spectacles in early 1980s India.

Notably, Debord’s spectacle society is similar to the ‘dreamworlds’ described in Susan Buck-Morss’ *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Buck-Morss presents the commonalities between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War where dreams of ‘mass utopia’ (life beyond material scarcity) manufactured through spectacles of industrial modernisation dominated the political imagination.⁶² Unlimited freedom of choice and material abundance shaped the ‘utopia of consumption’ in the United States whereas in the Soviet Union, the cult of ‘human-as-machine’ sustained its ‘utopia of production’ as industrial labour became the model of bodily discipline and productivity – ‘A million hammers striking at the same moment would set the entire world vibrating’.⁶³ However, the ‘dreamworlds’ were repeatedly demystified as they turned into catastrophes of war, human abuse, and ecological exploitation.⁶⁴ Although written as a critique of mass culture in advanced industrial societies, both capitalist and socialist, Debord and Buck-Morss’ analyses of mass spectacles as reflections of social relations of power can be extended to postcolonial contexts such as one depicted brilliantly in Achille Mbembe’s *On the Postcolony*.⁶⁵

In the ‘postcolony’, spectacles reinforce the legitimacy of the ruling class by rearticulating established relations of power, knowledge, and dominance in those

⁶² S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2000).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 107.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xiv; Also see S. Buck-Morss, ‘The City as Dreamworld and Catastrophe’, *October*, 73 (Summer, 1995), pp. 3-26.

⁶⁵ A. Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley, 2001).

societies. Exploring this thesis, Mbembe studies the ways in which the new *commandement* (the postcolonial state) seeks to institutionalise and legitimise itself.⁶⁶ He examines how state power creates a world of meanings of its own, a ‘mastercode’, which governs the logic of all other meanings within society. It does so through its routine administrative and bureaucratic practices that include legal and civic codes, but also through unique and spectacular symbols and images.⁶⁷

As Pinney observes, Mbembe’s thesis suggests that the shared semiotics and gestures of such a system inscribe the dominant and dominated within the same epistemological field.⁶⁸ By doing so, Mbembe argues against traditional interpretations of postcolonial relations in binaries of resistance versus passivity or autonomy versus subjection vis-à-vis the *commandement*.⁶⁹ Rather he focuses on the constant ‘convivial tension’ that exists between state and society as they ‘cohabitate’ or share the same space.⁷⁰ Borrowing from Timothy Mitchell, ‘the edges of the state’ become uncertain in such a system as ‘societal elements seem to penetrate it on all sides’.⁷¹ Conversely, as Mitchell notes, the more completely the state penetrates society, ‘the more completely it can be exploited’.⁷²

By highlighting the intimate relationship between the postcolonial state and its spectator-society, Mbembe examines the possibility of demystification or subversion of

⁶⁶ Mbembe uses the term *commandement* to mean ‘any authoritarian modality, which embraces the images and structures of power and coercion’. A. Mbembe, ‘The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Postcolony’, *Public Culture*, 4/2 (2008), p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ C. Pinney in R. Dwyer and C. Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India* (New Delhi, 2002), p. 16.

⁶⁹ A. Mbembe, ‘Provisional Notes on the Postcolony’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 62/1 (1992), p. 3.

⁷⁰ Mbembe, ‘Banality of Power’, p. 5.

⁷¹ In C. J. Fuller and V. Beni ed., *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (London, 2001), p. 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

state power through visual spectacles of humour. In his study of postcolonial Cameroon, he describes how the public evoked humour and ridicule by sharing obscene and grotesque images of the *commandement* and its leaders as a means of escape or refuge.⁷³ Similarly, in postcolonial India, humour was often employed to attack or challenge state authority. For instance, Mrs Gandhi and her regime were the subject of several allegorical references in literature, art, and film. Perhaps the most well-known example is Salman Rushdie's evocative critique of the Emergency in his novel, *Midnight's Children* (1981). Rushdie's allusion to Mrs Gandhi as 'the Widow' whose actions symbolise a destructive coming-of-age event for the 'midnight's children' is striking in Mbembe's terms. Other notable examples of political satire from the period include films such as *Kissa Kursi Ka* (dir. Amrit Nahata, 1978) which depicted Sanjay's controversial involvement in the Maruti project, and *Aandhi* (dir. Gulzar, 1975) which was allegedly based on Mrs Gandhi's estranged relationship with her husband, Feroze Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi was also a favourite amongst cartoonists who often exaggerated her physical features such as her prominent nose, and the characteristic white streak in her hair.

Like Mitchell, Mbembe notes that such attacks on the *commandement* or its leaders do not entirely erode their material basis or threaten their dominant position.⁷⁴ On the contrary, by maintaining a close relationship with its subjects, by allowing 'pockets of indiscipline to flourish', the state is able to enforce strict punishment via its courts and legal institutions, thus repeatedly legitimising itself in the process.⁷⁵ For instance, in the

⁷³ Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', p. 4; This is similar to the strategy of 'détournement' elaborated by Debord, which in an elementary sense refers to a negative gesture – the appropriation followed by the reversal of the spectacle via another spectacle. Here, the spectacle of state power and violence is refashioned, and thus challenged by the spectacle of humour and other forms of protest.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

examples cited above, censorship regulations punished those who circulated any critical representations of the Emergency government. In a way, as Srirupa Roy perceptively notes, the Emergency was an elaborate state spectacle where every day became ‘the day of the Indian republic’ as the state paraded through the streets of the nation ‘sorting out the good from the bad’.⁷⁶ Crucially, Roy argues that such spectacles did not derive singularly from a centralised institutional authority but were ‘coproduced’ by a range of complicit actors and institutions.⁷⁷ These included law abiding citizens, media channels, and a wide network of pedagogical institutions such as schools, libraries, museums, etc.

In their conceptualisation of ‘imagined states’, Ferguson and Gupta similarly note that states represent themselves as ‘reified entities’ through specific sets of metaphors and visual practices that are consumed and reproduced by non-state actors.⁷⁸ As Roy argues, these visual strategies of communication thus lead to the creation of a public that ‘sees the state’, or rather a public ‘that is produced through the proliferation of images of the state’.⁷⁹ This calls for a ‘conception of publicness not as a form of discourse’ but as a *particular way of seeing*:

‘We know we are "the public" when we either see the state, or when we are asked to see it in a particular way: as self-conscious spectators of a staged display of and about ourselves’ (emphasis in original).⁸⁰

Roy’s theoretical approach is consistent with Freitag’s ‘visual framework’ of studying nationalism rooted in aesthetics, images, and spectatorship, rather than in textual sources and the print media central to the scholarship that followed Anderson’s *Imagined*

⁷⁶ Roy, *Beyond Belief*, p. 87.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ J. Ferguson and A. Gupta in J. X. Inda ed., *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics* (Malden; Oxford, 2005), pp. 105-6.

⁷⁹ S. Roy, ‘Seeing a State: National commemorations and the public sphere in India and Turkey’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 48/1 (2006), p. 204.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*; It is noted that spectacular communication is not limited to the visual mode. Indeed, aural (marching band, gun shots), and tactile (lynching, body searches) modes of communication relay the existence of the state in mundane and extraordinary ways alike.

Communities.⁸¹ Freitag, in her examination of the ‘visual vocabularies’ of predominantly illiterate societies in colonial South Asia, argues that images circulated during civic ceremonials, religious festivals, *darshans*, and even popular cinema were the ‘shapers and bearers’ of nationalist thought.⁸² By equating ‘ways of seeing’ with ‘strategies of knowing’,⁸³ Freitag argues that visual consumption significantly shaped community and national identity formation in colonial India.⁸⁴ Moreover, the ‘very ambiguity’ and ‘ability of the viewer to bring to his or her gaze individual interpretations’ enabled negotiations in state-society relations.⁸⁵ Adding to this point, Appadurai and Breckenridge note that visual consumption as a ‘political practice’ is not passive but includes resistance, co-optation, and critique by spectators.⁸⁶ Such a framework places the agency of the spectator in equal footing with that of producers of mass spectacles albeit noting that even though the visual realm is open to interpretation, the interpretations and interpreters themselves do not *become equal* in the process, nor is there a single, shared visual culture that binds them as one (emphasis in original).⁸⁷

Roy’s rich reading of Indian nationalism in *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Nationalism in Postcolonial India* is also based on a visual methodology that privileges photographs, documentary films, and government advertisements as central to

⁸¹ S. B. Freitag in Dwyer and Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation*, pp. 38-9.

⁸² Ibid., p. 39; ‘*Darshan*’ is a particularly performative and interactive way of engaging with Hindu religious imagery. For an excellent theoretical discussion on the ‘corporeality’ or embodied realities produced by participating in *darshan*, see C. Pinney, ‘*Photos of the Gods*’: *The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London, 2004).

⁸³ J. McAleer, ‘Empires of Vision: A reader ed. by Martin Jay, Sumathi Ramaswamy (review)’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16/3 (2015), Retrieved 14 September 2018, from Project MUSE database.

⁸⁴ S. B. Freitag, ‘The Realm of the Visual: Agency and modern civil society’, *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, 36/1-2 (2002), p. 366.

⁸⁵ Freitag in Dwyer and Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation*, p. 67.

⁸⁶ A. Appadurai and C. A. Breckenridge in C. A. Breckenridge ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis, 1995), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Freitag, ‘The Realm of the Visual’, p. 367; For a theoretical insight into visual methodology, see M. Laing, ‘Between Image and Spectator: Reception Studies as Visual Methodology’, *Fashion Theory*, 22/1 (2018), pp. 5 – 30.

Nehruvian nation-building. These sources depict state-managed or ‘state-protected’ aspects of history and culture projected during Republic Day parades, in speeches, and at museum exhibitions.⁸⁸ Roy’s thesis suggests that the deliberate production of ‘official nationalism’ (beyond internal beliefs) consolidated the ‘reified’ Nehruvian state as an ‘elevated entity’ – that above any other agency.⁸⁹ Quoting Hansen and Stepputat:

‘The continuous state spectacle(s) asserting and affirming the authority of the state...only occasionally succeed[ed] in producing the specific social effects they aim[ed] at, but always reproduce[d] the imagination of the state as the great enframer of our lives’.⁹⁰

Elsewhere, Stepputat has argued that political theory is far too focused on the state as governance and ‘statecraft’, and ignores the state as ‘stateliness’ or ‘pomp in the sense of splendour, display, dignity, and presence’.⁹¹ Indeed, as Scott remarks, this lack of scholarly attention to state spectacles (or ‘stateliness’ as *at least* a legitimate form of statecraft) is peculiar because states resort to specific practices and rituals, which in turn make use of specific political vocabularies, to ensure that they are imagined in some ways than others.⁹²

For instance, in his paper on Mao’s spectacular regime, Hung demonstrates that the parades organised by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) served numerous purposes:

⁸⁸ Roy, ‘Seeing a State’, p. 211.

⁸⁹ T. B. Hansen in T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat ed., *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham, N.C.; London, 2001), p. 226.

⁹⁰ T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat in *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁹¹ F. Stepputat, ‘Marching for Progress: Rituals of citizenship, state and belonging...’, *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 23/2 (2004), p. 245.

⁹² Quoted in J. Ferguson and Gupta in Inda ed., *Anthropologies of Modernity*, p. 108; See C. Six, *Spectacular Politics: Performative Nation-building and Religion in Modern India* (New Delhi, 2010), p. 10, 15; In his seminal work on the pre-colonial Balinese state, Clifford Geertz takes this argument further to claim that the symbolic representation of the state through grand displays and rituals is not merely ‘an illusion or derivation of statecraft’ but rather ‘something in its own right’. He suggests that the function of the rituals of the ‘theatre state’ is not to further political power. Rather, these rituals and ceremonies are ends in themselves, and that the state is ‘a device for the enactment of the rituals’. In Geertz’s words, ‘power served pomp, not pomp power’. (J. D. Legge, ‘Clifford Geertz: twenty years after’, *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review*, 6/1 (1982), p. 83); Many argue against Geertz’s proposition which seemingly subordinates the material basis of state power entirely to the cultural realm. See, for instance, B. Anderson, ‘Clifford Geertz. “Negara; The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali” (Book Review)’, *The American Historical Review*, 86/5 (1981), p. 1137.

‘They were festivals to highlight the demolition of the old order and to embrace the new socialism, a legitimisation of the CCP’s authority, a display of myriad achievements under communism, an affirmation of the centrality of the role of Mao in modern Chinese revolutionary history (hence expressing the cult of Mao), and an announcement of China’s presence in the international socialist camp.’⁹³

Similar visual projections were key to the self-promotion of the Soviet leadership in the inter-war years. Soviet state spectacles took various forms such as military parades, space missions, sports, opera music, ballet, etc.⁹⁴ The internationalisation of sport after the First World War, for instance, saw Soviet authorities advocate sport to encourage discipline and fitness, and to promote nation-building in its multi-ethnic society.⁹⁵ Boys and girls from a young age were encouraged to take up elite sports, and to compete in international spectacles to project a united nation, and to communicate the ideological potency of the communist ‘way of life’.⁹⁶ Indeed, as Edelman notes, Soviet victories were often viewed as the ‘final product of a Soviet sports machine’ – ‘The athlete was as much the creation of the state as the statue of Stalin in the park’.⁹⁷

Although the cult of personality constructed around figures such as Mao in China or Stalin in the U.S.S.R was more aggressive, the Indira Gandhi years similarly demonstrate how a single leader came to be positioned above the Indian state. There no longer was a clear distinction between Mrs Gandhi’s personal authority, and that of the institutions of the state. The 1970s, in particular, showcase how Mrs Gandhi’s personal and political difficulties quickly generalised into a crisis of the Congress Party, and ultimately the Indian state.⁹⁸ Alternatively, ‘victories’ such as the Bangladesh War or

⁹³ C. Hung, ‘Mao’s Parades: State spectacles in China in the 1950s’, *The China Quarterly*, 190 (2007), p. 413.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, C. Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, 2012).

⁹⁵ R. Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sports in the U.S.S.R.* (New York; Oxford, 1993), p. ix.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *LA Times* (25 July 1991) in *Ibid.*, pp. vii-viii.

⁹⁸ S. Kaviraj, ‘A Critique of the Passive Revolution’, *EPW*, 25/45-47 (1988), p. 2437.

the nuclear tests were single-handedly attributed to Mrs Gandhi's leadership. Celebratory 'national' spectacles examined in this thesis such as the 1982 Asian Games or the inauguration of Maruti-Suzuki were also commemorated on Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay's birthdays respectively. It can be noted that the form of legitimacy derived via the staging of these 'developmental' spectacles versus in the traditional form of *durbars* or public statues and buildings named after the charismatic leader was based on the leader's successful accomplishments in the name of its 'people'.⁹⁹ Symbolic and material advancements in the 1970s and early 1980s were indeed attributed to Mrs Gandhi's leadership, which memorialised her permanently in association with these important events.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps most telling is Congress President D. K. Barooah's famous phrase, 'Indira is India, India is Indira'¹⁰¹ which firmly projected Mrs Gandhi as the source of all state power, and the very basis of its legitimacy. In the case of contemporary India, the only other political personality to 'saturate public space', and to command authority in this

⁹⁹ Although my analysis is limited to the theoretical concept of the spectacle, a brief discussion of Max Weber's study of 'charisma' is useful. Discussing Weber's theory of 'legitimate' rulership, Derman notes that relations of domination between the ruler and the ruled are based on legitimacy conferred upon the former by the latter. Weber enumerates three 'pure types' of legitimacy sought by persons in power – 'traditional' (monarchy and patriarchy), 'legal-rational' (bureaucracy and civil service), and 'charismatic' (war lords, prophets, and contemporary political parties). (J. Derman, 'Max Weber and Charisma', *New German Critique*, 113 (2011), p. 55-6); Jacob notes that, in reality, these 'pure types' of legitimacy are always found in combinations. On charismatic leadership, in particular, it is important to note that legitimacy does not merely depend upon a set of charismatic 'traits' possessed by a single leader, but rather the *perception* of it by a group of followers in a specific historical, cultural context. Thus, quoting Willner, 'charismatic affect in one culture may have little relevance for another'. (P.S. Jacob, *Film and Political Advertisements of South India* (PhD thesis, UCLA, 1994), p. 114); On this point, also see J. Breuille, 'Max Weber, Charisma and Nationalist Leadership', *Nations and Nationalism*, 17/3 (2011), pp. 477-99; The 'charismatic affects' produced by Mrs Gandhi's spectacles indeed added a 'personal' dimension to her relationship with the middle class in the 1980s in a way similar to her engagement with the 'masses' in the 1970s.

¹⁰⁰ On this point, see M. N. Truesdell, *Spectacular Politics: Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Imperial* (New York, 1997), p. 88.

¹⁰¹ In T. Crowley, 'India is (still) Indira', Jacobin (22 March 2016), <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/indira-gandhi-congress-bjp-modi-emergency> (17 September 2018).

manner is current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.¹⁰² The exponential growth in mass media technology in the last two decades has enabled more sophisticated and targeted modes of political communication (employed effectively by PM Modi), which has been captured in several brilliant studies that further map the resulting transformations in state-society relations.¹⁰³ However, the significance of imagery and spectacular politics, i.e. the practice of ‘stateliness’ as ‘statecraft’ in a politico-performative context, evident during Mrs Gandhi’s years in office is yet to receive scholarly attention.¹⁰⁴

Mrs Gandhi’s partial abandonment of her populist rhetoric for a more exclusive, middle class-friendly narrative in the early 1980s witnessed the ‘marketing’ of the state in various forms – as the magnificent urban architecture constructed for sporting spectacles (Asian Games), as the ‘driver’ of change symbolised via the family car (Maruti 800), as a cultural resource exhibited at international festivals (Festival of India), and even as a manifestation of middle class prestige during diplomatic summits (Non-Aligned Movement Summit). In this context, Lieven de Cauter notes how the spectacle is ‘located in necessity’ for a number of reasons: ‘national prestige, political manoeuvres to withdraw attention from a precarious local state of affairs, the stimulation of international commerce, the opening of new markets, promotion of export, the self-promotion of towns, giving creditability to imperialistic and colonial aspirations and so

¹⁰² C. Jaffrelot, ‘The Modi-centric BJP 2014 Election Campaign...’, *CSA*, 23/2 (2015), pp. 154-8; See P. Chakravartty and S. Roy, ‘Mr. Modi Goes to Delhi: Mediated populism and the 2014 Indian elections’, *Television & New Media*, 16/4 (2015), pp. 311-22.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, A. Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge, 2001); A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis; London, 1996); L. Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform* (Minnesota, 2006); W. Mazzarella, *Shovelling Smoke: Advertising and Globalisation in Contemporary India* (Durham, NC; London, 2003); and C. Jaffrelot, ‘Narendra Modi and the Power of Television in Gujarat’, *Television & New Media*, 16/4 (2015), pp. 346-53.

¹⁰⁴ Notably, the performative politics of South India has been the subject of several scholarly works that examine the unique visual populism associated with film star-politicians. See, for instance, P. Jacob, *Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India* (Lanham, 2009).

on'.¹⁰⁵ Still, he adds that the 'most urgent' motivation for this exercise 'seems to be the desire to visualise progress itself'.¹⁰⁶

The spectacle, however, does not merely impose the idea of a progressive state upon its spectators as 'top-down' propaganda. Indeed, with the deliberate use of interactive media (such as television or the Internet) to further its spectacular effects, the state ceases to be 'monologic',¹⁰⁷ and rather seeks to engage with a number of spectators in the process. Thus, whilst I draw upon the works of scholars like Srirupa Roy who have engaged with the theoretical concept of the postcolonial 'spectacle' and its making in India, I also examine its reception whereby I suggest that the audience's subjectivities in turn shaped the representations of the 'performative state'.

On the Middle Class

Political communication in general, and state spectacles in particular vary in form and content, and also in their actors and audiences. Delimiting the scope of this thesis, I will focus on four state spectacles that were primarily directed at the urban middle class, and in many instances an increasingly participative Indian diaspora. It is acknowledged that different groups such as rich farmers, the business elite, and the middle class viewed occasions such as the Asian Games or the Festival of India with different and often divergent lens. Furthermore, within the middle class, interpretations varied along caste, linguistic, gender, regional, and political lines.¹⁰⁸ The point to be noted is that there were

¹⁰⁵ L. de Cauter, 'The Panoramic Ecstasy: On world exhibitions and the disintegration of experience', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 10 (1993), p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ On this point, see Willem's study on postcolonial Zimbabwe in W. Willems, 'Risky Dialogues: The performative state and the nature of power in a postcolony', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27/3 (2015), pp. 356-69.

¹⁰⁸ Although this thesis does not privilege any sociological category, it makes note of the difference in public opinion based on some of these 'identities' such as between men and women, or between Congress and Janata Party supporters.

perhaps no truly ‘objective’ observations of the spectacle. The attempt then is to capture some of these differences, and, more importantly, to examine the engagement between the state and the middle class via the medium of the spectacle.

Indeed, *the* middle class itself is an ambiguous concept. In the case of India, Varma notes that the middle class is at once a ‘clearly identifiable’ but numerically ‘broad-brush identity’.¹⁰⁹ Traditionally, it has been identified and self-identified by ‘objective’ markers such as income level, educational qualification, possession of consumer goods, and a variety of administrative, managerial, clerical, and other white-collar occupations whose origins can be traced back to colonial policies.¹¹⁰ Jaffrelot and van der Veer add to this list merchants, traders, and other small and medium-scale entrepreneurs who were indigenous to the Indian milieu from the time of the Raj.¹¹¹ Historically, a common feature across the spectrum was also the middle class’ upper caste composition, and a common outlook or ‘shared values’ that characterised its social ‘status’.¹¹²

As an analytical category, Kothari classifies the ‘middle elites or those individuals in the intermediate roles in developing countries’ as those filling the gap between the elite and the people.¹¹³ As ‘brokers’ or ‘natural interpreters’ of the ‘national political culture’, the middle elites are also a ‘communication link between the masses and the national elites’.¹¹⁴ To this, Poduval adds that the middle class must not be viewed simply as an

¹⁰⁹ P. K. Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class* (New Delhi, 1998), p. xiii.

¹¹⁰ C. Brosius, *India’s Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity* (New Delhi; Abingdon, 2010), p. 14.

¹¹¹ C. Jaffrelot and P. van der Veer ed., *Patterns of Middle Class Consumption in India and China* (New Delhi, 2008), pp. 13-14.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19.

¹¹³ Cited in D. Vajpeyi, ‘Modernity and Industrial Culture of Indian Elites’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 17/1-2 (1982), p. 78.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

intermediate economic strata that rests between the upper and working class.¹¹⁵ Rather, it should be defined by its ‘acquisition of crucial non-material attributes’ such as style, taste, and social networks that facilitate upward mobility.¹¹⁶ Poduval argues that these attributes of ‘civility’ make the middle class more of an ‘intermediary class’ that plays a crucial role in the reproduction of class relations.¹¹⁷

Following Bourdieu’s foundational work on strategies of social reproduction, Fuller and Narasimhan analyse the process of ‘structuration’ by which similar economic classes become distinct social categories.¹¹⁸ For instance, in their study of Tamil Brahmins as a ‘modern middle class group’, they argue that ‘middle class-ness has always been shaped by pre-existing values and practices, which are important sources of diversity alongside variations in income or consumption patterns’.¹¹⁹ Although Tamil Brahmins self-identify as a ‘middle class caste’, they simultaneously claim to belong to a distinct upper stratum of the middle class.¹²⁰ They become a separate social class – an upper middle class differentiated from a lower middle class – based on common cultural practices such as appreciation of classical music and dance, use of Sanskritised Tamil, practicing vegetarianism, etc. This suggests that *becoming* middle class encompasses a range of inherited (often caste-based) and adopted practices.

Moreover, *being seen* as belonging to the middle class by its members and others is a crucial aspect of *being* middle class in India. As a result, several theorists have proposed

¹¹⁵ Cited in P. Joshi and R. Dudrah ed., *The 1970s and its Legacies in India’s Cinema* (London, 2014), p. 39.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ C. J. Fuller and H. Narasimhan, *Tamil Brahmins: The Making of a Middle Class Caste* (Chicago, 2014), p. 221. Also see P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1999), Chapter 2.

¹¹⁹ Fuller and Narasimhan, *Tamil Brahmins*, p. 16.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 221.

that it is more useful to examine ‘what it means to claim’ middle class status rather than attempting to define its composition.¹²¹ Indeed, Leela Fernandes notes that the possibility to join the middle class, and the claim to participate in middle class rituals makes the boundaries of this interest group ‘both fluid and political in nature’.¹²² Going a step further, Donner argues that one reason why middle class lifestyles ‘acquired a hegemonic role’ in postcolonial India was precisely due to their association with the *open-ended* ‘aspirations and discourses of modernity’ (emphasis added).¹²³

For the purpose of this thesis, I deliberately make use of a ‘fluid’ interpretation of the Indian middle class. By attempting to study the middle class in early 1980s India, I do not seek to map an all-encompassing middle class identity but rather to identify specific state-produced images and claims, the consumption and assertion of which came *to be seen* as particularly middle class in India. As McGuire argues, treating the middle class as ‘a historically specific claim’ can bring into focus ‘its suite of practices and discursive constructions, the history of which can be traced’.¹²⁴ Thus, for instance, Fernandes observes that the ‘newness’ of the ‘new’ middle class which emerged in the wake of the economic reforms in 1991 did not simply refer to an increase in the population entering

¹²¹ Srivastava quoted in P. Chatterjee, T. Guha-Thakurta, and B. Kar ed., *New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices* (New Delhi, 2014), p. 409.

¹²² Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class*, p. xviii.

¹²³ H. Donner, *Being Middle Class in India* (London; New York, 2011), p. 13; As Jeffrey points out, what also unites this heterogeneous group is ‘a shared anxiety about the possibility of downward mobility’, resulting in specific practices to ensure their dominant position in society. C. Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford, 2010), p. 5.

¹²⁴ M. L. McGuire, *Inhabiting Aspiration: Embodied Practices of New Middle-Classness* (PhD thesis, Univ. of Chicago, 2016), pp. 13-4; For an engaging study of state-sponsored middle class formation along similar lines in South Korea, see M. Yang, ‘The Making of the Urban Middle Class in South Korea...’, *Sociological Inquiry*, 82/3 (2012), pp. 424-45. Yang examines the ‘political-ideological’ project of middle class formation under the Park Chung Hee regime as an attempt to consolidate state power, and to reconstruct the nation along newly established middle class norms that championed self-discipline and commitment to the ‘cause’ of modernisation.

the middle class.¹²⁵ Rather its newness ‘rested on an emerging set of political claims of public representation’ within the realm of democratic civic life.¹²⁶

In 1985, a cover story in *India Today* magazine similarly noted the ‘suddenness’ by which a ‘new’ middle class had taken centre-stage to make its demands felt by the state.¹²⁷ It estimated its size to be close to a hundred million – roughly ten to fifteen per cent of the population at the time – comprising prosperous farmers, the growing labour elite, small-scale entrepreneurs, professionals, salaried employees, and thousands of workers who had immigrated to the Gulf.¹²⁸ First, this reflects the conceptual diversity underlying middle class composition in India in the early to mid 1980s . Furthermore, as the article remarked, the growing visibility of an assertive middle class had altered the political culture whereby the earlier image of the ‘money-grubbing never-do-well’ *babu* was replaced by the ‘manager-politician’, referring to Rajiv Gandhi’s technocratic cadre of ministers. Crucially, the emergence of such a culture also signified the emergence of a middle class defined ‘through cultural and consumerist forms of identity’ in place of a state-managed one.¹²⁹ Indeed, from 1980 onwards, governments claimed to provide better consumer goods and services over improved social services as indicators of their performance to mobilise middle class support.¹³⁰

Slightly different networks of patronage characterised the relationship between the middle class and the state in the past. As Fernandes notes, upper tiers comprising civil

¹²⁵ Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class*, p. xviii.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹²⁷ T. N. Ninan, ‘Rise of the middle class’, *IT* (16 December 1985), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indias-middle-class-represents-the-emergence-of-a-major-political-and-economic-force/1/354808.html> (21 April 2016).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Rajagopal, ‘The Emergency as Prehistory’, p. 1003.

¹³⁰ See J. Patino, *Consumption and Social Change in a Post-Soviet Middle Class* (Washington; Stanford, 2008), p. 145 for a similar argument made in the context of post-Soviet middle class society.

servants and white-collar workers were employed into the institutional apparatus of the state.¹³¹ The middle class, in turn, supplied the human and cultural capital necessary for the many development projects initiated in the early years after Independence. Varma argues that middle class identity at the time was also shaped by a ‘common attitude’ towards the nation rooted in ‘ideals’ of morality, austerity, and simplicity.¹³² It showed allegiance to a leadership that had an aura of personal sacrifice in figures like Nehru and Gandhi whose ideas provided an ideological framework for the entire nation.¹³³

The ‘new’ middle class, in contrast, referred to these ‘politicians of yesteryears’ as ‘freedom fighters’, and replaced them with a ‘new breed’ of professionals for whom politics was ‘a profession as good as any other’.¹³⁴ This retreat from ideology and a moral conception of politics was perhaps most evident during the Emergency. On the one hand, urban, upper-caste members welcomed social programmes like family planning that disproportionately affected lower caste and class groups. On the other hand, sections of the middle class particularly the intelligentsia questioned press censorship, infringement of civil rights, and failing economic conditions. The simultaneous endorsement and condemnation of Mrs Gandhi’s policies was further proof of the middle class’ ‘ideological rudderless-ness’ at the time.¹³⁵

The Emergency, in many ways, represented the critical juncture at which the middle class became more assertive especially in its demands for a lifestyle centred around new

¹³¹ Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class*, pp. 21-4.

¹³² Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, p. 27.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹³⁴ IIPO, ‘Values in the Winds of Change’, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 26/5-6 (1981), p. I. The survey revealed a new middle class ‘value jargon’ with phrases such as ‘ascent aspirations’, ‘occupational mobility’, ‘risk-taking capacity’, ‘social dynamism’, etc.

¹³⁵ Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, p. 99.

patterns of consumption, as noted above. In this regard, it was no longer willing to be taken for granted by either the Congress or the Janata Party. Keeping in mind the impact of middle class opinion on electoral calculus, Mrs Gandhi's appeals to this group in the early 1980s appear purely strategic. However, her changing socio-economic orientation in her final years also betrays an acknowledgment of the long-term failures of her own 'socialist' policies. In the early 1980s, Mrs Gandhi surrounded herself with individuals like L. K. Jha, Abid Hussain, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and Rajiv Gandhi who, as her economic advisors, were more inclined towards a more 'market-friendly' framework.¹³⁶

Indeed, as journalist Vinay Sitapati writes:

'The presence at the top of the bureaucracy of liberalisers such as L. K. Jha, Abid Hussain, Manmohan Singh, and Montek Singh Ahluwalia ensured a critical mass of officials who could implement changes to economic policy as long as politicians gave the go-ahead. Many of the policies that Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh would implement in 1991, were, in fact, worked upon during this period. By the mid-1980s, Indian policymakers had become convinced of the need for economic liberalisation.'¹³⁷

Moreover, in 1981, India was approved a \$6 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund which was a turning point in the nation's developmental strategy.¹³⁸

Although many of the loan's requirements such as currency devaluation were opposed in Parliament, Mrs Gandhi's government put into effect certain 'homegrown conditionalities' such as the setting up of export-oriented units, and relaxation of import controls on raw materials which notably gave off the image that India was undertaking reforms on its 'own terms'.¹³⁹ This was further supported by institutional changes that

¹³⁶ See V. Shastri, 'The Politics of Economic Liberalisation in India', *CSA*, 6/1 (1997), pp. 34-42 for a discussion of this 'change team' comprising bureaucrats and external policy advisors who 'created political space for new ideas' of reform in the 1980s (p. 32).

¹³⁷ V. Sitapati, *Half-Lion: How P.V. Narasimha Rao Transformed India* (Haryana, 2016), p. 268.

¹³⁸ C. Candland, *Labour, Democratisation, and Development in India and Pakistan* (London, 2007), p. 97.

¹³⁹ P.K. Chaudhry, V.L. Kelkar, and V. Yadav, 'The Evolution of "Homegrown Conditionality" in India', *Journal of Development Studies*, 40/6 (2004), pp. 64-7; Also see K. Dash, 'India's International Monetary Fund Loans...', *Asian Survey*, 39/6 (1999), pp. 884-907. Dash argues that despite accepting IMF aid and several pro-liberalisation measures, Mrs Gandhi was able to maintain her 'socialist' image by reinforcing bank nationalisation and anti-monopoly policies in 1981. According to Dash, 'The continuation of bank nationalisation was promoted by her supporters as a demonstration of Indira Gandhi's assertive

favoured growth in the business community. Maiorano, referring to arguments made by Kohli, Rodrik, and Subramanian, argues that Mrs Gandhi's attitudinal shift towards a more 'pro-business' approach in the 1980s was a sign that her government 'had chosen to embrace...Indian capital as [its] main ruling ally'.¹⁴⁰ Concessions to the business community came in the form of relaxation of licensing requirements, increased investment in infrastructure, renegotiating labour relations, and a more liberal credit policy.¹⁴¹ Another major step were the administrative reforms initiated by the Economic Administration Reforms Commission set up in 1981 under the chairmanship of L. K. Jha. The commission recommended a shift in governmental emphasis 'from regulation to development', and from direct to indirect control of industrial enterprises.¹⁴²

Alongside changes in economic orientation, Maiorano argues that Mrs Gandhi proclaimed herself as the strong leader the country desperately needed whilst she tried to substantiate the 'modernisation dream' of the middle class.¹⁴³ The first argument is examined in Chapter 4 of this thesis as part of Mrs Gandhi's foreign policy strategy. On the latter, it is crucial to note that the state's support for middle class consumption,

pragmatism against Western influence, and reinforced her image as a strong and nationalist leader' (p. 892).

¹⁴⁰ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, p. 89; See D. Rodrik and A. Subramanian, 'From "Hindu Growth" to Productivity Surge', *IMF Staff Papers*, 52/2 (2005), pp. 193-228; A. Kohli, 'Politics of Economic Growth in India: 1980-2005 Part 1: The 1980s', *EPW*, 41/13 (2006), pp. 1251-9; and K. Sen, 'What a Long Strange Trip it's Been', *CSA*, 17/4 (2009), pp. 363-77. Sen supports Rodrik and Subramanian's argument that this attitudinal shift 'left little paper trail in actual policies but had an important impact on investors' psychology' (p. 272). However, he adds that significant formal institutional changes implemented during the late 1970s and early 1980s contributed to India's growth spurt. (Ibid.); On this important debate, also see M. Sengupta, 'How the State Changed its Mind', *EPW*, 43/21 (2008), pp. 35-42.

¹⁴¹ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, pp. 90-5; These policies were outlined in the revised 'Twenty Point Programme' announced by the Planning Commission in January 1982. Interestingly, following its announcement, Mrs Gandhi's media adviser, H. Y. Sharada Prasad, suggested the use of radio and new television technology to broadcast the programme's past achievements and new objectives. Grasping the potential of visual media, Prasad noted, 'The TV talk could be backed up by [statistical] graphs'. 'Regarding 20-Point Programme', 15 January 1982. National Archives of India PMS 37/7/18/1982.

¹⁴² S. Maheshwari, *Administrative Reforms in India* (New Delhi, 1993), pp. 225-8.

¹⁴³ Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, p. 121.

leisure, and entertainment was not a straightforward acceptance or promotion of ‘modernisation’ understood as Western-style ‘individualism’, nor did its spectacles produce consumers entirely divorced from their social contexts. Indeed, as the thesis chapters seek to demonstrate, the early 1980s offered opportunities ‘to sample the pleasures of modernity within collective units like the family’.¹⁴⁴ In particular, the concept of the nuclear family is central to my analysis of the consuming middle class in Chapters 1 and 2. Similarly, in Chapter 3, I study official representations of Indian culture at international festivals filtered through the lens of diasporic families in Britain. The assumption that the *middle class family* was a *collective spectator-subject* of Mrs Gandhi’s performances is therefore maintained throughout the thesis.

Noting the power of images in shaping ‘new’ middle class culture in India, Fernandes writes:

‘Policies of economic liberalisation since the 1990s have been accompanied by an array of visual images and public discourses that have centred on a shifting role of the middle class and their attitudes, lifestyles, and consumption practices. For example, popular stories, advertising images, and news reports that detail the spread of consumer items such as cell phones, rising wage levels for the managerial staff of multinational companies, and expanding consumer choice for goods such as cars, washing machines, and colour televisions have produced an image of the rise of an emerging middle class culture in India.’¹⁴⁵

This thesis attempts to identify and examine the markers of a pre-liberalisation middle class culture in India which developed into the visual forms, practices, and subjectivities outlined above. As Punathambekar and Sundar argue, the 1980s have traditionally been regarded as a minor interlude in the nation’s shift ‘from one imaginary (Development) to another (Globalisation)’.¹⁴⁶ Alternatively, existing histories overwhelmingly focus on the Rajiv Gandhi years as the beginnings of state-sponsored, middle class flirtations

¹⁴⁴ Khilnani, *Idea of India*, p. 186.

¹⁴⁵ Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class*, p. xv.

¹⁴⁶ Punathambekar and Sundar, ‘The Time of Television’, p. 402.

with ‘modernisation’.¹⁴⁷ This thesis fills a crucial historiographical gap by locating its beginnings to the early 1980s, and placing the state under Mrs Gandhi at the centre of its making. Finally, in doing so, it seeks to portray another dimension of Mrs Gandhi’s constructed image as a leader of this influential demographic in her final years.

A Note on Sources and Methodology

The examination of four different state spectacles required consulting a variety of historical sources spread across New Delhi, Oxford, and London. Records of the planning of various events were primarily found in the memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies of Indian bureaucrats and politicians, parliamentary debates, meeting minutes, and unpublished and published reports of numerous organising committees. These were supplemented by Mrs Gandhi’s policy statements, speeches, and press interviews. The unavailability of access to Mrs Gandhi’s private papers at the Nehru Library in New Delhi led me to alternative sources such as the Prime Minister’s Secretariat and Prime Minister’s Office records at the National Archives of India. Additionally, recently declassified documents of the Central Intelligence Agency, Festival of India papers at the British Library, and private papers of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were consulted. These sources were particularly useful as they contained parts of Mrs Gandhi’s correspondence on select subjects like the Emergency, liberalisation, and nuclear disarmament.

Recent works on the Indian middle class have predominantly been based on ethnographic fieldwork and case studies. The historical nature of this thesis required a

¹⁴⁷ See, for instance, Fernandes, *India’s New Middle Class*; and Mazzarella, *Shovelling Smoke*.

different set of sources to analyse middle class opinion. A significant portion of the spectacles' publicity took the form of newspaper reports and articles circulated in periodicals. Given my focus on an urban, middle class readership, I primarily consulted four English dailies, one Hindi daily, and three English periodicals.¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, an opinion survey from August 1984 revealed that 38.1% of newspaper readers across Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras read only English papers whilst 40.5% read both English and 'Language' papers. 19.8% responded to reading only Language papers.¹⁴⁹ I also consulted Editorials and Letters to the editor of dailies and periodicals. A readership survey from 1982 similarly revealed that 58% of respondents read Editorials, and 59% read Letters to the editor 'regularly' or at least 'occasionally'.¹⁵⁰ To gauge international opinion, I primarily referred to two British sources, *Guardian/Observer* (London) and *Economist* (London), and the American *India-West* (California).

According to the aforementioned survey, 44% respondents also read newspaper advertisements 'regularly', 20% 'occasionally', and only 9% were 'not interested'. Moreover, 58% looked at political cartoons 'regularly'.¹⁵¹ As noted in preceding theoretical discussions, the spectacles at the heart of this thesis were most effectively

¹⁴⁸ According to the 29th Annual Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, 36 out of 1,609 dailies had an individual circulation of over 100,000 copies in 1984. The ranks (out of 36) and circulation (out of 19 million) of the dailies consulted in this thesis as representative of middle class readership were as follows:

(3) *Times of India* (henceforth TOI) (English, Bombay): 338,793

(4) *Navbharat Times* (Hindi, Delhi): 307,007

(6) *Hindustan Times* (henceforth HT) (English, Delhi): 269,228

(25) *Indian Express* (English, Bombay): 124,719

(x) *The Hindu* (English, Chennai): Unavailable

Three periodicals were consulted: *India Today* (henceforth IT), English fortnightly, Delhi (286,027); *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (henceforth IWI), English weekly, Bombay (158,583); and *Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth EPW), English weekly (unavailable). Data published by the Controller of Publications (Delhi, 1985), pp. 9, 37, 123-4, 141-2.

¹⁴⁹ IIPO, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 29/11 (1984), p. VI. The survey sample size was 1000.

¹⁵⁰ IIPO, 'Newspaper readership in the metropolitan cities: 1982', *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 28/5,6 (1983), p. XII. The survey sample size was 6000.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. III.

publicised in the visual form as films, advertisements, photographs, brochures, cartoons, and posters that appeared in newspapers and magazines at the time. Brosius argues that messages communicated through visual material enable a better understanding of the ‘aspirations and anxieties of producers and consumers of the images’ in different performative contexts.¹⁵² The text accompanying the images also reveals intentionally constructed associations between the spectator and the image.¹⁵³ For instance, promotional advertisements for the Maruti 800 car revealed as much about the statist message of family planning as they did about middle class attitudes towards conspicuous consumption (Figure 2.8, p. 184). Thus, following Freitag, the ‘agent-and agency-oriented exploration’ of visual sources placed the ‘act of seeing’ at the centre of ‘the world of evidence’ that I explored, and the conclusions that I derived.¹⁵⁴

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1, ‘Spectacle and the City: Asian Games’, examines the 1982 ‘Asiad’ in New Delhi as more than a sporting spectacle. It argues that the Games ushered urban and technological transformations that were central to the conceptualisation of the middle class as a ‘consumer class’ in India. It begins by tracing the birth of the Games to Nehru’s attempts at carving a unique identity for India as a moral superpower within the Asian region. These ideals underwent a change as sporting events transformed from purely ideological tools to commercialised spectacles where urbanisation, entertainment, and consumption became the new focal sites of state intervention. In this

¹⁵² C. Brosius, ‘Picturing More than the Nation’, *Social Anthropology*, 19 (2011), p. 105.

¹⁵³ See, for instance, J. Tepla, ‘Analysing Socialist Press Photographs: A Contribution to Critical Visual Methodology’, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 25/1 (2018), pp. 45 – 55.

¹⁵⁴ Brosius, ‘Picturing More...’, p. 103, and Freitag in Dwyer and Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation*, pp. 38-9.

context, it explores the construction of sports stadia, flyovers, and five-star hotels as the new ‘territorial’ sites of the spectacle, which led to a social and spatial segregation of the city. Through the example of migrant labour employed to ‘beautify’ the city, it examines notions of urban aesthetics, and cultural citizenship as an exclusive claim of the middle class to participate in the nation’s cultural myths and its spectacles as ‘consumers’. This chapter also explores how the Games came to enjoy a wide spectatorship with the introduction of colour television in India. It examines the significance of mass media technology for Mrs Gandhi’s ‘televisual’ politics with respect to four specific agendas: dissemination of state-approved ‘knowledge’, fostering national unity, image building, and entertainment for the masses. Finally, it comments upon the beginnings of India’s consumer and advertisement revolutions that were aided by the expansion of television coverage from 1982 onwards. The chapter concludes by highlighting the middle class dilemma vis-à-vis consumption and leisure that was reinforced by various forms of mass media, including Hindi cinema, in the early 1980s.

Chapter 2, ‘A People’s Car: Maruti 800’, explores the beginnings of India’s first public-private partnership in the manufacture of passenger cars. The Maruti-Suzuki joint venture between the Government of India and Suzuki Motor Corporation of Japan in 1983 launched India’s first ‘people’s car’ – Maruti 800. The chapter argues that the adoption of Japanese management practices at Maruti was in line with Mrs Gandhi’s own objectives of managing tense labour relations and enhancing labour productivity at the time by enforcing the rhetoric of ‘discipline’ previously vocalised during the Emergency. It notes that the collaboration was suggestive of the influence of state-controlled models of capitalism famously demonstrated by the ‘East-Asian Tigers’ where high growth rates were also attributed to ‘Asian values’ of hard work, loyalty,

and collectivism. These ideals shaped the norms of a new ‘consumer-citizenship’ in India, and indeed redefined modernisation as articulated by the state at the time – from Sanjay Gandhi’s indigenous model of development to Rajiv’s global brand of ‘Indianness’. The chapter further suggests that the conceptualisation and promotion of the Maruti 800 as the ideal car for a ‘small’ middle class family revealed subtle continuities with the controversial family planning programme of the state. By associating the Maruti 800, an object of aspiration for the middle class and of at least potential mass consumption, with a small family, the state reiterated its message of population control albeit subliminally.

Chapter 3, ‘Exporting Culture: Festival of India’, employs the concept of culture as a consumable resource in visually-mediated global markets. The primary objective of the chapter is twofold: To examine how Mrs Gandhi used Indian culture or ‘Indianness’ as something ‘exportable’ to engage with her critics and supporters in Britain, and how this exercise was viewed by spectators in India and by British-Indians. State-sponsored cultural extravaganzas like the Festival of India first hosted in 1982 in Britain were as much about diplomacy as they were personal for Mrs Gandhi’s image making endeavours. She took keen interest in the ‘visual scheme’ of India that was projected to a largely Western audience whilst conscious of her own image as she inaugurated the Festival alongside Margaret Thatcher. The chapter argues that the Festival’s promotion of Indian cultural exports in the form of handicrafts and tourism was facilitated by a trend of ‘Raj Revivalism’ in Britain which witnessed growing interest in the subcontinent and its colonial past. At the same time, the depiction of India’s scientific achievements at the Festival was also favourably received by an image conscious middle class at home.

The fourth and final chapter, 'Champion of the Third World: NAM Summit', examines Mrs Gandhi's desire to act as a spokesperson for all of South Asia, and to represent the wider 'Third World' at prominent international forums. The chapter begins with a discussion of Mrs Gandhi's pragmatic approach to foreign policy, which sought to establish India's flexibility, independence, and power in its conduct of diplomacy. In addition to this, the chapter suggests that Mrs Gandhi employed 'foreign policy as spectacle' as an instrument of image building, and to mobilise middle class support. This was especially relevant in her final years as she led several diplomatic summits, and visited numerous countries with the aim of establishing her status as an influential world leader. The 1983 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit held in New Delhi was a fine example of Mrs Gandhi's attempts to revive the otherwise dormant movement famously founded by her father. The chapter argues that Mrs Gandhi's personal relationship with leaders of the movement, and publicised dialogue on issues such as nuclear disarmament and economic development successfully championed her as the leader of a globally-oriented middle class in India.

Finally, the 'conclusion' discusses the contexts and consequences of Mrs Gandhi's assassination by her two Sikh bodyguards in October 1984. It comments on the spectacle of violence and martyrdom that was fabricated upon her death by the Congress Party. It thus revisits the central argument of the role of spectacular politics in Mrs Gandhi's life, and indeed in her death, and outlines the scope for further research on the subject.

Chapter 1 – Spectacle and the City: Asian Games

‘The Games gave us youngsters of those days a chance to be proud of – of our country, of our capital city and of our competence to host an international event successfully. But whatever said and done, the icing on the cake was the newly found city of ‘Delhi’ which was transformed into a world-class city with impeccable infrastructure, laid out in a record 23 months. From the handsome flyovers to sprawling stadiums and the Asiad village, from new roads to the mascot that will ever be remembered – Appu!’

K. Datta, ‘How the 1982 Asian games changed Delhi’, *Business and Economy* (16 February 2012)¹

‘The new class is highly visible. You can recognise the man a mile away in a safari suit, with a V.I.P. briefcase in one hand, and glossy magazines in the other. The woman, in her Ruby Queen polyester saree, alights from her latest red Maruti to shop for the latest offering from [Niki-Tasha].’

G. Das, ‘A New Rich Class is Born’, *TOI* (1 December 1985)

The ninth Asian Games took place between November and December of 1982, marking the return of the ‘mega-event’ to the host city of New Delhi after thirty-one years.² In 1951, the first ever Asiad was organised on a modest scale with little help from the Government of India. The Games then were primarily an attempt to foster friendship and unity amongst Asian nations, many of which had been recently decolonised, and were in the midst of securing their place in the emerging international order. High on hope, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned some form of Pan-Asian solidarity taking shape as he remarked on the occasion:

‘In these days when dark clouds of conflict hover over us, we must seize every opportunity to promote understanding and cooperation between nations. It must be remembered always that these Games and contests should be carried out in an atmosphere of utmost friendliness.’³

¹ Accessed at <http://www.businessandecconomy.org/16022012/storyd.asp?sid=6763&pageno=1> (2 March 2017).

² Muller defines a ‘mega-event’ as an ‘ambulatory occasion of a fixed duration that attracts a large number of visitors, has large mediated reach, comes with large costs, and has large impacts on the built environment and the population’. M. Muller, ‘What Makes an Event a Mega-event?’, *Leisure Studies*, 34/6 (2015), p. 634.

³ IX Asian Games Special Organising Committee, ‘Official Report’ (henceforth IX Asiad Report) Vol. 1 (Delhi, 1982), p. 14.

In this endeavour, Nehruvian India came to occupy a special position as the birth place of several diplomatic initiatives and regional movements of the time. The idea for a Pan-Asian Games itself was first put forward during the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947. Indeed, as Majumdar and Mehta argue, the Games were a ‘fascinating interplay of the progress of Indian nationalism, and the country’s ambitions of leadership in the postcolonial world’.⁴ Notwithstanding his contributions to concepts such as ‘one world’, non-alignment, and post-empire Commonwealth, Nehru’s efforts to secure this leadership role for India did not go uncontested. Similarly, with respect to the first Asiad, lack of capital and organisational experience led the sporting event to conclude as a modest affair.

In contrast, the 1982 Asiad was a celebration of India on a magnificent scale – of its culture of sport and hospitality, and of the organisational competency of the political leadership behind the show. Unlike the first time, Mrs Gandhi’s government took direct charge over the entire event, sparing no expense to transform Delhi into a ‘world-class’ city for the spectacle. Whilst sports were the main attraction of the fifteen-day extravaganza, the Games were simultaneously appropriated by state authorities to put on display India’s historic and modern-day achievements through posters, documentaries, and other audio-visual media. As part of this demonstration, infrastructure development was made a key priority, and as a newspaper report noted, ‘everything from stadia to sanitation, and from hotels to hospitals were put under the direct scrutiny and supervision of Mrs Gandhi’.⁵ As the world watched the live telecast

⁴ B. Majumdar and N. Mehta, *India and the Olympics* (London, 2012), p. 113.

⁵ Datta, ‘Let’s not forget them in Asiad ‘82’, *TOI* (2 August 1981), p. A7.

of the opening ceremony on 19 November 1982, which also marked Mrs Gandhi's sixty-fifth birthday, an article in *India Today* magazine remarked:

‘As a birthday gift to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, there could have been no better. And it was unquestionably no less than she deserved, if only for the fact that it was her gamble to go for the Games in an incredibly encapsulated time span of just two years.’⁶

The Indian Olympic Association had won the bid to host the Games in 1976. However, the Janata interim created an uncertain political climate in the country, calling into question any prospects of India hosting the Games in 1982. Nevertheless, once Mrs Gandhi was back in office, preparations quickly resumed. Amongst the public, both doubt and expectation led up to the Asiad, but for the Congress and Mrs Gandhi in particular there was much more at stake. That she would be directly associated with the success or failure of any such event was inevitable, and she was plainly aware of it. Perhaps echoing her thoughts at the time, Secretary-General of the Asian Games Special Organising Committee (henceforth AGSOC), S. S. Gill, remarked, ‘There are no tomorrows for us’.⁷

For most middle class spectators, the Games were first and foremost a prestige issue. Preparations for the Asiad included sustained investment in giving New Delhi a facelift which not only saw a rapid construction of hotels, flyovers, and stadia but an equally rapid destruction of slums and forests in the capital, both of which enjoyed the support of the middle class. Reminiscent of the Emergency's slum demolition programme carried out in the name of ‘beautification’ of cities, this activity resulted in labour exploitation, displacement of the urban poor, gentrification of neighbourhoods, and

⁶ D. Bobb, A. K. Menon, and S. Khandekar, ‘IX Asiad flame bursts into brilliance’, IT (updated 13 August 2015), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/ix-asiad-flame-burst-into-brilliance-at-jawaharlal-nehru-stadium-in-new-delhi/1/392352.html> (9 April 2017).

⁷ Quoted in M. Mellow, ‘There are no tomorrows for us’, *TOI* (13 September 1981), p. SM7.

commercialisation of public space – a ‘complex of symptoms’ Muller calls ‘the mega-event syndrome’.⁸

However, these issues were single-handedly glossed over, in full colour, with the introduction of the revolutionary mass medium – the colour television. Recent scholarship in media and communication studies regards the 1982 Asiad as a watershed in India’s telecommunications history which gave birth to new forms of politics around television, and the consumer and advertisement revolutions that followed subsequently. It is around these movements in the 1980s that a ‘new’ middle class identity ultimately came to be identified, defined, and targeted. By paying close attention to these historic developments, this chapter seeks to analyse the Asiad as beyond a sporting spectacle. As a former Indian diplomat recalled, the Games were not merely an ‘episode’ or an ‘event’ but rather the ‘beginning of a process’ that created a truly ‘aesthetic capital city’, and with it a ‘new’ middle class citizenry.⁹

‘You have certainly made New Delhi the capital of Asia.’¹⁰

In March 1947, Prime Minister designate Jawaharlal Nehru reached out to the delegation present at the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, declaring:

‘We stand at the end of an era and on the threshold of a new period of history. A change is coming over the scene now and Asia is again finding herself. We live in a tremendous age of transition and already the next stage takes shape when Asia takes her rightful place with the other continents...This conference, in a small measure, represents [the] bringing together of the countries of Asia.’¹¹

⁸ Muller, ‘What makes an event a mega-event?’, p. 633.

⁹ Telephone conversation, 9 August 2017, New Delhi (name withheld on request).

¹⁰ Anthony de Mello, Director of the Organising Committee of the 1951 Asiad, to Nehru quoted in Majumdar and Mehta, *India and the Olympics*, p. 147.

¹¹ J. Nehru, ‘A united Asia for world peace’, 23 March 1947, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, second series, Volume 2 (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 503-7.

This speech was made at a time of both optimism and anxiety for what was to be of India on the eve of Independence. Whilst the ‘squabbles’ of domestic politics kept him occupied in the months leading up to Independence, Nehru continued to wonder about the challenges that India faced in taking its legitimate place as equal amongst other independent nations of the world.¹² His call for the ‘bringing together of the countries of Asia’ reveals the internationalist, or at the very least regionalist aspirations of Indian nationalism that went beyond achieving independence at home in a political or territorial sense. This argument is not new as Sugata Bose has argued that anti-colonialism as a nationalist ideology ‘was both tethered to the idea of homeland and, paradoxically, strengthened by extraterritorial affiliations’.¹³ For Nehru, this vision was partly realised by mapping a unique and special identity for India within the Asian region.

At the time of the Delhi Conference, Pan-Asianism as an ideology was primarily formulated along the lines of anti-colonialism, anti-racialism, and civilizational pride in the ancient cultures of the ‘East’.¹⁴ A common attitude towards each of these, Nehru

¹² Here it is acknowledged that current scholarship tends to overemphasise Nehru’s role in shaping India’s foreign policy at the cost of side-lining alternative ideas and individuals, particularly in the years prior to Independence. Even so, much of India’s foreign policy principles in its early years were indeed laid down by Nehru and a handful of his closest advisors. This was not least due to the fact that Nehru was perhaps the most politically influential figure at the time to have any real interest in world affairs. Judith Brown notes in her biography that the task of formulating a coherent foreign policy was one that Nehru relished greatly, also because foreign visits gave him ‘mental refreshment’ from the ‘pressures at home’. J. Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven; London, 2003), p. 244.

¹³ Cited in C. Stole and H. Fischer-Tine, ‘Imagining Asia in India’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 54/1 (2012), p. 67.

¹⁴ The development of ‘Asianism’ as a pan-movement traces its roots to the early twentieth century with the Japanese victory over Russia in 1904-05. Japan’s military strength and rapid industrialisation during the Meiji period inspired many nationalists in different parts of Asia who sought to make their own, often self-orientalising, claims to Asian civilizational modernity as an anti-thesis to European modes of thought. However, Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1915 and its aggression in Manchuria in the 1930s revealed the expansionist tendencies of Japanese militarism, leading to the subsequent disengagement of several ‘nationalist’ movements with Japan. For some interesting perspectives on Pan-Asianism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Stole and Fischer-Tine, ‘Imagining Asia in India’; and P. Duara, ‘Asia Redux: Conceptualising a region for our times’, *JAS*, 69/4 (2010), pp. 963-83.

urged, would unite the countries of Asia against Western imperialism. Later, at the Bandung Conference of 1955, he somewhat redefined the basis of Asian, and by this time African solidarity to also include the principle of non-alignment or non-commitment to either of the two military ‘blocs’. On both occasions, however, Nehru argued against ‘group-ism’ of any kind, and instead pressed for a vague notion of Afro-Asian solidarity based on continued resistance to imperialism and commitment to world peace. As he remarked in 1947:

‘And may I say here that [Asian Relations] Conference, and the idea underlying it, is no way aggressive or against any other continent or country. Ever since news of this Conference went abroad some people in Europe and America have viewed it with doubt imagining that this was some kind of a Pan-Asian movement directed against Europe or America. We have no designs against anybody; ours is the great design of promoting peace and progress all over the world...In this Conference and in this work there are no leaders and no followers. All countries of Asia have to meet together on an equal basis in a common task and endeavour.’¹⁵

At the same time, he felt that it was ‘fitting’ that India play a leading role in ‘this new phase of Asian development’, and specifically in the revival of Asia in world affairs.¹⁶ After all, India was amongst the first Asian nations to celebrate independence from colonial rule, and could also lay moral claim to having set a precedent for peaceful and non-violent forms of resistance against foreign domination. Explaining Nehru’s motivations, Brown writes:

‘As a major stable independent power in Asia, India had a particular role to play in leading and interpreting Asia...In a way, this was India’s geographical and historical destiny in a world where...Asian countries needed to find a way to relating as equals to the richer powers of the western world.’¹⁷

In doing so, however, Nehru attempted to characterise the Indian nation-state as the ‘ideational core’ of the Pan-Asian movement, and the Indian freedom struggle as the

¹⁵ Nehru, ‘A united Asia’, p. 506; Nehru’s opposition to the idea of an ‘organised bloc’ is noteworthy in the context of Japanese attempts to create a ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’ in the 1940s. The concept of a unified Asia under the Japanese imperial regime was propagated as an intellectual challenge to Western imperialism. In India, the movement found support in the India Independence League famously associated with Subhas Chandra Bose.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Brown, *Nehru*, p. 246.

template for anti-colonial resistance.¹⁸ Similarly, at the Bandung Conference, he pressed for an Indian non-aligned version of Pan-Asianism. On a pragmatic level, Nehru was perhaps concerned about the growing influence of bloc-power ideology particularly in Pakistan and China, which affected India geopolitically. He thus sought to set an Indian example of independence – territorially and ideologically – for the rest of Asia to follow. This ideational representation of ‘Asianness’ in terms of ‘Indianness’ was met with scepticism and resistance especially from smaller Asian nations that were threatened by the growing dominance of India and China in the region. Indeed, Pan-Asian leadership was claimed by China, and by smaller states such as Indonesia particularly in the context of the Asian sports movement.¹⁹ Alongside many ‘supranational Asia-discourses’, there also continued to exist strong nationalisms within the region, such as in Japan, that refused to subscribe to any broadly conceived regional identity.²⁰ By the late 1950s, Nehru, too, began to lose faith in international frameworks of the kind he had envisioned before.²¹

In the historical context of India’s chequered but ambitious involvement in the Pan-Asian movement, the first Asian Games hosted in New Delhi symbolised an important

¹⁸ See S. Singh, ‘From Delhi to Bandung: Nehru, ‘Indian-ness’ and ‘Pan-Asian-ness’’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 34/1 (2011), pp. 51-64.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Majumdar and Mehta, *India and the Olympics*, pp. 121-6; When Indonesia hosted the 1962 Asiad in Jakarta, President Sukarno refused to issue visas to the Israeli and Taiwanese delegations despite them being members of the Asian Games Federation. Nehru showed his displeasure to Sukarno’s actions which he perceived were in response to pressures from certain Arab countries and China (Ibid.).

²⁰ Stole and Fischer-Tine, ‘Imagining Asia in India’, p. 92.

²¹ Interestingly, Chaudhuri argues that in its preoccupation with Nehruvian ‘idealism’, historical scholarship has ignored ‘the demands of [his] far more thought-out and practical approach to world problems’, noting that Nehru’s pragmatism shaped his conception of non-alignment and Pan-Asianism. Chaudhuri supports his arguments by analysing Indo-American relations since 1947, which he suggests reflected changing ideas and interests of the Indian leadership. R. Chaudhuri, *Forged in Crisis: India and the United States Since 1947* (New York, 2014), pp. 18-19; For a similar analysis of Nehru’s negotiations vis-à-vis Dominion status between 1947 and 1950, and India’s subsequent membership in the Commonwealth as a Republic see H. Kumarasingham, ‘The ‘Tropical Dominions’: The appeal of dominion status...’, *Transactions of the RHS*, 23 (2013), pp. 223 – 45.

event. The Games then were driven by the awakening of a whole continent on the one hand, and the aspirations of a young nation-state to be noticed on the other. At the conclusion of the 1947 Conference, Nehru optimistically remarked to noted activist Aruna Asaf Ali:

‘It was an amazing success from every point of view. I think we can definitely call it the beginning of a new era in Asian history. All those who came from the four corners of Asia felt the importance and significance of the occasion and went away duly impressed. Delhi did them well. India as a whole suddenly became conscious not only of all our neighbours but of Asia. We are all Asia conscious at present.’²²

Articulating this nascent Asia consciousness was the Games’ official motto given by Nehru himself – ‘Play the game, in the spirit of the game’.

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Figure 1.1: Young India – Nehru at the 1951 Asiad²³

²² Letter dated 7 April 1947 in *Selected Works of Nehru*, p. 517.

²³ Source: HT/Livemint, https://www.livemint.com/Multimedia/97V9qedshY0Z5dRM2KQuUN/The-first-Asian-Games.html?utm_source=scroll&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=scroll (19 July 2018).

Sport as Spectacle

'I also have a great desire to eliminate this label of Delhi being a purely political city. I want it to be an international sporting centre and god willing, I will do it.'²⁴

Historical accounts of sporting spectacles in the twentieth century capture the rise and fall of ideology in sporting phenomenon. After the First World War, sport was steadily internationalised as movements such as the Olympics grew popular all across Europe. More significantly, the ascendancy of authoritarian regimes from communism in the Soviet Union to fascism in Germany brought such spectacles to the fore as powerful arenas for the dissemination of political ideologies. Moreover, participation from Asia, Africa, and the Americas increased after the Second World War as performance in competitive sport came to be seen as indicative of a nation's 'manpower' and 'strength'.²⁵

At the same time, more routine demonstrations of able-bodied participants, predominantly men, have long dominated cultures everywhere, and have taken various forms such as ceremonial and military parades, indigenous martial arts, scouting camps etc. In most instances, the emphasis on masculine forms of physicality is interlinked with the message of discipline, fitness, patriotism, and respect for authority – all constituents of the ideal state-citizen.²⁶ Nehru's agenda behind the 1951 Asiad was

²⁴ AGSOC Chairman Buta Singh quoted in 'We did it', IT (15 December 1982), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/we-are-also-trying-to-bring-the-world-cup-football-to-new-delhi-buta-singh/1/392400.html> (13 July 2017).

²⁵ Indeed, sporting events were often at the heart of controversy for projecting racially supremacist projects such as during the Berlin Summer Olympics in 1936. Popularly called the Hitler Olympics, the 1936 spectacle was also the first sporting event to be telecast live on television although the broadcast at the time was restricted to a domestic audience.

²⁶ In India this rhetoric has been propagated ostensibly through 'apolitical' activities such as the increasingly commercialised practice of yoga, which Nehru personally excelled at, and in more militant forms of political organisation such as the training camps run by the Hindu nationalist organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Notably, India's current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a long-time member of the RSS, describes yoga as the 'sharpest weapon' against conflicts, claiming that 'Yoga is far beyond physical exercises. Through yoga, we will create a new yuga – a yuga of togetherness and harmony...Yoga is a journey from me to we'. 'Modi: Yoga Sharpen Weapon to Bring Peace', *India-West* (3 March 2017), p. A40.

similarly twofold – to promote Pan-Asian solidarity, and to inspire the youth in India to take up physical activity and sport in their role as nation-builders. As the official report of the 1982 Games (henceforth *Asiad Report*) remarked:

‘...Foremost in [the] fight for a new world order was Jawaharlal Nehru. This time, however, the spotlight was fixed on the youth – the leaders of tomorrow and what better way to symbolise the spirit of youth than sport – an activity which brings out the best in a human being, who competes, not only for the honour of his country but also for the Glory of Sport.’²⁷

Nehru’s call for taking up physical activity through competitive sport was effectively akin to participating in his larger scheme of development in postcolonial India. This line of thought is supported in Srirupa Roy’s book, *Beyond Belief*, wherein her study of steel townships built in the 1950s in India reveals statist aspirations of manufacturing healthy and disciplined producer-patriots.²⁸ State-sponsored construction of dams on river valleys that were to provide power to nearby townships and factories required sustained manual labour, an act of pride according to Nehru who believed there was nothing more special than to participate in this form of nation-building. For instance, in his speech at the dedication of the Bhakra-Nangal dam to ‘the nation’, Nehru described the site as a ‘big university where we can work and while working learn, so that we may do better things’, further employing religious metaphor to declare, ‘Where can be a greater and holier place than this...and which we can hold in higher regard’.²⁹ Examining his pedagogical rhetoric, Klingensmith argues that according to Nehru, ‘labourers and peasants could not simply be assumed to know the full import of what

²⁷ IX *Asiad Report* Vol. 1, p. 13; In her discussion of visual representations of masculine patriotism, Sumathi Ramaswamy brings to light the figure of the youthful male martyr, which dominated cartographic and chromolithographic practices during the nationalist struggle in India. In particular, Ramaswamy identifies the frequent depiction of the bloody, wounded body and severed heads of male martyrs such as Bhagat Singh and Subhas Chandra Bose as the ‘ultimate fate of masculine patriotism’, which were intended to inspire other young men to imbibe the same spirit. S. Ramaswamy, ‘Maps, Mother/Goddesses, and Martyrdom in Modern India’, *JAS*, 67/3 (2008), pp. 843-5.

²⁸ See S. Roy, ‘Chapter 4’ *Beyond Belief* (Durham, 2007).

²⁹ Quoted in D. Klingensmith, *One Valley and a Thousand* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 240.

they were involved in, unschooled as they were in modern ideas of progress...They had to be inspired and taught'.³⁰

It is interesting that in the run-up to the 1982 Asiad, Indian Olympic Association's President, Raja Bhalindra Singh, shared similar views on sport as a unique vocation to channel the idle but potentially destructive energies of the youth:

'I see it as a tremendous incentive for the youth of the country. For the first time, they have equipment and facilities that are the best available. Above all, it will channelise their energies into something worthwhile.'³¹

Explaining Singh's statement, an article in *India Today* noted:

'He quotes the example of Thailand which was racked with serious student violence in the early 1960s. But once Bangkok established itself as an international sports centre (it has staged three Asiads since then), Thailand's students have had more productive channels for their energies.'³²

This comment is particularly noteworthy in the context of student agitations on university campuses that became frequent and increasingly violent in the 1970s in India. During the Emergency, for instance, Mrs Gandhi described the 'air of discipline' that was needed to counter such socio-economic disruptions:

'It was not only the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund but also other international bodies and individual economists who came from different universities, they all were amazed at what we were able to achieve in this very short time apart from the fact that we had cleaned up the cities, removed beggars and introduced discipline. Some of the disciplines on traders were enforced. On students and so on nothing was done, but the air of discipline infected them also so that exams were on time and universities were run peacefully as in fact centres of learning should be.'³³

Mrs Gandhi's media and information advisor, B. G. Verghese, similarly revealed his proposition to contain student violence in Bihar in 1974 by advocating:

³⁰ Ibid., p. 270.

³¹ D. Bobb and A. Raina, 'Asiad '82: Race against time', IT (30 June 1982), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-set-to-stage-countrys-most-ambitious-undertaking-to-date---ix-asiad/1/391825.html> (9 June 2017).

³² Ibid.

³³ I. Gandhi and E. Pouchpadass, *My Truth* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 144.

‘...a national student service scheme as an antidote to restiveness in universities, and in order to inculcate some social values among the youth by confronting them with the challenges of drought and development.’³⁴

Incidentally, in a discussion with Margaret Thatcher in March 1982, Mrs Gandhi once again spoke about the dangers of the growing ‘penetration of Marxists’ in university campuses around the country.³⁵ A memo of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office documents the conversation:

‘A university named after her father had been completely taken over by Marxist elements. Now no views except those which conformed with Marxist philosophy could be expressed...[Mrs Gandhi] explained how ordinary Indians did not wish to strike, but the people who ran the trade unions manipulated them for political purposes.’³⁶

In her letters to American friend Dorothy Norman, Mrs Gandhi reiterated the message:

‘How does one measure the enthusiasm and hope of young people? The [Asian] Games have been more educational than any institution. They have drawn together the city and the village and given a new perspective to our young people.’³⁷

³⁴ B. G. Verghese, *First Draft: Witness to the Making of Modern India* (Chennai, 2010), p. 101.

³⁵ J. Holmes, ‘Visit of Mrs Gandhi: Tete-a-Tete Discussion with the Prime Minister’, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 22 March 1982, p. 2. PREM19/801 f54. Margaret Thatcher Foundation Digital Archive (henceforth MTFDA).

³⁶ Ibid.; Here Mrs Gandhi was most certainly referring to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi.

³⁷ I. Gandhi and D. Norman, *Letters to a Friend* (London, 1986), p. 168; PM Modi, in his radio broadcast ‘*Mann Ki Baat*’ (‘Heart’s Voice’) from March 2016, articulated similar thoughts on the spirit of sport in India. Speaking about India hosting the FIFA Under-17 World Cup in 2017, he urged: ‘Friends, I would like to hear your views on how best to use the [FIFA Cup] to our advantage...How should it be publicised? How can we increase the interest of our youth in sports...I view FIFA as a great opportunity to establish India as a brand at a global level. I consider this to be an opportunity to let the world know of India’s youth power – not in the sense of winning or losing a match. In the run-up to and preparation for the 2017 FIFA event, we can harness and display many strengths; while doing so, we can do image-branding for India as well.’ ‘English rendering of the text of PM’s “Mann KI Baat” programme on All India Radio’, <https://www.narendramodi.in/mann-ki-baat> (13 February 2018).

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Figure 1.2: Sporting Traditions of India on Asiad Commemorative Stamps – (left) Wrestling bout; (right) Arjuna the ‘archer’ as depicted in the *Mahabharata*³⁸

These statements suggest that the state sought to contain youth activism, or direct it into alternative missions that positively served the national cause. Indeed, physical participation in a full-fledged war, at a military parade, at a sporting spectacle, or even at a construction site served as ‘moments’ during which the nation could be made to ‘coalesce, and display unity and resolve’, and reproduce the visual metaphor of strength in numbers.³⁹ Images of ‘men at work’ collectively building the nation have historically been used as propaganda to produce better workers, soldiers, scientists, and sportsmen. However, this rhetoric underwent a change just as sporting events transformed from purely ideological tools to commercialised spectacles wherein urbanisation, entertainment, and tourism became the new focal sites of state intervention. Notably in

³⁸ Source: Department of Posts, Ministry of Communication/Travelindia-guide, <http://www.travelindia-guide.com/indian-stamps/collection/1982.php> (2 May 2018); For a fascinating historical account of martial culture in pre-colonial India, see R. O’Hanlon, ‘Military sports and the history of the martial body in India’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 50/4 (2007), pp. 490-523.

³⁹ E. Anderson, ‘Neo-Hindutva’: The Asia M.F. Husain campaign’, *CSA*, 23/1 (2015), p. 47.

this transition, the focus on the productive capabilities of ‘valorised’ masculine bodies was expanded to highlight their consumptive potential.⁴⁰ Thus, although the 1982 Asiad propagated a national consciousness derived from sport, there was less emphasis on military theatrics and overt propaganda. Instead, the Games were packaged as entertainment produced by the state for urban middle class consumption. As I argue below, this was achieved by placing ‘Indian culture’ at the centre of its entertainment thematic.

The Cultural Asiad

It is often argued that in all her years as Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi never conceptualised a long-term vision for India. Her policies were mostly reactive, and as a reaction to those critical moments when her legitimacy was under threat, she placed herself at the centre of carefully staged victories that projected the image of a leader in control. This was particularly evident during the annexation of Sikkim in 1975, the ‘peaceful’ nuclear explosion in 1974, and indeed the Emergency itself. In her conduct of diplomacy, this entailed a demonstrable possession of power in a tangible sense, and its exercise in a somewhat ad-hoc manner, such as during the 1971 war.⁴¹ A recently declassified document of the American Central Intelligence Agency (henceforth CIA) from 1972 reveals similar perceptions in the West:

‘In order to offset the fear that they really may be inferior...Indians are often so defensive – touchy and sensitive – that they appear to be offensive, that is assertive, vain, and arrogant...National achievements, especially the crushing victory over Pakistan in December 1971 and the apparent ability to create a nuclear

⁴⁰ D. L. Andrews, C. Batts, and M. Silk, ‘Sport, Glocalisation and the New Indian Middle Class’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17/3(2014), p. 270.

⁴¹ S. Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India’s Foreign Policy Under Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977* (New Delhi, 1982), p. 70.

weapon, have tended to buoy self-confidence, but euphoria is transient and the feelings of national inferiority are deeply imbedded.’⁴²

Indeed, the 1970s witnessed a continuous affirmation of the state’s capabilities in the military and scientific arenas which, when attributed to Mrs Gandhi’s leadership, enhanced her reputation as a ‘strong’ leader at home. The use of heavy industry, technology, and science as ideological tropes for legitimation shows commonalities with the earlier Nehruvian framework that similarly drew upon prevailing understandings of ‘modernisation’ and progress. In this context, and on the negative coverage of India’s ‘achievements’ by the Western media, Mrs Gandhi once argued:

‘I would say that this is very much like what soon after independence – or maybe even now – some Westerners felt about certain countries like India. “This country is poor, starving, and now it is raising its head and it wants to have nuclear energy and so on and so forth”. It is the same attitude and this is why whenever I have spoken abroad and in India about this inequality between nations, I have always mentioned that we have the same problem at home and we have to tackle it at home.’⁴³

Mrs Gandhi’s overwhelming victory in 1980 reignited the suspicions of many who questioned her authoritarian tendencies. In the United States, this was not least due to the fact that she had openly alluded to American involvement in aiding the Janata forces against her. Moreover, she had disregarded Western media coverage of the Emergency as biased and anti-Indian. Upon returning to power, Mrs Gandhi perhaps thought it appropriate to reach out to her critics in international circles albeit cautiously. She continued to orchestrate state spectacles that showcased Indian achievements in various fields, although this time traditional displays of power were accompanied by an even stronger focus on ‘soft power’, or India’s influence in the cultural realm. This was naturally evident during programmes like the Festival of India in Britain, but the use of

⁴² S. Neelakantani, ‘In 1972, CIA said Pakistan’s pro-West tilt ‘stems from fear of India’, TOI (26 January 2017), <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/in-1972-cia-said-pakistans-pro-west-tilt-stems-from-fear-of-india/articleshow/56794766.cms> (22 May 2017).

⁴³ Ministry of External Affairs, *Indira Gandhi Statements on Foreign Policy Volume 1* (New Delhi, 1982), p. 11.

historical-cultural tropes as a basis for legitimacy was also key in the production of the 1982 Asiad.

* * *

The opening ceremony of the Games at the newly constructed Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi was a grand affair. Five thousand athletes paraded behind the flags of thirty-two participating countries. The stadium hosted seventy-five thousand spectators, whilst millions watched the ceremony on their hastily purchased television sets at home. The opening acts were executed with precision as if to mimic the accuracy of the ‘high-tech’ time-keeping equipment lent by the Japanese for the competitions.

One newspaper report claimed:

‘The opening day ceremonial...left even the most die-hard critic of the Games speechless: the splendour of its pageantry, the near-faultless coordination of the events and the smooth meticulousness of their timing made it one of the greatest shows on earth, a dazzling feat of skilled management and brilliant creative artistry.’⁴⁴

Another described the ‘star-studded’ fanfare:

‘Film star Amitabh Bachchan’s English recitation of the Asian Games Hymn was heard in pin-drop silence and after it was over there was a thunderous ovation...The Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, received thunderous cheer from a packed Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium when she was welcomed by “Happy Birthday”.’⁴⁵

Towards the end of the spectacle, a foreign correspondent boldly declared, ‘It’s the best show India could ever put on.’⁴⁶

⁴⁴ S. Sethi, ‘Ceremonial: A magnificent show’, IT (31 July 2013), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/ix-asiad-opening-day-ceremony-in-new-delhi-leaves-die-hard-critics-speechless/1/392351.html> (9 June 2017).

⁴⁵ ‘Floral Appu gets standing ovation’, *TOI* (20 November 1982), p. 13.

⁴⁶ Sethi, ‘Ceremonial: A magnificent show’.

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Figure 1.3.1: Unity in Diversity – Cultural performance with Asiad mascot 'Appu'⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Source: IT (Ibid.).

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at D. Bobb, A. K. Menon, and S. Khandekar, 'IX Asiad flame bursts into brilliance', IT (updated 13 August 2015), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/ix-asiad-flame-burst-into-brilliance-at-jawaharlal-nehru-stadium-in-new-delhi/1/392352.html> (9 April 2017).

Figure 1.3.2: Performing *Holi* – the Hindu festival of colours⁴⁸

For many, the most memorable part of the ceremony was the unique cultural performance that followed the official pageantry. According to a report in *India Today*, besides the 'mandatory rituals' such as the arrival of the President and the march past and salute, 'the almost insuperable problem [for the Organising Committee]... was the additional pageant required to glamourise the opening, to transform it out of the ordinary into an event of world class'.⁴⁹ AGSOC Deputy Chairman, Adi Sethna, noted that a favourable option would have been a display of callisthenics popularly staged during similar spectacles abroad.⁵⁰ However, after watching videos of foreign acrobats

⁴⁸ Source: IT ('IX Asiad flame burst into brilliance').

⁴⁹ Sethi, 'Ceremonial: A magnificent show'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

particularly the Soviets at the 1980 Moscow Olympics, the Committee saw it impossible to replicate similar standards of performance in Delhi:

‘In 1981 when Marshal Agarkov, chief of the Soviet general staff, came, he offered to teach our boys callisthenics but it meant transporting 6,000 Sikhs to the Soviet Union. Besides, we simply weren't sure of their quality. Nor could we carry off an effective placard display by children. So we decided *we'll only put on what we can do best.*’[emphasis added]⁵¹

First, the designated image of the Sikhs as a martial race suited to perform physically arduous tasks, a long-standing colonial trope, is clearly reproduced in this statement. Indeed, the predominance of Sikh politicians and bureaucrats on the Organising Committee was striking, and suggests that they were placed at the forefront of such spectacles as role models.⁵² Second, it is noteworthy that a cultural programme drawing upon India's music and dance traditions was formalised to ‘glamourise’ the opening.

At first, regiments of the Indian Army were called to participate in ‘Bhangra, Lezium, Mallakhamba, and so on’.⁵³ These are various regional dance and gymnastic forms that emphasise the male performers’ vigour and virility. The National Cadet Corps from different States assisted in this performance by putting on display ‘a variety of [cultural]

⁵¹ Ibid.; AGSOC also screened a documentary on the Moscow Olympics for Indian athletes as ‘preparatory material’. (IX Asiad Report Vol. 2, p. 189); Notably, there was a longer history to the influence of Soviet spectacles in India. As Mrs Gandhi once remarked about the 1964 New York World Fair, where she was Chairperson of the Indian Pavilion: ‘I went to the USSR in April 1964...As I had never seen an international fair, it was considered advisable that I should see the Moscow one; although it was much smaller, it would give me some idea of how things are displayed.’ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 92; In a related but amusing comment about India's performance in sports, the following letter to the editor appeared in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*: ‘We still trail behind Japan, Korea and China. Due to mass poverty and overpopulation sport suffers in India. We have few playgrounds; poor parents cannot support their children; worse, they expect them to earn as early as possible. Naturally our youngsters cannot play or build up their health. Our degenerate food habits are also to blame. I have read the *Gita* very thoroughly, and I find no strictures against beef-eating...Beef is a cheap source of protein. The Japanese took to beef-eating after their defeat in Second World War and in three decades the height of the Japanese people has increased by 10 cm on an average. In the same period the average Indian has become shorter by that length.’ K. Susrata, *IWI* (12 December 1982), p. 6.

⁵² Incidentally, the ‘National Institute of Sports’ in India is also located in the former princely state of Patiala in Punjab. Founded in 1961, it is currently Asia's largest sports institute, and is popularly known as the ‘Mecca’ of Indian sports. Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports, <http://nsnis.org/> (5 August 2018).

⁵³ IX Asiad Report Vol. 1, p. 74.

items from all parts of the country'.⁵⁴ The Committee also felt it important to include young children 'to ensure the participation of various age-groups among the youth of the country'.⁵⁵ Gradually, the idea expanded to showcase folk and classical dance, classical music, and performances by school children. AGSOC thus emphasised the need to:

'...find acceptable leadership in choreography and music for such a diverse performance such as the Gaur dance from Madhya Pradesh – basically tribal, to a highly stylised and choreographed Holi dance from Uttar Pradesh...It was necessary to have a dedicated team of experts in music and dance headed by a personality of stature to undertake the task of overall choreography of music and dance.'⁵⁶

Crucially, there was the question of 'producing the required degree of "unity" in the total theme of the production'.⁵⁷ For this, sitar maestro Ravi Shankar was appointed as 'Official Consultant'.⁵⁸ Shankar had recently performed at the Festival of India in Britain, and had gained international renown for composing music for the 1982 biopic, *Gandhi*.

The cultural production included seven thousand performers from all over India whose coordination was a difficult task, as composer Raghav Rao revealed:

'It could only have been undertaken army style. The dancers were drilled day in and day out, rehearsed to the last second, each formation planned to perfection as in a military campaign. I can assure you that had the job been handed over to a few artistes, it would never have been done. They would be spitting on one another at the end of the first few hours.'⁵⁹

Moreover, according to the Asiad Report:

'...the necessity for authenticity in dance steps, dress and music was stressed...and a rapport was established with choreographers appointed by State authorities for their respective troupes...*A conspicuous decision was taken not to publicise details of the cultural component of the ceremonies, as it would detract*

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 74, 82.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 74.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 82

⁵⁹ Sethi, 'Ceremonial: A magnificent show'.

from the impact of the cultural spectacle on the actual occasion.'[emphasis added]⁶⁰

The collective efforts of the Organising Committee, choreographers, and performers materialised at the opening ceremony that had never before included a cultural component of such kind. If Nehru's 1951 Games emphasised India's moral qualities in the Pan-Asian movement, the 1982 Asiad was an overt, visual representation of India's uniqueness based on its cultural heritage.

It is important to note that for Mrs Gandhi and her advisors, this rehearsed and 'theatricalised' representation of martial and folk cultures, which brought together diverse elements from the military, the youth, school-going children, and even film personalities, was intended to establish links with a global network that not only comprised of other states but also foreign businesses and private corporations that were seen as a potential source of investment and much needed foreign exchange for the economy. Keeping this in mind, the use of history and culture as 'national exports' was an attractive proposition. Ravinder Kaur argues that 'cultural-historical facts about India become useful tropes that help the nation differentiate itself from other nations seeking the corporation's attention'.⁶¹ The 1982 Asiad saw similar efforts to commodify Indian culture in a market mediated by spectacular imagery – from the opening ceremonial to the Games' official emblem and mascot 'Appu'.

⁶⁰ IX Asiad Report Vol. 1, p. 82.

⁶¹ R. Kaur, 'Nation's Two Bodies', *Third World Quarterly*, 33/4 (2012), p. 615.



Figure 1.4: Asiad Emblem and Official Mascot 'Appu'⁶²

The Asiad emblem, reproduced in all official material related to the event, was strategically chosen as the historical monument 'Jantar Mantar' built by the Hindu Rajput ruler, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh, in Delhi in 1724. According to the Asiad Report, there were several reasons behind this choice:

'It is in the heart of the city of Delhi. It is a monument of purely Indian architecture, and it represents a quest for knowledge and perfection.'⁶³

The design and the accompanying Sanskritised text communicated three additional 'audio-visual messages, all of them relevant', and all of them encapsulating the 'imagined essence' of the (Hindu) nation (Figure 1.5):

'It's form suggests the stadium, it resembles a peepul leaf (in India, this symbolises the achievement of perfection, and is auspicious), and the namaskar or welcome, our typical way of greeting.'⁶⁴

⁶² Source: Wikimedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/6/6b/9th_asiad.png and https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/2/23/9th_asiad_mascot.png (14 August 2018).

⁶³ IX Asiad Report Vol. 1, p. 52.

⁶⁴ Ibid; and Kaur, 'Nation's Two Bodies', p. 604.

The shining sun on top was also considered auspicious with its bright red colour resembling the mark or *tilak* typically worn by Hindu priests and women on their forehead.

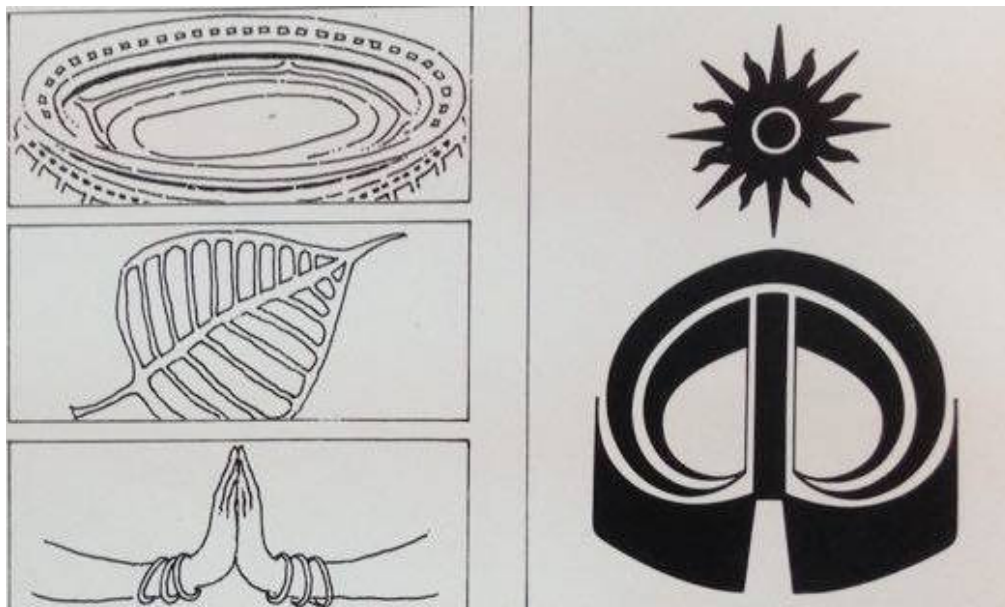


Figure 1.5: Official Emblem Explained⁶⁵

Asiad's memorable mascot, the baby elephant Appu, was similarly chosen for its many associations with Indian history and culture. The elephant in its numerous anthropomorphised forms has dominated folk, religious, and imperial art in India for centuries. For instance, Sujit Sivasundaram writes that in Mughal courts, elephants were often 'given human character', named, and prescribed castes, and were made the regal subjects of paintings depicting battle scenes and military victories.⁶⁶ Furthermore, its representations variously symbolised 'display and grandeur', the Hindu god 'Ganesh', and even Buddhist reverence for white elephants.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Source: IX Asiad Report Vol. 1, p. 52.

⁶⁶ S. Sivasundaram, 'Trading knowledge', *The Historical Journal*, 48/1 (2005), pp. 30, 43.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Notably, Appu's stance in a classical dance pose (Figure 1.4) appears to trace the territorial contours of India in the cartographic form. Superimposing the image of the mighty elephant onto the Indian nation itself, an official advertisement for the Games remarked that Appu was chosen 'for all that the elephant embodies in India'.⁶⁸ More tellingly, it read:

'...Gaily caparisoned, it had borne maharajas in colourful processions...and led kingdoms to victory on the battlefield. It figures prominently in Indian mythology, folklore and art, and is considered auspicious for new ventures. The elephant also characterises India in the minds of millions of people all over the world.'⁶⁹

Elsewhere, Mrs Gandhi, too, articulated the many religious and cultural associations with the elephant in India:

'The elephant is one of the most loved of our animal kin. It is a byword for strength and for wisdom. Many are the stories about its intelligence and helpfulness. The gentleness of the elephant has endeared it to children in all countries. *In our mythology, the elephant has a special place, especially with its association with Ganesh, the remover of obstacles.* No traditional function begins without remembering this deity. *It was a happy theme to make the elephant the symbol of the Ninth Asian Games. Appu has already caught imagination of the young people.* Let Appu also spread greater awareness of our efforts to conserve our natural wealth.' [emphasis added]⁷⁰

Such language borrowed heavily from the exoticised descriptions of the subcontinent popular at the time.⁷¹ The use of cultural tropes, including the projection of India's 'natural wealth' in the form of wildlife, interwoven with displays of high modernist feats such as sports stadia (more on which later), shows AGSOC's knowledge and employment of creative imagery to communicate a non-threatening and essentialised yet 'modern' idea of India 'in the minds of millions of people all over the world'.

The promotion of the Games also took more commodified forms such as various merchandise sold by private sponsors. Interestingly, a Bombay-based advertising

⁶⁸ 'The Elephant: Revered and loved in India', *TOI* (5 January 1982), p. 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ In S. K. Gupta, *Elephant and Indian Art in Mythology* (New Delhi, 1983), p. v.

⁷¹ This point is elaborated in Chapter 3 of this thesis (pp. 240-48).

company, Pahlaj Bajaj & Co., was given the sole concessionary rights to ‘sell’ the official logo and emblem to manufacturers of consumer goods. The company’s full-page advertisement in the *Times of India* declared, ‘Let us show you how this Mascot and Emblem can increase your product sales dramatically’:

‘Think of the image your product will gain in the market – both in India and abroad...By securing the reproduction rights, your products will be associated with the very character of the IX Asian Games and emerge a sure winner. Exporters can use the Mascot and Emblem on products sold in any country in the world.’⁷²

The conspicuous Asiad emblem and Appu were reproduced on clothing such as T-shirts and scarves, and on popular consumer items like watches, handbags, notebooks, and pens (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). It is noteworthy that the above advertisement appears to incentivise the commercial use of official state symbols for private profit whereas, in reality, private capital became indispensable to the state for its promotional activity. In fact, an article in *India Today* revealed that the franchising of the logo and the emblem was projected to generate almost fifty lakh rupees in revenue for AGSOC.⁷³

⁷² ‘The IX Asian Games fever is on...’, *TOI* (23 February 1982), p. 20.

⁷³ Bobb and Raina, ‘Asiad ’82: Race against time’; India’s first amusement park, ‘Appu Ghar’, was also named after the famous mascot, and was inaugurated in Delhi in 1984 by Rajiv Gandhi.



Figure 1.6: Mrs Gandhi's Wristwatch with the Asiatic Emblem on Display at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Museum, New Delhi⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Source: Photograph taken by the author of this thesis (April 2017).

Everybody's favourite little elephant makes a gay appearance on silk!

Four hi-fashion silk accessories to enhance your wardrobe!

KSIC has brought out a range of fashionable silk accessories to commemorate Asiad-82. Cravats, ties, scarves and handkerchieves printed in brilliant colours with the year's best loved motif. Ideal as mementoes of the most momentous happening of the decade, they also make original and tasteful gifts.

KSIC-The organisation
Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation, a Government of Karnataka Enterprise, controls some of the best silk manufacturing units in the State, including the Mysore Silk Weaving Factory. KSIC has obtained exclusive franchise for silk products during the IX Asian Games.

Available at our showrooms in:

World Trade Centre
Colaba
BOMBAY



KSIC

A Government of Karnataka Enterprise

Karnataka Silk Industries Corporation Limited

III & IV Floor Public Utility Building Mahatma Gandhi Road BANGALORE - 560 001

MCA/KSIC/54

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Figure 1.7: Appu on Silk – ‘Mementoes of the Most Momentous Happening of the Decade’⁷⁵
Image published with permission of ProQuest LLC. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

Ironically, mistreatment of the elephant chosen to portray Appu at the opening ceremony brought media attention to laws governing animal cruelty at the time. Appu, a thirteen-month old female elephant, was captured from the wild when details of the cultural programme were first laid out. According to a newspaper report:

⁷⁵ Source: *TOI* (1 December 1982), p. 10. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com

‘The organising committee thought the Games would get off to a good start if an elephant could be taught to kneel before the chief guest, Indian President Zail Singh, then rise and place a garland of marigolds round his neck.’⁷⁶

After several failed attempts, the Committee decided to exclude the elephant from the ceremony which led its owners, a circus troupe, to divulge details of its poor treatment to the media.⁷⁷ As one editorial noted:

‘It is still not clear how many Appus are there or whether any of them will take part in the Asiad. But there is something very symbolic that the AGSOC headquarters has in this regard – a neglected 2 ft clay statue of Appu lying near a dustbin in the corridor – Appu, the spirit behind the 9th Asian Games.’⁷⁸

Appu’s alleged exploitation received significant publicity, much to the annoyance of AGSOC Chairman, Buta Singh, who told reporters:

‘Why do you attach so much importance to Appu? If you give me the same amount of publicity I am ready to dance, prance and even stand on my head and do all the acrobatics you expect from Appu.’⁷⁹

Singh’s concerns about negative publicity were due to the small time-frame the Committee had to advertise the Games. The months leading up to the spectacle witnessed chaos, confusion, and delays that were reported by newspapers in India and abroad. The *Illustrated Weekly of India* described ‘the picture of confusion’:

‘The AGSOC headquarters in Delhi’s Pragati Maidan itself is the picture of disorganisation. The rooms are marked wrongly and haphazardly, several important desks have nobody behind them and most of the people do not seem to know what they are there for. Clusters of men can be seen all around – chit-chatting, joking, hobnobbing, but none of them is sure of anything.’⁸⁰

A special Publicity and Public Relations Committee was thus constituted in August 1981 to correct public perceptions, and to formalise a ‘regular plan for the publicity campaign on scientific lines’.⁸¹ According to the Asiad Report, sustained publicity was necessary to ‘sell the Games particularly to opinion-moulders in India’:

⁷⁶ S. Bhatia, ‘Appu the elephant has India in a spin’, *Observer* (14 November 1982), p. 6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ S. Thakur, ‘The Greatest Show and All That’, *IWI* (21 November 1982), p. 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Thakur, ‘The Greatest Show and All That’, p. 48.

⁸¹ IX Asiad Report Vol. 2, p. 203.

‘to counter the adverse propaganda against the Games by interested parties inside and outside the country who claimed that they were an unnecessary luxury for a poor country, and also to spread awareness for Asiad ‘82, within the country and outside.’⁸²

Several Sub-Committees and positions were added to include a Media Committee, Directorate of Marketing, Adviser (Marketing), and Adviser (Publicity).⁸³

Different types of publicity material including posters, brochures, newsletters, commemorative stamps, stickers, Appu pictograms, a ‘Cultural Festival Booklet’, and Air India features were produced ‘keeping in mind a high quality of printing and attractive designs’.⁸⁴ Posters depicting the Jantar Mantar, Appu, gymnastics, hockey, athletics, yachting, and Kathakali dance were widely circulated. For the worldwide distribution of competition schedules and tourist brochures, a list of news agencies, radio and TV organisations, and Indian embassies and missions across 35 countries was compiled.⁸⁵ Few AGSOC members even went on a special ‘publicity mission’ to Hong Kong, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Jakarta to encourage tourism in India during the Games.⁸⁶

The subject of tourism was also raised in the Lok Sabha in the context of expanding India’s foreign exchange reserves at the time. This was keeping in mind external happenings particularly the second oil shock of the early 1980s that impacted India adversely as a net importer. Moreover, as Atul Kohli points out, Mrs Gandhi’s commitment to increasing industrial output during this period necessitated significant

⁸² Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 196; and Vol. 2, p. 186.

⁸³ Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 186.

⁸⁴ In-flight brochures describing Delhi’s historic sights, places of accommodation, and sale of tickets were placed on all Air India flights in the run-up to the spectacle (Ibid., pp. 202-3).

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 200.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 193.

imports of raw material in various sectors, further depleting available foreign exchange.⁸⁷

Around the same time, many commented upon the visible 'slump' in tourism due to weak leadership at the political and administrative levels.⁸⁸ It was argued that travel agencies were not adequately incentivised to play a 'more aggressive role in marketing and selling India abroad', and the hotel industry had been denied similar concessions.⁸⁹ In response, Minister of State from the Department of Tourism, Khurshid Alam Khan, noted that in addition to the fifty thousand visitors that were expected in Delhi, ten thousand were projected to visit other parts of the country during the Games.⁹⁰ Khan stressed that offices of the Department were indeed working closely with foreign broadcasters and travel agents.⁹¹ Although no separate class of Games' tickets was reserved for foreigners, only those of the highest denomination in foreign currency were sold abroad.⁹² Interestingly, a designated number of tickets were allocated for distribution in non-Asian countries 'where there was a concentration of the Asian community', identified as U.S.A., U.K., Canada, Kenya, and Mauritius.⁹³

⁸⁷ Kohli, 'Politics of Economic Growth in India, Part I', p. 1257.

⁸⁸ K. N. Malik, 'Tourism facing big slump', *TOI* (10 December 1980), p. 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Lok Sabha Debates* (henceforth LSD), xxxii(ii), 15 October 1982, p. 221.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² IX Asiad Report Vol. 2, p. 210.

⁹³ *Ibid.*



Figure 1.8: Taste of Indian Hospitality – Air India advertisement⁹⁴

In another instance of the state seeking private sponsorship, three advertising agencies were appointed to design and produce the publicity material viz. Hindustan Thompson Associates Ltd., Advertising & Sales Promotion Company, and Clarion Advertising Services Ltd.⁹⁵ Similarly, for the photographic coverage of the Games, AGSOC sought

⁹⁴ Source: Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 228.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 203; Incidentally, the Chairman of Hindustan Thompson at the time, S.K. Kooka, was also the Commercial Director of Air India. Air India's famous mascot, the 'Maharaja', was Kooka's brainchild along with Bombay-based artist, Umesh Rao. 'The Maharaja', Air-India, <http://www.airindia.in/the-air-india-brand.htm> (24 August 2018). For a discussion of Air India advertisements, see Chapter 3 (pp. 243-6).

the ‘help of outsiders’, including ‘talented Indian and foreign sports photographers’.⁹⁶ The Committee argued that although the government’s photography division had spent over 15 lakh rupees to import special cameras and ‘other sophisticated equipment’, their photographers ‘lacked experience in the highly specialised art of sports photography’.⁹⁷

In a newspaper report, Chairman Buta Singh revealed that in addition to a ‘donation’ of twelve crore rupees from the Emir of Kuwait, the Committee expected to raise substantial funds in the form of ‘royalty from various foreign firms supplying sport equipment, donations from sports loving people of the country, advertisements, and the help of industrialists and business houses’.⁹⁸ Another report in *India Today* identified a handful of multinational sponsors such as American Express, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Sony Corporation.⁹⁹ In particular, a Dubai-based firm ‘Metco’ contributed approximately 5 crore rupees in advertising rights, whilst Los-Angeles based Vipin Sehgal and Associates offered a similar sum for world-wide marketing rights.¹⁰⁰ Sehgal, an influential management consultant of South Asian ancestry, also documented extra footage of India during the Games for his TV programme ‘India Today’. He noted that the intent behind the show was ‘to bring India into the American mainstream’ as it was ‘the most misrepresented, the most misinterpreted in the United States of all the countries in the world’.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ ‘Photo Division seeks help of outsiders’, *TOI* (22 September 1982), p. 11.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ ‘Bid to secure advts from abroad: Asiad’, *TOI* (8 August 1981), p. 11; Aid extended to India by Middle Eastern countries during this period was noteworthy in the context of the migration of Indian workers for construction activity in the Gulf, remittances sent to India, and Mrs Gandhi’s high-profile visit to the region in 1981-82. Notably, a memo of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office revealed that as of March 1981, India’s inflow of remittances from the Gulf (primarily into the State of Kerala) almost equalled its ‘rather large deficit on trading account’. ‘Mrs Gandhi’s India’, Telegram No. 26, 26 March 1981. PREM19/487 f292. MTFDA.

⁹⁹ Bobb and Raina, ‘Asiad ’82: Race against time’.

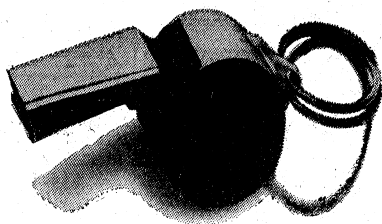
¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ M. W. Potts, ‘LA Entrepreneur responsible for worldwide telecast of Asian Games’, *India-West* (16 April 1982), p. 1.

Broadcasting rights were also sold to the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union and the Arab States Broadcasting Union. Incidentally, the possibility of an Arab boycott led to some controversy as representatives of the Arab Olympic Committee objected to Israel's participation in the Games. As a senior Qatari official remarked, 'We, as Arabs, cannot even dream of taking part in an international competition along with the Zionists. It's up to the Asian Games Federation and the Organising Committee of the Games to decide whether to accommodate us or Israel'.¹⁰² In the end, Israel was excluded from the Games in Delhi, and from all subsequent Asiads.

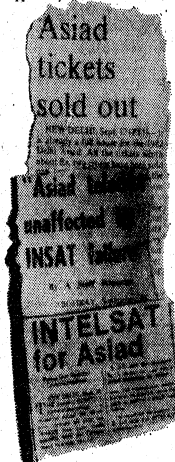
¹⁰² 'Arab boycott threat: Games', *TOI* (15 November 1981), p. 9.

19 November - 4 December 1982.
Over 70 lakh enthusiastic sports fans
will avidly watch
more than 5,000 contestants
from 32 Asian countries
vying for 580 gold, silver
and bronze medals.



Will your ads be there
to catch this largest-ever
"captive" audience?

The IX Asian Games, New Delhi,
19 November - 4 December.
To be staged in 13 main stadia seating
over 38 lakh sports enthusiasts.
To be watched by more than
60 lakh television viewers between
9 a.m. and 6 p.m.
Every day. Day after day.
What a stupendous advertising
opportunity!



First come, first served.
Intelligent national advertisers
and leading ad agencies have,
already recognised the
tremendous potential of the
Asiad in stadia advertising.
(Please see box.) They have
booked the sites of their choice,
already. It's still not too late,
though. Even now you can get
hold of better sites (prime or
others) with the best possible
OTS both in stadia and over
television.

Special deals within easy reach.
One of the most convincing
reasons to make a quick decision
are the special in-stadia
advertising packages now
available at prices as low as
Rs.1.5 lakh. Apart from these, you
could opt for individual sites for
your ads and spend less for the
advertising opportunity of the
decade. (Please refer to the
Ready Reckoner.)

**Some of the advertisers who
have already booked space**

- Bajaj Auto
- Bata
- Bengal Lamps
- Chinvar Exports
- H.M.T.
- Indian Telephone Industries
- J.K. Tyres
- Jyotindra/Gwalior Rayon
- Kirloskar
- Jagajit Industries Ltd.
- Mico
- Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd.
- M.R.F. Ltd.
- Nilon Synthetic Fibres & Chemicals Ltd.
- Peerless General Finance & Insurance Co.
- Reckitt and Colman of India Ltd.
- Selvel
- Usha Sales

**Act now! Get choice high-exposure sites
at exceptionally attractive prices!**

Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium (Opening & closing ceremonies, Football Athletics)	
Prime	Rs. 1,75,000
Balcony	Rs. 75,000
Gate	Rs. 30,000
Subway hoarding	Rs. 7,500
National Stadium (Men's Hockey)	
Prime	Rs. 1,25,000
Perimeter	Rs. 30,000
VIP skirting	Rs. 20,000
Hoarding behind the seating	Rs. 15,000
Model Town Stadium (Football)	
Prime	Rs. 80,000
Fence	Rs. 30,000
VIP	Rs. 20,000
Gates	Rs. 15,000
Ambedkar Stadium (Football, Wrestling)	
Prime	Rs. 80,000
4 blocks (roof)	Rs. 25,000
VIP fascia	Rs. 20,000
Hoarding	Rs. 15,000
Shivaji Stadium (Women's Hockey)	
Prime	Rs. 60,000
4 banners (corner blocks)	Rs. 25,000
Harbaksh Stadium (Equestrian events)	
Prime	Rs. 60,000
VIP fascia	Rs. 20,000
Fencing	Rs. 15,000
Tennis Stadium	
Prime	Rs. 1,00,000
Hoarding	Rs. 15,000
Banner	Rs. 10,000
Yamuna Velodrome (Cycling)	
Prime	Rs. 60,000
Banners around the circuit	Rs. 15,000
Gates (VIP stands)	Rs. 10,000
N.D.M.C. Swimming Pool	
Wall	Rs. 1,00,000
Prime	Rs. 80,000
Banners (1 - 10, upper seating)	Rs. 30,000
(11 - 20, - do -)	Rs. 20,000
Indoor Stadium, Talkatora (Basketball)	
Prime	Rs. 80,000
Vantage sites (4)	Rs. 25,000
Banners (1 - 8, 17 - 20)	Rs. 25,000
(9 - 16)	Rs. 20,000
National Indoor Stadium	
Badminton: Prime	Rs. 1,00,000
Gymnastics: Prime	Rs. 80,000
Partition	Rs. 20,000
Volleyball: Prime	Rs. 80,000
Partition	Rs. 20,000
Banners on beam (1 - 4, 17 - 20)	Rs. 15,000
Gymnastics & Badminton (Banners on beam)	Rs. 30,000
Special events for total sponsorship	
Golf	Rs. 6,00,000
Sailing	Rs. 6,00,000
Table tennis	Rs. 6,00,000
Rowing	Rs. 3,75,000
Boxing	Rs. 2,00,000
Archery, Handball (Delhi Univ.)	Rs. 2,00,000
Shooting	Rs. 2,00,000

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Kautiha Suite 682, New Delhi 110 021.
Tel. No.: 370271
Telex: 031-4911/031-3247

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A.K. Advertising Pvt. Ltd. are the promoters of MEETCO
London Ltd. who are the sole concessionaires
for in-stadia advertising for the
IX Asian Games.

Figure 1.9: Ads and Audiences - 'Will your ads be there to catch this largest-ever "captive" audience?'¹⁰³

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¹⁰³ Source: TOI (14 October 1982), p. 13. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com

Official publicity was phased in three campaigns – an ‘institutional’ press campaign, campaign to highlight architectural developments, and campaign to announce competition schedules and the sale of tickets.¹⁰⁴ To aid mass publicity, state-owned broadcasting platforms, All India Radio and Doordarshan (TV), were effectively employed. Between August 1981 and November 1982, Doordarshan broadcast an average of three-hour long programmes on the Asiad daily.¹⁰⁵ According to the Asiad Report:

‘The main thrust of programmes on TV and radio was four – to reassure the public, domestic and foreign, that the Games would take place on schedule and that it would be the biggest and most magnificent Asiad ever held; to stimulate interest and muster a national will behind the Asiad ‘82, and make the people realise that as hosts, both our national honour and prestige was involved; spread awareness; and to highlight the inspiring human-interest stories that emerged from all those involved in Asiad ‘82, from the Chairman to the humble labourer, constructing stadia or flyovers or roads.’¹⁰⁶

It is remarkable that ‘spreading awareness’ about actual sporting events was not nearly as crucial as projecting a positive image of the country and its leadership.¹⁰⁷

Infrastructural monuments constructed for this ‘most magnificent’ Asiad were the subject of intense political controversy and public debate. Most recollections highlight the transformation of Delhi in the wake of the Games as a cause of celebration of the ‘arrival’ of the capital city. However, the creation of new urban spaces mostly exclusive to the upper and middle class had profound impact on other city dwellers particularly the urban poor, who were subjected to material and emotional displacement of many

¹⁰⁴ IX Asiad Report Vol. 2, p. 203.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Despite extensive planning, many in the public were dissatisfied with the Committee’s publicity efforts. As the following letter to the editor argued, official campaigns tended to exclude the ‘common man’ in their message: ‘There has been much publicity of the preparations for the games. I do not think there has been any carefully planned campaign of public relations aimed at the common man who will ultimately make or mar our country’s image with our foreign visitors...There is still time for a concentrated effort through TV, radio, the press and influential contact agencies like the taxi-men’s union, to educate the public in what it can do to help make the Asiad a success and thus to serve the country.’ C. L. Proudfoot, ‘Asian Games’, *TOI* (13 November 1982), p. 8.

kinds. The next section will explore the relationship between the ‘infrastructure state’,¹⁰⁸ the middle class, and the urban poor in the context of the ‘Super Asiad’.

Building Super Temples of Sport

“‘A new drain”, the minister cried out, “Where is the money for a new drain? Won’t you people ever be satisfied? We’ve given you stadiums, colour television and liquor shops! We’ve given you socialism and progress! And now you come and ask for a new drain?””¹⁰⁹

The title of this section is a play on Nehru’s famous metaphor, ‘temples of modern India’, for hydroelectric dams built in the 1950s. I invoke Nehru across two themes. First, the construction of concrete sports stadia and luxury hotels, which replaced the dams as sites of ‘stateliness’ or state performance, reflects a continuity with the Nehruvian framework of high-modernism in infrastructure building. Indeed, dams and stadia were arguably the new ‘secular’ structures which unlike other heritage monuments could not be traced to any particular religious community or civilisational period. These ‘temples’ ostensibly belonged to all citizens of the new nation-state. However, I argue that the association of these new sites with leisure and entertainment added a ‘consumptive’ dimension to earlier preoccupations with national output and ‘production’. Second, I comment upon various conceptions of the modern Indian city – also a site of nationalist modernity fundamental to the citizen-making project.

In a remarkable display of efficiency, projects approved for the Games were completed in a record time of two years. In this short period, approximately 500 crore rupees were spent on sprucing up New Delhi’s sports infrastructure, and giving new form and

¹⁰⁸ Borrowing from J. Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Puri, ‘Socialism and all that’, *HT* (20 November 1983).

meaning to the city's existing transportation, communication, and housing networks.¹¹⁰ Attempts to elevate the capital to a 'world class' city included the expansion of roads, construction of flyovers, and purchase of new buses for mass transit. Notably, these were justified by state authorities as a response to the anticipated increase in car ownership in cities.¹¹¹ A plan for the city's first electric 'ring railway system' was similarly proposed 'to provide faster commuter services', although this did not materialise at the time.¹¹² Ten new five-star hotel projects were also approved to meet the expected rush of tourists during the Games.

In terms of creating maximum impact, however, the focus was on the construction of five new multipurpose stadia, including the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, the Indraprastha Stadium, and the Talkatora Sports Complex. Additionally, the National Stadium with a seating capacity of 21,000 previously used to stage the 1951 Asiad was renovated and utilised for the Games.¹¹³ In the wake of these developments, a newspaper report correctly observed how Delhi was 'Asiad-ised' almost overnight – 'Instant greenery and flowers, instant white beams, [and] even a dubious face-lift for the monuments ("taking years off their age")...' ¹¹⁴

In December 1980, several committees were constituted in consultation with Mrs Gandhi to oversee the timely completion of the projects. The hand-picked entourage

¹¹⁰ S. Grover, 'Building for the Asiad', *IWI*, 103/33-39 (1982), p. 112.

¹¹¹ This is worth keeping in mind given the promotion of the 'Maruti 800' passenger car at the time (Chapter 2). Concerns about traffic and air pollution caused by automobiles, and the large-scale felling of trees due to construction also found space in letters to the editor of several newspapers and periodicals.

¹¹² 'Electric trains for Capital by June 1982', *TOI* (8 October 1980), p. 1.

¹¹³ M. de Mellow, 'Are we allergic to Asiad'82', *TOI* (28 June 1981), p. 23.

¹¹⁴ N. Gupta, 'Is Delhi losing its history?', *TOI* (18 September 1983), p. A4.

was put under the charge of IAS officer and newly appointed Secretary General of AGSOC, S. S. Gill. An article in *India Today* noted:

‘...though packed with politicians, the 28 committees set up under the SOC to handle various aspects of the Games contained enough talent in the form of technocrats, senior service officers and bureaucrats to ensure that once established, the pace could be maintained.’¹¹⁵

From the outset, however, expenditure on urban infrastructure was opposed by numerous parties from former Prime Minister Charan Singh to critics within the Congress Party who dismissed the Games as a costly *tamasha* unsuited for a poor country like India.¹¹⁶ Many in the public similarly found it difficult to justify the cost, such as the following reader in the *Times of India* who urged:

‘Sports on an international scale are undoubtedly an expensive luxury. But since it is far too late in the day to back out of an international commitment there is one thing we can do. That is, to ensure that the crores that will be spent will serve the original purpose, namely, sports, not end up as a “tamasha” for two weeks or be used for the covert purpose of solving Delhi’s chronic housing shortage or even improving its traffic and tourist potential.’¹¹⁷

Indeed, investment in urban projects was explained by authorities as ‘part of the metro’s normal requirements’.¹¹⁸ In an interview with German weekly *Die Zeit*, Mrs Gandhi herself defended the construction of luxury hotels that were labelled as ‘anti-poor’:

‘You see what they claim is absolutely ridiculous because these were the people who had completely ruined all the programmes which were for the poor...Now it is quite true that we need not perhaps have had the Games but we had given our word that we would have them in our previous regime when costs were much less. So far as hotels are concerned we need them for the people...We don’t have enough place for people to stay at and we find that they pay for themselves...What we are doing for the Games is something that we were doing anyway. Only we are doing it quicker in order to get it ready by a particular time. Otherwise we would need these hotels and other things.’¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Bobb and Raina, ‘Asiad ’82: Race against time’.

¹¹⁶ The word ‘tamasha’ literally translates into spectacle or entertainment but with negative connotations of vulgarity and ostentation.

¹¹⁷ S. Serbjeetsingh, ‘Asian Games’, *TOI* (8 May 1980), p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Bobb and Raina, ‘Asiad ’82: Race against time’.

¹¹⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, *Statements on Foreign Policy Volume 1*, pp. 35-6.

Similarly, in her letters to friend Dorothy Norman, she criticised the negative media attention on the Games' budget:

'Our newspapers are, as usual, trying desperately hard to look under the carpet for a grain of dirt, or a flaw, so the concentration is on the amount spent...'¹²⁰



Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave is all set for a future of graceful negotiations.

You will find the resplendent colours of the Peacock on your key ring at Delhi's new Taj Palace Hotel. A fitting metaphor: India's first bird of plumage finds reflection, in all of its pride and glory, in a lobby of understated magnificence. And a hotel which does it equal justice.

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Colour TV brings the latest movies into your bedroom. And if the fresh flowers at breakfast are your favourite bloom, there's reason. A very savvy computer aids and abets our Guest Relations staff. It will remember your favourite flower and never misspell your name while billing you. In seconds even if you decide to check out at three in the morning.

Let your fingers do the flying.

The Taj Palace will enjoy every advantage of the latest electronics technology. You can direct dial inter-city in India or overseas to London, if you wish, while dawdling over breakfast in bed. Our convention facilities are India's finest with simultaneous translation in five languages and a service that extends from word processors and hi-speed duplicators to entertainment planning for a convention of 1300 and even, when the human touch makes all the difference, live secretaries! Seven banquet rooms and two exquisitely landscaped garden areas offer a range of options — an exclusive gathering of 100 or a grand wedding reception for 2500. A small movie theatre seats 43 and is equipped for 35 mm projection.

The Taj Palace Hotel makes a glittering debut at Sardar Patel Marg.

Loving kindness for the Inner Person.

Great food is an art, and at the Taj Palace Hotel, we add the spice of artifice. Each of our four restaurants is a matchless original and will offer cooking unique not just to Delhi, but to all of India.

Handi: With interiors inspired by the rustic arts and crafts of Gujarat, the Handi will offer the famous Handi cooking of Northern and Western India. Choice meats and poultry, fresh vegetables, exotic lentil dishes, simmered for hours in clever celebrations of spices and sauces.

Isfahan: Ornamented with an antiquary's prize collection of Persian copper samovars and coffee pots, Isfahan will offer the finest grilled and broiled meats derived from the ancient culinary talents of Persia, Afghanistan, and all of Central Asia.

The Orient Express: Agatha Christie planned a murder on it. Graham Greene used it to write an exquisite novel-on-wheels. Now the Taj Palace Hotel recreates the legendary European train which once plied, in high style, between London and Constantinople, carrying Archbishops and Grand Dukes, Cat burglars and Czarinas, the very rich and the merely notorious. Our Orient Express bar offers decor, drinks and a menu inspired by the cuisines of the countries on this famous train's route.

The Tea House of the August Moon: Come, discover the beguiling, unfolding joys of the famous Chinese Dim Sum. For the first time in India. Ably supported by an a la carte menu of impeccable distinction.

... and thoughtful provisions for staying fit as a fiddle.

We believe that the pleasures of the palate and the joys of a neat silhouette need not be mutually exclusive. Thus you will find an experienced Resident Consultant at our Health Club who will work out a fitness plan just for you. Besides the health club, with the very latest facilities including yoga, complete hydrotherapy etc. the hotel will have a swimming pool and a jogging track around the garden. And a complete beauty parlour.

Once again, we ask for your indulgence.

When the Taj Delhi opened, we asked you to bear with our teething problems and very graciously, you did. We ask, once again, for special consideration. We have kept our promise to Asiad '82. During the games, the hotel rooms have been contracted and reserved by the Government of India for delegates to the Asian Games. We plan a grand debut on January 1, 1983, when general reservations will be accepted. With your support, we hope that the Taj Palace Hotel will make it a memorable New Year for us all.



THE TAJ GROUP OF HOTELS

Figure 1.10: Key to 'Understated Magnificence' – Cuisines, computers, and colour TVs at the Taj Palace Hotel¹²¹

Image published with permission of ProQuest LLC. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

¹²⁰ Gandhi and Norman, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 168.

¹²¹ Source: *TOI* (14 November 1982), p. 7. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com

Despite such statements, it is impossible to ignore the context of these developments in both time and space, for the decision to invest in infrastructure – stadia, flyovers, roads, and luxury hotels – is not made on purely material or utilitarian grounds but rather, as Kajri Jain argues, on symbolic grounds for status-building.¹²² In her work discussing ‘territorial’ sites of the spectacle, Jain examines the concept of ‘massive media’ as a ‘powerful force at work in shaping the processing of globality’ in contemporary India.¹²³ In her study of large iconic statues of Hindu religious figures that appeared along motorways in India in the early 1990s, Jain explores the networks of religious tourism, entertainment, and commerce that emerged as a consequence of these ‘massive’ developments. Adopting Jain’s theoretical framework, I suggest that the ‘secular’ infrastructure complex of the 1982 Asiad, much like the giant dams of Nehruvian India, accrued symbolic and economic value to the state as a highly localised manifestation of its power, and to the city of New Delhi as a source of prestige as well as revenue generating tourism.¹²⁴

Moreover, these sites derived their exhibition value from their spectatorship that consumed their monumental character, and furthered the grandeur associated with the event.¹²⁵ By precisely ‘seeing’ these grand sites, the public legitimised the

¹²² K. Jain, ‘Post-reform India’s Automotive-iconic-cement Assemblages’, *Identities*, 23/3 (2016), p. 328.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 329; On spatial thinking and politics, see K. Easterling’s *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London, 2014), and M. Acuto’s review of the book in *International Affairs*, 91/3 (2015), pp. 642-4; Easterling argues that ‘the most radical changes in the globalising world are being written not in the language of law and diplomacy, but rather in the spatial information of infrastructure, architecture and urbanism’ (Acuto, p. 642). Easterling explores the creation of ‘infrastructure space’ as a political process, or ‘extrastatecraft’, as something that is ‘built both “outside” and “in addition to” statecraft’ (*Ibid.*). She studies the creation of ‘free zones’ in the Middle East and China, and the introduction of high-speed internet in Africa, to study the role of non-state organisations in shaping these ‘infrastructure spaces’.

¹²⁴ Jain, ‘Post-reform India’s Automotive Assemblages’, p. 334.

¹²⁵ At the same time, the role of mass media – print, radio, and television – must be noted in the circulation of discourses on ‘massive media’ via images, and written and oral commentaries which added to their spectacular value.

infrastructure state in all its self-appointed roles. The agency of the spectator was thus just as crucial, especially in relation to the new ‘cityscape’ that emerged precisely as a result of middle class understandings of public space, aesthetics, and hygiene as I will discuss later.

In the context of this symbolic value, objections raised against expenditure on the Games were met with chastising remarks from middle class sympathisers such as the following:

‘The cynics, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing, raised crusty objections to the expenditure involved...They have also questioned the need for India to stage this “extravaganza”. These are the sort of questions that have always been asked whenever the country has embarked on large-scale projects, be it a dam, a power house or an atomic station...As far as the Asian Games are concerned, let it not be forgotten, that India were the founding fathers, and that it is thirty years since we last held them...Dignity and self-respect demand that we hold them – at least more than once in a lifetime.’¹²⁶

Others pointed out the need to ‘enlighten’ the ‘masses’ about their responsibilities as good host-citizens:

‘National pride, if effectively kindled, will tide the people over the inconveniences that always arise during a period of preparation. It’s the ‘man in the street’, who is going to pack the stadia during the Games. It’s the little man, who now has to straddle a trench in order to get his bottle of milk, that we have to inspire. It’s the office clerk who has to make a long detour to get to his office, because a road is blocked for widening whose co-operation we have to win. Everyone out there, must feel that he is part of the Asiad ’82 adventure...He must become conscious of the honour that had been bestowed on India’s capital. He must be enlightened about the responsibilities attached to a country playing host in the Asian Games.’¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Prabhu, ‘Asian Games and After: Much Potential to be Tapped’, *TOI* (7 December 1982), p. 8.

¹²⁷ de Mellow, ‘Are we Allergic to Asiad ’82’; de Mellow was a noted broadcaster for All India Radio, and frequently gave commentaries during Republic Day parades. He is remembered for his seven-hour long commentary of Gandhi’s funeral procession in 1948.

A magnificent indoor stadium rises — half a kilometre in circumference, the largest free span stadium in Asia¹²⁸

Report on Asia's greatest spectacle of sport...

Gymnastics. Volleyball. Badminton. These will be the sports on view upon the wooden playing arena of this stadium during the Asian Games.

Here, in November 1982, 25,000 people will gather to view the spectacle of sport.

The fourth largest in the world.

This covered stadium, the fourth largest in the world and the largest in Asia, is a feat of technological brilliance—and the first of its kind the world over to be completed in less than 2 years.

Breathtaking design.

Inside, the effect is breathtaking. From the circular central arena the stands sweep upwards to the height of a 6-storey building. Above, resting solidly on 8 pylons spread over the periphery, the 2000-tonne space-frame structural dome soars to a height of 44 metres.

This steel and aluminium-roofing dome spans 150 metres—yet not a single pillar disturbs the sightlines.

Prof. Z. S. Mikowsky, the world-renowned structural expert who was present during the crucial decentering operation involving the removal of all temporary supports and the gentle lowering of the dome upon the pylons, stated afterwards that "this day should go into the annals of the history of engineering achievement."

Unique lighting and sound.

The light and sound systems, specially designed, are scientific marvels. The brilliant illumination,

enough for colour tv coverage without colour distortion, will come from 216 metal-halide lamps mounted on circular cutwales 21 metres above the floor.

The integrated audio-communication system, designed by Philips and being used for the first time in India, incorporates a high quality public address system, micro-processor based intercoms and digital wireless paging equipment. Using an automatic noise dependent audio-processor (ANDAP), the public address system ensures high intelligibility of transmitted speech, even during the noisiest ambient conditions. An electronic equalisation circuit ensures a uniform frequency response at all points in the stadium.

2-in-1 stadium.

Another unique feature of this fully airconditioned stadium is a 22-metre foldable PVC partition which can be raised in 12 minutes. This partition effectively makes the stadium a 2-in-1, with the provision for holding two sports events simultaneously, cutting out the sight and to a large extent the sound of one from the other.

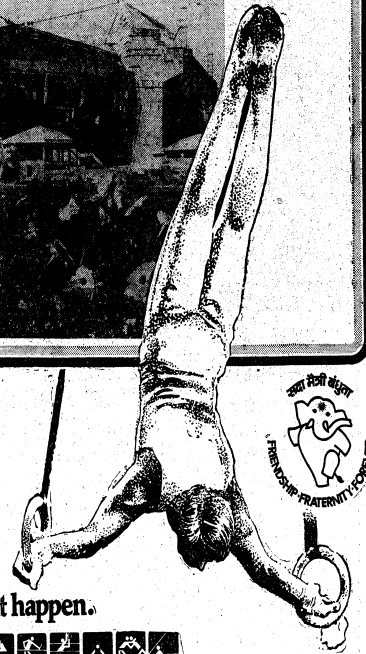
All-round excellence.

In this stadium complex not only the indoors but also the outdoors is well planned. The comprehensive outdoor lighting system by Philips uses sodium vapour lamps to give a high level of illumination—which ensures proper security, free movement and quick entrance or exit.

In its conception, this stadium is remarkable—immensely complex in its engineering design yet simple in its functional purpose: to give sportsmen the best in playing facilities and spectators the finest of viewing.

A remarkable facility for Delhi.

The construction of this stadium complex is part of a meticulously coordinated activity involving hundreds of specialist agencies. An effort which will help make Delhi one of the finest



sports centres in the world. An effort which is a tribute to the youth of India, because it gives them wonderful sports facilities.

An honour to India.

Architects, planners, engineers, workers and sports lovers are busy preparing for the biggest Asiad ever. The challenge is exciting, the rewards plentiful. Hosting it will indeed be a great honour for India.

The Asiad. The largest spectacle of sport in Asia. Eagerly awaited, keenly contested, once every 4 years.

The IX Asiad is coming, and we are getting ready.

**IX ASIAD
DELHI 1982**
November 19 - December 4

Working to make it happen.



Issued in the interest of sport by Peico Electronics & Electricals. Philips, the trusted Indian household name for over 50 years.

PHILIPS

Figure 1.11: Issued 'In the Interest of Sport' by Corporate Sponsor Philips¹²⁸
Image published with permission of ProQuest LLC. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

The expectation of sacrifice and collective responsibility (especially from the youth 'working to make it happen' as in Figure 1.11) was a recurring feature of the vocabulary used to publicise state spectacles. Organisers demanded a sense of 'public

¹²⁸ Source: *TOI* (4 May 1982), p. 22. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com; First established in 1930 as a subsidiary of the Dutch multinational, Philips India Pvt. Ltd. was a popular brand of radio and video cassette recorders. It gained significant market share in the electronics industry in the 1980s after securing a contract to arrange the lighting and sound installations in various stadia for the Asiad. See S. Sen, 'Philip Electronics: Light and Shadow', *Business Today* (26 May 2013), <https://www.businesstoday.in/magazine/special/oldest-mnc-in-india-philips/story/194628.html> (14 May 2018); and 'History - Philips India Limited', Elcoma India, <http://www.elcomaindia.com/lighting/history/philips-india> (14 May 2018).

spiritedness'¹²⁹ and civic commitment for the 'national cause' that was the Asiad. Roads, stadia, and flyovers, however, are not inherently nationalistic, but are capable of assimilating into broader narratives of national prestige.¹³⁰ The conversion of these concrete symbols into national ones was facilitated by communication strategies and media outreach directed by the state, and reiterated by private sponsors like Philips. As the above quotes suggest, the official narrative was expected to be accepted and passed on by each one of the city's inhabitants as their civic duty towards the nation. However, the stated benefits of development, material or symbolic, did not entail equal access for all. In fact, the 'massive media' built for the Games led to a spatial and social reorganisation of the city. This city was not a space open to all, specifically excluding those who had laboured to 'beautify' it in the first place.

Construction for the Games was carried out by 125,000 workers recruited by agents and contractors from numerous villages in the States of Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan.¹³¹ According to a report published in October 1982 by the civil rights organisation People's Union for Democratic Rights (henceforth PUDR report), men, women, and children migrated in large numbers to Delhi where they were pushed to complete the projects under severe working conditions.¹³² The report claimed that contractors had violated several labour laws, and denied workers the rights guaranteed under the Minimum Wages Act, Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, Bonded Labour system (Abolition) Act, and other standing

¹²⁹ Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre', p. 238.

¹³⁰ Klingensmith, *One Valley and a Thousand*, p. 279.

¹³¹ People's Union for Democratic Rights, 'The Other Face of Asiad 82' (October 1982) (henceforth PUDR report), available at <http://www.unipune.ac.in/snc/cssh/HumanRights/06%20STATE%20INDUSTRY%20AND%20WORKERS/03.pdf>, p. 3.

rules.¹³³ It reported over a dozen cases of cholera and gastroenteritis amongst workers living in makeshift slums, more than one of which resulted in death. It also noted the widespread prevalence of child labour at construction sites, and in a specific case of bonded labour brought to the organisation's notice, around 100 labourers were allegedly brought by one *jamadar* (middleman to the contractor) from Orissa who exploited them under archaic labour laws.¹³⁴ The report claimed:

‘Jamadar Chakra Raut...let fall the hint during conversation with us that he was paying the workers according to the Orissa Dadan Act – a hangover from the colonial days – under which the employer gives some money in advance to the worker and extracts from him as much labour as possible in lieu of the advance.’¹³⁵

A special parliamentary committee was constituted to look into this matter, as one MP, Indrajit Gupta, of the Communist Party of India led the charges against the Delhi administration in the Lok Sabha. In a passionate speech, Gupta urged:

‘When the officers and Delhi Administration come and talk to the workers in the presence of the jamadars and contractors, is any of them going to give any evidence about bonded labour? The reports appearing say that they are brought from their homes and they are made to sign a bond which many of them do not understand. They cannot read; they are illiterate. Many of them are coming from States where they do not know Hindi. The bonds are written in Hindi...Once they have signed it, if they are dissatisfied with the conditions of work, they cannot leave...What are they going to do about elementary human facilities like water, medical care, accommodation and so on? These workers are not sub-human beings. They are not animals brought here like slave labour to construct some five-star hotel, some fly-over and some stadium for the greater glory and prestige of the special organising committee. I am very glad now that I refused to be a member of this Committee because so many stinking things are coming out.’¹³⁶

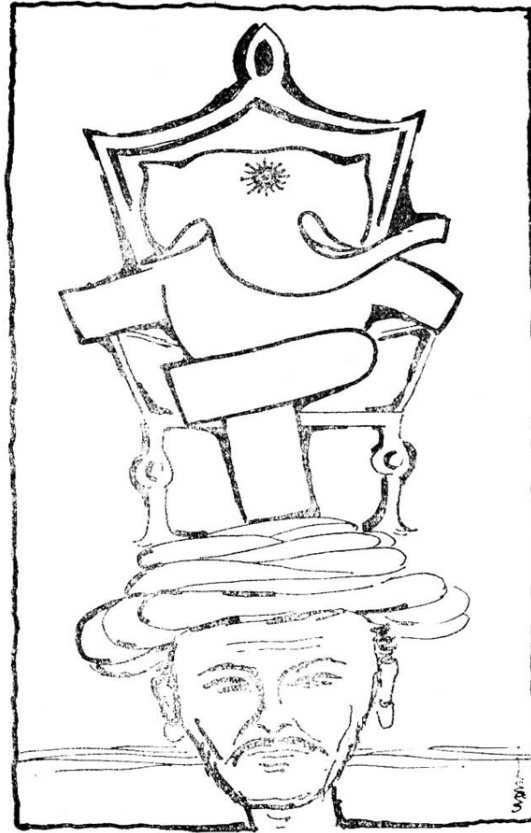
¹³³ Ibid., p. 8.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ *LSD*, 6th session, 19/19, 10 September 1981, p. 287; Similar controversies were reported in international media. For instance, an article in the British *New Statesman* noted: ‘The preparations have left Delhi hardly recognisable. Historical buildings have been bulldozed, roads and parks dug up, six massive 5 star hotels constructed and the once romantic skyline ruined by 7 flyovers. For the workers employed on these contracts, India’s numerous labour laws might as well not have existed.’ ‘Asiad’, *New Statesman* (19 November 1982). British Library Archives. MSS Eur F215/232.

THE OTHER FACE OF



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PEOPLES UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

Figure 1.12: Cover Page of PUDR Report¹³⁷

The findings of the PUDR report, although eye-opening for many at the time, reflected patterns inherent in the phenomenon of urbanisation in general, and in the middle class project of city-making in particular.

The spatial expansion of cities was linked to an increase in population of migrants from smaller towns and the rural countryside. On the one hand, these groups historically presented a novel vote base for political parties during elections. Moreover, they provided a steady supply of cheap labour for the city's many development projects. On

¹³⁷ Source: People's Union for Democratic Rights (New Delhi, 1982).

the other hand, as Nandini Gooptu argues, city officials and policy-makers over time began to view the scarcity of resources as ‘jeopardies by population growth in general and more particularly by the increasingly prominent “floating population” of the poor’.¹³⁸ The suspect urban poor were made up of migrants as well as the original inhabitants of the area who had been chased away from the centres of ‘growth’. More crucially, the urban poor, whilst clearly not a homogenous community, were seen as a ‘distinct social segment sharing undesirable traits and posing a threat to moral and social order, public health, and political stability’.¹³⁹ Although these attitudes were predominantly associated with the middle class, they reflected deeper prejudices underlying the concepts of civic space, civic consciousness, and the very ‘language of modernity and of modern governments’ that fundamentally shaped the ‘cityscape’.¹⁴⁰

The highly visual and often racially charged descriptions of dirt and disease found in nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of Indian cities reinforced existing prejudices held by many middle class thinkers who went on to build the state apparatus in postcolonial India.¹⁴¹ The ideologies informing notions of clean and pure bodies have been examined by several scholars through the lens of caste, class, and gender. In particular, these studies discuss the qualifications of caste-based purity inherent in the

¹³⁸ N. Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth-Century India* (Cambridge; New York, 2001), p. 7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4; In her thesis on development-led displacement in the State of Andhra Pradesh, Vyjayanthi Rao notes that whilst those affected by state development projects cannot always be represented in homogenous categories of religion, ethnicity, or language, an overwhelming majority are indigenous people on the one hand, and oppressed castes on the other. V. V. Rao, *Ruins and Recollections: On the Subject(s) of Displacement* (PhD thesis, Univ. of Chicago, 2002), p. 137.

¹⁴⁰ D. Chakrabarty, ‘Open space/public space’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 14/1 (1991), p. 16.

¹⁴¹ On the influence of Victorian discourses on science and disease on early Hindu nationalist thought (Hindu ‘revivalist’ Arya Samaj movement in particular), see H. Fischer-Tine, ‘From *Brahmacharya* to ‘Conscious Race Culture’ in C. Bates ed., *Beyond Representation: Colonial and Postcolonial Constructions of Indian Identity* (New Delhi, 2006), pp. 241-69; Also see M. Daechsel, ‘Between Suburb and World Politics’ in the same edition (pp. 270-99) on the fashioning of middle class identities in early twentieth century Lahore influenced by the concepts of city and space as articulated in the colonial metropole.

social and spatial ordering of Hindu society, and with it the practices of inclusion and exclusion which deeply influenced the city-citizenship model upheld by middle class policy makers.¹⁴²

Judgements about ‘purity’ were later vocalised as technocratic concerns and civic anxieties about public health and hygiene, a lack of which was believed to be an inherent moral and cultural failing of the urban poor.¹⁴³ Against these perceptions, Gooptu explores how an ‘urban-based civic vision’ developed amongst the ‘newly enfranchised middle classes’, which fit neatly within the narrative of modernity, rationality, and progress associated with the postcolonial city.¹⁴⁴ A civic community occupying civic space thus influenced the everyday commercial and private use of limited land and resources. Urban infrastructure such as wide roads and promenades, flyovers, and airports as well as spaces for leisure and entertainment such as sports stadia, art and culture centres, and museums became exclusive sites for the elite where intermingling with other groups was restricted to unequal client-server relationships. Moreover, the presence of slums and other ‘illegal’ settlements in close proximity to these sites was seen as a ‘nuisance’ by planners who then took it upon themselves to take strict action against physical ‘encroachments’ as well as the ‘encroachers’ themselves.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Curiously, the important place of ritualistic cleanliness and hygienic jurisprudence equally prevalent amongst Muslims has been comparatively understudied in the literature in the Indian context; See, for instance, A. Dorron and I. Raja, ‘The Cultural Politics of Shit’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 18/2 (2015), pp. 1-19; A. Dorron, ‘Unclean, Unseen’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39/4 (2016), pp. 715-39; S. Prasad, ‘Sanitising the Domestic’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 27/3 (2015), pp. 132-53; A. Baviskar ‘Cows, Cars and Cycle-Rickshaws’ in A. Baviskar and R. Ray ed., *Elite and Everyman: The Cultural Politics of the Indian Middle Classes* (New Delhi; London, 2011); S. Srivastava, *Entangled Urbanism: Slum, Gated Community and Shopping Mall* (New Delhi, 2015); and M. Zerah and F. Landy, ‘Nature and Urban Citizenship Redefined’, *Geoforum*, 46 (2013), pp. 25-33.

¹⁴³ Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ Here, I refer to the theoretical concept of ‘nuisance’ elaborated by Asher Ghertner in his influential book *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi* (New York, 2017). Ghertner argues that

In his history of the city of Mumbai, Gyan Prakash similarly writes:

‘The [Bombay Municipal] Committee used symbolically rich images of sewage and waste, densely packed slums, and traffic-snarled city streets to express a sense of India’s shortcomings as a nation. On the one hand, there was a deep belief in the nation’s existence; on the other hand, the emotively charged images of poverty, congestion, and filth questioned the fullness of identity and prepared the ground for the manipulation of urban space according to a set of functions and needs.’¹⁴⁶

This set of functions and needs, however, betrayed a particular mode of aesthetics and spatial strategies, which in turn governed the logic of segregating the city into public versus private spaces on the one hand, and social groups into citizens versus populations on the other. On these theoretical categories, I refer to the influential works of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee respectively. Chakrabarty examines the Indian *bazaar* or the ‘outside’ as ‘a place where one came across and dealt with strangers’.¹⁴⁷ The streets of the modern Indian city were filled with ‘strangers’ who were ‘potentially dangerous’ and ‘untrustworthy’, and thus kept outside the boundaries of one’s private home.¹⁴⁸ The ‘strangers’ referred to in Chakrabarty’s discussion can be identified as the urban poor who were seen as somehow inherently lacking a proper citizen-culture. At the same time, Chatterjee argues that the postcolonial state, in fact, consciously denied

‘nuisance’ is an ‘inherently aesthetic category used to identify sensory revulsion’ which was used by planners and policy-makers in the making of Delhi from 1990 onwards. Ghertner’s work examines the application of a ‘world-class’ aesthetic normativity, which he describes as ‘rule by aesthetics’, to the process of city-making as against statistics-based techniques used by traditional urban theory practitioners. In particular, he explores the removal of slums from areas earmarked for post-liberalisation development projects such as shopping malls on the basis of what planners perceived Delhi ‘should look like’ (pp. 1-16); Also see J. Scott, ‘Chapters 1 and 2’ *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998); Examining the ‘illegitimacy’ of slums, and by association of slum-dwellers, Gautam Bhan notes how the ‘use of identity of the ‘encroacher’ reduced the poor to the ‘slum’: ‘It is not just the encroachment that is the distorted urban substance; it is the encroacher himself that is no longer legitimate or desirable.’ G. Bhan, ‘The Impoverishment of Poverty’, *Environment and Urbanisation*, 26/2 (2014), p. 553.

¹⁴⁶ G. Prakash, *Mumbai Fables: A History of an Enchanted City* (Princeton, 2010), pp. 259-60.

¹⁴⁷ Chakrabarty, ‘Open Space/Public Space’, p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; Several scholars have critiqued Chakrabarty’s public-private dichotomy through different disciplinary frameworks. For instance, Sanjay Srivastava’s work explores urban spaces that do not follow the ‘sharply differentiated’ dual model proposed by Chakrabarty. In his ethnographic study of highways, shopping malls, and religious ‘amusement’ sites such as the Akshardham Temple complex in New Delhi, Srivastava examines ‘threshold spaces’ that are on the boundaries of the outside and inside. These spaces reflect new strategies of leisure, consumption, and contact between different social groups in contemporary India. S. Srivastava, ‘Urban Spaces, Disney-Divinity and Moral Middle Classes in Delhi’, *EPW*, 44/26-27 (2009), p. 341.

full citizenship to these groups by treating them as ‘populations’ or ‘empirical categories of people with specific social or economic attributes’ that were relevant from the point of view of administrative and welfare schemes.¹⁴⁹

It is important to note that the notion of citizenship here does not refer to one’s legal status in binaries of either formally belonging or not belonging to a particular nation-state, or exercising a set of constitutionally-backed political and economic rights, although the citizenship of the urban poor based on these understandings was also not guaranteed. Rather I make use of a fluid interpretation of citizenship in a cultural-civic sense, or as a shared claim to participate in the nation’s cultural myths and its spectacles.¹⁵⁰ In citizenship literature, these dimensions have been categorised as ‘formal’ and ‘substantive’ respectively, whereby substantive citizenship ‘addresses the actual conditions of exercising formal citizenship rights’.¹⁵¹

For instance, in his paper examining social exclusion based on unique food practices, Holwitt studies the concept of ‘sensory citizenship’ by integrating sensory perceptions (evoked through ‘other’ bodies) with formal regimes of citizenship:

‘In many ways, citizens distinguish themselves from non-citizens by essentialising the latter’s ways of living as fundamentally different from their own. These practices of othering do not merely depend on mental or cognitive prejudices, but are rooted in bodily ways of perception that often escape reflection and articulation, which explains the longevity and resilience of different forms of sensory othering.’¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ P. Chatterjee, ‘Are Indian Cities Becoming Bourgeois at Last?’, http://abahlali.org/files/001_partha-chatterjee-are-indian-cities-becoming1.pdf (3 July 2017), p. 176.

¹⁵⁰ Similar to the concept of a ‘middle class’, Veena Das notes that the suggestion ‘that citizenship is a claim rather than a status, which one either has or does not have’ shows the ‘precariousness as well as the promise’ of belonging to a polity – a nation, a city, or a community. V. Das, ‘State, Citizenship, and the Urban Poor’, *Citizenship Studies*, 15/3-4 (2011), p. 320; On the history of citizenship in India and its various meanings and realities, see N. G. Jayal, *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013).

¹⁵¹ P. Holwitt, ‘Strange Food, Strange Smells: Vegetarianism and sensorial citizenship in Mumbai’s redeveloped enclaves’, *CSA*, 25/4 (2017), p. 8.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Drawing upon the above concepts, I argue that migrant groups building infrastructure for the Asiad were expected to do so as their duty towards the nation, which restricted their *citizenship as producers* to their labour contribution. Crucially, they were denied access to the sites of the spectacle *as consumers* on account of their potentially dangerous and corrupt bodies. Indeed, they were made into ‘subjects’ of governance and ‘objects’ of statist intervention through programmes that sought to control their actions (labour) as well as their bodies. For instance, entry into the stadium required a ticket that was validated by security officers at the point of entry. This practice evaluated and sorted bodies according to purchasing power, but also gave law enforcers the power to judge if the ‘right’ people were being let in. This transformed the stadium into an exclusive site of healthy, ordered, and disciplined consumption by middle class families who could claim their identities as consumers.

The direct attack on ‘poor bodies’ was twofold. First, through public health missions such as family planning, and second, via the actual displacement of ‘bodies’ that ‘occupied’ prime real estate through slum demolitions. This two-pronged strategy, whilst having specific colonial and postcolonial precedents, was implemented most infamously during the Emergency.¹⁵³ For instance, in his study of the period, Patrick Clibbens quotes a Congress MP who wrote to Mrs Gandhi, urging:

“‘Beggar menace in our towns and cities is...[a] problem which has been bringing a bad name to our country, particularly through the foreign visitors and tourists’. These people who ‘pester all the sundry [sic] in all our bazars’ should instead be rounded up and made productive citizens. “This begar [sic] problem should also be tackled during this Emergency and the country rid of it once and for all...Anyone found begging should be arrested and imprisoned and made to work for his living”’¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ See S. Kaviraj, ‘Filth and the Public Sphere: Concepts and practices about space in Calcutta’, *Public Culture*, 19/1 (1997), pp. 83-113.

¹⁵⁴ Dharanindhar Basumatari quoted in P. Clibbens, “‘The destiny of this city...’”, *CSA*, 22/1 (2014), p. 59. Also see E. Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (London, 2003).

The agenda of manufacturing efficient *producer-citizens* is clearly brought out in this statement.

Notably, the reduction of the body to its material environment is also examined by Kristen Ross who argues that the desire to beautify cities and one's immediate surroundings is closely linked to the act of beautifying the self. In other words, the construction of sports stadia, open avenues, and luxury hotels can be analysed alongside middle class consumption of products that created the same effect on a bodily level.¹⁵⁵ It is useful to examine Ross's arguments in the context of the early 1980s in India during which a consumer revolution was also gaining momentum.¹⁵⁶

In particular, I look at two categories of consumer goods – beauty products and household cleaning appliances – both of which played with notions of hygiene and cleanliness on an individual-familial level, and both of which were highly gendered in their constructed appeal. The surge in the consumption of these products, at least visually, is made evident by the number of advertisements that appeared in newspapers and lifestyle magazines at the time. The beauty industry, for instance, grew exponentially in the early 1980s as a cover story in *India Today* from March 1982 exclaimed:

‘Bombarded from every angle, the urban Indian woman has taken to the face-pack more easily than to the pill; adapted to hair-conditioners as she may never to hard liquor; and as for any kind of talcum, to borrow poet Ogden Nash's nonsense, it is always more than walcum.’¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ K. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1995); For a discussion of modern fitness regimens and their impact on middle class ‘bodies’, see Andrews, Batt, and Silk, ‘Sport, Glocalisation’, pp. 267-70.

¹⁵⁶ T. N. Ninan, ‘Consumer industry witness phenomenal growth rate’, IT (15 February 1984), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19840215-consumer-industry-witnesses-phenomenal-growth-rate-unmatched-by-any-other-sector-802781-1984-02-15> (29 July 2018).

¹⁵⁷ U. Singh and S. Sethi, ‘Cosmetics: The beauty boom’, IT (31 March 1982), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/beauty-no-longer-a-skin-deep-business-but-a-sprawling-multi-crore-business/1/391549.html> (5 July 2017); This reference to birth control pills is worth keeping in mind in

Even traditional Indian cosmetics such as henna began to capture market interest especially abroad. As Delhi-based beautician, Shahnaz Hussain, remarked at the opening of her beauty clinic, ‘Shahnaz Herbal’, opposite Harrods in London, ‘Yoga is in, Raga is in, so naturally, Herbal is in’.¹⁵⁸

Interestingly, the report argued that ‘beauty awareness’ was partly motivated by an increasing number of working women willing to spend their wages on beauty products, especially on Western brands. Quoting an executive in the cosmetics industry, it remarked, ‘You’re not selling a product in this industry, you’re selling a dream’.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, this dream of consumption and beautification was reproduced in carefully worded advertisements which were often intended to be provocative:

“Does make-up label you ‘fast, ‘loose’, or ‘that type?’”, “Is make-up right only after marriage?” and “Do men look down on make-up?”.¹⁶⁰

Along similar lines, a satirical piece appeared in the *Times of India* which noted the emancipatory potential of cosmetics:

‘In India...the man is the main buyer. Even for selling women’s clothes and other consumer goods, he has to be appeased first. In virtually all advertisements for women’s outfits, a man is shown hovering over the woman, overshadowing her in smartness and good looks. In this highly unequal competition, women have begun to wear blood red lipstick so as to put the awe of the blood-thirsty Kali into the heart of the man. Lipstick is the only cosmetic that men have not yet started wearing. But some Siva-like subterfuge must be [y]elling in many a male subconscious in order to outdo the looming feminine challenge...’¹⁶¹

Female superstars of the time such as Zeenat Aman, Rekha, and Parveen Babi often appeared in such campaigns due to their ‘Westernised’ image that was reinforced by the unconventional roles they portrayed on-screen, their Anglicised accents, and their

the context of aggressive family planning strategies implemented in India during this period, discussed in detail in the next chapter (pp. 164-9).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ S. Surinder, ‘The last female frontier’, *TOI* (9 January 1983), p. A3.

fashion and make-up in public. The consumption of products associated with these women was seen as liberating by many working women as well as by younger college-going women in cities.¹⁶²

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at At the Edge blog, <http://8ate.blogspot.com/2008/11/zeenat-aman-in-vintage-lux-ads.html> (23 July 2018).

Figure 1.13: Zeenat Aman – ‘Keeps me soft to touch. And that’s important, isn’t it?’ (1970s)¹⁶³

¹⁶² See S. Gadihoke, ‘Selling Soap and Stardom: The story of Lux’, Tasveer Ghar, <http://www.tasveergharindia.net/cmsdesk/essay/104/index.html> (18 July 2018) for a historical study of the Lux campaign as one of the earliest examples of celebrity endorsements in India.

¹⁶³ Source: At the Edge blog, <http://8ate.blogspot.com/2008/11/zeenat-aman-in-vintage-lux-ads.html> (23 July 2018).

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Cutting the Chai blog, <https://www.cuttingthechai.com/2012/03/5734/ad-from-1979-look-thats-rekha-with-a-lakme-face/> (14 August 2018).

Figure 1.14: As Good as Imported – Lakmè make-up campaign with Rekha (1979)¹⁶⁴

In the early 1980s, however, these representations were limited to a few female actors and beauty products since a larger consumer demographic was found amongst middle class housewives who were perceived to have a more conservative aesthetic. Most household related advertisements thus targeted the traditional *sari* clad, visibly Hindu woman depicted in her role as the ideal wife and mother. Patricia Uberoi has argued that the ‘consociation of women with material products’ has the ‘ideological function of making (culturally constructed) gender roles appear as “natural”.’¹⁶⁵ For instance, in

¹⁶⁴ Source: Cutting the Chai blog, <https://www.cuttingthechai.com/2012/03/5734/ad-from-1979-look-thats-rekha-with-a-lakme-face/> (14 August 2018).

¹⁶⁵ P. Uberoi, ‘Feminine Identity and National Ethos in Indian Calendar Art’, *EPW*, 25/17 (1990), p. W45.

the heteronormative domestic sphere, the responsibility of ensuring cleanliness and hygiene fell squarely on women's shoulders. This idea was reproduced in advertisements promoting consumption and feminine domesticity side by side through products such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners, soaps, and detergents.¹⁶⁶



Figure 1.15: Becoming Capable, Economical Assets to the Family: Usha sewing machine (1980s)¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Rachel Dwyer suggests that beauty advertisements reveal something about the ‘private consumption’ practices of women, especially housewives for whom reading lifestyle magazines was an important form of leisure, and of ‘taking time out for themselves when not doing household chores’. R. Dwyer, ‘Shooting Stars...’ in R. Dwyer and C. Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation* (New Delhi, 2001), pp. 260-70; Dipesh Chakrabarty also brings to light the gendered underpinnings of ‘practicing’ cleanliness in the private domain of the household: ‘[The household] does not simply delineate a hygienic space where cleanliness is practiced. Housekeeping is also meant to express the auspicious qualities of the mistress of the household, her Lakshmi (the goddess of well-being) – like nature that protects the lineage into which she married. As ‘outsiders’ who have to be received into the bosom of the patrilineal and patriarchal family, women are particularly subject to the rituals of auspiciousness.’ (Chakrabarty, ‘Open space/public space’, p. 20); On feminine domesticity in late colonial India, also see A. McGowan, ‘Modernity at Home: Leisure, autonomy and the new woman in India’, Tasveer Ghar, <http://www.tasveergharindia.net/cmsdesk/essay/95/index.html> (18 July 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Source: Reddit, <https://i.redd.it/eg0c9tcwsm601.jpg> (23 July 2018); On the fascinating social histories of Western sewing machine technology in colonial and early postcolonial India, see D. Arnold, ‘Global Goods and Local Usages: The small world of the Indian sewing machine’, *Journal of Global History*, 6 (2011), pp. 407-29.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Old Indian Ads, <http://oldindianads.com/print/1980-vim-with-perfume> (23 July 2018).

Figure 1.16: ‘Fresh, Clean Smell’: New and improved Vim cleaning soap (1980s)¹⁶⁸

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at At the Edge blog, <http://8ate.blogspot.com/2008/05/lalitaji-in-surf-det-ergent-wars.html> (23 July 2018).

Figure 1.17: ‘Washes Whitest of All’: Surf detergent (1980s)¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Source: Old Indian Ads, <http://oldindianads.com/print/1980-vim-with-perfume> (23 July 2018).

¹⁶⁹ Source: At the Edge blog, <http://8ate.blogspot.com/2008/05/lalitaji-in-surf-det-ergent-wars.html> (23 July 2018).

Here I also make note of Sanjay Srivastava's study of the middle class practice of 'moral consumption'. In his analysis of women's lifestyle magazines, Srivastava concludes that the side by side positioning of 'explicit articles on sex and sexuality with those on religious "values", rituals, and texts should be understood in the context of the process of moral consumption'.¹⁷⁰ Accordingly, in the above advertisements, women's consumption of cleaning and beauty products was legitimised by their subliminal functional message – that of 'caring' for one's family, thereby adding a moral dimension to the otherwise 'corrupt' act of consuming 'westernised' products of capitalism. Curiously, as shown in Figure 1.17, the woman was often depicted wearing a white *sari*, that is the visual marker of a Hindu widow. The use of the colour white to represent cleanliness and purity suggests a conscious departure from recognised cultural norms to first and foremost communicate the desirability of the consumer product. The wife was now differentiated by other markers such as bangles or a Hindu wedding necklace.

The importance of personal hygiene was overtly emphasised through phrases such as 'perfumed fresh, clean smell', 'fragrant', 'hidden dirt', 'cleansing power', etc. Such vocabulary reveals the middle class obsession with beautifying the self and the private space of one's home that can be analysed alongside their vocal championship of civic projects urging to keep public spaces 'clean and green'. Moreover, cleanliness narratives were subliminally woven around identifying culprits, or the 'other' against whom one had to cleanse the self. In other words, protection was needed not only from

¹⁷⁰ Srivastava, 'Urban Spaces, Disney-Divinity and Moral Middle Classes in Delhi', p. 342; Moral consumption here is differentiated from the *swadeshi* rhetoric of responsible consumption of domestically manufactured products.

the dirt and pollution of one's external environment but from the everyday, unavoidable contact with the masses inhabiting public space.

These forms of prejudice informed the development of private 'enclaves' within cities from where the 'other' could be appropriately distanced. A prototype of such an enclave was the Asian Games Village built in Delhi's Hauz Khas neighbourhood as a residential complex for athletes during the Games. The sprawling Games Village, designed by renowned architect Raj Rewal, contained 853 flats interconnected by narrow *mohallas* and *galis* to create 'the ethos of a typical Indian village', and, as explained in one newspaper report, to 'encourage the intermingling of sportsmen – so essential for the success of any youth festival of sport'.¹⁷¹ Delhi Development Authority (henceforth DDA) advertised the site as a 'traditional village with modern facilities' – a complex with a 'definite visual character...with 20th century efficiency'.¹⁷² These facilities included a hospital, a reading room, two video cassette film libraries, a coffee shop, a discotheque, and a shopping arcade.¹⁷³ The site also contained the Siri Fort Auditorium used to stage cultural performances for residents.

DDA developed several multi-featured parks on the outskirts of the Village that became popular tourist sites. As an advertisement boasted:

'DDA has developed 750 parks, 52 city forests and woodlands, 15 rock gardens, 11 man-made lakes, a deer park, bird sanctuaries, playgrounds for every community and children's parks in an effort to create an *environment of leisure and aesthetic beauty for the residents of the city.*' [emphasis added]¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ 'Frenzy builds up at Asiad Village', *TOI* (12 November 1982), p. 11; and Mellow, 'Will sport become our way of life?', *TOI* (23 May 1982), p. A7.

¹⁷² IX Asiad Report Vol. 2, p. 3; and '26-Hectare Asiad Village Complex', *IWI*, 103/33-39 (1982).

¹⁷³ 'Frenzy builds up at Asiad Village', *TOI*.

¹⁷⁴ '1.21 hectares of greenery for every 1000 persons', *IWI*, 103/33-39 (1982).

Asiad Village with its clean and green boulevards, in-house cultural centre for leisure and entertainment, and gated housing symbolised the ideal city in a microcosm for those allowed access to its various facilities. Once the Games ended, the flats were advertised for ‘qualified’ middle class buyers and Non-Resident Indians. As an advertisement in the *Hindu* read:

‘Come home with pride! DDA offers 853 *exclusive houses* in the Asian Games Village...Only against payment in foreign exchange exclusively for non-resident Indians and other eligible Indian nationals (who have worked in an international organisation recently)...No doubt these houses are the most sought after real estate in Delhi today – a life time *investment for a happy and healthy living for you and your family.*’[emphasis added]¹⁷⁵

Caldeira observes that real estate advertisements can inform us about patterns of social differentiation in the city:

‘[They] present the image of islands to which one can return every day, in order to escape from the city and its deteriorated environment and to encounter an exclusive world of pleasure among peers. The image of the enclaves, therefore, is opposed to the image of the city as a deteriorated world pervaded by not only pollution and noise, but, more important, confusion and mixture, that is social heterogeneity.’¹⁷⁶

Indeed, the continuing prevalence of such attitudes was revealed in an incident that took place in the State of Uttar Pradesh in May 2017. In a village primarily resided by marginalised Dalit families, soaps and shampoos were reportedly distributed for villagers to bathe and ‘cleanse themselves’ before meeting with Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath.¹⁷⁷ The district magistrate argued:

‘We have not distributed these items but if somebody has done so, it must be for a good cause. The local administration is running a cleanliness campaign in slums

¹⁷⁵ ‘Come home with Pride’, *The Hindu*, 26 October 1983.

¹⁷⁶ T. P. R. Caldeira, ‘Fortified Enclaves’ in J. Holston ed., *Cities and Citizenship*, pp. 119-20; For an engaging analysis of advertisements for private residential properties in New Delhi in the 1990s, see V. Dupont, *The Idea of a New Chic Delhi Through Publicity Hype* in R. Khosla ed., *The Idea of Delhi* (Mumbai, 2005), pp. 78-93. Dupont discusses how ‘the vocabulary of the private promoters...project the new residential complexes as fully independent and modern urban entities, yet in a bucolic environment’ (p. 92); See S. Srivastava, ‘Urban Spaces, Post-nationalism’ in P. Chatterjee, T. Guha-Thakurta, and B. Kar ed., *New Cultural Histories of India: Materiality and Practices* (New Delhi, 2014), pp. 409-36 for an excellent historical study of the private real estate development corporation, The Delhi Land Finance (DLF).

¹⁷⁷ ‘Clean yourselves with soap before meeting Adityanath, Dalit villagers told’, *The Wire* (28 May 2017), <https://thewire.in/140934/adityanath-up-dalits-soap/> (7 July 2017).

and is sensitising locals, as [they] are not aware about cleanliness and hygiene. They are prone to contracting diseases like encephalitis as they defecate in the open.¹⁷⁸

In response, a village resident remarked:

‘The hut leaks when it rains, and we have to seek shelter in the corners of the hut all night. We don’t have money to buy a tarpaulin. The two bars of soap are not going to last forever.’¹⁷⁹

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Peter Serenyi/MIT Libraries, Rotch Visual Collections, <https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/58396> (22 July 2018)

Figure 1.18: Producer-Patriots – ‘Beautifying’ the Games Village (1981-82)¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Source: Peter Serenyi/MIT Libraries, Rotch Visual Collections, <https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/58396> (22 July 2018); Incidentally, P.C. Alexander, Mrs Gandhi’s principal secretary between 1981-84, reveals in his memoirs that Mrs Gandhi herself was very conscious of ‘neatness and orderliness’ in her immediate surroundings: ‘Indira Gandhi attached great importance to neatness and orderliness in everything she did and in the environment in which she lived or worked. A flowerpot in the wrong place, a chair in an awkward position, a photograph hanging slanted on the wall, pencils, pens and stationary carelessly thrown about on the table or dust or dirt in a corner would immediately attract her attention. Often she would not wait for an orderly or someone else to do the job of restoring neatness and order in her office; she would do such jobs herself shaming others who should have been more conscientious in their work’. Her appreciation of arts and urban aesthetics was also well-known. P. C. Alexander, *My Years with Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 37.

A Spectacle in Technicolour

‘Our culture is an audio-visual culture; our traditions and rituals are all based on sights and sounds. In the past communication took place through roving minstrels, through folk dance and music that demanded body action. Now, it is TV which has to be the main communicating medium. And, our critics should make a note here. TV all over the world today is synonymous with colour TV, just as airplanes are synonymous with jet planes.’¹⁸¹

Thus far I have argued that those claiming middle class status participated in the Asian Games as consumers of the spectacle whilst being actively written into a shared narrative of national prestige associated with it. One of the ways by which the state attempted to disseminate this narrative was via its monopoly on radio and television broadcasting. As Punathambekar and Sundar observe, the early 1980s were a ‘formative period’ in the Indian mass media landscape during which new technologies (television in particular) played a crucial role in shaping ‘consumerist norms’ of middle class identity.¹⁸² I turn my attention to the development of these technologies below.

In July 1981, in a confidential letter to Margaret Thatcher’s private secretary, Michael Alexander, Roderic Lyne of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office included the following ‘personality note’ on Rajiv Gandhi:

‘Rajiv has been drawn into the political vacuum created by the death of his younger brother [Sanjay], who had been his mother’s only trusted confidant. His entry into politics was carefully stage managed and scrupulously above-board: the style markedly different from Sanjay’s. It is not yet clear what formal role he will play...[He] is already informally involved in some policy questions...and he could be groomed to succeed his mother as Prime Minister. He knows he has a lot to learn and is ready to work at it. His decency and ancestry should appeal to a wide-cross section of Indian society.’¹⁸³

Rajiv entered the political scene as a reluctant Member of the Lok Sabha mainly to support Mrs Gandhi after Sanjay’s untimely death in June 1980. He first rose to

¹⁸¹ Vasant Sathe, Minister of Information and Broadcasting (1980-1983) quoted in S. Mitra, ‘Our ethics are different’, *IT* (31 May 1982), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/tv-all-over-the-world-today-is-synonymous-with-colour-tv-vasant-sathe/1/391738.html> (12 July 2017).

¹⁸² Punathambekar and Sundar, ‘The Time of Television’, p. 402.

¹⁸³ ‘Rajiv Gandhi: Call on Prime Minister’, 3 July 1981. PREM19/799 f179. MTFDA.

prominence for his role in the successful organisation of the Asiad. In her letters to friend Dorothy Norman, Mrs Gandhi reiterated what seemed to be a popular opinion at the time:

‘It is no doubt that it is Rajiv’s own effort, his organising capacity, aim at excellence, and concern for the minutest detail that enabled us not only to be ready on time, but, as we are told by the Heads of various international Sports Associations who have come, to attain international standards in our constructions and all other arrangements. The opening ceremony was spectacular.’¹⁸⁴

In historical accounts, Rajiv is also credited for setting the stage for India’s full-fledged embrace of the ‘Western’ principles of economic liberalisation with special reference to the information technology and electronics sector. Indeed, anecdotes shared by those close to Rajiv reveal his fascination with television and computer technology: ‘He not only gave it a good deal of attention but spent time thinking of ways in which he could match international standards’.¹⁸⁵

Although the mass availability of television sets is rightfully attributed to Rajiv’s time in office, the roots of India’s telecommunications revolution can be traced to policy decisions under Mrs Gandhi instead. In particular, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980 – 1985) saw significant changes in the information and broadcasting policy framework compared to previous years.¹⁸⁶ Efforts included granting partial autonomy to individual bodies over content, commercial sponsorship of programmes, and collaboration with foreign producers in technical fields.¹⁸⁷ These changes were especially visible in the development of Doordarshan programming in the early 1980s.

¹⁸⁴ Gandhi and Norman, *Letters to a Friend*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁵ Quoting former Director General of Doordarshan, Bhaskar Ghose, in B. Ghose, *Doordarshan Days* (New Delhi, 2005), p. 21.

¹⁸⁶ See Planning Commission of India, ‘6th Five Year Plan – Communications, Information and Broadcasting’, <http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/6th/6planch18.html> (13 September 2018).

¹⁸⁷ Notably, intelligence reports of the CIA from August 1984 comment upon the progress of similar liberalisation measures undertaken by Mrs Gandhi’s government: ‘Prompted by dissatisfaction with past economic performance and by interest in the potential benefits of advanced Western technology, Prime

Mrs Gandhi: The Televisionary

‘Mid-1980s, [Doordarshan’s] sponsored programme brought television to life for the first time: we laughed (*Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*), we cried (*Buniyaad*), we even worshipped the box (*Ramayana and Mahabharata*). This was the golden age of Indian television and it bound us together every evening: one family, one nation, one channel, one culture.’¹⁸⁸

Mrs Gandhi oversaw independent India’s first comprehensive study on broadcasting as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting (henceforth I&B Minister) between 1964 and 1966.¹⁸⁹ At the time, the state built, owned, and governed almost all of the radio and television infrastructure via its broadcasting platforms, Akashvani (All India Radio) and Doordarshan (Television).¹⁹⁰ Victoria Farmer, in her analysis of post-Independence media politics, argues that state control over the media (not including Hindi cinema) was explained as necessary for promoting specific audio-visual messages on ‘development’ amongst a largely illiterate population.¹⁹¹ The 1960s, in particular, witnessed strong efforts to link government broadcasting with the promotion of ‘development schemes’, both ‘material’ and ‘cultural’ where the former disseminated information on agricultural and health practices whilst the latter lay emphasis on national integration based on India’s diverse cultures.¹⁹² Mrs Gandhi explained this approach to mass media at the time in a Lok Sabha speech:

‘A developing country, especially one of the size of India, faces enormous problems, difficulties and pressures, and therefore needs to have a new approach in its mass media. Family Planning, the food problem, the need for greater

Minister Gandhi, after her return to office in 1980, made a multitude of relatively minor policy changes in India’s extensive system of direct controls. She eased the stranglehold of bureaucratic controls on industry and provided a more favourable climate for private investment...We believe the Indian experiment with liberalisation is not yet over.’ Directorate of Intelligence, CIA, ‘India: Economic liberalisation stalled’, 20 August 1982, pp. 2, 7, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R001301970001-2.pdf> (13 September 2018).

¹⁸⁸ S. Bajpai, ‘The world came home: The history of television in India’, *Indian Express* (24 July 2014), <http://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/television/the-world-came-home-2932048/> (31 July 2017).

¹⁸⁹ The report published in 1966 was officially titled ‘Radio and Television: Report of the Committee on Broadcasting and Information Media’, popularly referred to as the A.K. Chanda Committee Report.

¹⁹⁰ V. Farmer ‘Depicting the Nation: Media Politics in Independent India’ in F. Frankel ed., *Transforming India* (Delhi, 2002), p. 258.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 259.

production etc. must all be dealt with taking into account the mental blockages, superstitions and traditions of the people which exist in different parts of the country. To gain the trust of the people, we must keep in touch with the thoughts which stir them. The Ministry is here to project the policies of the Government and to elucidate them. But I am very conscious of the fact that the media units should not become mere purveyors of Government bulletins. They must face the challenge of becoming live and imaginative communication links between our far-flung and diverse people and to try to draw the people into the process of the growth of the country, to help to make them more constructive and more informed participants in nation-building activities. We must try and create intellectual cement which will hold the people together no matter what the crisis, no matter what the provocation.¹⁹³

Incidentally, when press censorship was in effect during the Emergency, she similarly urged:

‘Publicity is a nation-building activity. Its function is not only to explain government’s policies, but to strengthen the foundations of the nation. It must build people’s self-confidence, promote the forces of unity and national harmony and fight the forces of separatism, communalism, superstition, and cynicism.’¹⁹⁴

The above quotes reveal the ‘material’ and ‘cultural’ aspects of the state’s approach to mass media at the time: to educate the uninformed and ‘superstitious’ about development policies in ‘imaginative’ ways which would ‘stir them’, and to caution against divisive forces by showcasing unified reflections of one another through films and documentaries. A former diplomat recalled how Mrs Gandhi’s heart was ‘fully in her job’ as I&B Minister as she sought to ‘develop niche things’ particularly in the interest of shaping the minds of the youth.¹⁹⁵ However, as Mrs Gandhi’s former information advisor, B. G. Verghese, reveals:

‘[She] was not happy with the ministry’s role and structure, and set up a committee under A. K. Chanda to review the various departments under her charge – All India Radio, the Department of Audio-Visual Publicity (DAVP), the Films Division, the Office of the Press Registrar and the Press Information Bureau (PIB) – with a view to revamping them and allowing them a greater measure of autonomy. Corporatising AIR, permitting commercial broadcasting to facilitate greater autonomy and supplementary funding were among the committee’s recommendations.’¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Speech on 9 April 1965 in I. Gandhi and S. Mishra ed., *Indira Gandhi Speeches in Parliament* (New Delhi, 1996), p. 934.

¹⁹⁴ S. K. Dhawan ed., *Selected Thoughts of Indira Gandhi* (Delhi, 1985), p. 268.

¹⁹⁵ Telephone conversation, 9 August 2017, New Delhi (name withheld on request).

¹⁹⁶ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 81.

In the 1970s, Mrs Gandhi's views on information technology-enabled development, particularly via television, were influenced by her close friendship with one of India's foremost pioneers of space research, Vikram Sarabhai. As Mrs Gandhi's former media adviser, H. Y. Sharada Prasad, notes:

'We had set our faces against [TV] when the rest of the world had enthusiastically embraced it. When Indira Gandhi finally gave the green signal for an Indian TV, there were people who said that the Big Sister had done so in order to be watched in every home. The gagsters of the time used to say that Nehru was a visionary, Shastri a revisionary, and Indira Gandhi a televisionary. We tend to forget that the people who persuaded Indira Gandhi were not politicians and bureaucrats, most certainly not advertisers, but our space scientists – Vikram Sarabhai, Yash Pal, E.V. Chitnis and their team. They were excited by the prospect of satellite TV pouring knowledge from the skies particularly to villagers in inaccessible terrains.'¹⁹⁷

At a time when television was deemed an unnecessary luxury by some and an unrealistic dream for a developing country by others, Sarabhai pushed for a 'leap-frog' approach which would enable India to 'circumvent the long, arduous processes followed by the Western world'.¹⁹⁸ He urged investing in the latest, most sophisticated technologies in satellite transmission already available at the time to expand the reach of television in the interest of 'national integration, for implementing schemes of economic and social development, and for the stimulation and promotion of the electronics industry' in India.¹⁹⁹

Sarabhai's vision partly came to fruition in 1975 with 'SITE' (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment), declared by a United Nations study as the 'world's most ambitious test of direct television broadcasting' at the time.²⁰⁰ A daily two-hour instructional programme on diverse socio-economic subjects from family planning to

¹⁹⁷ H. Y. S. Prasad, *The Book I Won't Be Writing* (New Delhi, 2003), p. 248.

¹⁹⁸ A. Shah, *Vikram Sarabhai: A Life* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 130.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁰⁰ W. Schramm and International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems/UNESCO, 'Mass Media and National Development – 1979', <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000370/037073eb.pdf> (18 August 2017), p. 11.

farming methods was broadcast on television sets in 2,338 select villages across six States.²⁰¹ It was believed that in a country grappling with widespread illiteracy, visual media would enhance people's knowledge and adoption of scientific ideas and 'modern' methods via region-specific, multilingual programmes. In a way, the experiment attempted to cultivate a scientific temperament amongst Indian villagers, as previously espoused by Nehru. Indeed, Farmer argues that much of the investment in television technology in the 1960s and 1970s drew upon a 'modernisation paradigm that correlated modernity, mass media, and development'.²⁰² Furthermore, as articulated by Sarabhai, the potential for national integration featured prominently in policy debates around television.

The Emergency was a turning point in the state's employment of mass media as newspapers, and the press broadly, became the prime target of censorship. During this period, the potential of state-owned television and radio in projecting government ideology was acknowledged and utilised by Mrs Gandhi and her advisors. Although All India Radio was officially separated from Doordarshan in 1976, both continued to project the virtues of Mrs Gandhi's leadership on the one hand, and the message of national unity and discipline on the other.²⁰³

The need to propagate ideas of national unity became particularly urgent in the early 1980s as the threat of separatist movements loomed large from Punjab to Assam, and in the ongoing struggle in Kashmir. As a counter to these regional movements, the

²⁰¹ N. Mehta, *India on Television* (New Delhi, 2008), p. 35.

²⁰² Farmer 'Depicting the Nation', p. 264.

²⁰³ Interestingly, the government reduced its import duties on television parts, which resulted in an increase in their domestic assembly from about 1,250 sets in 1969 to a quarter of a million in 1977. Mehta, *India on Television*, p. 36.

‘oneness’ of the Indian people was emphasised through radio and television programmes that underlined the principles of Indian territoriality, secularism, and modernity whilst their binary ‘other’ was identified with catch phrases such as separatism, communalism, and superstition/irrationality.²⁰⁴ For instance, in her speech on the inauguration of a transmission tower in Allahabad in 1983, Mrs Gandhi noted:

‘Above all...is the need to foster the unity and strength of the country, and to modernise the country while maintaining our traditions and preserving our culture and our civilisation...Before the fight for freedom, or even during its earlier phases, I can recall how little was our knowledge of other places. South India used to mean Madras and the people of Madras, etc., used to think of Bombay as North India. Anybody belonging to any province in the South, say Kerala or Karnataka, used to be called a Madrasi...Today, through the medium of television, we come to know how other people live, what their problems are, the variety of creeds and religions and the different forms of dance and art, thus get to know India.’²⁰⁵

Months before the inauguration of the Asiad, as it switched to colour, Doordarshan was linked to the INSAT 1A Indian satellite. On this symbolic day, strategically coincident with Independence Day in August 1982, Doordarshan commenced its nationwide broadcast of the ‘National Programme’ (henceforth NP). The NP included short programmes and films mostly in Hindi, and a news bulletin in English. Contrary to the programme’s title, Farmer notes that the NP projected an India that was ‘overwhelmingly North Indian, Hindi speaking, middle class, and Hindu’, which betrayed a ‘contradiction between state-professed secularism and media-abetted communalism’.²⁰⁶ In practice, this meant that various regional centres of Doordarshan broadcast their programmes from 5 pm to 8:30 pm, following which all transmitters were linked to New Delhi as the NP was broadcast until 11 pm.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ See S. Asthana, *Culture, Power and Representation: Construction of ‘National’ Culture on State-run Television in India 1982-1998* (PhD thesis, Univ. of Minnesota, 2013).

²⁰⁵ ‘TV for modernisation’, 1 August 1983 in I. Gandhi, *Selected speeches and writings 1982-84 Volume V* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 291.

²⁰⁶ Farmer, ‘Depicting the Nation’, p. 267.

²⁰⁷ Ghose, *Doordarshan Days*, p. 30; In an amusing letter to the editor of the Hindi newspaper *Navbharat Times*, a reader complained that on 17 November 1983, Delhi Doordarshan showcased a Hindi film called *Badtameez* which started at 7 pm but was abruptly cut as the NP came on at 8:30 pm. They urged: ‘Why couldn’t they have scheduled to begin the film half an hour earlier? Those who don’t own a TV

A newspaper report noted that although critics of the NP did not question its effectiveness as a means to promote national integration, they felt that it took away ‘almost the entire prime viewing time’ for regional centres to broadcast programmes in their own languages.²⁰⁸ For instance, representatives of the AIADMK Party in Tamil Nadu argued that it was ‘an ingenious way of imposing Hindi’, and appealed directly to Mrs Gandhi to ‘put an end to a dangerous trend which posed a threat to India’s unity’.²⁰⁹ Interestingly, the report cited the programme’s coverage of the *Amarnath Yatra* in Kashmir as an ‘excellent example’ of inter-regional and inter-communal visual participation in the pilgrimage, albeit adding:

‘The direct TV coverage of Id prayers whether in Bengal or any part of South India would have a tremendous impact on the Muslims in Kashmir who have for decades been fed on the propaganda from the other side of the ceasefire line that India is a Hindu state.’²¹⁰

* * *

Sarabhai’s ‘leap-frog’ approach was later adopted by I&B Minister, Vasant Sathe, who was assigned the mammoth task of expanding India’s television network for staging the Games in 1982. When Sathe took over the Ministry in January 1980, the number of black and white TV sets in use was around 1.5 million for a total population of almost 700 million.²¹¹ As Sathe acknowledges in his memoirs:

‘...the world was moving very fast and there was hardly any country in the world where colour television was not in operation... Even among the 34 Asian countries that belonged to the Asian Broadcasting Union, 33 had already introduced colour television by 1981. India was the only major country which was still living in the era of black and white. I thought since the whole world, including the neighbouring countries like China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, etc. had all gone for colour transmission, how was it that a big country like India refused to keep pace with the world in this technology?’²¹²

set, will they knock on their neighbour’s door at 10:30 pm to ask if they can watch the climax of a film [after the NP]?’ K. Sudha, ‘Doordarshan ki soojboojh’, *Navbharat Times* (21 December 1983).

²⁰⁸ N. L. Chowla, ‘Importance of TV’s National Programme’, *TOI* (11 September 1982), p. 8.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Sathe, *Memoirs of a Rationalist*, p. 213.

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.

Indeed, there were many sceptics in Parliament opposed to the introduction of colour TV in India at the time. For instance, representatives of the Finance Ministry argued that resources apart, introducing colour TV on the scale suggested by the Ministry would 'benefit only the very rich in the larger urban areas and hardly any other section of the population'.²¹³

Meanwhile, as preparations were underway for the Asiad, Sathe reveals that not a single Asian country was willing to broadcast the Games in black and white since they had all transitioned to colour.²¹⁴ This was viewed as a serious problem by AGSOC and Rajiv Gandhi in particular, who wanted the spectacle to be broadcast as an event of 'world-class'.²¹⁵ Eventually, then Finance Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, agreed to the purchase of 4 OB vans and 20 ENG cameras from a West German firm solely for the event.²¹⁶ Sathe adds that he took 'extra care' to send technical experts to Germany 'to learn the use of...ENG cameras to enable them to be ready well in time for the Asiad coverage'.²¹⁷

Various import schemes were simultaneously put in place to facilitate what was called the 'backdoor entry' of colour TV into Indian homes, such as the import of ready-to-use sets, sets for hire, and even a proposal for NRIs to send colour TVs to India under a 'blood relative' scheme.²¹⁸ Moreover, import tariffs were relaxed to reduce the cost of purchase of components necessary for their domestic assembly. Television sets were primarily imported from West Germany, South Korea, and the Middle East, which caused some controversy as it was argued that the models sent to India were obsolete,

²¹³ Ibid., p. 217.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ L. K. Sharma, 'Govt.'s decision on colour TV scheme lopsided', *TOI* (25 July 1982), p. 7.

and would not have found ‘ready acceptance in any advanced country’.²¹⁹ Notably, a newspaper report remarked:

‘The consumer angle apart, there is an irony in import of TV set kits from South Korea. All these years, the Indian policy-makers waxed eloquent on the need for self-reliant growth in electronics. They had nothing but contempt for the economic development model followed by countries like South Korea and Taiwan which gave a free hand to multinationals and pursued a strategy of exports-led growth. And today, a country which is able to export defence electronics is to get its colour TV from South Korea.’²²⁰

These reactions are noteworthy as they indicate a visible shift in the government’s attitude towards alternative development models that deviated from India’s professed commitment to self-reliant socialism, more on which in Chapter 2.²²¹

With the establishment of a separate ‘Asian Games Cell’ within Doordarshan, AGSOC was prepared for the worldwide colour telecast of the Games in November 1982, which included daily live coverage of sporting events for an Indian audience, and separate 45-minute ‘highlights’ for international transmission.²²² More significantly, the broadcast projected the image of a nation at its proudest moment, highlighting its traditions of sport, culture, and hospitality on the one hand, and the grandeur of its man-made wonders – stadia, flyovers, and hotels – on the other. The unprecedented success of television coverage amongst the Indian viewership did not go unnoticed by Mrs Gandhi, as Farmer observes, who subsequently assigned S. S. Gill with the task of creating a Pan-Indian television network before the 1985 elections.²²³ It is noteworthy

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ See pp. 158-60 of this thesis.

²²² IX Asiad Report Vol. 2, p. 299.

²²³ Farmer, ‘Depicting the Nation’, pp. 265-66; Also see J. Feuer, *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (London, 1996) for a critical account of the development of a televisual political culture in Reaganite America in the 1980s.

that television's reach expanded from approximately 0.5 million viewers in 1971 to 210 million by 1983 with a similar increase in the ownership of television sets.²²⁴

The desire to formulate new communication strategies using mass media took on a level of urgency in the early 1980s for two additional purposes – image building and mass entertainment. When Sathe took over as I&B Minister, Mrs Gandhi remarked that she was entrusting him with a 'sensitive portfolio':

'My task, in her words, was "to win over all those who had been alienated both in media and the film industry during the Emergency"... She said, having handled this ministry herself, she knew how important it was.'²²⁵

The Emergency had alienated several of Mrs Gandhi's supporters including those influential in the press and the media. Her own media advisor and speech writer at the time, H. Y. Sharada Prasad, reveals interesting details of her engagement with the media world upon her re-election:

'In her second coming, she made an earnest attempt not to appear to bear grudges. She called over many editors for personal meetings, either in small groups or one to one, *particularly to discuss foreign policy*... Over all, it could be said of Indira Gandhi that she had the feeling that *she could reach out directly to the people over the head of the press*. Many think that this attitude is at the root of the importance she gave to television, although the fact is that she recognised early enough that we could not keep TV out and also that there was an intimate relationship between information technology and overall scientific development.' [emphasis added]²²⁶

Prasad's account suggests two motivations behind Mrs Gandhi's approach to mass media in her final years. First, her general distrust of the press, both in India and abroad, led her to believe that television would enable her to directly communicate to a wide audience, and to explain her thoughts and actions without any misrepresentations. Second, by placing special emphasis on foreign policy issues, Mrs Gandhi attempted to elevate her image as an influential world leader.

²²⁴ Punathambekar and Sundar, 'The Time of Television', p. 408.

²²⁵ Sathe, *Memoirs of a Rationalist*, p. 194.

²²⁶ Prasad, *The Book I Won't Be Writing*, p. 265.

Indeed, Doordarshan was often criticised for its disproportionate focus on Mrs Gandhi's foreign visits, and presence at high profile international events. A reporter from *India Today* magazine once remarked to Vasant Sathe that 'whenever she cuts a ribbon, flies in or flies out, meets visiting dignitaries, lays foundation stones – the TV follows her', to which Sathe responded:

'Because she is news. Because her cutting ribbons has an intrinsic news value. Because she makes policy statements very often. Because she draws crowds. And because the TV needs her more than she needs the TV.'²²⁷

This was certainly an overstatement as in spite of her deep suspicion of the press, Mrs Gandhi frequently, and indeed willingly appeared for interviews. In her final years, she also held numerous press conferences which almost always included foreign correspondents.²²⁸ Despite the tough questioning, Mrs Gandhi appeared confident in her responses which were well rehearsed. As Prasad notes in his memoirs:

'It has been rightly said that a press conference is not a genuine event in its own right but a media occasion where newsmen decide what's news. But able politicians even if they find the grilling distasteful, know they can utilise the occasion for their own advantage.'²²⁹

That Mrs Gandhi took on his advice is revealed in another instance described by Prasad:

'The prime ministers I know used to put in a great deal of homework before those mammoth Vigyan Bhavan press conferences. They prepared similarly for press conferences and foreign tours. Mrs Gandhi, for example, expected her staff to give her, five or six days in advance, a list of the questions that the press was likely to ask, couched in the toughest possible manner. Apart from studying the questions, she held a regular rehearsal to which some senior officials like the foreign secretary, the finance secretary and the home secretary were called besides officers of their own secretariat. The dummy press conference went on for an hour-and-half or two. On some of the most knotty issues, she also called for further written

²²⁷ S. Mitra, 'Our ethics are different', IT (31 May 1982), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/tv-all-over-the-world-today-is-synonymous-with-colour-tv-vasant-sathe/1/391738.html> (14 August 2017).

²²⁸ Interestingly, on the subject of foreign media attention, Malik describes the preferential treatment accorded to foreign correspondents in New Delhi in the 1980s. In the case of British correspondents, he notes: 'An accreditation card given to a British journalist posted in India enables him or her to go to various ministers and offices and to meet the concerned minister or officer almost at will. But the British accreditation card of an Indian journalist permits him to go only to the reception counters of British government offices. Indian VIPs are generally easily available to British journalists, mainly on the plea that the UK papers have a large international readership. Indian journalists, on the other hand, are made to wait even with junior British officials. Even the regular briefing on issues to the foreign journalists in India is done at a much higher level.' K. N. Malik, *India and the United Kingdom: Change and Continuity in the 1980s* (New Delhi; London, 1997), pp. 203-4.

²²⁹ Prasad, *The Book I Won't Be Writing*, p. 262.

notes. The questions that did get asked when the big day came around were well within the anticipated lot.²³⁰

In addition to the press, Mrs Gandhi had several opportunities to engage with the heads of various governments on the subject of media, particularly on the development of domestic communication technologies. In the same spirit, the year 1983 was proclaimed by the United Nations as the 'World Communications Year'. It was envisaged that the initiative would encourage all countries to undertake an in-depth review of their communication policies, and 'stimulate the accelerated development of communications infrastructure'.²³¹

Mrs Gandhi had often been critical in her statements about Western media and its bias against the developing world in general, and her and India in particular. The question of false reporting on Indian affairs, allegedly at its peak during the Emergency, was discussed in almost all of Mrs Gandhi's meetings with international leaders. For instance, in her address at the Media Conference of the Non-Aligned in New Delhi in 1983, she noted:

'One-sided reporting and distorted news is an old story for us. My first taste of it was Miss Mayo's book 'Mother India', which I read... Today's media are equally adept at playing up the worst aspects, real, exaggerated or imaginary, in the developing countries. Many journalists consider it smart to imitate the popular Western definition of bad news being good news and are bored by constructive and developmental activity... Is this what really interests readers? Are they content to remain ignorant of what is happening in various spheres, of what deepens their understanding, what helps them to discharge their duty as well-informed citizens?'²³²

The development of domestic satellite technology in this context was thus significant not only from the point of view of remaking Mrs Gandhi's image but for projecting a

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 261; See Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, pp. 44-5 for a similar account.

²³¹ United Nations General Assembly, 'World Communications Year' (19 November 1981), <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/36/a36r040.htm> (12 August 2017).

²³² 'Media in Developing Countries' in Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings of Indira Gandhi 1982-84 Volume V*, pp. 293-94.

well-informed picture of India to a ‘biased’ Western audience. The relationship between Western media and Indian political developments in the early 1980s is examined in detail in Chapter 4 of this thesis.²³³

* * *

In a speech delivered at the inauguration of Delhi Doordarshan’s second ‘commercial’ channel in September 1984, Mrs Gandhi argued:

‘Television is not a rich people’s luxury. The TV network is expanding fast, but the basic question is how beneficial the programmes are, how good the entertainment is, and how much of education flows from it. In a country as diverse as India, it is not easy to please everyone. Children, college-going girls and boys and village folk – all want different programmes. Farmers want programmes on agriculture. Housewives want tips on house-keeping. Everyone generally wants entertainment, although there is difference of opinion on what really entertains. All this makes the task of the people who produce programmes quite difficult.’²³⁴

As television infrastructure expanded alongside a growing viewership, greater emphasis was laid on producing quality content for entertainment through feature films, soap operas, advertisements, and music programmes. As Vasant Sathe observed, ‘It was clear that the main task of television like that of the film industry, was to entertain the masses...Even in developing countries, entertainment served the purpose of diverting the minds of underprivileged classes from the pangs and suffering of poverty’.²³⁵

On this subject, a comprehensive report titled *An Indian Personality for Television* was published by the P. C. Joshi Committee in 1984, which was severely critical of Doordarshan’s increasing commercialisation and dependence on foreign resources. In particular, it emphasised the role of the state as a ‘communicator’ with certain moral responsibilities to create content suitable in the Indian cultural context:

²³³ See pp. 308-13.

²³⁴ ‘TV Fosters Unity’, 18 September 1984 in Gandhi, *Selected Speeches (1982084) Volume V*, pp. 296-7.

²³⁵ Sathe, *Memoirs of a Rationalist*, p. 211.

‘The question of moral responsibility arises because television is very subtle in its impact, and it has invaded the home. *Its influence has been compared to water dripping on a stone and eroding its hardness slowly and steadily.* TV influences tastes and consciousness very slowly but steadily and without our knowing. Are the television authorities and professionals in India fully alive to their moral responsibility and to what society expects of them in terms of very high standards of their programmes, artistic as well as ethical?’[emphasis in original]²³⁶

The report further questioned the Delhi-centric organisation of Doordarshan, and the overall urban/elite bias in its programmes which, it argued, depicted lifestyles unfamiliar to the average Indian. It urged that India not digress from its ‘socialist’ and ‘labour-class’ path, and instead redefined entertainment as ‘integration of work and play’:

‘Doordarshan must capture for the viewers the richness and dignity of the life of labouring classes in which the principles of work and play are harmonised; it must not romanticise the empty life of the non-labouring elites in whose case play is divorced from work.’²³⁷

In this context, the influence of Western film, dance, and music was identified as a serious threat to Indian culture, which was arguably worsened via the medium of television. As the report noted, ‘The danger of communication being the carrier of the cultural values (or the malaise) of the affluent West to India and other developing countries is imminent’.²³⁸

Following these recommendations, the primary challenge for the I&B Ministry was to ‘put into effect the idea of a problem-oriented, people-oriented, development-oriented and entertainment-cum-enrichment-oriented Doordarshan’.²³⁹ Notably, it was acknowledged that entertainment programmes must *not be viewed* as paternalistic or moralising. Quoting the award-winning director, Sai Paranjpye, the report remarked:

²³⁶ Publications Division, ‘An Indian Personality for Television – Volume 1’ (henceforth Joshi Committee Report) (New Delhi, 1985), p. 58.

²³⁷ Ibid., pp. 57-8.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

‘Let us not fool ourselves that the ordinary man has spent his hard earned money to buy a TV set in order to keep track of the tour programmes of Ministers or to keep abreast of ‘nation-building’ activities. He wants to forget the harrowing daily routine, sit back and relax, and see good programmes along with members of his family. He buys his TV set in order to be entertained...Subtlety, alas, is totally missing on our TV screen. We often defeat the best of purposes by being over-obvious, blasé and crude. With some sadness I have to acknowledge that a film made on the life of Mahatma Gandhi by a foreigner has done much more to make the nation conscious of the Mahatma than all the Raghupati Raghava bhajans played ad nauseam on the radio. Showing, on TV, a shoddy map of India during a national integration song is facile, obvious and insulting to the intelligence of the viewer. Thought and imagination have to go into the simplest of programmes.’²⁴⁰

Recommendations made by the Joshi Committee were supplemented by the feedback received on numerous ‘TV Audience surveys’ to determine the content that was showcased from mid-1980s onward. It is worth mentioning that Doordarshan programmes in the 1980s subliminally projected Indian ‘values’ like simplicity and frugality, caste and religious harmony, family planning, and community living. These ideas were carefully woven into the storylines of what Doordarshan’s former Director-General, Bhaskar Ghose, describes as ‘turgid family dramas’.²⁴¹ During this period, middle class, family-centric soap operas like *Hum Log* became immensely popular, whilst the turn of the decade saw the success of religious/mythological shows like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.²⁴² A second ‘commercial’ channel was soon launched which primarily featured Hindi films and film-based programmes like the popular *Phool Khilen Hain Gulshan Gulshan*.²⁴³ The ‘commercial’ channel was primarily

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

²⁴¹ Ghose, *Doordarshan Days*, p. 34.

²⁴² Interestingly, the term ‘soap opera’ originally referred to television programmes sponsored by soap manufacturers. Indeed, *Hum Log* was co-sponsored by Colgate-Palmolive, Nestle, and Food Specialities Ltd. See ‘Doordarshan serial Hum Log...’, *IT* (31 August 1984), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-the-arts/media/story/19840831-doordarshan-serial-hum-log-lands-in-trouble-due-to-dhirendra-brahmachari-connection-803683-1984-08-31> (29 July 2018).

²⁴³ A Radio and Television Audience Survey conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion in April 1983 revealed that TV viewership amongst ‘literate households’ in metropolitan cities was as high as 74%, where 67% respondents watched feature films, 43% watched the news, and a significantly lower percentage watched the ‘National Programme’. IIPO, *Monthly Public Opinion Survey*, 28/9 (1983), pp. I, II.

sponsored by advertisers and private corporations which added significantly to Doordarshan's revenue at the time.²⁴⁴

Although television ownership in the 1980s was primarily limited to middle and upper class households in urban centres, the need to produce universally appealing content was continually emphasised by the state. It was argued that the tradition of community viewing in India meant that families with women and children would often get together to watch television in public spaces. Producers were thus urged to keep in mind an impressionable viewership, and to produce content that was both *for* a family audience and *about* family relationships.²⁴⁵ In this context, it was also believed that violent and promiscuous behaviour on-screen would encourage minors and women to emulate the same in real life.²⁴⁶ As Ghose recalls in his memoirs:

‘Safe. This was a word used so often in Doordarshan that it became a sort of password. Is this programme safe? Is that news story safe? Is it safe to screen this particular film...It was amazing how hysterical the Ministry got when something they thought inappropriate was shown.’²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ For an engaging study of India's first sitcom, *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, showcased in 1984 on Doordarshan, see Punathambekar and Sundar, ‘The Time of Television’. The authors suggest, in particular, that the show's popular depiction of ordinary middle class families and their consumerist lifestyles was ‘foundational to the notion of India as a “global nation”’, and ‘the centrality of the middle class in that new imaginary’ (p. 418).

²⁴⁵ P. Uberoi, *Imagining the Family: An ethnography of viewing Hum Aapke Hai Koun?*, in Dwyer and Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation*, p. 311.

²⁴⁶ A. Chowdhry, ‘Anxiety, Failure, and Censorship in Indian Advertising’ in W. Mazzarella and R. Kaur ed., *Censorship in South Asia* (Bloomington, 2009), p. 128; Ghose recalls how ‘adult films’ were shown on the commercial channel only after 11:30 pm: ‘The idea came, to be honest, from Rajiv Gandhi himself, who felt that we ought to cater to more mature viewers and not restrict ourselves to the bland films shown earlier in the evening’ (Ghose, *Doordarshan Days*, p. 85); The depiction of sexual content on-screen was seen by the Indian Censor Board as morally corrupting for a young viewership. Echoing this sentiment, some MPs also accused Doordarshan of screening English ‘pornographic films that went against the great cultural traditions of Bharat Mata, of deliberately corrupting the tender minds of our children’ (p. 86). What is noteworthy, however, was the widespread promotion of family planning, including advertisements for condoms, throughout the 1960s and 1970s on roadside posters, Doordarshan documentaries, and newspapers that were arguably seen by children as well. It will be interesting to examine how a younger audience responded to these messages, and whether it led to conversations about sex between parents and children. Interestingly, on the subject of sexual health, Parameswaran notes that at one time, even advertisements for sanitary napkins were restricted to the post 10 pm slot on Doordarshan (A. Parameswaran, *Nawabs, Nudes, Noodles* (London, 2016), p. xiii); These instances capture the ambiguities and tensions underlying the state's position on matters of sexual pleasure and reproductive health. Also see pp. 162-69 of this thesis.

²⁴⁷ Ghose, *Doordarshan Days*, p. 33; Notably, censorship was also imposed on Doordarshan's newsreaders who were not permitted to comment on political events on television. One of Doordarshan's

Against these anxieties, middle class tastes were seen to have a corrupting influence on familial units, and on Indian society as a whole. For many, this was most evident in the growing popularity and availability of consumer goods in the mass market. Concluding its analysis, the Joshi Committee Report remarked:

‘The problem of India is that the new middle class has turned acquisitive and hedonistic and is aggressively trying to utilise the agencies of the State including the communication network for the pursuit of...“play, fun, display and pleasure”. The vast masses on the other hand have still to fight for their economic and social survival at the level of elementary and basic needs...Will the Communication Revolution aid the vast masses in their uplift and emancipation or become the instrument of the upper-middle classes for their self-aggrandisement?’²⁴⁸

From Covert to Conspicuous Consumption

Renowned advertising executive, K. V. Sridhar, recalls in his recent book, *Thirty Second Thrillers*:

‘Before the 1980s, whenever I was asked, “So what do you do?”, I used to be in a fix, because with this question, came the tough task of explaining what a Creative Director does in advertising, alongside explaining what advertising is. But in the early 1980s, the magic-box – the television set made my job easy. As television became popular and colour television a rage, advertisements also began to get entertaining...No longer were they propaganda; simply pushing the product down the audience’s throat. Now, they were emotionally sliced moments of life that resonated with people.’²⁴⁹

leading female anchors from the 1980s, Rini Simon, recalls: ‘Television was even more closely monitored then because you had visuals with it. There was an unspoken ethic that you could not show your bias or your political leanings. If a newsreader misbehaved, or changed the meaning of a sentence, he or she would be hauled up and depending on the gravity of the mistake, you would be yanked off or given a lower bulletin’. A. Nathan, ‘Three Doordarshan-era anchors recall...’, Scroll (25 September 2017), <https://scroll.in/magazine/849481/three-door-darshan-era-anchors-recall-what-a-dignified-era-of-television-news-looked-like> (25 September 2017).

²⁴⁸ Joshi Committee Report, p. 60; In this context, William Mazzarella argues that rather than analysing India’s television history as a transition from statist to consumerist dispensations, it is more useful to evaluate the medium in ‘representative’ and ‘constitutive’ terms. According to Mazzarella, ‘In a constitutive mode, media provide a public space in which to actualise social potentials, a context in which new collective self-understandings can emerge’, whereas in a representative mode ‘media either didactically stage aspirational ideals that have been centrally pre-decided (the statist model), or communicate messages that are intended to “fit” their audiences’ pre-identified “cultural values” (the consumerist model).’ The Indian experience with television between the 1960s and the mid-1980s, although indicating a shift from a statist to consumer-oriented dispensation, consistently ‘tended to fall back on a representative ideal of cultural “fit”’. Mazzarella explains this as a result of the state’s authoritative tendencies which, whilst seeking to develop a ‘socially transformative’ media, refused to ‘grant them the open-endedly constitutive role’ that such a transformation requires. See W. Mazzarella, ‘“Reality must improve”: The perversity of expertise and the belatedness of Indian development television’, *Global Media and Communication*, 8/3 (2012), p. 220.

²⁴⁹ K. V. Sridhar, *Thirty Second Thrillers* (London, 2017), p. 22.

Sridhar goes on to argue that the growth in consumer advertising occurred around the same time as lively debates in the media began taking notice of the middle class. Indeed, in his history of advertising in contemporary India, William Mazzarella comments upon the ‘intense media fixation on the exploding middle class’ in the early to mid-1980s.²⁵⁰ Further, he examines how multiple studies analysing ‘habits’ and ‘tastes’ began to delineate the ‘collective subject’, the Indian middle class, into distinct ‘manifestations of the Indian consumer – the Indian teenager, the new Indian woman’, and so on.²⁵¹ Private advertising agencies also began targeting producers, urging them to take advantage of new visual technologies to sell their products. For instance, in the following advertisement, one agency explained the benefits of advertising during ‘primetime’:

‘While they are watching, are you missing out? Esquire offers an exciting new medium to advertise on ‘primetime’ – Traditionally, you have believed in complete coverage. That is why you are advertising in a carefully computed blend of newspapers, magazines, cinema and TV. The rush is in reaching all the people who are exposed to the media. But are you reaching the segment where the “*buying power*” lies?...The video revolution has already taken the country by storm, caught the popular imagination with a speed that outshines every other popular medium before it, and sets itself up as the mass entertainer of the future. To you this shift in the consumer access to entertainment means a new vista of advertising.’[emphasis in original]²⁵²

Similarly, a report published by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion examined the ‘commodity’ value of advertisements:

‘Spending more money in the creative area is even more important than buying space and colour. Producing attractive advertising does help to increase perception levels. The single most deciding criterion is shown to be the “interestingness” of advertisements. Interest causes both perceptions and sales effects. *Advertising and every single ad or piece of copy should be viewed as just another “product” that should perform the functions it is designed for. Poor advertising should be discontinued just as quickly as unsuccessful product lines.*’[emphasis added]²⁵³

²⁵⁰ W. Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke, Advertising and Globalisation in Contemporary India* (Durham and London, 2003), p. 73.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² ‘Primetime Media Services’, *The Hindu* (6 December 1983).

²⁵³ J. Stapel, ‘Advertising Research for Increased Profitability’, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 26/10 (1981), p. 20.

It is noteworthy that knowledge of modern advertising techniques was also encouraged at the state level. For instance, a three-day seminar on ‘Advertising and Communication Update’ took place in October 1983 in New Delhi to establish ethical standards in advertising, and to discuss the ‘use of advertising for national causes’.²⁵⁴ The seminar was sponsored by the Public Relations Society of India, and was attended by then I&B Minister H. K. L. Bhagat and Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee.²⁵⁵ These events were ostensibly hosted in the interest of consumers even as the state struggled to defend its ambiguous position on consumer goods, and their impact on Indian sensibilities. Keeping this in mind, Mazzarella observes how Mrs Gandhi attempted to reconceptualise ‘the ascendant discipline of marketing’ as ‘an older productivist idiom’:

‘Advertising increasingly involves market research and consumer analysis. Looked at this way, advertising is a factor of production, and therefore, of technological development.’²⁵⁶

Incidentally, critics of the impending consumer revolution argued that the adoption of new technologies and products from the ‘West’ including automobiles, televisions, air-conditioners, and so on worsened India’s material and ideological dependence on developed countries. As one reader of the *Times of India* lamented:

‘The bane of our planning is that in spite of our being a very poor country our elite wants to adopt the lifestyles of the affluent of the rich countries...The fascination...on part of our elite makes them indulge in unrestrained vulgar display of riches without any compunction. They do so completely unmindful of its disastrous demonstration effect on society and on the psyche of the masses.’²⁵⁷

Such criticism was in line with the Joshi Committee Report that similarly identified consumerism as a predominantly middle class/elite ideology detrimental to the wider

²⁵⁴ ‘Seminar on advertising from Thursday’, *TOI* (19 October 1983), p. 7.

²⁵⁵ The Public Relations Society of India is a nationwide association of public relations practitioners from the public and private sectors, founded in 1958. Official website, <http://prsi.org.in/prsi.html> (16 May 2018).

²⁵⁶ Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke*, p. 87.

²⁵⁷ R. S. Dangayach, ‘Wrong Planning’, *TOI* (19 January 1982), p. 8.

Indian 'socialist' fabric. It is important to note, however, that middle class demand for consumer goods was not a new phenomenon. In fact, in the 1960s and 1970s, high customs duties and luxury taxes did not deter consumers who purchased commodities like cars, scooters, and alcohol at a premium, whilst others turned to the flourishing 'black market' to satisfy their demands.

From the late 1960s, an underground 'black' economy was linked to self-made 'dons' and gangsters smuggling contraband from the Persian Gulf into the Western port cities of Bombay and Daman. Official reports traced much of this activity to 'Arab and Indian syndicate masterminds' stationed variously in Kuwait, Dubai, Aden, and Sharjah, who maintained close contact with their counterparts in India.²⁵⁸ The latter, in many cases, wielded significant influence through the patronage of wealthy industrialists, film stars, and politicians. During this period, relations between India and the Gulf countries were affected by the movement of smuggled contraband, particularly gold, entering India, and migrants and contractual workers moving westward. Indeed, it was not uncommon to find several job postings in newspapers for engineers, cooks, hotel maids, and construction workers who were offered all kinds of incentives to build the future cities of the Middle East.

Up until 1980, commonly smuggled items into India included gold biscuits, perfumes, cigarettes, alcohol, and wristwatches. Items smuggled out of India included opioids and narcotics, silver, antiques, and animal skins and hides.²⁵⁹ Interestingly, fluctuation in

²⁵⁸ G. S. Vohra, 'Smuggling is big business now: II – New techniques', *TOI* (18 July 1974), p. 4.

²⁵⁹ *LSD*, 9th session, 30/16, 12 August 1982, p. 219. During a Lok Sabha debate, it was revealed that Gulf markets were illegally 'flooded with *lungis* and bedspreads under Indian brand names' to entice unsuspecting consumers (*LSD*, 3rd session, 8/41, 1 August 1980, pp. 11 – 13); Debates to discuss appropriate action against smuggling offenders were frequent in Parliament. Several politicians and diplomats from across the political spectrum were convicted of partaking in such activity.

gold prices in the early 1980s had a detrimental impact on smuggling activity in precious metals. By then, however, electronic items such as TV sets, video camera recorders, and calculators constituted the bulk of seized goods. A cover story in *India Today* from November 1981 titled 'India: Smuggler's Supermarket' offered the following estimates:

'In the current year, [seizure] figures for the first six months alone were slightly over Rs 5 crore. Of that, gold accounted for Rs 74 lakh, textiles another Rs 60 lakh, watches were Rs 59 lakh while the rest were mainly electronic items. That, incidentally, is another overt indication that gold, which formerly occupied the number one spot on the smugglers' checklist, has now been rather rudely overtaken by the insatiable demand for fancy electronic gadgetry. Gold seizures all over the country in 1980 were valued at Rs 1.51 crore and corresponding figures for the first six months of 1981 stood at Rs 1.01 crore. In comparison, seizures of electronic items like VCRs, sophisticated stereo systems and calculators are, according to one unofficial estimate, as high as Rs 20 crore.'²⁶⁰

Describing smuggling as lucrative 'big business', a report in the *Times of India* detailed the covert operation:

'Smuggling techniques have altered over the years. In the fifties anti-smuggling measures hardly existed...During this period, Arab dhows used to unload their contraband directly at ports along the 3,000-mile-long western coast. Since then, anti-smuggling measures have been tightened. Now dhows tranship the contraband in mid-ocean into boats manned by Indians, who land it at various pre-arranged points on the coast...The procedure is as follows: When a craft carrying the contraband is about to land at a particular point, the smuggler "sitting in his air-conditioned office" tells his accomplices where the goods will be unloaded. The accomplices along with a vehicle and a driver arrive at the selected spot. When the coast is clear, the accomplices signal the craft, which is some distance away, to approach. As soon as it lands, the contraband is taken out and loaded on the vehicle. The driver, alone, takes the goods to an appointed spot, where another driver takes over and delivers the consignment to the assigned place...Lookout men, equipped with walkie-talkie sets keep watch from a distance when a major consignment is unloaded. If they spot a customs party, the craft is advised on the walkie-talkie to go back.'²⁶¹

The above description reads like a classic Hindi film plot, and, indeed, the dangerous world of smuggling was the inspiration for several films produced during this period including commercial successes like *Yaadon Ki Baaraat* (1973), *Deewar* (1975),

²⁶⁰ D. Bobb and A. Raina, 'India: Smuggler's Supermarket', *IT* (25 October 2013), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19811130-india-proving-to-be-one-of-the-top-smuggling-paradises-on-the-world-map-773484-2013-10-25> (25 October 2017).

²⁶¹ Vohra, 'Smuggling is big business now', *TOI*.

Kalicharan (1976), and *Don* (1978). In *Deewar*, one of the central characters ‘Vijay’, played by superstar Amitabh Bachchan, was allegedly based on Haji Mastan Mirza, a notorious smuggler of the time. Like Vijay’s character, Mastan had joined the Bombay docks as a porter in 1944 where he handled cargo shipments from around the world. In an interview with *Mumbai Mirror*, Mastan’s adopted son, Sunder Shekhar, recalls:

‘People who came back from Haj brought electronic items like transistors and watches. Some of them even brought gold biscuits. Mastan helped them smuggle these items out of the port by hiding them in his clothes, headband or underwear. He was well rewarded.’²⁶²

According to Shekhar, Mastan’s popularity grew amongst Mumbai’s elite, including politicians and film stars, not least due to his ‘influence over Mumbai’s Muslim voters’.²⁶³ He adds:

‘Sanjay Gandhi never missed the opportunity to visit daddy when he came to Mumbai...During ‘70s, daddy had excellent relationship with Dharmendra, Firoz Khan, Raj Kapoor, Sanjeev Kumar and Dilip Kumar. Salim [of Salim-Javed] and Amitabh [Bachchan] often visited him while *Deewar* was in the pipeline.’²⁶⁴

The on-screen depiction of villains in films like *Deewar* reveals public perceptions of the ‘underworld’ at the time which was at once seen as glamorous and enticing, but also dangerous and morally corrupting. The villain, typically the smuggler-cum-don, was shown as a wealthy, Anglicised Muslim or Christian who wore Western suits and accessories, and was chauffeured in vintage cars. He smoked quality cigarettes (most commonly the ‘State Express 555’ brand), and drank premium Scotch (poured by one of his henchmen from a distinctly green-coloured bottle of the ‘Vat 69’ brand). His

²⁶² ‘The real Haji Mastan’, *Mumbai Mirror* (23 July 2010), <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/other//articleshow/16037081.cms> (24 October 2017).

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; Mastan was detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the Emergency. Upon his release, he publicly pledged before Jayaprakash Narayan along with 80 other notable smugglers to renounce smuggling, and vowed to follow ‘Gandhian ideals’. Few smugglers in Dubai with Indian arrest warrants against them wrote to Morarji Desai and Narayan, and stated that they too were ‘ready to come back to India and even willing to do social service’. Interestingly, in the late 1980s, Mastan formed his own rather unsuccessful political organisation, ‘Dalit Muslim Minorities Suraksha Mahasangh’. ‘Indian smugglers in Dubai want to reform’, *TOI* (30 July 1977), p. 13.

‘Western’ lifestyle was further projected by his sexual encounters with multiple women who were also given Anglicised names and a ‘Western’ aesthetic.²⁶⁵ This is strikingly similar to Shekhar’s description of Mastan:

‘He wore designer suits, ties and his hair was neatly combed back. He had a Mercedes Benz, plush with TV and radio, and puffed 555 cigarettes. If someone spoke to him in English, he would just keep saying: “Yeah, yeah”.’²⁶⁶



Figure 1.19: Scene from *Deewar*: Vijay with notable smuggler Davar in his high-rise apartment overlooking South Bombay (dir. Yash Chopra, 1975)

The film also showed the conspicuous consumption of liquor and sex at the smuggler’s lavish residence, a hotel rooftop party, or a foreign location. The set included strategically placed props associated with leisure like television, liquor cabinet, billiards table, and animal-skin wall hangings. In contrast, the smuggling activity took

²⁶⁵ Also see A. Kasbekar, *Hidden Pleasures: Negotiating the myth of the female ideal in popular Hindi cinema*, in Dwyer and Pinney ed., *Pleasure and the Nation*. Kasbekar notes that ‘the vamp’ in old Hindi cinema was portrayed as ‘the over-westernised *femme fatale*...with names like ‘Rosie’ or ‘Mary’...parodied as either an Anglo-Indian (a racial outcaste) or a member of India’s Christian minority’. She was often a cabaret dancer operating in bars, night clubs, or ‘similar “foreign” dens of vice’ owned by the gangster-villain (p. 298).

²⁶⁶ ‘The real Haji Mastan’, *Mumbai Mirror*.

place in a dark ‘godown’ where hoarded containers of grain and kerosene were stored, and the ‘action’ sequence took place. The illegal consumption of such goods was juxtaposed with the honest and frugal lifestyle of the ‘hero’ to clearly differentiate between morally right and wrong actions.

Crucially, these on-screen portraits were given legitimacy by the state’s regulatory policies on the production and consumption of consumer goods. As noted previously, a noticeable change came about in the early 1980s with the state-sponsored import of colour television sets for the Asiad. This was followed by a reduction in tax and import duties on other consumer durables desired by the middle class such as refrigerators, air conditioners, computers, and cameras. Accompanying changes in policy were the plethora of print advertisements of Indian and foreign brands of cigarettes, alcohol, video games, etc.²⁶⁷ Consumer brands also began employing creative marketing strategies such as contests and games to offer consumer items as additional ‘prizes’:

‘Wills Filter cigarettes – A unique blend, a unique brand now presents the unique social event of the year: Made for each other contest...
First prize: Air-conditioned Premier Padmini Deluxe, 2nd prize: Exquisite Kashmiri carpet, 3rd prize: Elegant Silver Salver.’²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Interestingly, an *India Today* report argued that the profitable movement of contraband in the 1970s may have prompted the state to introduce consumer commodities via its legal channels. It noted: ‘One overt indicator of the increase in smuggling is the recent appearance of huge full-page advertisements in almost all the major publications for items ranging from Casio calculators, Sony and Sanyo cassette recorders, Seiko watches to JVC, VCRs and even Marlboro and Winston cigarettes – all items that are restricted. Though customs authorities claim that the ads are meant for Indians travelling abroad, it is obvious that the real target is customers in India who now have a vast selection of competitive contraband to choose from’. Bobb and Raina, ‘India: Smuggler’s Supermarket’.

²⁶⁸ *HT* (27 November 1983); It is worth noting that the types of consumer goods advertised, and the language of advertisements varied between newspapers depending on their readership demographic. For instance, comparing English newspapers like the *HT* or *TOI* with the popular Hindi newspaper *Navbharat Times* reveals subtle differences in advertising strategies. Between 1982 and 1983, advertisements for popular items such as televisions, computers, washing machines, refrigerators, and foreign holidays appeared primarily in English dailies, or appeared only in English in Hindi dailies. Popular items in Hindi advertisements included agricultural inputs such as tractors and generators, detergent soaps, and cigarettes.

Notably, the popularity of consumer advertisements developed a previously lacking consumer consciousness amongst the middle class in India. The 1980s saw, for the first time, an organised interest in consumer protection against ‘fake’ goods, and in channels for grievance redressal at the judicial level. In fact, Verma argues that the ‘real consumer movement’ only began in 1984 when significant changes were introduced to the existing Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, most notably via the recognition and regulation of ‘unfair trade practices’ (UTPs).²⁶⁹ A range of advertising strategies were classified as UTPs including bargain prices, pseudo gifts or prizes, sales promotion under contests and lotteries, and misleading claims about a product or service.²⁷⁰ This was followed by other substantive measures such as the formation of the Advertising Standards Council of India and the Consumer Complaint Council in 1985. Finally, the most significant milestone in the Indian consumer movement came with the passing of the Consumer Protection Act in 1986.²⁷¹ Between the spectacular Asiad in 1982 and the formal adoption of the New Economic Policy in 1991, consumer advocacy grew from strength to strength just as new products and services were introduced to the ever expanding Indian market.

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²⁶⁹ D. P. S. Verma, ‘Developments in Consumer Protection in India’, *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 25/1 (2002), p. 108.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 109; Also see ‘Dissenting voices raised over consumer revolution by market pundits’, IT (15 February 1984), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19840215-dissenting-voices-raised-over-consumer-revolution-by-market-pundits-802753-1984-02-15> (29 July 2018).

²⁷¹ Consumer complaints appeared frequently as letters to the editor in English and Hindi newspapers, such as the following: ‘With the Diwali season warming up, ‘Bargain sales’ have exploded in great numbers all over the city. Offers of buy one saree and take one home free etc. are making headlines in advertisements...The claims, I find, are as false as they are loud! One place sells sarees worth Rs 115 or so at Rs 150 and gives cheap cotton sarees worth Rs 30 for free. Any reasonably intelligent customer knows that at mill rates, the seller would have procured both these sarees well within Rs 120 each! So he is not sacrificing any part of his profit for the sake of the festival for you or me! Why do these people underestimate the housewife? We are a very practical and particularly sharp lot. Don’t we manage our households on shoe-string budgets? So a message to these, save your breath.’ *The Hindu*, 3 November 1983.

In her fascinating account of the urban transformations brought in the wake of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, Broudehoux makes use of Debord's concept of the 'integrated spectacle' to interpret architecture as building, consolidating, and reproducing the hegemony of the state and the market.²⁷² The new cityscape dotted with large sports stadia, national museums and theatres, and new airport terminals was a result of the collaborative efforts of state and corporate activity. Broudehoux notes that the spectacular presence of these 'mega-infrastructures' of power on the one hand 'boldly marks the continuous presence of the state...and reinforces the awareness and experience of state power' on an everyday basis.²⁷³ On the other hand, it emphasises the prominence and power of private investors funding these projects who consequently become important 'economic players in [the] city's symbolic economy'.²⁷⁴ Similarly, in this chapter, I have examined the 1982 Asiad as a manifestation of the 'integrated spectacle' which brought together state and private actors to enhance the visibility, grandeur, and prestige of Mrs Gandhi's office. At the same time, I have attempted to extend the framework of state-market collaboration to trace the development of new visual technologies, which were coterminous with a consumer and advertising boom in contemporary India.

It is ironic that the Congress Party's most recent foray into the staging of sport spectacles at the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi revealed the deeply institutionalised corruption within the Party, which contributed in no small measure to its electoral defeat on a national scale in 2014. The next chapter explores the controversial Maruti car project which similarly threatened Mrs Gandhi's political

²⁷² Broudehoux, 'Images of Power', pp. 52-62.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

dominance in the 1970s, and indeed played a major role in the negative representations of the Emergency regime. As the chapter will argue, Maruti's nationalisation, and subsequent collaboration with the Japanese multinational Suzuki transformed business cultural practices in India, and produced a spectacle that was firmly associated with a newly assertive and aspirational middle class culture in India.

Chapter 2 – A People’s Car: Maruti 800

‘I have been dreaming about Maruti these days and blissfully planning all the things I shall do when I finally take possession of it, I mean her. Other people may entertain silly ideas about driving around in their Marutis, but that’s certainly not for me. No Maruti of mine shall ever work...My Maruti shall be transported as carefully as the Kohinoor straight from the showroom.’

Lal, ‘Dream Car’, *TOI* (10 April 1984), p. 8.

‘Maruti Suzuki has announced halting the production of its iconic first small car, the Maruti 800, which revolutionised road transport for millions of Indians...In many ways, the Maruti 800 was the first harbinger of liberalisation...[It] symbolised a revolution of expectations in India – a Maruti culture of sorts. As it passes into the footnote of history in India’s automobile industry, that culture lives on.’

‘The Car That Symbolised Middle Class Dreams’, *New Indian Express* (12 February 2014)¹

When Sanjay Gandhi’s defunct Maruti Motors Limited was nationalised in June 1980, the passenger car market in India was dominated by two private sector players: Hindustan Motors, owned by the elite Birla family which manufactured the ‘Ambassador’, and Premier Automobiles Limited, owned by the industrialist Walchand Hirachand Doshi which manufactured the ‘Padmini’.² The two accounted for the majority of car sales in India, a commodity itself deemed a ‘luxury’ at the time. When Maruti Udyog Limited (henceforth MUL) was launched in 1983 as a joint venture between the Government of India and Suzuki Motors Corporation of Japan, it was expected to produce 20,000 units between 1984-85.³ Thereafter, it was projected to increase its annual production by another 20,000 vehicles, ultimately targeting to reach

¹ Accessed at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/opinion/editorials/The-CarThat-Symbolised-Middle-Class-Dreams/2014/02/12/article2051296.ece> (23 September 2016).

² A third private company, Standard Motor Products India, manufactured the relatively less popular ‘Standard Herald’. Although the units were assembled domestically, all three models incorporated foreign parts and technology via joint venture partnerships with foreign manufacturers. It is worth noting that G. D. Birla and Walchand Hirachand were both members of the National Planning Committee set up in 1938 under the chairmanship of Nehru. They were also important architects of the Bombay Plan of 1946 that laid down recommendations for a protectionist industrial policy post-Independence.

³ ‘Rs. 269-crore Maruti project approved’, *TOI* (18 August 1982), p. 1.

a 100,000 vehicles by 1988-89.⁴ Within a decade from its inception, MUL achieved its first major milestone as the only Indian automobile company to have produced a million vehicles. By March 2011, the number jumped to 10 million, and in May 2015, Maruti's 15 millionth car rolled out from the company's sprawling manufacturing plant in Manesar, Haryana.⁵

Today, Maruti Suzuki India Limited (henceforth MSIL) manufactures 1.5 million 'family cars' annually, i.e. one car every twelve seconds.⁶ It occupies a market share of roughly forty seven percent in India, placing it head and shoulders above its competitors.⁷ In four decades, Maruti transitioned as a symbol of middle class luxury to a value for money brand accessible to the average Indian consumer. Moreover, the brand is regarded for quality assurance, strong customer service, and, notably, its indigenous roots despite being a wholly Japanese subsidiary from 2007 onwards. R. C. Bhargava, MSIL's current chairman, ponders over its success, 'All this was done by a Public Sector Undertaking at a time when the public sector was characterised by inefficiency and sloth. Why and how did this happen?'⁸

Maruti's controversial history is largely a political one, marred by accusations of nepotistic favours, bankruptcy, and an overarching and inefficient public sector administration. Against this background, this chapter seeks to explore Maruti's

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 'Maruti Suzuki rolls out its 15 millionth vehicle', Maruti Suzuki official website (12 May 2015), <http://www.marutisuzuki.com/pressrelease12may2015.aspx> (23 September 2016). At the time of writing, in addition to the Gurgaon and Manesar plants in Haryana, Maruti expanded to a thousand acre manufacturing facility on the outskirts of Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

⁶ 'Company at a Glance', Ibid.; MUL was renamed Maruti Suzuki India Limited in 2007.

⁷ Sengupta, 'Top 2 auto companies hold 70% market share', TOI (14 December 2017), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Top-3-auto-companies-hold-70-market-share/articleshow/50749746.cms> (23 September 2016).

⁸ R. C. Bhargava, *The Maruti Story: How a Public Sector Company Put India on Wheels* (Noida, 2010), p. xvi.

dynamic comeback in 1983 with Mrs Gandhi as the project's unofficial 'brand ambassador'. In particular, I examine the birth of a unique Maruti work culture, and its significance for Indian industry at the time. I argue that the adoption of Japanese management practices at Maruti were in line with Mrs Gandhi's attempts to manage tense labour relations at the time by projecting the message of productivity and discipline, previously vocalised during the Emergency.

Moreover, the chapter traces the consolidation of a middle class support base for the Congress Party, and for Rajiv Gandhi in particular, driven by their attitude towards family-oriented consumption, and 'modernisation' of the economy. Indeed, the 'people's car' project redefined modernity as articulated by the state at the time – from Sanjay Gandhi's ostensibly indigenous model of development to Rajiv's openly collaborative and global brand of 'Indianness'. Drawing upon visual methodologies to examine consumer culture, I also study passenger car advertisements, and their impact on middle class aspirations, and their material realities. Finally, as a full-fledged media spectacle from the beginning, I seek to illustrate how the 'people's car' project placed the state as the 'driver' of middle class mobility in the 1980s in India.

'When I grow up, I am going to make cars.'⁹

“Perhaps, you living across the oceans do not know the long history of vilification, falsehood, accusations and allegations that we had to face over it”. With tears in her eyes, she described the long hours her late son Sanjay spent every day, in a hot and dusty workshop, trying to develop an Indian small car, and translate his dream into reality. In between, her voice would crack, and she would sip water and dry her eyes.¹⁰

On 14 December 1983, in a tearful but symbolic moment, Mrs Gandhi handed a pair of car keys to Indian Airlines' employee, Harpal Singh (Figure 2.5, p. 179). Singh's name

⁹ Sanjay Gandhi quoted in V. Mehta, *The Sanjay Story* (Noida, 2012), p. 61.

¹⁰ Indira Gandhi quoted in Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 1.

had been computer generated from a long ‘waiting list’, which made him the first owner of the Maruti 800 family car. The day also marked the late Sanjay Gandhi’s birth anniversary whose dream of manufacturing a ‘people’s car’ for the Indian middle class had come to fruition as a state spectacle produced by a new brand of technocratic leadership in collaboration with a multinational corporation – attributes unheard of at the time.

‘The motor car had always fascinated Sanjay’, writes author Vinod Mehta, describing how ‘on his sixth birthday Panditji [Nehru] presented Sanjay with a pedal car, and this instantly became the boy’s proudest possession...On the lawns of Teen Murti, grandfather would push the car and the grandson would take off with what he thought was great speed’.¹¹ By the time Sanjay was brought back to Delhi as a teenager after a troublesome stint at boarding school, he had declared his interest in producing motor cars as a career. Nehru was thrilled, and greatly admired what he believed was ‘Sanjay’s instinctive skill in all things electrical’ as he declared to his friends, ‘Sanjay knows more about electricity than all of us put together...He is going to be a great engineer one day’.¹² Perhaps Nehru’s elation lay in the hope that his own grandson would translate his vision of a modern, industrialised India into reality.

Curiously, Sanjay’s passion for speed and cars did not translate into an interest in engineering or obtaining formal training of any kind. However, both Mrs Gandhi and Nehru were keen that he complete a practical course to gain first-hand experience with automobiles. Thus Sanjay was admitted to a three-year Rolls-Royce apprenticeship

¹¹ Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, p. 62.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

programme in the U.K., which he quit at the end of two years. ‘I have learned everything there is to learn. I would be wasting my time if I stayed on any longer’, he argued.¹³

When he returned to India in the mid-1960s, Sanjay channelled his energy into developing a model ‘small car’ for the Indian middle class rather than plunging into the rough and tumble of politics. He began working in a hired shed amongst car junkyards in Delhi’s Gulabi Bagh neighbourhood. This shed was to be the birth place of Sanjay’s prototype ‘Maruti’, which in Hindu mythology is another name for the monkey-god, ‘Hanuman’. Mehta quotes one of Sanjay’s friends:

‘Gulabi Bagh was then a filthy truck shop surrounded by garbage dumps and overflowing sewers. The workshop itself was crowded with bits and pieces of twisted metal, rusting parts, and a giant-sized hand-operating press on which wheel hubs were formed, one hole at a time. Sanjay was not discouraged and immediately set about with the first Maruti prototype on a makeshift roof structure right above the 100 square-foot-odd space, with various equipment resting precariously around’.¹⁴

Whilst Sanjay toiled in his workshop, the question of manufacturing a ‘people’s car’ in India led to several contentious debates in Parliament. Post-Independence, the automotive industry had been subject to multiple inquiries and recommendations by ‘experts’.¹⁵ As Chairman Bhargava notes, the production of a passenger car was both a valid and an impossible dream for India.¹⁶ Its validity was legitimised by Nehru’s developmental vision itself – ‘motorisation was essential for modernising Indian industry and stimulating economic growth’ – although the development of private

¹³ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁵ P. B. M., ‘The Mirage of an Automobile Policy’, *EPW*, 2/16 (1960), p. 680.

¹⁶ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 2.

modes of transportation went against the ‘socialist’ priorities of the planners at the time.¹⁷

Notwithstanding these dilemmas, one of the earliest inquiries, the 1953 Tariff Commission Report, outlined several preconditions deemed necessary to develop a ‘self-sustaining’ automobile sector in India.¹⁸ It recommended setting up ancillary industries to supply car components to existing car manufacturers as well as introducing new cars at a price more suited to the Indian market.¹⁹ However, on both counts, the first mover advantage lay with the established Hindustan Motors and Premier Automobiles. Despite Committee recommendations, they continued to import car components, and justified setting prices artificially high. In the 1950s and 1960s, demand for passenger cars significantly exceeded their supply which further allowed manufacturers to sell at a premium. For instance, the ‘Ambassador’ was worth forty years of an average Indian’s salary at the time, and was rightly viewed as the status symbol of a few high ranking officials.²⁰ The government’s inaction to check monopolistic activity, and the absence of any indigenous public sector car manufacturers was criticised by many in public and in Parliament. Notably, public dissatisfaction on this issue reflected latent middle class aspirations of car ownership during allegedly austere times. A harsh critique of the 1953 report and of a similar report published in 1956 appeared in the *Economic and Political Weekly* which urged:

‘There appears to have arisen an implied assumption that the existing automobile producers have a birth-right to survival, irrespective of efficiency or fulfilment of solemn undertakings by them to the Government... The 1956 Report set up almost a charter for the automobile producers; they should be assured a guaranteed market

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A. C. Gupta, Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Maruti Affairs (New Delhi, 1979) (henceforth Maruti Commission Report), https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_1k5cgbo2uuTlpERjZMLTd2Qkk/edit (22 July 2018), p. 1. This inquiry was commissioned under Justice A. C. Gupta during the Janata rule to probe into allegations against Mrs Gandhi, and her involvement in Sanjay’s Maruti project.

¹⁹ P. B. M., ‘The Mirage of an Automobile Policy’, p. 680.

²⁰ G. Sen, *A Million Cars for a Billion People* (Mumbai, 2015), p. 65.

for their products; they should be insulated not only from foreign but also internal competition...The Jha Committee [of 1959] would further strengthen the existing automobile producers by recommending that a consortium (or cartel) of them should be allowed to produce ancillary products and an approved small car.²¹

Further to recommendations made by the Jha Committee, another 'Expert Committee' was set up in October 1960 under the chairmanship of G. Pande, then Vice-Chancellor of Roorkee University, to determine the feasibility of a public sector 'people's car' project.²² Exploring the possibility of foreign collaboration, the Committee offered thirteen European car manufacturers a collaboration with the GOI to set up a manufacturing facility in the country.²³ Despite some favourable responses, however, the Committee concluded that although theoretically possible, 'the development of a new design of passenger car is...of necessity a lengthy process', adding that it was 'wholly inadvisable to consider the establishment of a plant for the production of such a car'.²⁴ Moreover, the Ministry of Steel and Heavy Industries explained that foreign collaboration was particularly difficult due to the 'foreign exchange situation' in the country.²⁵

In addition to the above, it must be noted that the push to develop a wholly indigenous passenger car was consistent with the objective of self-reliance critical to state planning at the time. As the Jha Committee proclaimed in 1959, 'We will have the people's car,

²¹ P. B. M., 'The Mirage of an Automobile Policy', pp. 680-1; The Jha Committee was set up under the chairmanship of L. K. Jha, then Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, to determine the feasibility of producing a low-cost passenger car domestically – 'small yet roomy, sturdy, and capable of carrying an average Indian family' – within a price range of Rs. 5,000 – Rs. 7,000 (equivalent to approximately Rs. 75,000 in 2018). A. Celestine, 'The origins of the Indian small car dream', *Economic Times* (31 March 2011), <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/et-commentary/the-origins-of-the-indian-small-car-dream/articleshow/7831216.cms> (16 August 2018).

²² Maruti Commission Report, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1 – 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

of the people, manufactured by the people, for the people of this country'.²⁶ Indeed, this qualification of indigeneity would be crucial for Maruti's success in the future, more on which later. Ultimately, C. Subramaniam, then Minister of Steel and Heavy Industries, declared in the Lok Sabha:

'...the small car project could not be moved up in the list of priorities and for some time the priority in the field of automobiles should be definitely and overwhelmingly in favour of the manufacture of commercial vehicles for the transport of goods and public passenger transport...Government have to defer consideration of the small car project till more propitious conditions.'²⁷

Thereafter, more critical matters kept Nehru and his successors occupied viz. wars with China and Pakistan, successive droughts, and the devaluation of the rupee in 1966-67.

By 1968-69, the Planning Commission of India concluded that given the lack of funds, the public sector would not participate in any foreign collaboration to manufacture cars. Instead, private entrepreneurs willing to manufacture a low-cost, indigenous car were to be issued licenses by the government. Mrs Gandhi's former media advisor, B. G. Verghese, notes that the 'small car' concept 'found a place in an "addendum" to the Fourth Plan document', and ten Letters of Intent were issued for the project of which one was granted to Sanjay Gandhi.²⁸

Many in Delhi's political, primarily Congress, circles began taking note of Sanjay's 'brave attempts' to put together an indigenous 'people's car'.²⁹ A newspaper report quoted one admirer of his Maruti prototype:

'Her name is Maruti – and she may as well be India's first small car...To watch Maruti in her true colours and form, the officials from the Ministry were taken for a spin. They seemed pretty pleased with it. If all goes well and Maruti fits the bill, India's first small car might be on the road in two years',³⁰

²⁶ Quoted in Sen, *A Million Cars*, p. 66.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 159.

²⁹ Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, p. 70.

³⁰ Ibid.

whilst another noted,

‘Its shape and tiny tyres at once make it look like the first cousin of the Austin Mini... “But it is a very different car; it is a car made entirely in India, all the parts were made here”, explains the maker of the car, Mr. Sanjay Gandhi.’³¹

When Sanjay was granted the licence, Mrs Gandhi was at the peak of her popularity following the successful general elections and the Bangladesh War in 1971. Although her position and authority were undisputed within the Congress, the news of Sanjay’s license was strongly questioned by the opposition. For instance, George Fernandes, MP from the Samyukta Socialist Party, accused Mrs Gandhi of ‘practising nepotism of the worst type’ to further a project that was ‘irrelevant to the urgent needs of the nation’.³² Several politicians joined in his criticism – Raj Narain called it a ‘disgrace to democracy and socialism’, Jyotirmoy Basu ‘corruption and nepotism’, Madhu Limaye ‘naked corruption’, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee ‘corruption unlimited’.³³ When Mrs Gandhi finally responded, she went on to commend the ‘enterprising’ spirit of her son:

‘My son is a delicate young man, and with whatever money and energy he has, he has modelled a car, not a posh one, but one fairly comfortable and suitable to Indian conditions. It would suit the middle class...My son has shown enterprise and I could not say no to him...If he is not encouraged, how can I ask other young men to take risks?’³⁴

³¹ Maruti Commission Report, p. 6; The Maruti Commission Report later alleged that Sanjay’s prototype was in fact built using illegally imported parts: ‘Mr Chandra Shekhar [then Janata Party president] recalled that Mrs Gandhi and her ministers had repeatedly stressed in Parliament that Mr Sanjay Gandhi was producing a 100 percent indigenous car...But the engine was smuggled by a German national as his personal luggage and he was appointed consultant [in the project]’. (‘Curbs on company ads as political aid’, *TOI* (8 September 1979), p. 1); These claims are also supported in B. N. Tandon’s memoirs, who was Joint Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Secretariat at the time. Tandon notes that on 1 May 1975, N. K. Seshan, Mrs Gandhi’s private secretary, informed him that Maruti had bought a ‘lot of equipment from foreign firms’. Tellingly, the diary entry reads: ‘For entirely another purpose the industry ministry is collecting information on the end use to which different imports under various licenses have been put. If all the information is collected Maruti will be exposed...The PM is annoyed with [Seshan] because he had started collecting information that could be embarrassing for Maruti. According to the PM, he should have taken the view that not only was it very difficult to collect the information but also that it would not serve any purpose.’ B. N. Tandon, *PMO Diary-I: Prelude to the Emergency* (New Delhi, 2003), pp. 317-18.

³² Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, p. 72.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Many contended, however, that in addition to the licence, Sanjay was able to procure land for his Maruti factory at a throwaway price, courtesy of Haryana's then Chief Minister, and 'ardent Sanjay-ite', Bansi Lal.³⁵ In 1971, the Government of Haryana forcefully acquired more than four hundred acres of land in Gurgaon, then a rural district a few kilometres from Delhi, and allotted three hundred acres to Sanjay's Maruti.³⁶ It is remarkable that Sanjay was also offered to pick the exact location of his factory, which happened to be in close proximity to a military base. The land acquisition was particularly controversial as it led to the displacement of residents across five villages in the area. According to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Maruti Affairs (henceforth Maruti Commission Report) set up during the Janata rule to probe into Maruti's corrupt dealings, village residents objected on multiple grounds. They argued that the location chosen contained most of their fertile land, and the acquisition hindered food production and affected the farmers' primary source of livelihood.³⁷ In response, the Haryana Government, after deliberating with Sanjay, agreed to offer some compensation to the petitioners. It is telling that the area adjacent to the factory was valued at almost forty thousand rupees per acre. The displaced, in contrast, were offered less than twelve thousand rupees.³⁸

Shortly afterward, Maruti assumed secondary importance for Sanjay as he involved himself in the decision making processes of the Prime Minister's Office. Mehta notes

³⁵ S. Sethi, 'If Sanjay Gandhi had lived', IT, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-today-40th-anniversary-sanjay-gandhi-rajiv-gandhi-janata-party-congress-sunil-sethi/1/543047.html> (26 October 2016).

³⁶ Maruti Commission Report, p. 26; Today, Gurgaon – the 'millennium city' – is the nucleus of several manufacturing and service hubs in India. The Gurgaon-Manesar-Rewari region around Delhi, in particular, is a major centre of industrial activity, the development of which goes back to the Maruti factory opened in the 1970s.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 35-7.

that a ‘façade of normalcy’ on the Maruti front was kept up for a while.³⁹ For instance, at the 1972 World Fair in Delhi, a Maruti model was displayed at the Haryana Pavilion as an exhibit of ‘indigenous technology and ingenuity’ – ‘The car was placed on an elevated, revolving pedestal, its features accentuated by spotlights’.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, many amongst Mrs Gandhi’s closest aides brought to her attention the disastrous way in which Maruti was being managed. Mrs Gandhi’s principal secretary and one of her most trusted advisors, P. N. Haksar, tactfully suggested sending Sanjay’s prototype for a safety test, knowing well that the model would not be cleared for production.⁴¹ Miraculously, a testing facility in Ahmednagar in Maharashtra issued Maruti a certificate of clearance in 1973.⁴² K. K. Birla, then Chairman of Hindustan Motors, similarly details his experience with Sanjay in his autobiography. On being approached to invest in Maruti, Birla attempted to dissuade Sanjay by noting that the project required significant capital investment to begin production. He writes:

‘Sanjay, a strong-willed person, had his own views. He appeared to be very confident of himself. He had no doubt, he declared, of making a success of the project in the manner he had conceived. When I found him determined to proceed with the project, I assured him of my support in a small way to start with.’⁴³

Still unsure of the project’s viability, Birla shared his reservations with Mrs Gandhi directly. He remarked that it was imperative that Sanjay invest in more advanced

³⁹ Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ Ibid.; Here Mehta is referring to the International Trade Fair that took place in 1972 at the ‘Pragati Maidan’ exhibition complex in New Delhi. Pragati Maidan (Progress Grounds) was inaugurated by Mrs Gandhi that year to mark twenty five years of Independence, and consisted of several pavilions including the famous ‘Hall of Nations and Industries’ designed by renowned architect, Raj Rewal, who also designed the Asiad Village. ‘Watch: Pragati Maidan’s buildings will be demolished’, Scroll, <https://video.scroll.in/829753/watch-pragati-maidans-buildings-will-be-demolished-heres-why-theyre-important-to-architecture> (21 February 2017).

⁴¹ G. Austin, *Working a Democratic Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience* (New Delhi; New York, 2003), p. 185.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ K. K. Birla, *Brushes with History: An Autobiography* (New Delhi, 2007), p. 18.

technologies in production, and suggested collaborating with a foreign manufacturer instead.⁴⁴ However, as he reveals:

‘It was clear that Indira-ji was uneasy about Sanjay’s project. But there was hardly anything she could do to dissuade him, and she knew it. Sanjay was a man of strong and fixed views and was obdurate enough to yield to neither pressure nor persuasion. Indira-ji asked me to give him whatever guidance I could.’⁴⁵

Birla then asked B. G. Verghese, former media advisor to Mrs Gandhi and then editor of the *Hindustan Times*, to publish his impressions of Sanjay’s factory in the newspaper. Verghese notes in his memoirs:

‘Sanjay explained the features of the product he had designed and its economics before showing me the contraption he had produced. It was all I could do to prevent myself from laughing...What I had been told and shown was plainly a piece of monumental nonsense and revealed a degree of naivety and arrogance that was truly extraordinary.’⁴⁶

By the time the Emergency was declared in June 1975, Sanjay exploited his position to obtain more favours for his ‘people’s car’ project. Adding to previous charges of nepotism and corruption, Maruti was sanctioned a number of loans from different nationalised banks. Sanjay also set up two private companies – Maruti Technical Services (MTS), where his ‘partners’ were listed as his sister-in-law Sonia Gandhi, her two children Rahul and Priyanka, and one other person named Shroff; and Maruti Heavy Vehicles Private Limited (MHVP) that manufactured road rollers.⁴⁷ Word soon spread about Maruti’s potential bankruptcy as it was alleged that Sanjay intended to divert the company’s investments to the above third-party companies. Interestingly, in

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Verghese, *First Draft*, pp. 193-4.

⁴⁷ Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, pp. 85-7; A newspaper report was quick to point out: ‘Mrs Sonia Gandhi, with even lesser technical qualifications than her brother-in-law...was appointed managing-director of MTS without the approval of the Reserve Bank of India. As a foreign national, she could not hold shares of any Indian company of profit without the Reserve Bank’s approval’. (‘Sanjay not qualified to hold Maruti post: panel’, *TOI* (11 June 1979), p. 13, and ‘Who did what in Maruti affairs’, *TOI* (25 September 1979), p. 5); Interestingly, a defensive response to the above argued that it was not illegal for foreign born wives of Indian nationals to hold shares in an Indian company as long as there were no ‘desires’ to send remittances abroad. M. S. Lakshmanan, ‘Not Illegal’, *TOI* (4 October 1979), p. 8.

a diary entry from 23 May 1975, then Joint Secretary in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, B. N. Tandon, observed:

'The PM is very annoyed with the director-general of supplies and disposal. The reason was that a sister company of Maruti has made road-rollers and the directorate's help was needed to sell them. The director-general refused to extend the necessary help. The PM has asked the [Central Bureau of Investigation] to enquire into his integrity and of his officials. Such instances are on the increase. If an official refuses to help Maruti, the CBI is asked to inquire into his honesty and integrity.'⁴⁸

Meanwhile, foreign newspapers already reporting the illegalities of the Emergency administration began commenting on the Maruti controversy. For instance, *Washington Post* noted, 'The bureaucrats say they can do nothing. Sanjay calls up Secretaries and says "give the contract to so and so"', and a diplomat recalled, 'If you wanted to sell something you had to get in touch with Maruti... Sanjay took no pains to deny his ability to influence Government decisions'.⁴⁹ One of Mrs Gandhi's advisers argued in the *Sunday Times* that the Emergency 'fiasco' was greatly exacerbated by the Maruti affair – 'Maruti is where the rot started because it raised so many questions that have never before been properly answered.'⁵⁰

The results of the 1977 elections were unforeseen by both Mrs Gandhi and Sanjay. The Janata leaders wasted no time to arrange for Mrs Gandhi's arrest on multiple charges of corruption not least due to her involvement in furthering Maruti.⁵¹ Facing lengthy questioning under the numerous committees set up to probe into the Emergency, Mrs

⁴⁸ Tandon, *PMO Diary-I*, p. 351.

⁴⁹ Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, p. 88.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Along with Minister of I&B, V. C. Shukla, Sanjay was also found guilty of destroying prints of the 1975 satirical film, *Kissa Kursi Ka*. The session's judge concluded that the motive of destruction was the 'manner in which the political functioning of the [Congress] government was ridiculed in the film'. It was found, much like a Hindi film scene, that '13 trunks which carried the film material from Bombay were brought to the Maruti factory where it was converted into scrap...the empty cans were disfigured and thrown into air and water, and locks on the trunks [were] melted'. 'Kissa case: Shukla, Sanjay convicted', *TOI* (27 February 1979), p. 1.

Gandhi grew conscious of the disrepute that the ‘people’s car’ project had personally brought her. During the Janata years, newspapers in India and abroad were flooded with reports implicating her in accordance with the Gupta Committee verdict:

‘[Justice A. C. Gupta] has dwelt at length on the prevailing sense of fear that prompted implicit obedience which left no one in “doubt as to the origin of the power that made such a state of affairs possible. Mr. Sanjay Gandhi exercised not only a derivate power, its source was the authority of the prime minister”...It bluntly states that the affairs of the Maruti “appear to have brought about a decline in the integrity of public life and sullied the purity of administration”.’⁵²

Notably, one reporter questioned the social effects of ‘consumerist’ projects like Maruti:

‘In big cities, it is no longer fashionable to be poor, however much some of us may talk of Gandhism and however much we may denounce what we call ostentatious display of wealth or conspicuous consumption and detest what Mr. George Fernandes has described rather graphically as the five-star culture...The younger generation is even less willing to accept austerity as a way of life than ours.’⁵³

Another strongly worded letter to the editor in the *Times of India* argued:

‘Recent articles... glorifying Mrs Indira Gandhi were classic examples of spineless journalism...Mrs Gandhi’s shielding of the corrupt hardly helped to cleanse public life. Her motherly love led to Maruti. She was a prime minister whose tenure was economically disastrous for the nation...a prime minister who undermined the respectability of the Planning Commission by churning out ridiculous populist slogans like ‘Garibi Hatao’...But the tide has turned. The Janata, in spite of a creditable economic record is out. Mrs Gandhi is already reaching out for the throne...Persons who only two years ago had heralded the arrival of the Janata have overnight changed colours and are returning to the fold like erring sheep.’⁵⁴

As noted previously, Mrs Gandhi portrayed herself as a victim to Janata’s unjust attacks whilst boldly declaring that the Maruti Commission Report was ‘politically

⁵² ‘Maruti Guilty: Gupta’, *TOI* (8 September 1979), p. 1.

⁵³ G. Jain, ‘Maligning a national sport’, *TOI* (24 January 1979), p. 8; In another report, the president of the not-for-profit International Organisation of Consumers’ Union (now ‘Consumers International’), Anwar Fazal, accused Japanese and American multinationals of ‘selling unnecessary and harmful goods to developing countries by taking advantage of people’s ignorance’. In particular, he argued that ‘Japan was largely responsible for spreading automobiles in developing countries’, and urged Japanese firms to ‘develop a more correct and human approach to industrial activity’. (‘Multinationals ‘plundering purses of poor’ *TOI* (18 June 1980), p. 7); Interestingly, in February 1979, the Janata Minister of Heavy Industries argued that it was ‘of paramount importance to establish a major public sector presence’ in the field of automobile production which was the only heavy industry entirely in the private sector. S. S. Aiyar, ‘Plan to acquire Maruti’, *TOI* (17 February 1979), p. 1.

⁵⁴ A. V. Karnik, ‘Mrs Gandhi’, *TOI* (5 October 1979), p. 8.

motivated'.⁵⁵ She further argued that 'the two-and-half years of Janata rule was directed against one woman', and that was 'nothing but political vendetta' against her personally.⁵⁶ Around the same time, Congress General Secretary, A. R. Antulay, claimed that:

'The wide and undue publicity...had not diminished an iota of Mrs Gandhi's popularity – indeed, it had tremendously increased her standing and stature among the people of India, and the release of the Gupta report could not by any stretch of imagination impair her status as India's only popular national leader.'⁵⁷

Although 'the people of India' did not let her down as the 1980 elections demonstrated, the following letter to the editor in the *Times of India* reflected the sombre attitude of perhaps many at the time:

'Whether or not [Mrs Gandhi] has or has not stacked away crores for personal or domestic (a la Maruti) purposes is not the real issue. The real issue is why people are so casually and coolly believing every conceivable allegation against Mrs Gandhi, a person who was at one time an unchallenged leader and idol of the masses?...The malady must be deeper, the reasons stronger, the credibility gap wider and historical experience vastly adverse to Mrs Gandhi. Surely, it is unfair to blame the political community for this state of affairs. Mrs Gandhi's actions, cynical disregard for scruples in politics, insincere political populism...and pathetic denials of naked facts have convinced the political community that she is after all a "pure politician" lacking a national vision, moral fibre, and strength of political character.'⁵⁸

Mrs Gandhi returned to office conscious of public opinion that questioned her motives and methods. Ironically, taking the democratic vote as the ultimate verdict, all judicial charges against her were soon dismissed. It is significant that when Mehta completed his biography of Sanjay in 1978, he concluded:

'Whatever else might be uncertain in the coming months, one thing is certain: Maruti, the son of the wind god, has been consigned to the back pages of history. A carping historian might, with some justification, contend that 20 finished models – the total output of Maruti in five years – do not deserve even the back pages. The seasoned historian, while sympathetic to the point, will reply that Maruti was not just a story of a car project that failed...'⁵⁹

⁵⁵ 'Report is politically motivated', *TOI* (9 September 1979), p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ 'Cong. (I) for probe', *TOI* (8 September 1979), p. 1.

⁵⁸ G. N. Rao, 'Corruption Charges', *TOI* (31 January 1979), p. 8.

⁵⁹ Mehta, *The Sanjay Story*, p. 92.

Maruti Woes Continue

‘Indira Gandhi’s sentiments in completing her son’s dreams cannot be forgotten. The government’s decision appears to have had more to do with maternal psychology than with hard headed economics.’⁶⁰

Within six months of emerging victorious, Mrs Gandhi faced the biggest jolt of her personal and political life – that of losing her son and designated heir, Sanjay, to a plane crash. Many commentators have since argued that Maruti’s successful relaunch in 1983 was due to Mrs Gandhi’s involvement in the project, and her keenness to personally ensure that Sanjay’s ambitions of manufacturing a ‘people’s car’ were fulfilled. As an article in the London *Economist* remarked, Mrs Gandhi intended to ‘erect a permanent memorial’⁶¹ for Sanjay, and put together a team of ‘experts’ who were to carry forward his legacy in the form of Maruti.

Reviving the ‘people’s car’ project also aligned with Mrs Gandhi’s own agenda of addressing middle class demands at the time. In this case, the long-held aspiration of car ownership was made into a reality, and Sanjay’s Maruti was chosen to set the precedent. As Jagdish Khattar, former Managing Director of MUL (1999-2007), recalls:

‘Mrs Gandhi bestowed on the company all the indulgences one reserves for a son...[Maruti] was given all kinds of concessions, and Arun Nehru, part of the family, was entrusted with the task of clearing all the obstacles in its path.’⁶²

Indeed, on Mrs Gandhi’s insistence, Arun Nehru, then a successful businessman and distant cousin of Rajiv and Sanjay’s, was consulted to explore the possibility of reviving Maruti. During this time, Nehru was elected as MP from the Rae Bareilly constituency in

⁶⁰ Dilip Cherian and Mohan Ram (Business India Magazine, 25 April 1982) quoted in Sen, *A Million Cars*, p. 91.

⁶¹ ‘Apt Memorial’, *Economist* (25 October 1980), p. 71.

⁶² J. Khattar and S. Sinha, *Driven: Memoirs of a Civil Servant Turned Entrepreneur* (New Delhi, 2014), p. 170.

Uttar Pradesh, a seat of historical significance for the Gandhi family previously held by both Feroze and Indira, and more recently by Sonia Gandhi. According to Chairman Bhargava, Nehru was called because ‘Mrs Gandhi wanted an objective commercial assessment of the viability of the project’.⁶³ She essentially sought an ‘outsider’s’ advice to dissociate Maruti from its corrupt and politicised image.

Nehru soon took charge of the enquiry, and reported that the project was viable only if foreign technology was introduced, and a joint venture was formed with the technology giver – a first for the public sector at the time.⁶⁴ As Mrs Gandhi acted on his advice and initiated Maruti’s nationalisation, Bhargava notes that ‘no one would have dared to oppose her on such a sensitive matter’.⁶⁵ An ordinance was issued to acquire the assets and undertakings of Sanjay’s Maruti Motors Limited, which was given legitimacy through the Maruti Limited (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act of 1980.⁶⁶ At the same time, findings of the Maruti Commission Report were officially rejected on the grounds that ‘several witnesses who tendered evidence before the Commission of Inquiry did so under pressure of [Janata] government authorities’.⁶⁷

Maternal psychology aside, Mrs Gandhi was aware of the disrepute that Sanjay’s Maruti had personally brought her. V. Krishnamurthy, MUL’s first chairman, writes in his memoirs that it was important to make Maruti a success because Mrs Gandhi felt that ‘the party was being ridiculed and her family was under attack’.⁶⁸ At the time,

⁶³ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Quoting MP Yogendra Makwana in *LSD*, 6th session, 18/3, 19 August 1981, p. 231.

⁶⁸ V. Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm: A Memoir* (Noida, 2014), p. 130; Krishnamurthy replaced Sumant Moolgaokar as Chairman of Maruti in 1982.

many alleged that Maruti's nationalisation was simply an attempt by the Gandhi family to make up for lost money in the project.⁶⁹ When it was first announced, the decision to nationalise was met with uproar and walk-outs by the opposition in Parliament. Notably, socialist leader, Madhu Dandavate, warned that the liquidation of liabilities of 'a sick unit in the private sector would set a dangerous precedent'.⁷⁰ Responding to a remark by then Minister of Commerce, Pranab Mukherjee, that the public sector needed the 'Maruti culture', Dandavate further expressed 'shock and surprise' at the 'hospitalisation of a sick unit rather than nationalisation'.⁷¹

In the Lok Sabha, another Jana Sangh MP from Gwalior, N. K. Shejwalkar, emphatically questioned the project and its controversial history:

'My submission is that Maruti has been a matter of great debate for all of us because it has caused decline in integrity in public life and sullied public administration. Even today, Government has not opened its eyes...The values have been injured and affected by this Maruti business right from its inception. Even today, the way it has been constituted, the way in which the Managing Director was appointed, the way in which the amounts were advanced to the members of the family of a particular person...'⁷²

On the latter point, it was alleged that compensation of as much as four crore rupees was offered to 'members of the family of the then directors' of Maruti without any legitimate claims.⁷³ Many like Shejwalkar were also correct to point out that the managers of Maruti, legally a public sector undertaking, were appointed arbitrarily, and rather personally by Mrs Gandhi. This is suggested in Bhargava's memoirs:

'Mrs Gandhi, despite having an aggressive policy towards nationalising important economic institutions, probably realised the limitations of the public sector for achieving excellence...She understood that getting the right people to manage Maruti would be a key factor for success and decided to get the best of the private and the public sector.'⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ 'Takeover of Maruti will set dangerous trend: Dandavate', *TOI* (19 October 1980), p. 7.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *LSD*, 7th session, 23/22, 22 December 1981, p. 453.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 15.

As non-executive Chairman, Mrs Gandhi first drafted Sumant Moolgaokar, then chairman of Telco (now known as Tata Motors), who was well-respected in the automobile sector.⁷⁵ This was the first time that the head of a private corporation was chosen to manage a public sector initiative. Bhargava notes that, in a way, this was ‘a precursor to the public-private partnership system’ replicated in several infrastructure projects in the 1980s.⁷⁶ More importantly, he notes that Moolgaokar’s selection was intended to ‘give credibility to a project that was, at the time, seen to have been born in sin’.⁷⁷

The appointment of V. Krishnamurthy as Vice-Chairman had similar motivations. Krishnamurthy had gained his reputation as ‘the person responsible for turning around the slothful Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL) into an efficient, customer-focussed organisation’.⁷⁸ Management advisor, Mrityunjaya Athreya, remarks that in traditionally ‘top-down’ institutions controlled by the Planning Commission, Krishnamurthy ‘took the bull by its horns and produced corporate plans’ to reinvent their operations.⁷⁹ When Mrs Gandhi approached him, she said, ‘I can get any number of advisers for the Planning Commission, but I can’t get a good manager. L. K. [Jha] tells me you are among the few people who can make Maruti a success’.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Tata Motors was the largest manufacturer of commercial vehicles in India at the time. It entered the passenger car market in 1991, and is today one of the world’s leading automotive companies.

⁷⁶ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 16; BHEL is a Government of India-owned manufacturer of power plants and electrical equipment. It was established in 1964, and comprised one of Nehru’s ‘commanding heights’ of the economy.

⁷⁹ In Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. xiii.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 130; L. K. Jha was Mrs Gandhi’s economic advisor at the time. As noted above, the Jha Committee had made recommendations on the small car project in 1959. Jha served as Ambassador to the United States between 1970-73, and was known to be more sympathetic to the market-friendly postures of the ‘West’. That Mrs Gandhi chose him as her economic advisor in the early 1980s is also noteworthy.

Krishnamurthy candidly admits in his memoirs that for a while, he was unconvinced about joining Maruti. Aside from a past conflict with then Minister of Industry, Charanjit Chanana, he adds that Maruti's 'negative image' was a discouraging factor:

'My family and friends were convinced that I should not have taken up this assignment...So negative was the image of Maruti at that time that my wife stopped socialising, except when it was absolutely unavoidable, because she was hesitant to face remarks about my wisdom, or lack thereof, in accepting the assignment.'⁸¹

Nonetheless, he accepted Mrs Gandhi's offer, noting:

'I realised that it would be churlish to refuse because of my ego when the Prime Minister herself was giving the assignment so much importance and saying she was under attack.'⁸²

Interestingly, like Bhargava, Krishnamurthy suggests that Mrs Gandhi was keen to make Maruti an example of successful public-private partnership in India. Referring to Moolgaokar, she said, '[Maruti] could be an excellent example of two leaders from the private and public sectors working together on a *national project*' [emphasis added].⁸³

Aware of the possibility of 'political interference', Mrs Gandhi nominated to the Board of Directors individuals 'in whom she had absolute confidence and whose capabilities and decision making she trusted'.⁸⁴ According to Krishnamurthy, this was to 'ensure that certain critical decisions' of the Board which could require a change in government policy 'had her support through her nominee', who was none other than Arun Nehru:

'In the appointment of Nehru to the Board...she deviated from the conventional practice of not nominating MPs to public sector Boards. These actions instantly gave a status to the Maruti Board and sent out a message in government circles about the seriousness of the project.'⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 131.

⁸² Ibid., p. 130.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 132.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 133.

Following Nehru's appointment, Rajiv Gandhi was also asked to oversee the project informally.⁸⁶ For Rajiv, Maruti was to 'serve as a catalyst for modernising the Indian automobile sector and changing its image'.⁸⁷ In a way, it was strategic to have him associated with the project given his own 'clean' image. Moreover, both Rajiv and Nehru were popularly regarded as symbols of youth and dynamism – attributes that would be beneficial for staging Maruti's comeback.

It is noteworthy that the Arun-Rajiv duo signalled an important transition from the politicised leadership of the Indira-Sanjay years to a technocratic brand of governance in India, both elite in their composition but geared towards different developmental ends. For instance, whilst Sanjay, at least publicly, described modernisation as a process dependent on domestic resources and capabilities (under Sanjay, Maruti was argued to be a wholly indigenous brand), Rajiv favoured a more outward-looking collaborative approach, or one of being 'one with the world'. Under Rajiv, the Indian economy was partially liberalised in the 1980s, and foreign equity participation was allowed in certain industries on a case-to-case basis. This 'opening up' was neither intended to nor resulted in a withdrawal of the state from the economy. In fact, 'market-restructuring measures' introduced in the 1980s strengthened the interventionist policies of the state that sought to increase domestic competitiveness by introducing a handful of foreign firms in the market.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ After Sanjay's death, Mrs Gandhi grew increasingly suspicious of people around her, and sought the company of only a handful of trusted advisers. That she would ask Arun Nehru and Rajiv to oversee Maruti is further suggestive of her tendency to keep 'sensitive' projects within the family.

⁸⁷ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 133.

⁸⁸ A. M. Nizamuddin, 'Declining Risk, The Advent of Liberalisation, and State-Multinational Bargaining' (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2001), p. 80.

Indeed, the example of Maruti suggests the influence of alternative economic models which combined elements of market capitalism with state authority. This is also reflected in the choice of Mrs Gandhi's economic advisors including L. K. Jha, Manmohan Singh, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and P. V. Narasimha Rao. Rao, in particular, implemented India's economic reforms in 1991 as Prime Minister, and was 'a fervent believer in the redemptive power of the state', finding state-directed models of capitalism especially attractive.⁸⁹ Arguably, similar frameworks of public-private partnership captured the zeitgeist of the period exhibited by the successes of 'East-Asian Tigers' – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan – where high growth rates were attributed to an interventionist, export-oriented industrial policy on the one hand, and 'Asian values' of discipline, loyalty, and collectivity on the other. The compatibility between statist regimes and the market was also demonstrated by China under Deng Xiaoping, who presided over the country's spectacular economic reconstruction in the 1980s.

At the same time, this decade witnessed a growing acceptance of the 'neoliberal' phenomenon in much of the Western world, which gradually spilled over to parts of Asia and Latin America. The terms of reference for economic experiments undertaken in India, however, found greater resonance with the Eastern Tigers.⁹⁰ Writing for *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, journalist Yoichi Funabashi contemplated the prospects of this 'Asianisation of Asia':

⁸⁹ Sitapati, *Half-Lion: How P. V. Narasimha Rao Transformed India*, p. 269.

⁹⁰ On the colonial genealogies of 'neoliberal governing' in India, see Ritu Birla's rich reading of the 'legal-governmental techniques' adopted by the colonial and national state in 'Jurisprudence of Emergence: Neo-Liberalism and the Public as Market in India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38/3 (2015), pp. 466-80. Challenging the popularly held state versus market dichotomy, Birla draws parallels between the colonial, liberal regime which sought to transform the Indian public, or its 'subjects', into a *market* for British-made goods, and the modern-day Indian state which similarly inscribed the *public as market* on the basis of its legal and institutional frameworks (p. 472).

‘Interest is growing in Asian models of economic development...Philosophical and theoretical frameworks are forming around these models...As Asian nations phase out the special relationships they have had with former colonial powers and integrate with the global economy, they are starting to see neighbouring countries as trading partners, providers of investment opportunities and competitors...They deal realistically, not ideologically, with new international circumstances.’⁹¹

Relationships were especially sought with countries willing to share not only their material resources but also technical ‘know-how’ and business ‘cultural’ practices. The revised ‘Twenty Point Programme’ announced by the Planning Commission in January 1982 outlined the steps taken to facilitate such activity:

‘In order to ensure speedy establishment of 100% export oriented units, a special Board has been set up to accord single point clearance to these units in regard to industrial licensing, foreign collaboration, import of capital goods and raw materials, etc. In order to expedite foreign collaboration approvals, additional powers have been delegated to the administrative Ministries.’⁹²

Mrs Gandhi, too, noted the pragmatic appeal of importing technical knowledge for domestic industry:

‘We welcome foreign investment as a vehicle of new technology and have designated several areas for it and for joint ventures. Advances made in some areas absorb so much capital and research inputs that it would be unwise and wasteful to duplicate the work done elsewhere.’⁹³

With projects such as Maruti, ‘development’ itself was thus redefined as a collaborative product of Indian and foreign technocratic expertise. Perhaps closer to Rajiv’s technocratic management was the scientific socialism espoused by his grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, who surrounded himself with like-minded professionals, scientists, and ‘experts’ entrusted with the task of development ‘planning’. For Nehru, the method of universal science offered the only solution out of economic and social backwardness in India. However, whilst Nehru’s scientific method was garbed in a language of

⁹¹ Y. Funabashi, ‘The Asianization of Asia’, *Foreign Affairs*, 72/5 (1993), pp. 78-80; The 1980s also produced several studies testing the adaptability of the Japanese ‘way of doing things’ in Western, especially American, contexts. The importance of human resource management, in particular, was the focus of famous texts such as William Ouchi’s *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge* (New York, 1982), and Akio Morita’s *Made in Japan* (London, 1986).

⁹² ‘Regarding 20-point programme’, p. 38. NAI PMS 37/718/82.

⁹³ Quoted in Dhawan ed., *Selected Thoughts of Indira Gandhi*, p. 116.

austerity and sacrifice for the national good, Rajiv's embrace of technology bore no such claims.⁹⁴ Hailed as the leader of the middle class, Rajiv furthered a kind of modernisation closely linked with ideas of consumption, pleasure, and leisure. After all, Rajiv represented colour television sets, Coca-Cola, and computers.⁹⁵

Indeed, drawing upon Foucauldian notions of biopolitical governmentality, Itty Abraham suggests that the early 1980s indicated:

‘a move from strategic technology projects that sought to enhance a territorialised vision of state sovereignty (atomic energy, space) to a biopolitical model (telecom, basic needs, infrastructure, digital governance) that foregrounded the welfare of the national population, *seen now as actual or potential consumer-citizens*.’[emphasis added]⁹⁶

As I argue in the following sections, the promotion of Maruti replete with the vocabulary and imagery of consumption for middle class families can be examined as an innovative and targeted application of new forms of biopolitical technology in India.

A Small Car for a Small Family

In his memoirs, Krishnamurthy explains that he deliberately appointed leaders from outside the automobile industry to manage Maruti's day-to-day operations:

‘One, I strongly believe that the top management of any large organisation should be a composite one, with expertise in different areas – technology, finance, administration, and the like...Two, I could only have drawn on people from Hindustan Motors and Premier Automobiles, and I was worried that they would

⁹⁴ For interesting perspectives on anti-consumerist ideologies within and beyond the Congress Party in the early years after Independence, see A. Naseemullah, ‘The Political Economy of Economic Conservatism in India’, *Studies in Indian Politics*, 5/2 (2017), pp. 233-47.

⁹⁵ What is perhaps less known is Mrs Gandhi's commitment to scientific development along similar lines. Ashok Parthasarathi, advisor to Mrs Gandhi on scientific affairs in the 1980s, writes: ‘Nehru saw scientists basically as denizens of research laboratories and higher educational institutions...Although he inducted economists like P. C. Mahalanobis and Pitambar Pant into the Planning Commission, he was content leaving the overall economic policy and management, the building up of the public sector he was so committed to, as well as the defence system and foreign policy to the civil service. It was Indira Gandhi who brought scientists, engineers, and technocrats into policy-making and in managerial positions like secretaries to the government, on a large scale. And she did so not only in the Science and Technology agencies of space, electronics and agriculture, and defence R&D, but also in core economic ministries and major public sector companies.’ A. Parthasarathi, *Technology at the Core: Science and Technology with Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi, 2007), pp. 305-6.

⁹⁶ I. Abraham, ‘From the Commission to the Mission Model...’, *JAS*, 76/3 (2017), p. 18; See Inda ed., *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics* (Malden, MA; Oxford, 2005).

bring along with them the work culture of those organisations and that would certainly not have helped the objective of Maruti – which was to change the face of the industry.⁹⁷

For instance, on the appointment of R. C. Bhargava as Director of Marketing, Krishnamurthy writes that Bhargava's experience as an Indian Administrative Service officer was seen as useful for handling bureaucratic procedures.⁹⁸ Bhargava also had a 'flair for marketing' which 'would be crucial in the automobile industry'.⁹⁹ This is noteworthy as much effort went into projecting a 'Maruti culture' distinct from the established ethos of public sector institutions at the time, more on which later.

With the right people identified, the next task lay in choosing the right foreign partner to collaborate with. In the 1960s, when the Planning Commission had first reached out to European manufacturers for collaborating on a low-cost car project, one French company, Renault, had been identified as a suitable partner.¹⁰⁰ Although the 'people's car' idea did not materialise then, Renault was back in consideration in 1980. In particular, the Ministry of Heavy Industries strongly favoured a collaboration to manufacture Renault's 'family sedan' model called 'R18'.¹⁰¹ However, as Krishnamurthy notes, the executives at Maruti were unsure whether a large sedan was the appropriate choice for the Indian market given that discussions up until then had been regarding a smaller car.¹⁰² On the other end, then non-executive Chairman, Sumant Moolgaokar, was adamant that Maruti emulate Telco Motors to produce a light commercial vehicle rather than a passenger car. At one of the first meetings of the Board, he stated, 'Gentlemen, before we start anything, I would like to express a strong

⁹⁷ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 136.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Maruti Commission Report, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, pp. 138-9.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

view – Maruti should not manufacture cars!’¹⁰³ At this point, Krishnamurthy writes that he was able to bypass dissenters from the Ministry and within the Board itself by approaching Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv directly. Moolgaokar ultimately resigned over his opposition to the ‘people’s car’ project, following which Krishnamurthy took over as chairman. The passenger car idea was thus put back on track.

Before approaching potential collaborators, Bhargava, given his marketing background, suggested creating a market survey to hear from Indian consumers directly about the kind of ‘family car’ they aspired to own.¹⁰⁴ In typical bureaucratic fashion, there was plenty of opposition to the survey as Ministry officials argued that Indian families were large in size, and would naturally prefer larger sedans.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, the Board went ahead and commissioned the Indian Market Research Bureau to conduct the survey. Krishnamurthy notes that this itself was a ‘path breaking exercise’ at a time when surveys were rare even in the private sector.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the results presented novel although in hindsight somewhat predictable trends – almost ninety per cent of car usage in India was with four or less people confined within city limits, and that customers sought fuel efficiency, reliability, and low initial cost.¹⁰⁷ The survey revealed an urban customer base with smaller families, and a middle class value for money attitude towards consumer durables.

Here it is worth noting that the way in which the Maruti 800 model was advertised, in particular its *small family car* image, reinforced the ‘small family, happy family’

¹⁰³ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁴ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 140.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

rhetoric heavily promoted by the state during the Indira Gandhi years, most infamously during the Emergency. This preoccupation with population growth, birth statistics, and family planning was part of a wider discourse and attack on the populations of developing countries at the time largely led by aid agencies and multinational organisations like the World Bank and the United Nations.¹⁰⁸ Efforts to reduce fertility and the average family size included state sponsored, coercive reproductive programmes often introduced ostensibly in the form of women's health missions and development schemes.¹⁰⁹

In many ways, the results of the Maruti market survey revealed pre-existing knowledge and acceptance of family planning and the 'nuclear family' concept amongst urban middle class households in India, or amongst the more 'affluent classes', which was then established as a social norm. Indeed, a survey conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion in July 1981 concluded that family planning, at least in urban areas, was 'accepted as an imperative for a better family life'.¹¹⁰ Another survey revealed that 75% of urban respondents favoured sterilisation as a solution to population growth.¹¹¹

Interestingly, William Mazzarella, in his history of advertising in contemporary India, illustrates how the family planning campaign during the Emergency failed precisely

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, M. J. Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008); M.J. Connelly, 'Population Control in India: Prologue to the emergency period', *Population and Development Review*, 32/4 (2006), pp. 629-67; M. Mamdani, *The Myth of Population Control: Family caste and class in an Indian village* (New York; London, 1972); and S. Engh, *Population Control in the 20th Century: Scandinavian Aid to the Indian Family Planning Programme* (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2006).

¹⁰⁹ For an ethnographic account of the family planning programme during the Emergency, see E. Tarlo, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi* (London, 2003), and R. J. Brown, 'Storming the Citadels of Poverty', *JAS*, 73/2 (2014), pp. 471-92.

¹¹⁰ IIPO, 'The Indian Family in Transition: An urban survey of popular attitudes towards the family, marriage and children', *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 26/7 (1981), p. III.

¹¹¹ IIPO, 'Indian Public Opinion on National and International Issues', *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 28/2-3 (1982), p. XI.

due to its moralising and dictatorial tone. The message of practicing safe sex was communicated ‘top-down’ by way of statist orders, failure to follow which resulted in punishment in the form of involuntary sterilisation. Even the advertisement campaign for the state sponsored condom brand, *Nirodh* (which translates into restraint or control), ‘seemed detached and admonitory’.¹¹² Mazzarella argues that the ‘stern tone of these communications...was a symptom of the government’s distance from the sensate lives of the people’.¹¹³ In contrast, the identical but subliminal messaging of the Maruti campaign reveals changing strategies in government communication, as Arvind Rajagopal observes:

‘Governance in the aftermath of the Emergency placed an overt reliance on consent over coercion as categories of culture and community gained importance over earlier developmental distinctions premised on an authoritarian relationship between state and the people.’¹¹⁴

Rebranding family planning as ‘A People’s Programme’, a report published by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 1982 hinted at the same idea, stating that ‘intensified efforts will be made to spread awareness and information about the small family concept by effective and imaginative use of multi-media and interpersonal communication strategies’.¹¹⁵ Notably, Mrs Gandhi urged that the Ministry was ‘trying to create a favourable climate for family planning with the help of mass media [and] folk media’, adding that ‘parents are more likely to restrict their families if they have reasonable assurance of the healthy survival of their *two children*’[emphasis added].¹¹⁶

¹¹² Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke*, pp. 68-71.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Rajagopal, ‘The Emergency as Prehistory’, p. 1003.

¹¹⁵ Government of India, Min. of Health & Family Welfare, ‘Annual Report 1981-1982’, p. 61.

¹¹⁶ Speech on 17 February 1984 in Gandhi and Dhawan ed., *Selected Thoughts of Indira Gandhi*, p. 111.

Similarly, former information officer, I. R. Rao, reflects on his experience as Joint Director in the Department of Advertising and Visual Publicity in the early 1980s. Rao supervised the ‘revamped’ family planning campaign as chief of media for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. In his memoirs, he explains the design of an audio-visual campaign to expand the publicity for the programme:

‘With my experience in the DAVP I ran a campaign in Delhi, with the caption “Large Families Miss the Bus”, with [public transport] buses painted with families running after the buses with children in their hands. It displayed small families seated happily in the bus. The campaign was popular and people understood the simple message.’¹¹⁷

Such ideas were given new impetus with the introduction of the colour TV and advanced satellite technology in 1982. The aforementioned Joshi Committee Report titled ‘An Indian Personality for Television’ explained how effective communication could address ‘one of the most exacting, and exciting, challenges facing the country’ – population growth.¹¹⁸ The report noted that television in general, and Doordarshan programming in particular, had ‘an immediacy and intimacy’ that made it a powerful communication tool.¹¹⁹ It thus called for a ‘redefinition of family planning communication’ distinct from the earlier ‘top-down’ approach to one which would emphasise ‘*the ability of the human being to take a conscious decision regarding a very basic intimate aspect of life that signifies control on its course*’ [emphasis in original].¹²⁰ Systematic attempts were made to ‘create the circumstances’ in which the smaller family concept could be ‘perceived to be, in reality, as advantageous as the communication messages claim’.¹²¹ Other notable recommendations of the report included:

¹¹⁷ I. R. Rao, *Conflict Communication: Chronicles of a Communicator* (New Delhi, 2016), p. 141.

¹¹⁸ Joshi Committee Report Volume 2, p. 125.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

- a) Areas/communities/religious groups that are particularly lagging behind in family planning acceptance should be identified and an intensive communication campaign that is culture and value specific carried out for such identified segments.
- b) Such programmes should as far as possible draw upon prevailing customs, folklore and cultural ethos of the target audience and attempt through a creative interpretation of the familiar to convey the modern message of family planning.
- c) Religious sayings or other examples from religion should be particularly used to provide sanctity to the family planning message.¹²²

It is worth noting that the communities typically targeted by such policies were the rural and urban poor, Muslims, and low-caste Hindus, collectively identified as ‘backward’.

State sponsored cultural agendas also began making an appearance on television as entertainment, drawing upon an international repertoire of techniques in population management at the time. For instance, former Director General of Doordarshan, Bhaskar Ghose, writes that in the early 1980s, an American NGO called the Population Communications International called upon the Ministry of I&B, and put forward the idea of using soap operas to communicate social messages subliminally.¹²³ The Ministry responded positively, and Mrs Gandhi invited Miguel Sabido, ‘a pioneering producer’ from Mexico who had used soap operas to successfully carry messages about family planning.¹²⁴ Ghose remarks that this was ‘seen as something of a genius’ by media authorities in India, who in the wake of the 1982 Asiad were also made conscious of new television technology.¹²⁵

Thus was launched India’s first and one of its most iconic soap operas, *Hum Log* (‘We the People’), in 1984. Directed against a middle class setting, the show addressed social issues such as caste harmony, empowerment of women, and Hindu-Muslim marriage.

¹²² Ibid., p. 137.

¹²³ Ghose, *Doordarshan Days*, p. 34.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

A production executive on the show recalled how ‘in those six or eight characters you had a set of new Indian values...a different approach to caste, eliminating the idea of Untouchables. This was a bold and beautiful vision of what India could be’.¹²⁶

The state sponsored family planning programme in ‘one of the most difficult areas of social engineering’¹²⁷ was also recognised by the UN General Assembly in March 1983 when Mrs Gandhi was made the first recipient of the UN Population Award alongside the head of the family planning programme in China. Incidentally, Mrs Gandhi, referring to China, declared elsewhere in a speech that ‘India wants to learn from those Asian countries which have succeeded in their population control programmes’.¹²⁸

Several studies have analysed Indian experiments with population control including the effective use of visual campaigns. However, the spectacular promotion of Maruti as the ideal small car for the average Indian family has received little attention despite the project’s historic association with Sanjay Gandhi and the Emergency. It must be noted that Maruti targeted middle class families that were rarely themselves affected by population policies. However, the representation of the small car as an object of middle class desire was crucial for its potential emulation by other socio-economic groups, as I will discuss in later sections.

¹²⁶ S. Hegarty, ‘How soap operas changed the world’, BBC News (27 April 2012), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17820571> (23 April 2017).

¹²⁷ I. Gandhi, ‘Commitment to Family Planning’ speech on accepting the UN Population Award, New York, 30 September 1983 in *Selected Speeches and Writings of Indira Gandhi 1982-1984*, p. 303.

¹²⁸ Speech on 17 February 1984 in Dhawan ed., *Selected Thoughts of Indira Gandhi*, p. 110.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Department of Posts, Ministry of Communication/Somestamps, <http://www.somestamps.com/pages-articles/301-350/article342-200812-india-family-planning.html> (10 August 2018), and Quora, <https://www.quora.com/If-population-is-a-big-problem-in-India-why-doesnt-it-take-any-action-like-China-is-taking> (10 August 2018).

Figure 2.1: Family Planning Stamp and Print Advertisement (1970s)¹²⁹



Figure 2.2: Problems of Plenty – A small family is shown as able to afford a brick house, proper clothing, and education even for the wife. Note the depiction of the young boy enjoying sport for leisure in contrast with the malnourished children on the right. The absence of the colour green to depict fertile land also strikes as a mark of poverty.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Translates to 'Next child not now, Never after two or three'. Source: Department of Posts, Ministry of Communication/Somestamps, <http://www.somestamps.com/pages-articles/301-350/article342-200812-india-family-planning.html> (10 August 2018), and Quora, <https://www.quora.com/If-population-is-a-big-problem-in-India-why-doesnt-it-take-any-action-like-China-is-taking> (10 August 2018).

¹³⁰ Source: Annual Report of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (1981-82).



Figure 2.3: ‘1.5 Million: One Population Clock India is Proud of’ – Maruti’s advertisement celebrating a moment of pride as its 1.5 millionth car whizzes past a vast commercial complex.¹³¹

Armed with statistics, the Maruti Board sought out small car manufacturers suitable for partnership. Several European companies such as Volkswagen and Daimler-Benz in Germany, Renault and Peugeot in France, Fiat in Italy, and British Leyland in the U.K. were considered.¹³² However, most of them were sceptical of the viability of a passenger car project in a low-income country like India.¹³³ The focus now shifted eastward, in particular to Japan which boasted a sizeable production of smaller, fuel-efficient cars.¹³⁴ At first, the Indian team contacted Toyota Motor Corporation and Mitsubishi Motors, but it was Suzuki Motor Corporation (henceforth SMC) that

¹³¹ Source: ‘Million Special Edition’, *Gatirang: House Journal of Maruti Udyog Limited*, 14 (1996), pp. 4–5.

¹³² A potential collaboration between British Leyland and Maruti received publicity during the Festival of India. The collaboration was deemed of commercial and political value in Britain due to Mrs Gandhi’s close involvement in the project. See BLA MSS Eur F215/2 ‘Mrs Gandhi’s Visit to UK’.

¹³³ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 141.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

decided to approach Maruti instead.¹³⁵ It is noteworthy that this exchange took place at a time when Indian and Japanese businesses had little to no contact. In fact, when Maruti was first nationalised in 1980, *Japan Times* pointedly noted the opposition to the ‘scandalous’ project, quoting a Janata MP who labelled it as ‘India’s Watergate’.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, there was renewed interest in the Indian market as it gradually opened up to international activity.

In their initial meetings, the Maruti team was impressed with the quick decision-making of SMC’s leaders, and the Japanese ‘way of doing things’, which Bhargava observes was ‘quite different from the Western style’.¹³⁷ Referring to SMC Chairman Osamu Suzuki’s ‘austere and simple style’, Bhargava writes:

‘It was also apparent that Suzuki was very cost-conscious. The offices were not even air-conditioned. It had nothing like the beautiful guest house with a huge garden, in the centre of Tokyo, which Mitsubishi had used to entertain the Maruti team.’¹³⁸

The decision to partner with SMC had to be finalised rapidly since the deadline set by Mrs Gandhi to begin the sales of the car (by December 1983) was fast approaching. During this period, Chairman Suzuki visited India several times, and Mrs Gandhi took the relationship further by making a publicised day-long visit to Tokyo in August 1982. A newspaper report on her visit noted that it was ‘surprising’ that Indo-Japanese relations had not moved closer in almost two decades, albeit concluding:

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 146; In the early 1980s, Suzuki sought to expand its presence in Western markets. However, the demand for smaller, compact cars in developed countries was quite low. Under these circumstances, Suzuki offered to collaborate with India given its desire to manufacture a smaller car. (K. Motohashi, ‘Suzuki Motor’s Expansion in India’, *Global Business Strategy* (Tokyo, 2015), p. 22); Notably, SMC first entered into a joint venture partnership with the Government of Pakistan in 1982 to manufacture a similar low-cost family car. Although the ‘Pak Suzuki Motor Company’ still exists, it has not been as successful as Suzuki in India.

¹³⁶ ‘India Car Firm’s Nationalisation Hit in Parliament’, *Japan Times* (19 December 1980), p. 4.

¹³⁷ Bhargava, *The Maruti Story*, p. 30.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 40; Mitsubishi was a much larger corporation, and this was one of the reasons that led Maruti to not enter into further negotiations.

‘If the Maruti-Suzuki deal moves ahead quickly and successfully, more such interest would appear to be guaranteed, provided India is willing and able, to take advantage of it. For now, the size of the investment and transfer of technology by Suzuki makes it, as one observer puts it, “the biggest thing to ever happen between India and Japan”.’¹³⁹

Looking Eastward: ‘A Promising New Phase’¹⁴⁰

In January 1982, a report in the *Times of India* reflected upon Japan’s desire to deepen its relations with India. Quoting then Japanese Foreign Minister, Yoshio Sakurauchi, on his visit to New Delhi, it noted:

‘Stability in the sub-continent and the Indian Ocean have become “increasingly important” to Japan, and the government therefore intends to strengthen relations with countries of the region...[Sakurauchi] called upon the government and the people of India “to turn their eyes and hearts towards Japan and open out their arms to our country”.’¹⁴¹

In another report, journalist Inder Malhotra explained the historical context of this ‘promising’ relationship:

‘Free India, stepping on the world stage exactly two years after Japan’s complete and unconditional surrender in the second world war, had gone out of its way to befriend a defeated and then ostracized Japan...The main point about relations between this country and Japan is not that they have been close and friendly but that they could have been, indeed should have been, closer and friendlier.’¹⁴²

After a long spell of inactivity, Mrs Gandhi’s positive outlook on foreign investment was indeed welcomed by the Japanese. As the Japanese Minister in charge of sub-continental affairs, Yausji Ishigaki, explained:

‘...an obstacle to quicker progress on joint ventures was the image in the minds of Japanese businessmen. For long years they have seen India as a country seeking to develop an “autonomous” economy through its own efforts, leaving little room for foreign investment...What is needed is not big publicity about policy changes

¹³⁹ H. Stockwin, ‘Japanese interest riveted to India’, *TOI* (6 August 1982), p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Borrowing from I. Malhotra, ‘India-Japan Relations: A Promising New Phase’, *TOI* (2 September 1982), p. 8.

¹⁴¹ D. Mukherjee, ‘Japan desires closer relations with India’, *TOI* (20 January 1982), p. 15.

¹⁴² Malhotra noted Nehru’s efforts in enabling Japan ‘to step back into the Asian fold for the first time’ since the Second World War. Citing the first Asiad hosted in Delhi in 1951, he added: ‘When Japan’s desire to take part in the Games became known there were vigorous protests from Indonesia and other South-East Asian countries. But Mr Nehru’s persuasive charm eventually prevailed and the rising sun went up, along with other Asian flags, at the national stadium in New Delhi.’ (Malhotra, ‘India-Japan Relations’); Interestingly, in early 1980, the Japanese Vice-President of the International Olympic Committee offered to build a sports stadium in Delhi for the 1982 Games ‘on behalf of his country...in the interests of Indo-Japanese friendship’. ‘Baby Elephant Asiad Mascot’, *TOI* (2 February 1980), p. 7.

but actual experience of their working. Bureaucratic procedures resulting in long delays have been a major cause of complaint by our businessmen.¹⁴³

Ishigaki's remarks resonated with Krishnamurthy as he reveals in his memoirs:

'Once again I found myself taking over as head of an organisation with a credibility crisis. In the case of BHEL, people doubted the capacity of Indian managers to manage large organisations. [With Maruti], they doubted the capacity of an Indian firm – and a public sector one at that – to produce a quality car and that too in the volumes that the project was targeted to achieve.'¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, the above report concluded:

'In both academic and business circles [in Japan] there are signs of a renewal of interest in expanding ties with India. Mr. Shigeo Nagano, the veteran president of the powerful Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says that the scope for doing that was now better in view of "the recent efforts of the government of India to attract foreign investment within the framework of its policies".'¹⁴⁵

In light of these rapid developments, *Japan Times* declared the Maruti-Suzuki collaboration as 'the first major landmark in the modernisation of the Indian automobile industry' with 'far-reaching consequences' for the development of Indian industry.¹⁴⁶

It was agreed upon by both parties at the time that GOI would hold an equity of seventy four percent, leaving Suzuki with twenty six percent participation.¹⁴⁷ Legally, this meant that all critical decisions would require the approval of both parties. For Krishnamurthy, this was yet another way to insulate Maruti from political interference:

'I knew Maruti was more vulnerable than other public sector undertakings since it was identified with the Gandhi family. I would not be there permanently, and even

¹⁴³ Quoted in Mukherjee, 'Japan desires closer relations with India'; Similar perceptions have impacted India's poor performance in the often-quoted 'Ease of Doing Business' index compiled by the World Bank. Prime Minister Modi's spectacular 'Make in India' initiative can be viewed as an attempt to improve the image of bureaucratic and legal institutions in India that determine the ease with which foreign businesses can operate in the country. See World Bank's 'Doing Business' profile of India at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/india> (16 August 2018).

¹⁴⁴ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 135.

¹⁴⁵ Mukherjee, 'Japan desires closer relations with India'.

¹⁴⁶ 'India to make small cars with Suzuki', *Japan Times* (3 October 1982), p. 5; Notably, the Planning Commission constituted a special 'India-Japan Study Committee' to explore potential areas of economic cooperation. Reports published by the Committee were used as reference material by policy makers, and included subjects such as 'Japan's experience in introducing technology after World War II' and 'Investment in India – Japanese perception'. Government of India, Planning Commission, 'India-Japan Study Committee' Report 1982-83, http://planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/ar_e82_83.pdf (4 April 2017), pp. 25-6.

¹⁴⁷ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 149.

if I was, the political bosses could change. In times of fluctuating political fortunes, Maruti would be a target since it would be seen as a way of hurting Mrs Gandhi.¹⁴⁸

Similarly, the twenty six percent equity for Suzuki ensured that ‘its approval of important policy matters, such as CEO changes, was included as a condition in the agreement’, thereby allowing it to incorporate Japanese management styles into the venture.¹⁴⁹

Critical of this statute, the opposition questioned the legal arrangement in Parliament.

For instance, Amar Roy Pradhan, MP from the All India Forward Bloc, argued:

‘Is [this] not a clear-cut instance of India’s public sector working as an infrastructure of the multinationals such as Suzuki & Co?’¹⁵⁰

to which then Minister of Industry, N. D. Tiwari, responded:

‘I would request the honourable Minister to not bring in the question of multinationals and all that because this collaboration we have had in the context of induction of new fuel efficient small vehicle technology (sic). It is a collaboration which is fully in keeping with our national interests to update the automotive industry.’¹⁵¹

Another Congress MP eagerly defended Mrs Gandhi’s decision to revitalise Maruti through foreign collaboration:

‘Production of a small passenger car in the country was a dream in 1955-56 and we are pleased that our Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, under whose Government with her personal efforts these small passenger cars are going to be produced in our country (sic). These are to be used by the middle class people of our country. It is a long cherished demand of the people. This small passenger car, as the people say, will be the people’s car.’¹⁵²

Many amongst the public held similar views such as the following reader in the *Times of India*:

‘...for long India could not decide whether “to be or not to be” in the vanguard of the auto industry. Even communist countries have acknowledged the need for individual transport, and have entered into agreements with mass produced car manufacturers from the capitalist world, belatedly realising that technological fall-

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Motohashi, ‘Suzuki Motor’s expansion in India’, p. 228.

¹⁵⁰ *LSD*, 10th session, 32/3, 6 October 1982, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

out from the auto industry gives a tremendous boost to industrial growth. Whereas mass public transport should be upgraded and modernised, it need have no quarrel with individual transport. Japan owes its emergence as the industrial giant of the East mainly due to the spinoff gained from its massive auto industry.¹⁵³

With the support of the majority in Parliament and a welcoming public, the ‘long awaited’,¹⁵⁴ ‘prestigious automobile project’¹⁵⁵ was officially announced by Mrs Gandhi in August 1982.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at MUL/Carwale, <https://www.carwale.com/news/end-of-an-era-family-car-maruti-suzuki-800s-production-ends/> (10 August 2018).

Figure 2.4: Vehicle of Change – Mrs Gandhi inspecting the Maruti 800 model with O. Suzuki (to her right) in Gurgaon¹⁵⁶

Bookings and ‘Car-Wars’¹⁵⁷

‘Buying a new car was impossible. You had to wait for long periods of time before your turn came...I had returned from Germany and I had not brought a car with me. There was no way in which I could have got a car from the market immediately, perhaps the wait was twelve years for a Fiat...But there was a catch. Special and discretionary quotas applied to [employees of] the Bihar government...I was able to get it within weeks.’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ K. J. Pherwani, ‘People’s Car’, *TOI* (16 November 1982), p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Rs. 269-crore Maruti project approved’, *TOI* (18 August 1982), p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Quoting Pratap Bhanu Sharma in *LSD*, 10th session, 32/3, 6 October 1982, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Source: MUL/Carwale, <https://www.carwale.com/news/end-of-an-era-family-car-maruti-suzuki-800s-production-ends/> (10 August 2018).

¹⁵⁷ Borrowing from ‘Starshine and Car-Wars’, *TOI* (10 March 1984), p. 8.

¹⁵⁸ Former Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, quoted in Centre for Civil Society, ‘The Kafkaesque Tower of “DGTD” Clearances’ (10 February 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DU0pZOEHVIE> (3 January 2017).

As noted in the previous chapter, up until the 1980s the consumer goods industry in India was strictly regulated. Most consumer durables such as cars, scooters, cameras, air-conditioners, and telephones were beyond the immediate reach of middle class buyers who often found themselves on long waiting lists to obtain the goods. Contrary to state-professed austerity at the time, the demand for such commodities remained high even when the available options were few. For instance, one would wait for up to three years for a landline connection, and sometimes twelve years for a Premier Padmini – a white one as that was the only available colour.¹⁵⁹

Jennifer Patico, writing about middle class consumption practices in the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 60s, observes:

‘The very dynamics of shortage – and the practices people pursued to circumvent it – themselves partially arose from, and certainly reproduced, a kind of commitment to and investment in consumption that was particular to socialist Eastern Europe in the twentieth century.’¹⁶⁰

In the case of India, consumer goods shortages in the formal economy created a parallel ‘second-hand’ market where goods were often sold for many times their original price.

For instance, entrepreneur Mohit Satyanand describes the fate of a used Premier Padmini:

‘Today nobody wants to buy a second-hand car. The 70s and 80s was the opposite. The moment you drove [the car] out of the dealership, its value increased by up to sixty percent... You could drive a Padmini for three years and sell it for much more after that.’¹⁶¹

The imposition of strict controls and waiting lists was arguably intended to instil the ‘virtues’ of patience and delayed gratification as well as a deep appreciation of the state

¹⁵⁹ Congress MP, Jairam Ramesh, quoted in Centre for Civil Society, ‘The Curious “P” Form’ (3 February 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7m55mdHqiDw> (5 January 2017).

¹⁶⁰ Patico, *Consumption and Social Change in Post-Soviet Middle Class*, p. 37.

¹⁶¹ Mohit Satyanand quoted in Centre for Civil Society, ‘The difficulty of traveling abroad before 1991’ (22 June 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enfGS8VkBYk> (5 January 2017).

as the sole ‘provider’ of consumer goods. However, whilst the majority were expected to patiently wait for their turn, state officials or those with the right ‘connections’ were able to procure the items with relative ease. As Sinha’s quote reveals, discretionary quotas for ‘VIPs’ were a common practice, viewed by many as unjust and corrupt.

The booking process for Maruti 800 began in April 1983, and interested buyers were expected to register at select car dealerships well in advance. Models of the car were exhibited at numerous five star hotels witness to thousands of spectators.¹⁶² Adding to its spectacular hype, newspaper reports noted how ‘an impressive array of VIPs’ including Rajiv Gandhi were amongst the fifty thousand people who had made the ‘first bookings’:

‘They include the Vice-President, Mr. M. Hidayatullah, the Union Finance Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, and other cabinet ministers, some governors, Supreme Court judges, the chief minister of Punjab, Mr. Darbara Singh, several MPs, senior bureaucrats, heads of several public sector undertakings, top brass of the defence and police services, editors and Indians abroad, particularly those in the Gulf countries on contractual jobs.’¹⁶³

On the one hand, such reportage gave Maruti an elevated status as the car coveted by the most powerful people in the country, and even by ‘Indians abroad’.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, that numerous such ‘knowledgeable’ individuals had registered for the car signalled to the public that it must indeed ‘be a good buy’.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, the ‘people’s car’ project clearly targeted the ‘average’ Indian consumer with a middle class salary. Even the allotment process was advertised as being uniquely egalitarian based on a

¹⁶² ‘Maruti car to roll out by year-end’, *TOI* (8 April 1983), p. 10.

¹⁶³ S. Kirpekar, ‘Many VIPs book Maruti car’, *TOI* (7 May 1983), p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Karl Gerth, writing in the context of nineteenth century exhibitions and trade fairs, notes the symbolism and public anticipation built into the act of purchasing the ‘first few tickets’ by important individuals. As Gerth writes, ‘the ceremonious purchase’ of the first exhibition ticket went all the way back to Prince Albert, who bought the first ticket for the Crystal Palace exhibition in London in 1851. K. Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2003), p. 257.

¹⁶⁵ R. Venkataramani, *Japan Enters Indian Industry* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 61.

computerised system. Bookings made with authorised dealers were entered into a lottery such that chances of getting the car were randomised, ‘VIP’ or not. In the same spirit, Minister of Industry, N. D. Tiwari, announced that the booking forms would not require buyers to disclose their occupation or rank to prevent any biases.¹⁶⁶

Despite these measures, the advance booking system was criticised by many in public. That Maruti was advertised as the ‘people’s car’ raised the expectations of many who demanded a more affordable purchase price. At the time, the retail price of a Padmini was roughly Rs. 65,000, whilst an Ambassador cost around Rs. 73,000.¹⁶⁷ Comparatively, the Maruti 800 priced at Rs. 47,000 was advertised as the ‘better, cheaper car’, and one that could be purchased ‘with 15 to 20 months’ salary’ of an ‘average’ employee.¹⁶⁸ However, the booking required an advance deposit of Rs. 10,000, which was by no means a meagre sum. As one prospective buyer noted:

‘The procedure adopted by Maruti Udyog for booking cars to be manufactured appears to be highly irregular. The prescribed deposit of Rs. 10,000 for a vehicle is undoubtedly beyond the means of middle class people for whom the car is meant...There is no reason why a big amount should be demanded for the booking of a car which is yet to prove itself in Indian conditions.’¹⁶⁹

Another interested consumer argued:

‘I feel that the practical aspect of the project has been more or less overlooked. The government claims that this car has been basically made for the “poor and common man” and therefore is moderately priced at Rs. 47,500. It also claims that a separate [air-conditioned] model of the car is being designed for the affluent class. When over 75 per cent of our population is presently living below poverty line, it does not stand to reason to call a person investing around half-a-lakh of rupees, “a common man”. As a matter of fact, the so-called “Janata” model is primarily meant for industrialists, political leaders, as well as fat salaried bureaucrats.’¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ *LSD*, 12th session, 41/21, 24 August 1983, pp. 33-6.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ G.S.G. Vohra, ‘I – People’s Car Next Year’, *TOI* (11 October 1982), p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ O. Singh, ‘Maruti Bookings’, *TOI* (5 May 1983), p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ C. V. Mulgaonkar, ‘Maruti Car’, *TOI* (3 January 1984), p. 8.

In the middle of the booking process, it was further revealed that a five percent discretionary quota would be put in place, giving the Maruti Board the right to allot five percent of the manufactured cars to individuals or institutions ‘in the best interest of the company’.¹⁷¹ Industry Minister, N. D. Tiwari, explained that it was not in the ‘commercial interest’ of the company to place the Board’s proceedings before the Lok Sabha.¹⁷² Although he argued that no ‘VIPs’ were favoured in the selection of allottees, many questioned the purpose of reservations in the first place. For instance, Common Cause, a public interest organisation established in the early 1980s, argued:

‘It is our contention that the mere fact that this practice has been followed by manufacturers of vehicles in the private sector does not justify its adoption by a public sector organisation which is charged with certain social responsibilities and obligations. While it is understandable that special allocations may have to be made for certain essential public requirements, such as ambulances, the allocations to any individuals, whatever their status and importance, will be discriminatory and likely to be challenged as unlawful.’¹⁷³

Others pointedly questioned the lottery system:

‘[MUL] has made much of its fair play in drawing lots for Maruti cars by computer. One has no reason to doubt its bona fides. But in a democracy it is not enough to be fair only. One must appear to be fair. Let MUL publish the lists of its draw of lots in daily newspapers to remove any doubt in the minds of its customers.’¹⁷⁴

There were many who even proposed their own criteria to determine the eligibility for quotas:

‘Of late we have been hearing and reading in the newspapers about the five percent reservation for VIPs in the production of Maruti cars. The definition of VIPs has not so far been elaborated although some registration in this category has also taken place. May I draw the attention of the government to the real persons entitled to priority allotment? They are the shareholders of Maruti Ltd. (in liquidation) who are not likely to receive any compensation for the thousands of rupees given as share money.’¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *LSD*, 12th session, 41/21, 24 August 1983, p. 89.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ H. D. Shourie, ‘Maruti Allotment’, *TOI* (9 July 1983), p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ K. S. Khosla, ‘Maruti Allotments’, *TOI* (15 October 1983), p. 8.

¹⁷⁵ K. C. Nanda, ‘Maruti Cars’, *TOI* (25 October 1983), p. 8.

Public dissatisfaction was thus vocalised on multiple grounds – the lottery system, the quota principle, and the cost of the vehicle.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the Board announced the names of its computer-generated allottees in the presence of Mrs Gandhi and other ‘VIPs’ in a formal ceremony held at a five star hotel in New Delhi. Perhaps public grievances were assuaged to some extent when Maruti announced the donation of its first ‘deluxe’ air-conditioned model of the car to the Hindu temple at Tirupati. This ‘charitable’ act, however, also had its cynics:

‘This, in my opinion, is a good step as it is one of the holiest of holies in India and would help the company in its business promotion. But Maruti being a national institution should donate such cars to the other holy shrines such as Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar; the dargah of Moinuddin Chisti, Ajmer; the Jain trust, Palitana; Mulgandbkuli Vihar, Sarnath; Varanasi, and so on...!’¹⁷⁶

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Raj K. Raj/HT, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/the-very-first-maruti-800-is-now-an-abandoned-rusting-car/story-QZWaKgJFFn5u6L80E8QkMP.html> (23 July 2018).

Figure 2.5: Benevolent State – Mrs Gandhi handing over car keys to the first lottery winner, Harpal Singh (1983)¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ J. S. Bika, ‘Maruti Donations’, *TOI* (10 July 1984), p. 8.

¹⁷⁷ Source: Raj K. Raj/HT, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/the-very-first-maruti-800-is-now-an-abandoned-rusting-car/story-QZWaKgJFFn5u6L80E8QkMP.html> (23 July 2018).

Becoming Properly Middle Class¹⁷⁸

‘Maruti represented mobility. But in my view, not just mobility between Point A and Point B. But in the sense that I can move from Point A and Point B in my life.’¹⁷⁹

The news of the collaboration between Suzuki and GOI also reached an overseas audience. The Indian-American newspaper, *India-West*, published a lengthy report on the ‘public-oriented’ car project, noting the government’s efforts to establish India’s footprint in the automobile sector:

‘The pattern of buyers today reveals that 70 per cent of the cars are bought by the Government and public sector undertakings, rich farmers, and those in the export business. Thus, individual buyers have almost become a vanishing species. But hope is around the corner for the middle class. Early next year, a sleek four-door, four-seater fuel-efficient compact car will make its appearance on the Indian roads. It will be the Maruti or "people's car," to be made in collaboration with Suzuki of Japan.’¹⁸⁰

Rightly, the ‘people’s car’ project had established its target demographic amongst salaried, middle class professionals concentrated in cities. It must be emphasised, however, that despite its appeal, the Maruti 800 was beyond the financial means of the average Indian consumer in the 1980s. In fact, Maruti went on to replace the Ambassador as the symbol of middle class luxury – as ‘the dream car’ – and remained overbooked well into the 1990s. Arguably, car ownership in India became widespread only from the late 1990s onwards when the market was opened to foreign competition.

At the same time, it is remarkable how Maruti transformed ‘the car’ from a luxury good into an object of ‘at least potential mass consumption’.¹⁸¹ Envisaged as a state spectacle, Maruti successfully captured the imagination of millions, and furthered the aspiration

¹⁷⁸ Borrowing from J. Zhang, ‘Family Car, Filial Consumer-Citizens: Becoming properly middle class in post-socialist South China’, *Modern China*, 43/1 (2016), pp. 1–30.

¹⁷⁹ Media critic, Santosh Desai, quoted in National Geographic documentary ‘The 80s India: Relive the Era’ (2013).

¹⁸⁰ M. G. Srinath, ‘India’s Automobile Industry Shifts Into Top Gear with Suzuki’s Maruti’, *India-West* (1 April 1983), p. 14.

¹⁸¹ M. Kelly, ‘Essay Review – K. Ross, Fast Cars, Clean Bodies’, *FCS*, 6 (1995), p. 416.

of ‘family car’ ownership in India. Although the middle class has always been associated with an aspirational culture of sorts, the 1980s witnessed the state, for the first time, legitimising and actively ‘selling’ this culture to the public. Its allotment process and advertisement as the ‘people’s car’ were important signals that spurred middle class demands for other consumer goods in the market. Indeed, as advertisement executive, Santosh Desai, recalls, Maruti symbolised mobility within and even beyond the middle class:

‘The Maruti freed us from our scripts. For most of us, who were born in the middle class only to die there, the car was a border we could imagine crossing...The Maruti compressed the promise of consumerism in its appearance, performance and price. It flung the doors of aspiration wide open and made us believe for the first time we could escape the middle class...In a larger sense, it made us experience the power of desire and the exhilaration of being in the driver’s seat.’¹⁸²

Moreover, the signalling effect was reinforced by official policy changes. An article in *India Today* noted the state-sponsored roots of this ‘new’ middle class culture:

‘Over the last decade, a money-hungry government has actually slashed personal income tax rates from a maximum of 97 per cent to no more than 50 per cent, and sharply reduced the excise and customs duties on the kind of goods especially dear to the middle class: two-wheelers, cars, refrigerators (which today cost only marginally more than what they did a decade ago, despite over 100 per cent inflation), TV sets, and all manner of consumer electronic goods. At one extreme, the customs duty on even Scotch whisky was slashed last fortnight!’¹⁸³

The change in perception with regards to consumption is also demonstrated by the visual and textual vocabularies of consumer goods advertisements that flooded newspapers and magazines at the time, and indeed, as Ross notes, ‘preceded to a large extent’ their actual availability in the market.¹⁸⁴ These advertisements reveal the unique and innovative ways in which producers branded their products from a supply

¹⁸² S. Desai, *Mother Pious Lady: Making Sense of Everyday Life* (New Delhi, 2015), Kindle edition, Chapter 7 ‘Looking Back at the Maruti’.

¹⁸³ T. N. Ninan, ‘Rise of the middle class’, *IT* (16 December 1985), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indias-middle-class-represents-the-emergence-of-a-major-political-and-economic-force/1/354808.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 27.

perspective, but also serve as good indicators of consumer aspirations. For instance, most passenger car advertisements in the 1950s and 1960s described the car as a sought-after luxury with phrases such as ‘a cut above the rest’, ‘the ideal car for the chauffeur-driven’, ‘luxuriously upholstered’, etc.¹⁸⁵ These descriptions reflect the reality of the time as car ownership was limited to political and business elites. Advertisements for the Ambassador, in particular, showed wealthy looking couples as passengers of their solid and bulky ‘chauffeur-driven’ car – men dressed in Western suits and women typically in *saris* with jewels around their neck. (Figure 2.6)

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Team-BHP, <http://www.team-bhp.com/forum/vintage-cars-classics-india/31864-classic-advertisement-brochure-thread-29.html> (29 May 2018).

Figure 2.6: For the Status Conscious – Ambassador ‘Mark 2’ (c.1960s)¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ See D. Ravichandran, ‘The Best Indian Vintage Car Ads’, Wagenclub, <http://wagenclub.com/2014/11/the-best-indian-vintage-car-ads.html> (18 January 2017).

¹⁸⁶ Source: Team-BHP, <http://www.team-bhp.com/forum/vintage-cars-classics-india/31864-classic-advertisement-brochure-thread-29.html> (29 May 2018).

These are in contrast with advertisements for the Maruti 800 and other ‘owner-driven’ cars introduced in the market post-1991. Most Maruti advertisements depicted a nuclear family – a housewife with her two school-going children and briefcase-carrying husband with the car in the foreground (Figures 2.7 and 2.8). Phrases such as ‘family car’, ‘value for money’, ‘economical’, and ‘user friendly’ targeted first time middle class buyers. Similarly, when addressing car dealers, the objective was clear – ‘to maximise the market for Maruti, and to project and develop the highest possible image for the Company’, comparable to that in ‘developed countries’ (Figure 2.7).

Such creative yet carefully crafted representations of the ideal middle class family also reinforced certain gender roles. Kristen Ross notes how automobile advertisements have historically depicted the car as ‘l’aime de l’homme’ or ‘man’s friend’ as the ‘conjugal partner’ to household items like refrigerators and cooking appliances showcased as ‘les amis de la femme’ or ‘woman’s friends’ (see Figures 1.13-1.17 in Chapter 1, pp. 101-4).¹⁸⁷ Ironically, many commentators suggest that Maruti 800’s ‘small’ design in practice turned out to be liberating for women who could now drive independently for the first time. This argument reflects its own physical stereotypes as journalist Vinod Dua remarks how Indian women would never be seen driving the ‘bulky’ Ambassador but the ‘small’ Maruti 800 offered them a chance to be independent as ‘mobility ultimately came to mean freedom’.¹⁸⁸

Despite its alleged unisex appeal, Maruti continues to be a popular item of dowry offered to Indian grooms at weddings.

¹⁸⁷ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in National Geographic documentary ‘The 80s India: Relive the Era’ (2013).

Maruti Udyog Limited Invites applications for dealership in 16 cities. Ahmedabad Bangalore • Bhopal • Bhubaneshwar • Bombay Calcutta • Chandigarh • Delhi • Gauhati Hyderabad • Jaipur • Jammu/Srinagar Lucknow • Madras • Patna • Trivandrum

Maruti Udyog Limited, a public sector company, plans to appoint dealers in about 59 cities spread throughout the country. These dealers will be appointed in a phased manner.

The first phase is the appointment of dealers in the 16 cities listed above. Applications for the remaining cities will be invited later. All dealerships will be for the sales and service of the Company's products.

Maruti plans to go into production by the end of 1983, and will be producing cars, vans, pick-up trucks and three-wheel drive vehicles. The production volume planned for 1984-85 is 20,000 and will increase to 100,000 by 1988-89. It is expected that each dealer should be able to sell 1,500-2,000 vehicles a year.

The main criteria for appointing dealers shall be the ability of the dealer to provide a standard of customer service which is comparable to that available in developed countries, to maximise the market for Maruti and to project and develop the highest possible image of the Company. Where necessary, dealers will need to make suitable arrangements for the sale and service of vehicles in towns other than their headquarters but included within their territorial jurisdiction, in a manner acceptable to Maruti.

Maruti will provide dealers with designs for the show-room, layout, and equipment specifications for the workshop, minimum spare-parts stocks to be carried as well as facilities for training of servicing engineers and mechanics.

Applications for dealership should be submitted so as to reach the undersigned by 15th January, 1983, and should give full information under the following heads:

1. Full name, particulars and status of the applicant; if the applicant is a public limited company, give complete information relating to equity structure of the company, main shareholders, names of directors; copies of last three balance sheets; etc.
2. If the applicant is a private limited company, indicate names of the main shareholders and balance sheets/income tax paid by the company in the last three years; if the applicant is a partnership company, indicate names and shareholdings of partners and copies of income-tax assessments of last three years.
3. If the applicant is an individual, give name, age, full educational qualifications and experience.
4. Indicate whether you have any show-room/workshop for automobiles. If so, give full particulars. If not, indicate whether land for these is available and if so, give particulars about the land. If land is not available, indicate whether land can be purchased and if so, within what period and at what location.
5. Give full particulars about financial status and ability to make investments in show-room/workshop/stocking of spare parts/purchase of vehicles. It is expected that the investment required would be Rs. 50 lakhs for metropolitan cities, Rs. 20 lakhs for Class 'A' cities and Rs. 20 lakhs for the other cities. The investment amount will reduce to the extent workshop, show-room or land is available.
6. In addition a cash credit limit for the purchase of cars would be needed. Dealers will also be required to provide a cash security deposit of Rs. 5 lakhs, payable shortly before the delivery of vehicles commences. This would bear interest at 10%. Applicants need to provide a letter from their bankers, certifying ability to make these investments and also assuring the applicants' ability to provide the cash deposit and to get a cash credit limit of at least Rs. 40 lakhs.
7. Give full details of previous business experience.
8. Indicate whether the applicant or any of the partners, directors or their immediate relatives (wives or minor children) are, in any way, connected with any agency for the sale of motor cars or jeeps.
9. Give your assessment, in about 300 words, as to how you will be able to achieve the requirements of Maruti in respect of customer service, market development and of projecting the Company's image.
10. All applications should be accompanied by earnest money (refundable) in the form of a crossed bank draft drawn in favour of Maruti Udyog Limited on Canara Bank, Parliament Street Branch, New Delhi for an amount of Rs. 10,000. The application should be marked "Dealership" on the envelope and addressed to: The Senior Manager (Marketing), Maruti Udyog Limited, HANGALAYA (6th Floor), 15-Bahadurpura Road, NEW DELHI-110 001.



Maruti Udyog Limited

Figure 2.7: Maruti-Suzuki Dealership Invitation (1982)¹⁸⁹

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Figure 2.8: Family Friendly Maruti 800 (2014) – In this more contemporary setting of glass buildings and global ‘corporatized’ living, the small car is ideal for only one child, but spacious enough for the plethora of gifts and consumer goods purchased.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Source: *TOI* (18 December 1982), p. 7. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com

¹⁹⁰ Source: Carwale, <https://www.carwale.com/news/end-of-an-era-family-car-maruti-suzuki-800s-production-ends/> (29 May 2018).

In the 1990s, the imagery and language of car advertisements became bolder and rife with double entendre. For instance, an advertisement for the Maruti 'Esteem' from 1998 (Figure 2.9) shows a female model in a Western dress next to the car, as the text reads:

'The shape that will launch a thousand sighs – Body coloured bumpers hold you in a warm embrace. The driving seat fits snug. The upholstery works its magic over you. The soft, moulded dashboard seduces you, with controls within easy reach. An engine responds to your nearest touch. The 1998 Esteem. Get set for sighs of admiration.'

The campaign for 'Esteem' was designed to capture a new demographic with sign-off statements such as 'What Men With Drive Will Drive' and 'Much More Than Luxury'.¹⁹¹ Another advertisement for Mahindra's roofless 'Classic' model from the period similarly exclaimed,

'Admit it. You've always been crazy about topless models!'

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Team-BHP, <http://www.team-bhp.com/forum/indian-car-scene/58995-ads-90s-decade-changed-indian-automotive-industry.html> (29 may 2018).

Figure 2.9: Changing Aspirations – Maruti-Suzuki Esteem advertisement (1997)¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ 'Maruti Esteem: Now 'Much more than luxury'', *Gatirang*, 14 (Apr – Jun 1996), p. 12.

¹⁹² Source: Team-BHP, <http://www.team-bhp.com/forum/indian-car-scene/58995-ads-90s-decade-changed-indian-automotive-industry.html> (29 may 2018).

Perhaps even more revealing are the advertisements designed by car dealerships that offered consumer goods as ‘prizes’ for making early bookings. One such ‘Resham Motors’ in Bombay advertised:

‘Hurry! Hurry! Book Maruti Gypsy/Van and claim your fabulous prizes – Suzuki motor cycle, air-conditioner, refrigerator, music system, personal computer, colour television, etc. etc.’¹⁹³

Another dealer, ‘Vitesse’, announced:

‘the draw for the winners of Maruti Van and Bombay-London-Bombay air ticket for two by film star, Mr. Anil Kapoor, today at 7pm at our Worli showroom.’

There were others who incorporated Maruti’s ‘brand image’ to advertise their unique services, such as ‘JAI Auto’ in Bombay:

‘When your car is an extension of your workplace...A cool interior is the best way to keep your cool. Papers, papers and yet more papers! Reports to read, speeches to go over, signatures to be made. A never ending stream of work that spills over your normal working hours. And faithfully accompanies you every day in your car to-and-from your office from-and-to your home!’¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ The ‘Gypsy’ and the ‘Van’ were popular passenger cars manufactured by MUL in the late 1980s.

¹⁹⁴ *TOI* (22 May 1985), p. 5.

**When your car is
an extension of your work place...**

**A cool car interior is the
best way to keep your cool!**

FIVE STAR

Papers, papers and yet more papers! Reports to read, speeches to go over, signatures to be made. A never ending stream of work that spills over your normal working hours. And faithfully accompanies you everyday in your car to-and-from your office, from-and-to your home! What you wouldn't give for an air-conditioned car? Well, what are you waiting for, it takes less time than you think.

**Come to JAI or just dial 4921696
and we will show you how quickly,
how economically and how efficiently
we can air-condition your car.
In fact, we do it within a day!**

JAI offers you some of the best car air-conditioners in the world. To keep out the summer's heat, the dust, the grime, the pollution—and

to make your car a pleasure to travel and to work in.

Come to JAI, we will help you to select the right air-conditioner for your car—be it an imported one, Ambassador, Fiat or Dolphin. Also available are original custom-built units for installation in the new Contessa and Maruti.

We ensure a system that works well for your car. From a range of world famous car air-conditioning units... Hitachi, Unicle (Super King), Palm Air (Excel), and many others.

And once installed, JAI AUTO will maintain it for you too.

JAI AUTO

Avail of our Chauffeur driven replacement car facility at nominal rates.

If your car keeps cool, so do you!

JAI AUTO: 9, Medhu Industrial Estate, Pandurang Budhkar Marg, Worli, Bombay-400 013. Phs: 4921696, 4925186. Telex: 011-76039 BAID IN. MARKHA 1388

Figure 2.10: Consumer-Citizens – ‘If your car keeps cool, so do you!’¹⁹⁵

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Figure 2.10 is a good example of a new logic in consumer advertising that became popular during this period, combining the idea of working hard (‘long hours’) to fulfil aspirational, primarily material, desires. In this case, the reward for a hard day’s work was the air-conditioned car with its promise of shielding one from the grime and pollution of the city.¹⁹⁶ The car as ‘l’aime de l’homme’ symbolised the paternal ‘duty’

¹⁹⁵ Source: Ibid. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com

¹⁹⁶ Like the private ‘enclave’ of the Asiad Village, the car furthered social exclusivity through the segregation of public space based on notions of pollution/cleanliness and ‘public’ health. As Caldeira observes, ‘the relationship [the enclaves] establish with the rest of the city and its public life is one of avoidance...[P]ublic streets become spaces for elite’s circulation by car and for poor people’s circulation by foot or public transportation’. (T. Caldeira, ‘Fortified Enclaves: The new urban segregation’ in J. Holston ed., *Cities and Citizenship* (Durham, 1999), p. 125); In this context, the state-sponsored promotion of cars ironically reflects the failure of the state to provide a clean environment for its citizens in the first place. It is ironic that as car usage leads to a worsening of air quality in cities, consumerist fantasies such as air-conditioners, air purifiers, and, indeed, the car itself are viewed as somehow

of the male breadwinner to care for the family outside the home as a ‘conjugal partner’ to feminine domesticity inside the home as noted in the previous chapter.¹⁹⁷

In a powerful way, the image also represents the ‘business world’ in a microcosm as an exclusive gendered space overwhelmingly dominated by ‘driven’ men. The language suggests that the ‘privileges of consumer access’ are linked to professionalism in the work place.¹⁹⁸ The implicit notion of sacrifice alongside the explicit demand to work hard is once again reminiscent of the masculinised performativity of Nehruvian nation-building, or what Buck-Morss describes in her Soviet ‘dreamworlds’ as the cult of ‘human-as-machine’.¹⁹⁹ However, the statist discourse of working hard for the national good is now replaced by consumerist rewards for individual performance. In this context, Chowdhury argues that modern forms of consumer-citizenship are ‘not about rights that collective struggle has forced the state to honour’, nor do they ‘entail civic responsibilities such as voting’.²⁰⁰ Indeed, consumer-citizenship is about ‘economic responsibilities that accompany the act of earning “your own living”’.²⁰¹ Similarly, the consumer-citizen is one who contributes to the economy as a ‘responsible earner’, and in turn earns the ‘right’ to consume – ‘Consumption is his reward.’²⁰²

alleviating middle class anxieties about pollution and health. Also see D. Arnold, ‘The Problem of Traffic: The street-life of modernity in late-colonial India’, *MAS*, 46/1 (2012), pp. 119-41 for an engaging analysis of the ambiguous relationship between vehicular technologies and the middle class disciplining of public roads in late-colonial India.

¹⁹⁷ See pp. 99-106 of this thesis.

¹⁹⁸ Patino, *Consumption and Social Change*, p. 40.

¹⁹⁹ See Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, pp. 105-7.

²⁰⁰ K. Chowdhury, *The New India: Citizenship, Subjectivity, and Economic Liberalisation* (New York, 2011), p. 61.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

Zhang, in his paper on the urban middle class in China, argues that the making of class, family, and state is a ‘mutually constructive process’ in the new material world.²⁰³ In particular, he illustrates how middle class lifestyles in China, increasingly associated with the car, are ‘deeply embedded in...the multigenerational familial relationship contoured by state reproductive policies and the new political economy’.²⁰⁴ This argument has been partly examined above with reference to the ‘small family’ concept that shaped Maruti’s image. Additionally, Zhang’s analysis is relevant to the study of the role of state in advancing a set of values consistent with the objectives of making a particular type of nation-citizen. Following Zhang and Chowdhury above, the next section examines how Maruti was a state-made example of the values of discipline, productivity, and collectivity found in the new consumer-citizen in India.

Making Consumer-Citizens: ‘Maruti Culture’

‘The phenomenal success and growth of Maruti may be ascribed to a number of factors. Exceptional government support, preferential duty concessions, liberal permissions to hike prices, the customers’ preference for a new, modern car, the middle class boom in the country – all these have undoubtedly played their part. But by any reckoning, the most crucial factor has been the unique system of Japanese Management practices introduced from the very inception.’²⁰⁵

In his memoirs, Krishnamurthy proudly declares, ‘If there is one organisation which can claim to have been a catalyst for a different kind of work culture, it is Maruti’.²⁰⁶ For three decades, India’s public sector institutions were in disrepute for their stifling bureaucracy, inefficiency, and aversion to change. With Maruti, Mrs Gandhi sought to transform the image of state-managed projects by aligning their work culture with the best practices followed in the ‘developed’ world. As Krishnamurthy stated early on,

²⁰³ Zhang, ‘Family Car, Filial Consumer-Citizens’, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ B. Chatterjee, *Japanese Management: Maruti and the Indian Experience* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 20.

²⁰⁶ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 163.

‘[Maruti] may be owned by the government, but we have no intention of running this like a government company’.²⁰⁷

In particular, its collaboration with Suzuki exposed Maruti to what is popularly understood as the Japanese management system, and its core philosophies centred around the worker/employee. In his comprehensive study of Japanese management practices at Maruti, Bhaskar Chatterjee examines the influence of Japanese thought on Maruti’s work culture in its formative years.²⁰⁸ First, Chatterjee outlines the similarities between the Japanese and Indian socio-cultural milieux, particularly the relevance of ‘traditional values and ideologies inherited from their past’ which made it easier for Indians to adopt certain practices.²⁰⁹ Discussing the Tokugawa shogunate era of Japanese feudalism, Chatterjee compares its rigid and hereditary class-based hierarchy to the Indian caste system, noting:

‘Thus, within each social group, the individual knew exactly where he stood in relation to the others, as his status in society was clearly determined by his occupation, age, sex, marital status, wealth, position in the family, and soon his class and sub-class were limited by different sets of elaborate regulations defining political status and responsibilities.’²¹⁰

Thus in both contexts, individuals were made part of a ‘collectivity-oriented’ society, and the ‘norms and standards of collectivity’ formed ‘the basis of thought and action for every member of the group’.²¹¹ This was in contrast with the Western worldview

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Chatterjee, a former IAS officer and advisor in the Planning Commission, is regarded as the ‘Father of Corporate Social Responsibility’(CSR) in India.

²⁰⁹ Chatterjee, *Japanese Management*, pp. 2-5.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 6–7; Also see A. Ghosh, ‘Japanese “Zaibatsus” and Indian Industrial Houses’, *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 33/3 (1974), p. 318.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 7; On the fuzziness of individual versus group identity in the industrial context, see Ritu Birla’s *Stages of Capital: Law, Culture, and Market Governance in Late Colonial India* (Durham, 2009), which explores indigenous capitalists, or ‘joint-family’ businesses in colonial India as a community that constantly tread the line between customary practice and personal law, and formal legal codes of conduct instituted by the imperial state. Birla examines the insularity of the family/community complex amongst groups such as the *Marwaris*, which added to the colonial state’s ‘anxiety’ vis-à-vis the indigenous capitalists.

which was understood as being centred on the individual.²¹² Following this principle, the ‘world of the Japanese salaried worker’ was also ‘monolithic, orderly, and group-oriented’.²¹³ The worker/employee was inducted into a family-like work complex where his position was based upon seniority, and his commitment to the company. The worker was encouraged to develop a personal relationship with the organisation, and to act with the belief that the two shared ‘the same fate’.²¹⁴

Another central tenet, curiously adopted alongside an enforced hierarchy, was that of egalitarianism.²¹⁵ In Maruti, this was associated with the act of treating people with dignity regardless if one was a factory worker, a middle manager, or the chairman himself. Krishnamurthy writes that there was no class distinction at Maruti – ‘If a rule applied to a worker, it applied to everybody, including me as well. The hours of work, number of holidays, medical benefits, and comforts at the work place were the same

²¹² Interestingly, Japan’s history of passenger cars has much in common with the Indian experience. An exhibition booklet from the Toyota Automobile Museum near Nagoya in Japan reveals some noteworthy features. The exhibition titled ‘Dawn of the Family Car Age: People got at last their own car’ (sic) was on display between April and June 1992. It focused on the period between 1955 and 1966 in Japan, ‘tracing the steps with which automobiles, for long the dream of many people, came within their reach as family cars’. The exhibition showcased post-War Japan where private car ownership was negligible. Influenced by American motorisation and numerous ‘Auto Shows’ organised in Tokyo, aspirations for car ownership steadily rose in the 1950s. For some time, second-hand cars were popular since purchasing a new vehicle was expensive. In May 1955, a ‘prestigious’ Japanese economic journal published an article on a ‘People’s Car Project’, which although failed to materialise at the time, raised people’s expectations from domestic car manufacturers. The exhibition also traced the ease in availability of consumer goods in the market during this period, which ‘revolutionised’ the concept of consumption, and ‘set the stage for the coming age of automobiles’ in Japan. By the 1960s, the consumer-led boom had introduced the ‘fad’ for the 3Cs: colour TV, car, and cooler (air-conditioner). Toyota Automobile Museum, *Dawn of the Family Car Age*, exhibition booklet (30 June 1992), pp. 19-46.

²¹³ Chatterjee, *Japanese Management*, p. 19.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²¹⁵ On the tensions and contradictions inherent in Japanese Confucianist work ethic, see M. J. Dollinger, ‘Confucian Ethics and Japanese Management Practices’, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 7 (1988), pp. 575-84. Dollinger observes how the Japanese ‘have consciously chosen to...maintain their traditions on matters social and interpersonal’, but on ‘technological issues, they have adopted Western science and practice’, adding that ‘when the issue has been the adoption or design of a socio-technical system, the Japanese have chosen system harmony over individual rights’ (p. 583). On the principle of equality, Dollinger discusses conflicts in the Confucian ‘value system’ as ‘the need for rigid hierarchy and the full development of humanity’ where ‘hierarchical barriers prevent each person from reaching full potential’. This inherent contradiction is reproduced in the Japanese work place in the form of rigid hierarchies, and the simultaneous emphasis on treating individuals with dignity and respect (p. 581).

for all categories of employees'.²¹⁶ This general principle is followed to this day, and is visible in Maruti's unique practice of enforcing common uniforms, common canteens, common toilets, and open offices without partitions.²¹⁷

Crucially, Suzuki's insistence on punctuality, discipline, and discipline-linked productivity was strongly enforced in Maruti.²¹⁸ This took several 'Japanese-style manifestations' such as arriving at the work place fifteen minutes early, morning 'limbering up' exercises, regimented time clocks, making attendance a criterion to determine promotions, etc.²¹⁹ Even the communal canteen system was implemented to encourage employees to finish their meals quickly. Although these practices were not coercive, they were communicated clearly in weekly meetings and official circulars personally drafted by Chairman Krishnamurthy. Chatterjee notes that official circulars were distributed once every two or three months, and addressed a wide range of subjects 'which collectively were to form the core of a well-defined and distinctively "Japanese Maruti Culture"'.²²⁰

In one of the circulars, Krishnamurthy enlisted its basic philosophies:

'Dear Colleague...A compliance of the work culture with the organisational objectives is very essential. In order that we comply with the basic objectives adopted by Maruti since its inception, viz., fostering efficiency, productivity and

²¹⁶ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 166.

²¹⁷ Former Managing Director of MUL, Jagdish Khattar, notes that the concept of an open office, uniforms, and a common canteen was 'path-breaking for corporate India' at a time when it was 'dominated either by traditional family-controlled businesses or the suffocating hierarchy of government companies'. Indeed, the Maruti uniform became a 'status symbol' as employees began to get recognised in public. (Khattar, *Driven*, p. 176); A standardised dress for all employees was perhaps intended to foster unity and team-spirit, much like in a military regiment. Interestingly, as David Arnold observes, Indian factory workers' 'loose-fitting saris, dhotis, and shawls' often became trapped in industrial equipment, causing death and injury. The introduction of a dress code can perhaps also be explained as a means to avoid delays in production due to accidents. Arnold, 'The Problem of Traffic', p. 136.

²¹⁸ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 163.

²¹⁹ Chatterjee, *Japanese Management*, p. 39; The company awarded employees with high attendance records during annual Independence Day and 'Family-Day' celebrations, often offering awardees opportunities to travel to Japan for training. Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 165.

²²⁰ Chatterjee, *Japanese Management*, pp. 41-2.

team spirit, we have to start with the basic pre-requisite of creating an environment where only a “we” feeling dominates – where each one of us considers himself/herself to be an important member of one large Maruti family.²²¹

On the concept of ‘Maruti as a Family’, he noted:

‘Remembering that each of us is a member of a family – either as a father, mother, son or daughter – our task is to adhere with those very familial norms at our place of work – of each member helping the fellow-workers with their work and problems, building a congenial atmosphere of openness and developing a sense of pride from being a member of the Maruti family.’²²²

Another lengthy circular explained other Japanese principles worthy of emulation such as ‘discipline’, ‘time management’, ‘combined responsibility’, ‘values of economy’, and ‘development of human resource’.²²³

It is worth noting that a set of similar instructive phrases was vocalised by the Congress Party during the Emergency both to justify it and to give it legitimacy. When the Emergency was first proclaimed, it was justified as a necessary measure to reinstate economic and political stability. The lack of ‘collective discipline’ prevalent amongst hoarders and smugglers, and others who had carried out numerous strikes, *bandhs*, and lock-outs was viewed as a serious challenge for the economy which had to be put back

²²¹ Circular dated 6 August 1984 in *Ibid.*, pp. 92-4.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Circular dated 5 September 1984 in *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101; Notably, an article in Maruti’s in-house journal from 1997 describes the Japanese concept of *Yaru ki*, or the ‘zeal with which the Japanese pursued work without a profit motive’, to be similar to the work ethic ‘propagated in the ancient Indian spiritual text, the *Bhagvad Gita*’. It urged workers to follow the path of *nishkama karma*, or the committed pursuit of work without expectation of reward. N. Chibber, ‘Yaru-Ki: The traditional work ethic’, *Gatirang*, (Apr – Sep 1997), p. 24; On the significance of human resource in Japanese management, see N. Hatvany and V. Pucik’s ‘Japanese Management Practices and Productivity’, *Organisational Dynamics*, (1981), pp. 5-27. The author outlines three fundamental practices that define the Japanese approach to human resource – long-term secure employment, imparting a unique company philosophy, and integrating the employee in the decision-making process. Consultative decision-making, in particular, is followed in Maruti in the form of *ringi* – the passing around of a document called *ringi* containing a proposal for peer review. The *ringi* is sent to all team members, and the proposal is approved or rejected with unanimous consent. William Ouchi, in his acclaimed book *Theory Z*, describes *ringi* as ‘part of a culture’ which ‘consists of a set of symbols, ceremonies, and myths that...put flesh on what would otherwise be sparse and abstract ideas’. He notes, ‘When the value of cooperation is expressed through the ritual of *ringi*...then the neophyte experiences the philosophy of the corporation in a very concrete way’. W. G. Ouchi, *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge* (New York, 1982), p. 35.

on track.²²⁴ Thus Mrs Gandhi's 'Twenty-Point Programme' was announced with its key focus on the economy, and punishment of tax evaders, smugglers, and black marketers.

Supporters of the Emergency observed how trains and buses began running on time whilst noted social reformer, Vinoba Bhave, declared it an *Anushasan Parva* – a time for discipline.²²⁵ The rhetorical 'discipline of the graveyard' was reproduced in the public sphere as imaginative posters and visual campaigns 'framed in such a way that one was expected to agree and, perhaps, pass the word on'.²²⁶ Arvind Rajagopal examines a series of Emergency-era posters that precisely conveyed statist dictums garbed in the language of national progress. Describing the images, Rajagopal notes how 'The nation was "on the move" and there was much to be done. "Less talk" meant "more work", so there was little need for discussion' (Figure 2.11).²²⁷ A popular phrase urged, 'Iron Will and Hard Work Shall Sustain Us', whilst another reiterated Mrs Gandhi's 'Call for National Unity and Discipline':

'This is a time for unity and discipline. I am fully confident that with each day the situation will improve and that in this task our people, in towns and villages, will give us their full support, so that the country will be strengthened.'²²⁸

Rajagopal argues that these slogans were 'genre-crossing, government propaganda' meant to be interpreted as 'conditions' to be obeyed by all.²²⁹

²²⁴ Rajagopal, 'The Emergency as Prehistory', p. 1021; In certain ways, the famous Bombay textile mills strike led by unionist, Datta Samant, in 1982 evoked memories of the railway strikes that pre-empted the Emergency. Between 1977 and 1982, Samant single-handedly organised more strikes than any previous union leader. Notably, he also negotiated a wage increase for factory workers at Premier Automobiles. In light of Samant's rising clout amongst workers around the country, the contentious relationship between Maruti's workers' union and the management requires further study not least due to a recent event which led to the death of a Maruti employee amidst violent altercations at the Manesar plant. See S. Dubey, 'Datta Samant: A lion who prowls...' (14 July 2014), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19820228-datta-samant-a-lion-who-prowls-the-embattled-frontier-between-labour-and-capital-771550-2013-10-19> (18 August 2018).

²²⁵ Quoted in Singh, *One Life is Not Enough*, p. 213.

²²⁶ Rajagopal, 'The Emergency as Prehistory', p. 1026.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1026-27.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1034.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Rajagopal, 'The Emergency as Prehistory', p. 1023.

Figure 2.11: 'Nation on the Move' Emergency Poster²³⁰

In early 1980, an article titled 'Are We Disciplined?' appeared in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* making a similar appeal to its readers:

'Success, it may be said, is brought about by one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. The sooner our people realise this the better. At the same time, it is only a disciplined people who can work hard. There is a fallacious theory being advanced by some especially our foreign critics that the extremes of climate in our country saps our energy and prevents us from giving our best. This idea is as dangerous as it is foolish. We have only to see how our countrymen in Punjab and Haryana have transformed their States from practically arid wastes in smiling fields of green and become so prosperous in the bargain...They burned their animosities, sank their individual differences, withstood the ravages of repeated Indo-Pak wars and worked themselves to the point of exhaustion to achieve this miracle.'²³¹

²³⁰ Source: Ibid., p. 1023.

²³¹ V. Pereira, 'Are We Disciplined?', *IWI* (8 June 1980), p. 70; The association of Punjabi Jat and Haryanavi Jatt identities with physical strength and stamina is once again reproduced in this statement (see p. 67 of this thesis).

In the same spirit, Mrs Gandhi declared 1982 as the ‘Year of Productivity’ in India, identifying a set of national tasks to be fulfilled by responsible citizens. This time the message of discipline, productivity, and collectivity was repackaged and given legitimacy through positive ‘national projects’ like Maruti. Unlike the Emergency, the message was not coercive but rather persuasive, and applied in the right setting not as propaganda but as an emotive appeal to the middle class. In its formal vocabulary, the ‘company’ replaced the nation, and the worker was now the ‘consumer-citizen’ of the object he had produced. What remained unchanged was the idea that discipline and hard work would sustain the whole ‘family’, in this case the family-like work complex of Maruti-Suzuki.²³²

It will be worth exploring how notions of the ‘worker’ and ‘consumer’ changed in the Indian context with the introduction of new technologies and increased mechanisation over time.²³³ These ideas are especially relevant from a demographic perspective as outlined in previous sections. Indeed, the vast Indian ‘masses’ historically seen as a hindrance to development are now targeted as valuable segments of a growing consumer market. The 1980s, as a transitional period between the heydays of

²³² It is worth noting that the middle class was not unfamiliar with such rhetoric. In the past, the ‘family’ had variously comprised one’s village community in a Gandhian sense, for Nehru it manifested in the nation-state, and in the emerging neoliberal framework of the 1980s, it symbolised the private corporation. A ‘familial’ network of car dealerships, vendors, and suppliers of parts also emerged with Maruti’s successful launch. The ‘grooming’ and training of dealers, in particular, was crucial as they were the ‘face’ of the company in public. A closer look at these dealerships, their organisation, and functioning, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter.

²³³ See D. Vajpeyi, ‘Modernity and Industrial Culture’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 17/1-2 (1982), pp. 74-97 for a discussion of ‘elite perceptions’ of industrial culture in early 1980s India. Also see N. Gooptu, ‘Neoliberal Subjectivity, Enterprise Culture and New Workplaces’, *EPW*, 44/22 (2009), pp. 45-54. Gooptu examines the retail sector which captures a shift from earlier perceptions of work as a ‘moral duty’ to one which emphasises utility and the potential to consume in the post-liberalisation landscape (p. 45). On similar arguments, see Z. Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (Maidenhead; New York, 2004). Bauman specifically traces the development of a ‘consumer society’ in the workplace context wherein ‘ethical norms’ associated with work, production, and a ‘producer society’ gave way to ‘aesthetic interests’ in the act of consumption and a ‘consumer society’ (p. 31).

population control and market liberalisation, should be examined as a crucial decade during which new conceptions of India's demographic dividend began taking shape.

It is also noteworthy that Japan emerged on top of multiple public opinion surveys conducted in the 1980s in India on the domestic 'image' of certain countries.²³⁴ It consistently ranked before the U.S.S.R., U.S.A., West Germany, and the U.K. In numerous advertisements, Japan was credited for its 'unique' post-war capitalism which combined 'high technology and an unflinching willingness to work hard'.²³⁵ For instance, an advertisement for the Maruti 800 noted:

'At the end of the second world war, two atomic bombs very nearly blasted a tiny island out-of-existence. Not a single citizen of that country sat back amidst the rubble and destruction and said "what can I alone do?". Instead, they got to work right away. Licked the wounds of their battle scarred nation and rebuilt it from scratch, each one chipping in. Today, Japan leads the world in virtually every sphere.'²³⁶

The adoption of Japanese management practices in Maruti led many to recognise the government's attempts to change the overall image of its institutions. One reader in the *Times of India* made note of this conscious 'move away' from the 'Western' model:

'Maruti's real significance lies in the hitherto under-emphasised fact that it is the first high-profile, heavy industry – and that too in the public sector – which is acquiring not merely Japanese economic and technical assistance but also adopting in a big way the Japanese style of management, production and organisation. Indeed, it represents India's first major attempt to move away from the industrial stereotypes of the West and experiment with methods that have ushered in the most spectacular economic success of the latter half of the 20th century.'²³⁷

Introducing Japanese work ethic to the Indian socio-cultural setting was an ambitious task. However, Japanese methods were adopted relatively easily as most recruits were

²³⁴ See, for instance, IIPO, 'International Images', *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 29/9,10 (1984).

²³⁵ H. L. Zetterberg, 'New Values at the Workplace: A critical analysis', *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 29/8 (1984), p. II.

²³⁶ *TOI* (7 October 1985), p. 16.

²³⁷ 'Importance of Maruti', *TOI* (16 December 1983), p. 8.

young graduates with no prior work experience. As Chatterjee observes, the average age of the Maruti employee in 1983 was only twenty six years:

‘Youth, with its lack of rigidity, openness of mind and willingness to accept new ideas, readily took to the novel concepts propounded by the Company, and accepted them enthusiastically...Maruti’s new, novel, utterly modern plant and work practices captivated their imaginations and instilled in them a sense of pride and total commitment.’²³⁸

Krishnamurthy similarly notes that young recruits had no preconceived notions about working hours, overtime, and ‘other hang-ups’ common amongst blue collar workers at the time.²³⁹ He was thus able to introduce a range of ‘good practices relating to discipline and professionalism’.²⁴⁰

For instance, as part of their training, engineers were sent to Japan for long periods of time to gain first-hand experience in a traditional Japanese setting. The training organised by the Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship in Tokyo included a language learning programme, and residency with locals to encourage learning about Japanese family culture.²⁴¹ This ‘grooming’ was part of the dream job at Maruti for hundreds of engineers who were carefully selected from the best technical institutes in the country. As former Managing Director, Jagdish Khattar, reveals:

‘In the mid-1980s, it was indeed special for a young man to work in the company, enjoying as it did Mrs Gandhi’s patronage and the enthusiastic response from the market, not to speak of Maruti’s large ‘family’ of dealers, workshops, and suppliers.’²⁴²

A current employee who first joined Maruti in 1985 recalled the ‘thrill’ of traveling to Japan for the first time, and forming many long-lasting friendships with a select group

²³⁸ Chatterjee, *Japanese Management*, p. 41.

²³⁹ Krishnamurthy, *At the Helm*, p. 164.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Personal conversation, 26 December 2016, New Delhi (name withheld on request); AOTS, now called HIDA (The Overseas Human Resources and Industry Development Association), was established in 1959 by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry in Japan with the aim to train foreign engineers and managers from developing countries in Japanese methods.

²⁴² Khattar, *Driven*, p. 176.

of engineers from across Asia.²⁴³ But for many, even more memorable was the abundance of every consumer good imaginable – cameras, video recorders, and calculators – that filled their suitcases on their journey back home.



Figure 2.12: Disciplined Consumption – Maruti engineers on training in Tokyo (1985)²⁴⁴

Made in India

In February 2014, at the grand and spectacular ‘Auto Expo’ show in New Delhi, the Maruti 800 was given a rather unspectacular ‘quiet and solemn burial’.²⁴⁵ It was an event of ‘emotional relevance’ for many who knew the Maruti 800 as ‘the car that taught India how to drive and made Maruti what it is today’.²⁴⁶ The announcement was made following MSIL’s decision to halt the production of several older models, and to

²⁴³ Personal conversation, 26 December 2016, New Delhi (name withheld on request).

²⁴⁴ Source: Photograph shared by a Maruti employee with permission to share.

²⁴⁵ S. Banerji, ‘End of road for India’s beloved Maruti 800, company stops production’, HT (14 February 2014), <http://www.hindustantimes.com/autos/end-of-the-road-for-india-s-beloved-maruti-800-company-stops-production/story-2Ew1OvTta125XZ1BhNBidK.html> (30 January 2017).

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

pave the way for new vehicular technology, thus sending off the small, ‘family friendly’ Maruti 800 to its new abode amongst vintage cars in museums.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at CarWale, <https://www.carwale.com/news/end-of-an-era-family-car-maruti-suzuki-800s-production-ends/> (31 May 2018).

Figure 2.13: ‘Thank You, 800’ – Last Maruti 800 rolling off the production line²⁴⁷

In her discussion of ‘auto-mobility’ in post-liberalisation India, Kajri Jain argues:

‘If the dominant industrial regime of the mid-twentieth century was ‘Fordist’, the primary harbinger of economic reforms in India, and its passport to participation in a ‘global’ regime of the sensible, was Maruti-Suzuki.’²⁴⁸

Maruti redefined the concept of an Indian brand as one that was associated with a global network of experts with ‘roots’ securely established in India. ‘Being Indian’ no longer meant indigenous, self-sufficient production, but symbolised participation in world-class manufacturing methods. These ideas resonate with the government’s recent spectacle, the ‘Make in India’ campaign, launched in September 2014 ‘as part of a wider set of nation-building initiatives’.²⁴⁹ According to its official website, ‘Make in

²⁴⁷ Source: CarWale, <https://www.carwale.com/news/end-of-an-era-family-car-maruti-suzuki-800s-production-ends/> (31 May 2018).

²⁴⁸ Jain, ‘Post-reform India’s Automotive Assemblages’, p. 330.

²⁴⁹ ‘Make in India’ official website, <http://www.makeinindia.com/about>(31 January 2017).

India' aims to 'transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub' by attracting foreign investment :

'Make in India is much more than an inspiring slogan. It represents a comprehensive and unprecedented overhaul of outdated processes and policies. Most importantly, it represents a complete change of the Government's mindset – a shift from issuing authority to business partner.'²⁵⁰

The launch of Maruti-Suzuki in 1983 communicated a similar attitudinal shift in the government's approach to 'Brand India'.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Money Sharma/AFP/Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.dk/license/632744732> (10 August 2018).

Figure 2.14: 'Skill India' Tableaux Showcasing Maruti Suzuki 'Alto' at the Republic Day Parade, New Delhi (2017)²⁵¹

It is noteworthy that another 'indigenous' brand, Tata Motors, attempted to follow Maruti with the launch of its small car, 'Tata Nano', in 2008. The Nano, as Nielsen and Wilhite argue, was 'promoted and represented to tap into, and become iconic of, the ideas, desires and aspirations of "New India", or broadly of its burgeoning middle

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Source: Money Sharma/AFP/Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.dk/license/632744732> (10 August 2018). The 'Skill India' campaign was launched in 2015 by Prime Minister Modi. It aims to train over 400 million Indians in technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills by 2022.

class'.²⁵² From the outset, the Nano was advertised as an ideal car for Indian roads – cheap, small, and fuel efficient. More significantly, it claimed to be the cheapest passenger car in the market at the time. The demand for the Nano was initially high, and Tata Motors opted for a computerised lottery to announce its first sales. In the last eight years, however, the Nano has failed to capture the 'upper middle segment' of the Indian market, referred to as the 'dominant fraction' of the new Indian middle class which 'exerts a greater influence in terms of defining standards' and aspirations for other fractions of the same class.²⁵³ The authors argue that it was precisely due to its wholly 'Indian' image that Nano came to be associated with cheapness rather than affordability, and was thus stigmatised as 'less than everybody else's car'.²⁵⁴ The changing nature of identity-defining objects over time, and the image of the Nano as the 'indigenous' car for the 'masses', precluded it from seeing success the way the Maruti 800 did in the early 1980s.²⁵⁵

Just as the 'Make in India' initiative has gained international recognition due to its direct association with Prime Minister Modi, the success of Maruti-Suzuki was also attributed to Mrs Gandhi as the project's unofficial 'brand ambassador'. As Venkataramani concludes in his study of Maruti:

'It was Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who decided that India modernise and expand its automobile industry. She brushed aside the long-held nostrums of the senior bureaucrats and planners as well as the self-styled "socially conscious" but car-owning armchair "progressives" who professed to bleed for the poor while securing for themselves the comforts that they regarded as their birth right. While

²⁵² K. B. Nielsen and H. Wilhite, 'The Rise and Fall of the 'People's Car': Middle-class aspirations, status and mobile symbolism in 'New India'', *CSA* (2015), p. 8.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Today, MSIL seeks to reach beyond its established demographic of lower middle class families by attracting a 'premium' segment of younger, luxury-seeking buyers who prefer larger vehicles. The company has introduced its line of special showrooms called 'NEXA' which sell its 'premium' car portfolio in exclusive urban centres. See Y. Bhargava, 'Nexa: How Maruti hit pay dirt', *The Hindu* (17 September 2017), <http://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/nexa-how-maruti-hit-pay-dirt/article19704269.ece> (15 December 2017).

the Prime Minister's posture was, in part, traceable to her concern to support Sanjay Gandhi's venture, she also appears to have concluded that an expanded and modernised automobile industry could contribute to the country's economic development.²⁵⁶

The next chapter builds on this concept of the 'brand leader' in a different but related context of the export-oriented cultural industry in India. As I will demonstrate, Mrs Gandhi's active role in the staging of the spectacular Festival of India in Britain enabled her to directly engage with an audience well beyond the middle class in India.

²⁵⁶ Venkataramani, *Japan Enters Indian Industry*, pp. 179-80.

Chapter 3 – Exporting Culture: Festival of India¹

‘[The Festival] is an unprecedented and perhaps unrepeatable opportunity to look afresh at a country which has deeply affected not just our history but our way of life and perception of the world...Between some countries cultural links are little more than officially inspired cultural exchanges. Between Britain and India the cross-fertilisation of ideas and values is a living and creative process between peoples.’

Margaret Thatcher in R.M.J. Lyne, ‘Festival of India – Proposed message by the Prime Minister’ (8 December 1981)²

‘We are contributing to the affluent countries’ economies with skilled people, experts, specialists and so on, and, in money terms, it amounts to quite a lot. Apart from that, our main contribution is our basic philosophy. I don’t mean all these gurus who are trying to give short cuts to instant religion...India could probably play a cultural role in the world. But are we ready for it? Are we aware of our own culture as we should be before we attempt to export it?’

Indira Gandhi in Gandhi and Pouchapadass, *My Truth*, p. 158

In the run-up to the elections in 1980, commentators had already predicted Mrs Gandhi’s victory with near certainty. The same voters who had consigned her and the Congress Party to the ‘dustbin of history’ only three years prior now welcomed her return.³ Whilst the horrors of involuntary sterilisation, imprisonment without trial, and press censorship of the Emergency days appeared to have been forgotten or forgiven, the international community, particularly the foreign press, made no attempts to hide its deep suspicion of Mrs Gandhi, and the possibility of her imposing another Emergency. In the British media, for instance, her victory was marred by claims that she had never apologised for the ‘excesses’ committed during the period, and had gone to extreme lengths to protect Sanjay and his coterie. The mother-son relationship was

¹ This chapter is derived in part from an article published in *Contemporary South Asia*, 4 March 2019, copyright Taylor & Francis, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09584935.2019.1584605>

² PREM19/800 f102. MTFDA.

³ Atal Bihari Vajpayee quoted in I. Malhotra, ‘Indira Gandhi’s Legacy’, BBC News (28 October 2004), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3960877.stm (5 March 2018).

described as ‘enigmatic’,⁴ and Sanjay as ‘the arrogant super brat who tried to help his country’.⁵ Others suggested that the victory was merely a ‘result of populism, the persecuted image of the martyr for India, and the reassertion of a feudal deference to the claims of a dynastic ruler’.⁶ Soon after her re-election, a report in the *Economist* wondered whether Mrs Gandhi could ‘do it all over again’:

‘A month after her return to power, Mrs Gandhi is already showing signs of putting India back under strong-arm rule...Ominous pointers are the appointment of emergency-tainted officials to sensitive jobs, the sudden withdrawal of court cases against a leading emergency offender, and the revival of Youth Congress gangs which are once again demanding protection money in the name of party fund-raising.’⁷

Mrs Gandhi, on her part, defended the Emergency as a necessary constitutional step. For instance, in an interview with journalist Jonathan Power, she explained that it was ‘a shock treatment in a very special situation’.⁸ Citing numerous factors such as the demographic aggression spurred on by the Bangladesh refugee crisis, inflationary pressures, and two years of severe drought, she argued that the opposition movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan was ill-timed and ‘anti-national’ as it had encouraged state officials to disobey authority at a vulnerable time.⁹ Although acknowledging that certain ‘overzealous’ things were done in her and Sanjay’s name, Mrs Gandhi argued that the harassment faced by the public during the Emergency was on a ‘much smaller scale’ than what was experienced during the Janata rule.¹⁰ In her interviews, therefore, she held the Janata Party responsible for events that led to the Emergency, and further

⁴ ‘Gandhi heads for landslide polls victory’, *Guardian* (7 January 1980), p. 1.

⁵ ‘The arrogant superbrat who tried to help his country’, *Guardian* (24 June 1980), p. 19.

⁶ ‘Return of a fallen idol’, *Guardian* (19 January 1980), p. 9.

⁷ ‘Reminders of times past’, *Economist* (9 February 1980), p. 51.

⁸ J. Power, ‘Mrs Gandhi: Restore law and order’, *Observer* (3 December 1979), p. 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

criticised it for the ‘economic ruination of the country and the lowering of India’s prestige in the world’.¹¹

However, in response to the negative media attention, Mrs Gandhi felt the need to re-establish contact with international heads of government, and to personally explain to the ‘Western’ media ‘what had actually happened in the [Emergency] years and after’.¹²

As Pupul Jayakar, chairperson of the Indian Festival of India Committee and close friend of Mrs Gandhi, notes:

‘[Indira] knew she must win people over, set their doubts at rest and occupy her rightful place as a senior world statesperson, with concerns that extended beyond India’s national boundaries, to a world threatened by ecological and nuclear disaster...She hoped that her words would reach a world audience, and reveal Indira Gandhi in her new reincarnation as a reflective woman.’¹³

Similarly, P. C. Alexander, Mrs Gandhi’s principal secretary between 1981 and 1984, reveals in his autobiography:

‘[Mrs Gandhi] was keenly aware of the fact that the Emergency had tarnished her image as a liberal and a democrat...Apart from renewing personal contacts and trying to rebuild her image, she also wanted to use [foreign] visits to explore the possibilities of establishing closer economic cooperation between India and [other] countries.’¹⁴

To brand herself as supportive of, and the Indian institutional apparatus as conducive to new political and business relationships required the projection of a non-threatening ‘visual scheme’ of the nation that would attract potential collaborators, investors, and consumers.¹⁵ Here Mrs Gandhi understood the instrumental role of the media spectacle, including frequent interactions with the Western press. Moreover, facing a crisis of credibility at home, she performed on such occasions keeping in mind an image-

¹¹ A. Bose, ‘Gandhi promises to continue her “interrupted task”’, *Guardian* (11 January 1980), p. 6.

¹² Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, p. 65.

¹³ Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, pp. 426-7.

¹⁴ P. C. Alexander, *Through the Corridors of Power* (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 144-5.

¹⁵ Borrowing from Kaur, ‘Nation’s Two Bodies’, p. 610.

conscious middle class spectatorship. As a report in the *Times of India* perceptively noted:

‘Mrs Gandhi’s flashes of sympathy for suffering and stirring calls to grandeur (victory in Bangladesh, annexation for Sikkim, the 1974 nuclear explosion) are the heady ingredients of the magic that sustains her. Deeply suspicious of the press, she is nevertheless always readily accessible to visiting journalists and TV crews at least partly because she knows that exposure in the foreign, especially Western, media illuminates her halo at home.’¹⁶

One instance is particularly telling. During a press conference, Mrs Gandhi approached two Swedish journalists amongst a large crowd of Indian reporters. The journalists asked her how she felt to have been elected as leader of India once again, to which Mrs Gandhi promptly replied, ‘I have always been the leader of India!’¹⁷

In this chapter, I further suggest that Mrs Gandhi’s careful attention to Western media in general, and to the staging of foreign spectacles in particular enabled her to address Indians abroad who had only heard of disruptive political events through limited media channels, most of which, irrespective of their political leanings, had been critical of her. This was certainly the case with the over half a million strong diaspora in Britain and the British press.¹⁸ Indeed, in her biographic account, Frank remarks that Mrs Gandhi was eager to secure international support for her policies even during the Emergency, and invited numerous British personalities and journalists to visit India at the time.¹⁹ Frank mentions journalist John Grigg, who turned down her invitation, and then Leader of the Opposition, Margaret Thatcher, who made her first visit in September 1976.²⁰ Thatcher’s political opponent, Michael Foot, also visited India, and like her was

¹⁶ ‘As the others see Mrs Gandhi’, *TOI* (24 March 1982), p. 8.

¹⁷ Quoting James Manor from personal conversation with Diego Maiorano, author of *Autumn of the Matriarch: Indira Gandhi’s Final Term in Office*, 24 May 2016, Oxford.

¹⁸ The Indian diaspora, as Parekh notes, represented diverse groups including third and fourth generation East Africans who often had little interest in the politics of the subcontinent. In Malik, *India and the United Kingdom*, p. 9.

¹⁹ K. Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nehru Gandhi* (London, 2001), p. 383.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 383-4.

sympathetic of the Emergency. Upon his return to the U.K., Foot circulated a report in Parliament wherein he urged the British government to have ‘an imaginative understanding of what has been achieved during the Emergency and why these achievements invoke so much popular support [in India]’.²¹ Mrs Gandhi also enjoyed the support of many British-Indians, some of whom revived the ‘Indian Overseas Congress U.K.’ during this period,²² and other influential individuals such as the industrialist Swraj Paul, who were able to reverse the effects of negative press coverage to some extent. Many in the Labour Party were particularly sympathetic such as Scottish MP, Jennie Lee. Lee also wrote a strong ‘pro-Indira’ piece in the *Observer* titled ‘A fair deal for Indira Gandhi’ during the Emergency.²³ However, as former Minister of External Affairs, Natwar Singh, recalls about the majority of British-Indians:

‘The Indian community in England was a house divided. Roughly 30 per cent supported the Emergency, the rest did not. Several demonstrations were held in front of India House, asking for the release of JP and other leaders. India House is located in one of the most prominent parts of London. The demonstrators had specially chosen this venue, being sure that it would get maximum media coverage... All our efforts to contain the hostility of the media failed, particularly after the BBC office in India was asked to close down.’²⁴

Prominent amongst the protestors were supporters of the Akali Dal, Communist Party of India, and the Janata Party.²⁵

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 384; Recent accounts suggest that although critiqued in international media, the Emergency was more or less ignored by the leadership in the U.S. and U.K. who saw it as ‘business as usual’. See R. Chaudhuri, ‘Emergency, from the outside’, *The Indian Express* (4 July 2018), <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indira-gandhi-us-uk-media-on-indian-emergency-5244597/> (26 September 2018); Indeed, during her visit to the Soviet Union in 1976, Mrs Gandhi was wholeheartedly welcomed by Brezhnev, and the Soviet-Indian community.

²² Malik, *India and the United Kingdom*, p. 101.

²³ P. Hollis, *Jennie Lee: A life* (Oxford, 1997), p. 291.

²⁴ Singh continues: ‘A full-page advertisement appeared in *The Times*, carrying the names of hundreds of eminent and distinguished people... all friends of India, all condemning the Emergency. Unexpected side effects of the Emergency ensued. I used to regularly review books for the *New Statesman*, a Left-wing weekly wielding considerable influence. The editor, Anthony Howard, removed my name from the list of reviewers soon after Emergency was declared’. N. Singh, *One Life is Not Enough* (New Delhi, 2014), pp. 161-4.

²⁵ Malik, *India and the United Kingdom*, p. 102.

In light of the critical treatment of her regime in the British press, cultural events were viewed as unique occasions for Mrs Gandhi to directly engage with a community that was divided in its opinion of her motives and methods. The Festival of India (henceforth FOI) was one such opportunity.

From Blockbuster to Festival²⁶

The historic relationship between India and Britain had found visual expression in the past at several spectacular world fairs, *darbars*, and exhibitions that dotted much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Carefully curated exhibits from the subcontinent were at the forefront of ‘modern display techniques’ put to effect in emergent ‘world cities’ such as London, Paris, and New York, which made explicit the underlying dynamics between the metropole and the colony on the one hand, and self-representations of the empire on the other.²⁷ India’s Independence and subsequent membership in the Commonwealth, uniquely as a republic, impacted the way in which it was imagined and represented in post-empire Britain at various times, betraying elements of continuity and change. In this context, the nine-month long FOI inaugurated in March 1982 in London was the first of its kind visual exposition that, between its nineteen exhibitions and several live performances, showcased state-sanctioned aspects of classical and folk music and dance, ancient sculpture and painting, contemporary art, and pre-modern and modern scientific technologies originating from the subcontinent. The Festival was originally conceived as a diplomatic exercise between the British and Indian governments in the late 1970s.

²⁶ Borrowing from B. Durrans, ‘Competitive Pragmatism’, *History and Anthropology*, 6/1 (1992), p. 29.

²⁷ Breckenridge, ‘The aesthetics and politics of colonial collecting’, p. 203; Similar exhibitions were staged across India including the 1854 Bombay Metropolitan Exhibition, 1864 Calcutta Agricultural Exhibition, and 1903 Indian Art Exhibition. J. Sen, ‘Bullock Cart or Satellite Launch Vehicle’, *South Asian History and Culture*, 3/3 (2012), p. 435.

However, the form and content of the spectacle underwent significant changes just as the political situation in India transitioned from the chaos of the Janata government to the re-election of Mrs Gandhi as PM.

In 1977, British High Commissioner in India, John Thomson, first envisioned the Festival as a single ‘blockbuster’ exhibition showcasing Indian art at a gallery in London.²⁸ Brian Durrans, former curator for Asian Ethnography at the British Museum and representative of the participating Museum of Mankind, explains that the idea for such an exhibition was triggered by the prospect of a similar art show that was to take place in Paris later that year.²⁹ The Paris show was considered a ‘missed opportunity’ by the British to repair and restore their own historic ties with India, both economic and cultural, that had been ‘eroded’ by post-war geopolitics.³⁰

Indeed, trade with India had fallen considerably since the 1960s due to competitive offers by the Soviet Union, particularly in defence goods, combined with India’s import substituting policies, Britain's relatively minor share in development aid to India, and the declining competitiveness of British goods compared to their French and American counterparts.³¹ At the same time, the expanding Indian market was seen as an outlet for British exports not least given the domestic recessionary climate at the time. Given these factors, an event centred on India was deemed highly favourable, and suggests one of the reasons why the Festival was originally a British initiative. As High

²⁸ Durrans, ‘Competitive Pragmatism’, p. 29.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 27-8; Interestingly, *Times of India* reported that it was the 1976 ‘World of Islam’ festival in London that first inspired Prime Minister James Callaghan to host a similar ‘Hindu festival’ in Britain. His Indian counterpart, Morarji Desai, however, suggested Nepal for such a festival which was, unlike India, a Hindu state : ‘Though taken aback, Mr. Callaghan shot back, “What about a festival of India?”. To this, Mr. Desai consented.’ I. Sawhney, ‘Fund-raising idea saved festival’, *TOI* (17 March 1982), p. 20.

³¹ Durrans, ‘Competitive Pragmatism’, p. 27.

Commissioner Thomson wrote to his predecessor, Michael Walker, later appointed chairman of the British Festival Trust:

‘The French are our main competitors both commercially and in the Western world, politically. We know what we have to beat...to advance our commercial interests generally, clinching any deals that are ripe and to establish a friendly and cooperative atmosphere. FOI [is] an inspiring set piece for that. The importance of its success cannot be overemphasised.’³²

It was only in mid-1979, however, that the inaugural meeting to discuss such an event took place at the office of the Arts Council of Great Britain in London.³³ The meeting included specialists representing different spheres of cultural activity – the British Library, Visiting Arts Unit, British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum of Mankind, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.³⁴ It was here that Robert Skelton, keeper of the Indian Department at the V&A, put forward his idea of a much grander show – a suite of exhibitions showcasing a breadth of ‘Indian culture’ across several galleries and museums for a longer duration as opposed to the single exhibition idea.³⁵ According to Durrans, the inclusion of several venues was foremost expected to aid the organisation of the event as funds could come from their individual parliamentary grants.³⁶ But the idea of hosting a large-scale Festival was perhaps also inspired by similar spectacles staged in Britain during this period such as the ‘Great Japan Exhibition’ on the Edo period scheduled to take place between 1981-82, or the ‘World of Islam’ festival held in the spring of 1976. The thematic scope of the FOI also bore strong resemblance to the 1951 Festival of Britain, more on which later. Alternatively, Kapila Vatsyayan, Assistant Secretary and Joint Educational Advisor in

³² ‘Mrs Gandhi’s visit to U.K.’, 16 November 1981. MSS Eur F215/2; Walker was appointed High Commissioner to India in 1974, where he maintained ‘good relations’ with Mrs Gandhi’s government during the Emergency. ‘Sir Michael Walker’, *The Telegraph* (28 December 2001), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/1366430/Sir-Michael-Walker.html> (2 December 2016).

³³ Sen, ‘Bullock Cart or Satellite Launch Vehicle?’, p. 415.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Durrans, ‘Competitive Pragmatism’, p. 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the Indian Department of Culture, noted that British museum directors were ‘keen to repeat and outshine’ an exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Arts at Burlington House in 1947 – 48.³⁷ As noted above, the Festival can also be examined as a diplomatic attempt by the British to mimic, and further outdo the Paris show. Irrespective of motivation, it appears that the British Committee was in agreement regarding a ‘mega’ Festival of India.

Before discussing any details with their Indian counterparts, however, there was the all-important question of ‘defining India geographically’ to determine the selection of material based on provenance.³⁸ Durrans reveals that although no Indian representatives participated in this discussion, it was decided that territories outside of India’s defined yet contested borders were to be excluded despite the understanding that exhibits from neighbouring South Asian countries would reflect their shared cultural histories.³⁹ It was assumed that ‘Indian sensitivities in this respect were powerfully represented, although by proxy’.⁴⁰

Interestingly, this approach was later questioned by an influential organisation of local artists in Britain who felt that it was ‘inappropriate to maintain geographical, political, secular or religious differences’ in this matter, arguing that it was the Committee’s ‘responsibility’ to include exhibits and artists originating from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.⁴¹ The organisation in question, the Committee of Associations and Artists resident in the U.K. for the Festival of India (henceforth CAA UK), believed

³⁷ K. Vatsyayan, ‘India Presented in its Own Terms’, *Museum*, 34/4 (1982), p. 204.

³⁸ Durrans, ‘Competitive Pragmatism’, p. 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ M. Sharma, ‘Chairman’s Report, CAA UK’, 29 March 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

that all members of the South Asian community led similar daily lives in Britain, and were subject to similar controversies on a daily basis ‘on account of the colour of their skin’.⁴² They viewed the Festival as an occasion to highlight their shared histories and present victories against discrimination. Naseem Khan, CAA UK’s coordinator at the time, further argued that although a ‘shared heritage’ bound different individuals together, there was no singular Indian or Asian culture that could be justly represented at the Festival, just as there was no such thing as an Asian community – ‘There were Bengali, Gujarati, Punjabi, and many more’.⁴³ It was this ‘voice of survival’ of the individual communities that they hoped would be the focus of the Festival. Khan urged:

‘Without that voice, ordinary British people will lose the opportunity of understanding just a bit more of the different people in their midst. The danger must be, with so large and glittering a Festival, that the shadow it casts will obscure the things nearby.’⁴⁴

This emotional yet politically charged response to the initial scheme of the Festival, and to the proposed conceptions of ‘India’ and ‘Indians’ from members of the diaspora is worth keeping in mind especially in the context of an official ‘Indian culture’ that was ultimately represented.

When representatives from the Arts Council first met with their Indian counterparts in Delhi, the latter’s response too was unenthusiastic. Durrans explains that the scheme presented was ‘perceived as being British, both in its conception and overall control’.⁴⁵ In particular, Indian administrators were keen to demonstrate not only India’s cultural past and present in ‘traditional’ forms but also the advancements made in the fields of science and technology, which the British conception had failed to include. As Sen

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ ‘The Festival of India: Its import and perspectives’, *Museum*, 34/4 (1982), p. 220.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Durrans, ‘Competitive Pragmatism’, p. 32.

notes in his study of the *Science in India* exhibition at the Festival, the Indians ‘wished “to project that [they] have had a scientific bent of mind throughout mankind’s history and that their achievements in this field in recent years too are not mean by any measure”’.⁴⁶

The desire to put on display India’s modernity made visible by its artistic and scientific traditions in equal measure reveals the controversial nature of such spectacles. Organisational meetings often turned into ideological battle grounds between cultural administrators, artists, financiers, and politicians as each attempted to communicate a favourable image of the nation for an audience that comprised variously of other states, citizens, and private corporations. In this case, the combination of scientific/military developments and civilisational artefacts as legitimating tropes to define a national identity projected India’s ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power respectively, and resulted in the production of what Ravinder Kaur terms a national ‘visual scheme’.⁴⁷ This scheme typically contained ‘iconic images of the essential cultural and historical symbols, interwoven with new images depicting universally identifiable symbols of techno-modernity’.⁴⁸ As Sen’s paper similarly illustrates, the production of a well-balanced ‘visual scheme’ of India was of special concern to the Indian Committee from the start.

⁴⁶ N. J. Singh, Coordinator of the Indian Festival Advisory Committee, quoted in Sen, ‘Bullock Cart or Satellite Launch Vehicle’, p. 418. Also see B. Durrans, ‘Handicrafts, Ideology and the Festival of India’, *South Asia Research*, 2/1 (1982), pp. 13-22.

⁴⁷ Kaur, ‘Nation’s Two Bodies’, p. 610.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.
The image was sourced at G. Michell, 'The Making of a Great Exhibition', *Museum*, 34/4 (1982), p. 223.

Figure 3.1: A Spectacular Relic from the Past – Six-foot Buddha statue from sixth century Sarnath at the *In the Image of Man* exhibition⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Source: G. Michell, 'The Making of a Great Exhibition', *Museum*, 34/4 (1982), p. 223.



Figure 3.2: The Modern Man-Made Wonder – Full-scale replica of the Indian SLV-3 rocket at the *Science in India* exhibition⁵⁰

Overshadowing these early debates, however, the cost of transporting exhibition objects from India was opposed by many in the Janata Party. Crucially, in July 1979

⁵⁰ Source: Festival Review, second edition (May 1982), p. 3. MSS Eur F215/231

amidst domestic turmoil, Desai resigned from office following which a decision was made to withdraw from the Festival altogether on financial grounds.⁵¹

It was not until mid-1980, after Mrs Gandhi was re-elected, that there was a genuine push from the Indian side to pursue the Festival. P. C. Alexander remarks that from thereon the Festival's organisation was led with 'great care and attention' by a 'team of experts' under Mrs Gandhi's personal nominee, Pupul Jayakar.⁵² Jayakar was known for her involvement in the establishment of the National Crafts Museum in New Delhi, and was also former chairperson of the Handicrafts and Handloom Export Corporation of India. Whilst Jayakar, as chairperson of the reinstated Festival Committee, focused on classical and folk art, Mrs Gandhi worked with others on the Committee to broaden the scope of the spectacle to include in it India's 'remarkable achievements' in science.⁵³ As Niranjan Desai, then Minister of Press at the Indian High Commission in London, recalls:

'The Festival... could not have been more than a glass-cased exhibition of India's ancient glories were it not for the desire of Mrs Gandhi that [it] must display not only India's glorious past but also its dynamic present, and its hopeful future. The project, with Mrs Gandhi taking an active personal interest, now acquired a vision, a focus, a far greater involvement from the Indian side and an added impetus.'⁵⁴

Similarly, Alexander concludes in his memoirs:

'This was the first of Indian Festivals organised abroad and was soon to become the model for several other festivals to follow. Indira Gandhi had taken personal interest in the planning of the Festival and had provided advice and expert guidance at every stage of its organisation. The Festival was expected to generate its inevitable spin-off in improved trade, tourism and economic relations but the focus was on the art and culture of India of which there was quite a lot of ignorance in the U.K. in spite of a couple of hundred years of colonial link.'⁵⁵

⁵¹ Durrans, 'Competitive Pragmatism', p. 36.

⁵² Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, p. 90.

⁵³ 'Indian Summer', *The Statesman* (19 March 1982). MSS Eur F215/232.

⁵⁴ N. Desai, 'The Festival of India in Britain, 1982', *The Round Table*, 72/287 (1983), pp. 286-7.

⁵⁵ Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, p. 90.

The last sentence is noteworthy as the Festival, hosted in the heart of the former British empire, was intended to represent ‘a changing and more equal relationship between Britain and India’, or so was anticipated by administrators and middle class spectators at home.⁵⁶ The date for its inauguration was postponed to March 1982, and this time the Festival was also treated as a matter of personal interest by Mrs Gandhi’s newly elected counterpart, Margaret Thatcher.

‘For so many of us, you are the spirit of India.’⁵⁷

When Mrs Gandhi took office on 14 January 1980, Thatcher sent her the following message of congratulations:

‘It is now my turn to congratulate you on your resounding victory and I do so most warmly. The world’s biggest democracy has confirmed its faith in the democratic system. This will give pleasure and encouragement to all true friends of India.’⁵⁸

The two ‘iron ladies’ crossed paths several times in Mrs Gandhi’s final years. What developed over a short period of time was an unusual friendship based on mutual admiration and genuine fondness of one another. The two corresponded frequently, and did not hesitate to challenge each other’s views on contentious matters. As Mrs Gandhi wrote to Thatcher shortly after the latter’s visit to India in April 1981:

‘Even before you came we had known that our views would not coincide on a number of matters. But as I remarked on your arrival, this does not take away from friendship or the need for an exchange of views.’⁵⁹

or as Thatcher recalled about Mrs Gandhi:

⁵⁶ Sen, ‘Bullock Cart or Satellite Launch Vehicle?’, p. 417.

⁵⁷ Thatcher to Mrs Gandhi [emphasis in original], 28 April 1981. 3/2/58 f49. MTFDA.

⁵⁸ ‘New Indian Government: Messages of Congratulations’, Telegram number 030, Serial No. TSA/80, 7 January 1980. MTFDA.

⁵⁹ Letter dated 16 May 1981, Serial no. T.75(d)/81. MTFDA; In an amusing anecdote, Mrs Gandhi’s media adviser, Sharada Prasad, reveals that after her first meeting with Thatcher in 1976, Mrs Gandhi described her as ‘somewhat diffident’. Prasad adds that her assessment of Thatcher was a reflection of her own confidence and ‘mental make-up’. (Prasad, *The Book I Won’t Be Writing*, p. 18); In a similar vein, Natwar Singh, who was part of Mrs Gandhi’s Secretariat in the early 1980s, remarks in his autobiography: ‘The Iron Lady could be intimidating but she respected Indira Gandhi and was nervous in her presence. I once asked Mrs Gandhi what she thought of Thatcher. She said, “What Iron Lady? I saw a nervous woman sitting on the edge of the sofa”.’ Singh, *One Life is Not Enough*, p. 225.

‘We each recognised that the other’s views were sincerely and passionately held, and we were able to present them to each other straightforwardly, woman to woman, without any obfuscation or paering (sic) over of cracks, which so often lead to misunderstanding. And we were able to talk in a very personal way of how we coped with our problems – a way in which no other two women in the world could talk together. It was wonderful to be able to talk like that to someone who had complete understanding.’⁶⁰

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Central Press/Getty Images, <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-gandhi-and-thatcher-were-two-iron-ladies-too-many/20130413.htm#1> (24 July 2018).

Figure 3.3: ‘Iron ladies’ – Thatcher with Mrs Gandhi in London (1982)⁶¹

In her numerous personal correspondences with Thatcher, Mrs Gandhi raised the question of the British media and its negative reporting on her and on Indian affairs.

For instance, in a frankly worded letter dated 27 August 1980, she wrote:

‘My dear Prime Minister, I hope you won’t mind my touching upon a rather sensitive matter. It is my own and my Government’s desire to improve our relations with the U.K. Unfortunately, there appears to be groups and individuals in your country, and perhaps elsewhere, who do not wish this. Anyone in public life has to be immune to criticism and I have long got used to it, but the pattern of reporting on India in the press and media in the U.K., and almost all over the Western world, reveals what seems to be a persistent and concerted campaign of stories and image-casting which have little, if any, base in actuality. It is not my

⁶⁰ M. Thatcher in G. Parthasarathi and H. Y. Sharada Prasad ed., *Indira Gandhi: Statesmen, Scholars, Scientists and Friends Remembers* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 380.

⁶¹ Source: Central Press/Getty Images, <http://www.rediff.com/news/slide-show/slide-show-1-gandhi-and-thatcher-were-two-iron-ladies-too-many/20130413.htm#1> (24 July 2018).

intention that you should in any way interfere with the freedom of your press or academic institutions but I thought that I should mention that this is of considerable concern to the Indian people, who are made to feel that the U.K. does not care for our friendship.’⁶²

Here Mrs Gandhi was perhaps referring to some British reporters who had described her as ‘fascist’,⁶³ and others who criticised her ‘hawkish’ policies with reference to India’s development of nuclear weapons.⁶⁴ Mrs Gandhi also argued in this letter and elsewhere⁶⁵ that British media was ‘consistently and unfairly misreporting’ the nature of several riots that had broken out in parts of Uttar Pradesh in 1980, and that this reinforced a negative image of India in the West.⁶⁶ She maintained that the riots were not communal in nature as they were made out to be but were rather ‘an attempt by certain opposition parties to provoke confrontation with Government authority’.⁶⁷ Thatcher responded by acknowledging Mrs Gandhi’s concerns, and added:

‘May I say that I will do all I can to see that the traditional friendship which I value so much is not marred by unjust personal attacks on you or on India.’⁶⁸

In another revealing letter to Roderic Lyne of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Thatcher’s private secretary, Michael Alexander, described her meeting on the subject of the media with Mrs Gandhi’s close friend in Britain, Swraj Paul.⁶⁹ Paul reiterated Mrs Gandhi’s concern that ‘relations between India and the United Kingdom were drifting’, and that she expressed the ‘hope that something positive could be done to

⁶² Serial no. T166A/80. MTFDA.

⁶³ S. Datta-Ray, ‘Fascism is on the prowl again say Mrs Gandhi’s opponents’, *Observer* (24 February 1980), p. 12.

⁶⁴ ‘Indo-British Relations’, Telegram number 585, 25 July 1980. MTFDA.

⁶⁵ Letter dated 29 October 1980, Serial No. T/212A/80. MTFDA.

⁶⁶ Serial no. T166A/80. MTFDA; Mrs Gandhi was referring to Hindu-Muslim violence in the city of Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh in August 1980.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Prime Minister’s Personal Message, 27 August 1980. Serial No. T167/80. MTFDA.

⁶⁹ Swraj Paul is a well-known British industrialist who also sponsored the exhibition *Nehru: Architect of Modern India, Champion of World Liberty* at the Festival. As Frank observes, it was Paul who orchestrated Mrs Gandhi’s comeback in the U.K. in 1978. He organised support rallies that were attended in large numbers by Indians, and also arranged meetings with Prime Minister James Callaghan and several MPs. Frank remarks that Thatcher was, ‘of course, also present and entirely sympathetic’ to Mrs Gandhi’s loss in 1977. Frank, *Indira*, pp. 434-5.

reverse this trend'.⁷⁰ He added that 'Mrs Gandhi hoped that the Prime Minister might be able in future to take a rather greater personal interest in the question of relations with India'.⁷¹ He also mentioned the Indo-British Exchange Conference that was established after the Janata victory in 1977, and had 'always been a centre of criticism of Mrs Gandhi'.⁷² Alexander noted that it was unfortunate that the British government 'had continued to support the Exchange', and that 'this had caused a great deal of ill feeling in Delhi'.⁷³ On the suggestion of a potential visit to India to improve bilateral relations, Thatcher was quoted as saying, 'anything she could do to cement the friendship between the United Kingdom and India, she would do'.⁷⁴ Finally, Paul informed her of Mrs Gandhi's 'lonely and isolated position' after Sanjay's death, adding that she had 'in effect no-one to talk to'.⁷⁵

In her memoirs, Thatcher remarked that although her talks with Mrs Gandhi over the years had been 'interesting but largely inconclusive', she admired and respected her, noting that only a strong figure with a powerful personality could successfully rule a country like India.⁷⁶ Moreover, she observed that Mrs Gandhi was 'immensely practical', a common 'female trait' according to her.⁷⁷ She also mentioned the thorny issue of immigration at the time with reference to the British Nationality Bill of 1981 passed by her government. The Bill had effectively led to a tightening of immigration quotas to Britain from its former colonies. In response, the Indian government had expressed concern about the long waiting times for United Kingdom passport holders

⁷⁰ 'Call by Mr. Swraj Paul', 2 July 1980. PREM19/257 f6. MTFDA.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London, 1993), p. 161.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 161-2.

(U.K.P.H.) in India seeking to come to the U.K.⁷⁸ Before Rajiv Gandhi's official visit in July 1981, Thatcher was informed of his argument for 'substantially increasing' the quota for Indians 'even if this meant a lengthening of queues for other categories of immigrants'.⁷⁹ Rajiv stressed that these were 'touchy questions' for Indians, and suggested that Thatcher make a favourable statement on U.K.P.H. before her visit to India.⁸⁰

Adding further to British embarrassment, in July 1981 several racially motivated riots broke out in areas that were home to large South Asian communities. Previously, the 1979 riots in Southall had caused 'widespread public and parliamentary concern' in India.⁸¹ For instance, a reader in the *Times of India* argued that the riots were a 'natural outcome of the Conservative government's policies', urging then President Sanjeeva Reddy to 'keep himself aloof' during the wedding celebrations of Prince Charles and

⁷⁸ 'Your visit to India: Quota for United Kingdom Passport Holders in India', 30 March 1981. PREM19/487 f287. MTFDA.

⁷⁹ 'Rajiv Gandhi call on Prime Minister – Essential facts', 23 July 1981. PREM19/799 f179. MTFDA.

⁸⁰ 'Immigration and the Prime Minister's Visit', Telegram number 229, 18 March 1981. PREM19/487 f320. MTFDA; Here it is worth mentioning the mass expulsion of British passport holding Asians (Indians or those of Indian origin) by Ugandan President, Idi Amin, in 1972 which prompted Mrs Gandhi to confront Amin at the 1973 Non-Aligned Movement summit in Algiers. Amin had ordered all Asians who were not Ugandan citizens, around 60,000 at the time, to leave the country within 90 days. Many of those expelled sought refuge in the U.K. whilst others chose to go back to India. See J. Mehta, 'Negotiating Compensation for Indians...', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 28/3 (2001), pp.25-46. P. C. Alexander retells her encounter with Amin in later years in his memoirs: 'She received him with courtesy but throughout the meeting she did not say anything except a few words...But Amin was not the one to be put off by such signals. What was important for him was that he should have a meeting with Indira Gandhi even though it was all a one-sided talk. [Amin] came to meet her accompanied by half-a-dozen Indians, including a couple of Sikhs, who were introduced to her as very senior officials of his government. But Mrs Gandhi had known in advance that Amin had sent out his aides to collect a group of Indians from the city to accompany him on his visit to create the impression that his top aides were still Indians and the reports about him having driven out Indians from key positions in his government...were all false.' Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, p. 78; Mrs Gandhi's intervention in this matter is noteworthy as the concept of an Indian diaspora was yet to be of political or economic significance in domestic politics. It is interesting that unlike previous governments' distant stance on matters concerning Indians abroad, Mrs Gandhi considered the diaspora to be of interest rather than an external 'problem' that had to be somehow dealt with. In a significant way, Mrs Gandhi was the first PM to show an organised interest in the community, courting it and voicing its grievances. Whether it played a strategic role in Mrs Gandhi's electoral calculus or as a source of remittances, or whether she conceived a long-term vision for the community is debatable.

⁸¹ 'Call by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi MP, 28 July 1981 – Essential Facts'. PREM19/799 f177. MTFDA.

Lady Diana later that year.⁸² As the community in Southall was predominantly Punjabi, the Chief Minister of Punjab, Darbara Singh, paid a special visit to ‘calm the anxieties’ of Indians in the area.⁸³ His visit attracted considerable press attention, and Thatcher was advised to emphasise through the media that although the riots were racial in nature ‘...the trouble was not caused by problems between the Asian and White communities who enjoy excellent relations’ but was rather provoked by outsiders.⁸⁴ It was believed that any reassurances conveyed to Singh on this matter would be communicated with Mrs Gandhi as well.⁸⁵

In later years, Thatcher admitted that she never succeeded in ‘drawing Mrs Gandhi or her successors away from India’s traditional alliance with the Soviet Union...or in drawing her closer to America’.⁸⁶ In the early 1980s, the revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan added to India’s geopolitical importance, and brought into focus Mrs Gandhi’s foreign policy. Although her condemnation of the Soviet occupation was known to the British, it was considered important to have her oppose the presence of Soviet troops at the United Nations.⁸⁷ In a letter to American President Ronald Reagan, Thatcher detailed her impressions of India and its relations with the West during the Afghanistan crisis, which is worth quoting at length:

‘My main purpose in visiting India was to try to consolidate relations with Mrs Gandhi personally. I believe that I succeeded in fair measure. But there is a good way to go if relations between India and the West are to be put on a really sound footing. Mrs Gandhi is, as you must know, suspicious of our policies and, in particular, of the policies of successive US Governments. She claims to have had virtually no personal relations with your recent predecessors. You might be surprised, however, by the extent of her suspicion of Russian activities in India. She maintains these have often been directed against her, notably in the election

⁸² Pendharkar, ‘Two Reactions’, *TOI* (8 August 1981), p. 8.

⁸³ ‘India: Visit to UK of Punjab Chief Minister’, 17 July 1981. PREM19/799 f179. MTFDA.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Thatcher, *Downing Streets Years*, p. 161.

⁸⁷ UK High Commission Delhi to FCO, ‘Mrs Gandhi’s India’, 26 March 1981. PREM19/487 f292. MTFDA.

of 1977. She is definitely not a Marxist. Indeed she is greatly concerned about the activities of the Communists in India and is casting around for ways to defeat them. [...] On the other hand, perhaps as a counter to the threat she perceives from China, or possibly because she feels that the Soviet Union, as the super power nearest to India, has to be appeased, Mrs Gandhi remains strongly opposed to any action to support the Afghanistan resistance. She argues that the best hope of achieving Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which she genuinely wants, is through negotiations. I made it clear that I thought she was too sanguine.⁸⁸

Mrs Gandhi's stance on Afghanistan, and her refusal to oppose the Soviet Union is examined in detail in the next chapter.⁸⁹

In view of these circumstances, a non-controversial, cultural event like the Festival was deemed an ideal opportunity by the British to mend their drifting relations with India.⁹⁰

Ahead of Thatcher's visit to India in April 1981, High Commissioner Thomson explained to Chairman Walker that 'like everything else in India', the Festival was 'viewed politically with a special angle'.⁹¹ He noted that Indians were particularly keen to showcase their modern achievements, and that the British must not come across as 'treating India or her achievements in an off-hand manner'.⁹²

At the time, this statement was perhaps prompted by the Indian Committee's dissatisfaction with Her Majesty's Government's (henceforth HMG) lack of financial support to the Festival. In a letter to Keith Jeffery, Administrative Director of the Arts Council, Peter Blaker of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office explained that HMG

⁸⁸ Letter dated 27 April 1981. 3/1/13 f85 (T68/81). MTFDA.

⁸⁹ See pp. 295-97 of this thesis.

⁹⁰ The Indian community in Britain had historically voted for the Labour Party due to its connections with trade unions on factory floors, and Labour's support for Indian independence and anti-colonialism in general (Malik, *India and the United Kingdom*, p. 95); It may have been in Thatcher's interest subsequently to reach out to the community for electoral support. It is also worth noting that when Thatcher visited India in 1981, her image amongst the Indian public was not positive. Owing to the ideological divide between her and Mrs Gandhi, it was argued that relations between India and Britain were 'not so good as they should be'. This could add another dimension to Thatcher's involvement in the organisation of the Festival. IIPO, 'Indo-British relations and Margaret Thatcher's Visit', *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 26/10 (1981), p. 9.

⁹¹ J. A. Thomson to Michael Walker, 12 February 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

⁹² *Ibid.*

had not contributed financially to any such event in the past, and recommended that both governments avoid this degree of official involvement in the Festival.⁹³ In response, Jeffery argued that the Indian government was already working closely with its Festival Committee that comprised Mrs Gandhi's personal nominees, many of whom, including Jayakar, were her friends.⁹⁴ He suggested including an MP on the British Committee to reassure the Indian government that they were 'as determined as they to ensure the success of the Festival'.⁹⁵

That the Festival's funding was inadequate was brought to Thatcher's notice, and she promptly involved herself in raising money through alternative channels. For instance, Walker suggested that she host a reception for British industrialists with significant investments, and potential commercial interest in India.⁹⁶ He believed that it was important to send the message to the business community that their sponsorship of the Festival was not simply 'a question of cultural charity... but of enlightened commercial self-interest'.⁹⁷ He also advised Thatcher that Mrs Gandhi would take notice of the firms that were willing to contribute financially towards the Festival.⁹⁸ Remarkably, substantial funds were raised at this reception where the donors included the heads of major banks in the U.K. as well as industrialists representing automobiles, telecommunications, oil and gas, pharmaceuticals, etc.⁹⁹ Additionally, HMG contributed £1 million through grants made to participating museums and galleries.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Letter dated 13 March 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

⁹⁴ Letter dated 25 March 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Walker to Thatcher, 23 June 1981. PREM19/800 f164. MTFDA.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ For a complete list of sponsors and donors, see letter dated 18 January 1982 from Tom Petzal to Keith Jeffery in MSS Eur F215/172. Major Indian sponsors included the Tata group, Bank of India, and Bank of Baroda.

¹⁰⁰ 'Call by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi MP'. MTFDA.

In general, Thatcher was advised to stress in her personal conversations with Mrs Gandhi that she was indeed ‘taking close personal interest’ in the Festival.¹⁰¹ It was also deemed appropriate that she issue a formal invitation to her during her visit to India. In a letter to Michael Alexander, Michael Arthur of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office reiterated that good relations with India were important for ‘political and commercial reasons’, and an invitation to Mrs Gandhi would be a natural way to follow up on Thatcher’s visit.¹⁰² In addition to citing the Soviet argument, Arthur added:

‘There is a risk that Mrs Gandhi will be a more controversial figure in a year’s time than she is now. There are no current signs that she is contemplating a return to the personal rule of the Emergency period but the course of internal developments in India is, as always, unpredictable. If, as seems likely, the Reagan administration seek much closer relations with Pakistan, India may drift further toward the Soviet Union. But this is very speculative and none of it may happen. The best judgment we can make at present is that our interests would be likely to be served by Mrs Gandhi in 1982...There is certainly considerable Indian enthusiasm for the event (and Mrs Gandhi is thought to be taking a keen personal interest), and the chances are reasonably good that it will turn out to be what the organisers hope – a striking manifestation of Indian culture which could do much for the image of India in Britain and demonstrate a lively British interest in things Indian.’¹⁰³

The correspondence dealt with thus far has placed the Festival in its historical context with reference to British foreign policy. In the following section, I will argue that the spectacle was also a crucial set piece in the domestic ‘Raj revival’ in Britain that witnessed growing interest in the subcontinent through the lens of literature, art, and film. These depictions played with notions of colonial nostalgia, and legacies of the empire which helped redefine British identity in the 1980s. On the Indian side, I suggest that the Festival’s theme of ‘continuity and change’ reflected Mrs Gandhi’s thoughts on Indian culture, and its place in a rapidly changing society. This theme was viewed

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² ‘Invitation to Mrs Gandhi to visit the United Kingdom’, 30 March 1981. PREM19/800 f193. MTFDA.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

as instrumental to capture the diasporic nostalgia of Indians in Britain, and to simultaneously invoke feelings of prestige amongst middle class spectators at home.

Re-visiting 'Indianness'

For the Festival's various displays, the Indian Committee was keen to move away from a chronological format to adopt a more thematic approach which, it argued, better reflected the continuity and change, the unity and plurality of Indian culture, and its ability to carry forward a timeless 'idea of India' from the past into the present and the future.¹⁰⁴ In accordance with this theme, there was to be a judicious balance between the ancient and the contemporary, the traditional and the modern, and the intellectual and the manual.¹⁰⁵ For instance, at the *Science in India* exhibition, ancient models of mathematics, science, and medicine were explored alongside discoveries made under Mughal and British influences, and the contributions of the scientific community in the twentieth century. As the official Festival brochure noted, the 'astronomical constructions'¹⁰⁶ of Maharaja Jai Singh were intended to be explored alongside replicas from India's space mission (Figure 3.2).¹⁰⁷

The theme of cultural continuity was anticipated to resonate with Indians who had left their 'mother country' soon after Independence. For many immigrants, Indian culture

¹⁰⁴ Vatsyayan, 'India Presented in its Own Terms', p. 204.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁰⁶ Festival brochure, MSS F215/172. Note the revival of Jai Singh's constructions which were also incorporated into the Asiad emblem (Figures 1.4 and 1.5, pp. 70-71).

¹⁰⁷ Vatsyayan, 'India presented in its own terms', p. 216; On the symbolism behind replicas of cultural artefacts like ancient stone sculpture displayed alongside those of scientific missiles, see T. Guha-Thakurta, 'Conceits of the Copy...' in P. Chatterjee, T. Guha-Thakurta and B. Kar ed., *New Cultural Histories of India* (New Delhi, 2014). Guha-Thakurta argues that official 'remakes' or 'recreations' of a village scene, a historical site, or a famous nuclear missile are offered by cultural administrators 'as a gift and pride of the Indian nation, as a symbol of official cultural exchange and diplomatic goodwill' to the rest of the world (p. 181).

was paradoxically something that although continuously evolving, was somehow frozen in time, and had remained unchanged over the years – a source of strength to define their new identity in a foreign land. Indeed, as Singh notes, the ‘core feature’ of the Indian diaspora is its ‘collective imagining of India’ where ‘emotions, links, traditions, feelings and attachments’ are often rooted in memories that themselves served as ‘therapeutic sites of continuity’.¹⁰⁸ Thus, for those who witnessed the Independence movement, visually potent symbols like the Gandhian *charkha* or *swadeshi khadi* popularly exhibited at museums and festivals invoked memories of organised resistance against colonial domination. On this point, Varma remarks that for the Indian middle class in general, the very nature of the colonial experience had nurtured a romanticisation of India’s past as ‘an ideal, culturally efflorescent, and politically powerful time and space’.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, this ideal past, and Indian culture broadly was imagined and articulated as diametrically opposed to Western civilisation and its intellectual currents.

A feature of nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian nationalism, according to Partha Chatterjee, was its division of social institutions into separate domains of the material and the spiritual.¹¹⁰ On the one hand, the material or the ‘outside’ domain consisted of matters relating to the economy, statecraft, and science where the superiority of ‘Western’ ways was acknowledged, and regarded as worthy of emulation. On the other hand, the ‘inner’ spiritual domain made up of a set of cultural practices and beliefs was regarded as distinct and unique to the subcontinent that had to be

¹⁰⁸ G. Singh, ‘Introduction’ in B. Parekh ed., *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora* (London and New York, 2003), p. 4; and T. Guha-Thakurta, *In the Name of the Goddess* (Delhi, 2015), p. 89.

¹⁰⁹ Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, p. 33.

¹¹⁰ P. Chatterjee., *The Nations and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), p. 6.

protected from outside interference by the colonial state. During the freedom movement, elite nationalist leaders adopted and reinforced this idea of ‘specialness’ or distinctness of Indian culture to instil a fervour of resistance in their fellow subjects against the imperial regime. Later, this became a unique postcolonial mode of self-identification that was partly shaped by the colonial experience itself but was also reinforced by ‘outside imagery’ or an external identity given to India and Indians by the ‘West’.¹¹¹

For some Indians, however, the notion of ‘uniqueness’ was not limited to culture defined in socio-religious terms but as a positive articulation of modernity itself. As Gyan Prakash notes in his brilliant account of colonial modernity in India, a defining feature of Indian nationalism, articulated by ‘progressive’ figures such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and later Jawaharlal Nehru, was its vision of an India with a modernity of its own, which was not defined in opposition to ancient tradition but was rather born out of a critique of Western modernity. For these thinkers, Indian modernity was rooted in India’s historical existence as a pre-political, cultural community with its own unique intellectual, spiritual, and scientific traditions.¹¹²

Soon after Independence, an influential middle class sought to recreate this immemorial culture, and bring back the grandeur and prestige associated with it to the present.¹¹³

This middle class was in turn influenced by the powerful ideologies of thinkers like

¹¹¹ A. Sen., ‘Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination’, *Daedalus*, 134/4 (2005), p. 169; The effects of outside representations of ‘Eastern’ societies and cultures by ‘Western’ scholars also forms the central theme of Edward Said’s much contested work, *Orientalism* (London, 2003).

¹¹² G. Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (New Delhi, 2000), pp. 201-5; Also see K. N. Pannikar, ‘Chapter 5’ *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (London, 2002); and Jaffrelot and van der Veer ed., *Patterns of Middle Class Consumption*, pp. 15-16.

¹¹³ Varma, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, pp. 34-5.

Gandhi and Nehru. Over time, the Gandhian view was simplified and reduced to a critique of Western modernity rooted in his opposition to modern civilisation broadly, and urbanism and technology in particular. ‘Gandhism’ was made synonymous with the vision of an ideal future centred on village life and self-sufficient local communities. As he is famously known to have proclaimed, ‘The future of India lies in its villages’, or rather the future lay in a simpler past.¹¹⁴

For Nehru too the past was something that ultimately led to the present, ‘the moment of action’, and the future was something that flowed from it – all three were inextricably intertwined and interrelated.¹¹⁵ However, Nehru was also explicit about what he considered was ‘the burden of the past’.¹¹⁶ On the one hand, he praised the creative and adventurous spirit of Indian civilisation that had paved the way for ‘magnificent’ art and sculpture, and ‘highly ornate and complex’ literary forms over centuries.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, he expressed great frustration with the irrationalism and narrow orthodoxies which had replaced the ‘traditional scientific spirit of inquiry’ of the Indian people.¹¹⁸ These ideas were most strongly reflected in his disdain for religious superstition and orthodoxy.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, Guha points out that Gandhi’s ‘extraordinarily positive portrait of Indian culture’ in *Hind Swaraj* was not unrelated to his own diasporic identity. He argues: ‘For diasporic nationalism tends to be uncritical, eulogising the faraway homeland, its hallowed and mostly unsullied past, and its pristine and ageless culture’. (R. Guha, *Gandhi Before India* (London, 2013), p. 383); For a critical appraisal of Gandhian thought on Indian culture, see A. Nandy, ‘From Outside the Imperium: Gandhi’s cultural critique of the West’, *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 7/2 (1981), and P. Chatterjee, Chapter 3, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis, 1993).

¹¹⁵ J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi, 2004), pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ It is noteworthy that Mrs Gandhi, unlike her father, chose to display her religious identity publicly, particularly in her final years. During the 1979 election campaign, she was widely photographed on pilgrimages, consulting astrologers and *yogis*, and conducting Hindu rituals at home. Aside from personal beliefs, she found it politically advantageous to make use of vocabularies traditionally associated with political Hinduism to capture the Hindu middle class vote. (See Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, pp. 130-5, 138-42); In 1983, Mrs Gandhi also accepted an invitation to launch the *Vishva Hindu Parishad's* (VHP) *Ekatmata Yatra*. Rajagopal notes that this was the VHP's first mass contact

Despite his scepticism, however, India for Nehru was ‘like some palimpsest’, absorbing new cultures whilst retaining older layers of thought and tradition.¹²⁰ As he expressed in *The Discovery of India*:

‘There was something unique about the antiquity of the subcontinent, and its tremendous impress of oneness, making its inhabitants throughout these ages distinctively Indian, with the same national heritage and the same set of moral and mental qualities... Indeed, a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilisation.’¹²¹

Mrs Gandhi’s understanding of Indian culture was variously influenced by the writings of Gandhi, Nehru, and Rabindranath Tagore. Interestingly, she also wrote about the ‘composite’ nature of Indian culture, having absorbed ‘layers of *foreign* influence’ [emphasis added] over centuries, whilst managing to retain ‘a basic quality of Indianness despite many superficial differences’.¹²² Not dissimilar to the rhetoric employed by the Hindu right in India today, she argued:

‘There is hardly a thought in philosophy, science or the arts of which you will not find some grain in India. Even the passing fashions or cults which rock the West from time to time were found in India somewhere some time, and were tolerated without the raising of an eyebrow or affecting others. This is the secret of India, the acceptance of life in all its fullness, the good and the evil...’¹²³

In this context, she was once asked whether India and Indians could conserve their ‘original identity’ in the wake of modernisation. Mrs Gandhi noted that although individuals worldwide were fighting to retain their individuality, this was not the case with India.¹²⁴ According to Mrs Gandhi:

programme which demonstrated that Hindu symbolism could be effectively utilised for popular mobilisation. Indeed, after the success of this campaign, the VHP launched the *Ram Janmabhoomi* agitation. (A. Rajagopal, ‘Sangh’s Role in the Emergency’, *EPW*, 38/27 (2003), p. 2798); Instances of Mrs Gandhi’s superstitious beliefs can also be found in the memoirs of her close aides such as Sathe, *Memoirs of a Rationalist*, p. 147; K. P. Mathur, *The Unseen Indira Gandhi: Through Her Physician’s Eyes* (New Delhi, 2016), pp. 37-8; and M. L. Fotedar, *The Chinar Leaves: A Political Memoir* (Noida, 2015), p. 117. Also see pp. 321-22 of this thesis.

¹²⁰ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 51.

¹²¹ Quoted in P. Anderson, *The Indian ideology* (London; New York, 2013), p. 7.

¹²² I. Gandhi, *India: The Speeches and Reminiscences of Indira Gandhi* (London, 1975), pp. 47-8.

¹²³ ‘PM outlines India’s glorious heritage’, *TOI* (3 May 1982), p. 9.

¹²⁴ I. Gandhi, *The Years of Endeavour: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi, 1975), pp. 95-6.

‘India [was] the only country not to feel that we should just copy what is done in the West. We should learn everything we can from Western countries, and there is a great deal to learn, in science, technology and other things, even culture. But, as Gandhiji said, we shouldn’t be blown off our feet, we should keep our roots here.’¹²⁵

Invoking Nehru, she then argued that there was no conflict between the Indian man and the modern man, and that the leadership of India’s founding fathers had enabled Indians to retain what was great of their traditions whilst taking advantage of science and technology.¹²⁶ Mrs Gandhi also believed that although scientific knowledge could be acquired externally, it must not be super imposed over older thought. Rather, science and society must be an ‘organic compound’.¹²⁷ Here she also claimed to have been influenced by Tagore, whom she believed was ‘part of all time’ – ‘He combined the eternal and the immediate’.¹²⁸ Further, on reconciling Tagore’s universality with his nationality, she remarked:

‘Even the universal had to find an identity of place and nationality; to find a local form and name. That is why the poet was proud of being an Indian while aspiring to be a universal man. My father expressed the same idea in a different way when he declared that no one could be truly international unless he was intensely national.’¹²⁹

Both Nehru the ‘cosmopolitan nationalist’ and Mrs Gandhi, therefore, embraced the popular idea that modernisation was not the same as Westernisation, and likewise modern science was not Western but universal, and thus perfectly consistent with ‘Indianness’.¹³⁰

Here it must be emphasised that these ideas captured the imagination of a small elite of which the middle class was an important part. However, they are worthy of our attention

¹²⁵ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 178.

¹²⁶ Gandhi, *Years of Endeavour*, pp. 95-6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

¹²⁸ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 26.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ A. Nandy, *The Romance of the State: And the Fate of Dissent in the Tropics* (New Delhi, 2002), p. 160.

precisely because individual thinkers and actors like Nehru and Mrs Gandhi, along with their circle of advisors, were at the helm of producing an ‘official’ Indian culture that was to be representative of the nation. Postcolonial ‘Indianness’, whether reproduced as scientific planning or at Republic Day parades, was *made* part of a wider national consciousness. The translation of their vision into practice placed the state at the heart of this ‘elite’ project, making it the great enframer of Indian society.¹³¹

In her address to the ‘National Integration Council’ in 1984, Mrs Gandhi spoke on the subject of cultural unity in India, noting that the state ‘had been engaged in vigorous intellectual and moral campaigns...in order to promote the concept of India and of Indianness’:

‘I do feel that such a nation-wide campaign has to be revived. Government has a responsibility, but so has everybody else. We feel it is important to emphasise the heritage of our freedom movement. In this connection, I have written to Chief Ministers. The Education Ministry is also working on this. The spirit of the freedom movement is an integrating factor and something which gives pride to our younger generation and strengthens their roots.’¹³²

Elsewhere, she urged:

‘I have tried hard to do whatever I could for the revival of Indian culture from the beginning. The promotion of Indian folk dancing was at my initiative. The government had refused to help us the first year. It is only because of the Duke of Edinburgh’s visit [in 1959] that they asked us to put up a performance and offered the money for it. That was the first of what became a regular feature of our Republic Week celebrations. It was my suggestion to have floats and tableaux. Initially, there was opposition from those in charge. They felt that they would detract from the precision of the parade. But this programme also became popular.’¹³³

¹³¹ Gooptu in D. M. Peers and N. Gooptu ed., *India and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2012), p. 345.

¹³² I. Gandhi, ‘Promote Indianness’, 21 January 1984, *Selected Speeches and Writings 1982 – 1984*, p. 71.

¹³³ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 159.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Sharad Saxena/Outlook India (2 November 2009), <https://www.outlookindia.com/photos/people/indira-gandhi/7895/?photonono=17> (2 August 2018).

Figure 3.4: Mrs Gandhi Participating in a Folk Dance Performance at Teen Murti Bhavan¹³⁴

State spectacles such as Republic Day parades or the Festival can thus be examined as ‘big projects’ where political leaders, bureaucratic administrators, and academic experts emerging from the ranks of the middle class collaborated to propagate a national and international identity of India. Notably, they conceptualised and utilised Indian culture as something pliable – a resource that could be packaged differently for different audiences. As argued above, this exercise was not without tension. Indeed, the ‘visual scheme’ in its final form was flexible, drawing upon a multitude of ideas and images, some self-constructed and others externally imposed. At the FOI, the celebration of India’s imperial heritage, in particular, contributed to its controversial reception as I examine in the next section.

¹³⁴ Source: Sharad Saxena/Outlook India (2 November 2009), <https://www.outlookindia.com/photos/people/indira-gandhi/7895/?photonono=17> (2 August 2018).

Festivals and 'Emotional Imperialism'¹³⁵

The Second World War marked the beginning of the end of the British imperial project. The War left the economy in shambles, and the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union as 'superpowers' shifted the balance against Britain in the international order. Developed against an uncertain geopolitical climate, the Festival of Britain was an extravagant national exhibition inaugurated in the summer of 1951 in London, a full century after the city hosted the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition, which was the first in a series of spectacular 'world fairs'. Like the 1851 spectacle, the Festival of Britain was intended to 'reinvigorate the national economy, shore up Britain's international importance, and offer a funfair for the British populace and tourists alike'.¹³⁶

Hosted at a time of post-war austerity, and in the aftermath of the first wave of decolonisation across Asia and Africa, the 'most obvious representation' of British prowess and position in the world – the empire – receded into the background of the Festival.¹³⁷ Still, the exhibition highlighted Britain's positive 'contributions to civilisation' such as modern transportation, communication, and parliamentary systems particularly in its former colonies.¹³⁸ Not surprisingly, attempts to foster Commonwealth participation to enhance the reach of the Festival were soon discarded as newly independent countries including India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (erstwhile

¹³⁵ Borrowing from G. Gagne-Hawes, *Shadows of the Raj* (PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 2012), p. 266.

¹³⁶ A. Heinonen, 'A Tonic to the Empire?', *Britain and the World*, 8/1 (2015), p. 76; Also see H. Atkinson, *The Festival of Britain: A Land and its People* (London, 2012); and Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, p. 49. The Crystal Palace exhibition included displays of pre-industrial crafts brought from the subcontinent, which stood in contrast with the products of 'modern' industrial nations.

¹³⁷ Heinonen, 'Tonic to the Empire', p. 77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Ceylon) refused to partake in what they believed was a celebration of ‘Britain’s exclusive claims to modernity’.¹³⁹

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at The National Archives/Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.in/detail/news-photo/dome-of-discovery-and-skylon-south-bank-exhibition-june-news-photo/138602826#/dome-of-discovery-and-skylon-south-bank-exhibition-june-1951-picture-id138602826> (15 March 2018).

Figure 3.5: Forward-Looking Modernity – The Dome of Discovery and ‘Skylon’ at the Festival of Britain, London (1951)¹⁴⁰

As noted above, the 1970s and early 1980s brought India and Indians to the fore of British foreign policy not least due to the riots in Southall, and the controversial British Nationality Bill. Indeed, this was a period fraught with racial tensions in Britain combined with a recessionary climate, which culminated in the election of Thatcher in 1979. Interestingly, Gagne-Hawes notes that upon her election, Thatcher attempted to reverse Britain’s ‘defeatist image’ by turning a blind eye to crimes, strikes, and vicious debates around immigration, and instead turned back the clock to the heydays of British imperialism ‘to revive a sense of identity’ based on its former world dominance.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁴⁰ Source: The National Archives/Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.in/detail/news-photo/dome-of-discovery-and-skylon-south-bank-exhibition-june-news-photo/138602826#/dome-of-discovery-and-skylon-south-bank-exhibition-june-1951-picture-id138602826> (15 March 2018).

¹⁴¹ G. Gagne-Hawes, *Shadows of the Raj*, pp. 248-9.

Following the highly symbolic Falkland victory in 1982, Thatcher's speeches increasingly began referring to the resurrection of Britain's imperial glory:

'When we started out, there were the waverers and the faint-hearts, the people who thought we could no longer do the great things we once did, those who believed our decline was irreversible, that we could never again be what we were, that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an empire and ruled a quarter of the world. Well they were wrong.'¹⁴²

The use of such rhetoric exploited an 'imagined loss' of identity in a post-war, economically fatigued, and now multi-ethnic Britain.¹⁴³

Novelist Salman Rushdie notes that the continuing decline and growing poverty in much of Thatcherite Britain further encouraged many Britons to look back nostalgically 'to the lost hour of their precedence' – the British Raj.¹⁴⁴ This 'Raj revival' and subsequent affirmation of Britain's imperial past in the public sphere was visible in the rapid production of Raj-centric novels and films during this period which depicted the empire's civilising mission to uplift 'backward' colonies. As Rushdie argues, these 'false portraits' were intended to provide 'moral, cultural, and artistic justification for imperialism and its underpinning ideology' in late twentieth century Britain.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Rachel Dwyer notes that the positive images of the Raj gave a sense of security to a faltering national identity at a time of socio-economic uncertainty.¹⁴⁶ A string of films and TV shows set against the colonial landscape – *Gandhi* (1982), *A Passage to India* (1984), *The Jewel in the Crown* (1984), and *The Far Pavillion* (1984) – were amongst the many 'heritage productions' inspired by the days of the empire. Several novels with a subcontinental theme, including Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in E. Oliete-Aldea, *Hybrid Heritage on Screen* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 236.

¹⁴⁵ S. Rushdie, 'Outside the Whale', *Granta* (1 March 1984), <https://granta.com/outside-the-whale/>

¹⁴⁶ R. Dwyer, 'The Case of the Missing Mahatma: Gandhi and the Hindi cinema', *Public Culture*, 23/2 (2008), p. 359.

and Paul Scott's *Staying On* won the prestigious Booker Prize, leading critics at the time to jokingly remark that 'you had to write about India to win the prize'.¹⁴⁷

One of the most well-known examples from the 'Raj revival' genre, and its profitable 'commodification of the past'¹⁴⁸ is Richard Attenborough's Academy Award winning biopic, *Gandhi*. Apart from receiving positive reviews from critics and audiences worldwide, *Gandhi* was of personal significance to Mrs Gandhi.¹⁴⁹ Dwyer suggests that in light of the Emergency, Mrs Gandhi perhaps felt that the 'positive representations' of her father and the Congress Party in the film would, by association, help restore her own image in the West.¹⁵⁰ She thus authorised, through the National Film and Development Corporation of India, \$6.5 million of the \$22 million for the production of the film.¹⁵¹ Additionally, the External Publicity Division of the Ministry of External Affairs supplied 11,000 black and white photographs, 267 colour transparencies, and 424 colour photographs of the Mahatma to the production team.¹⁵²

Despite the Indian government's close involvement, however, *Gandhi* essentially remained a Western film with an Anglo-centric Hollywood style narrative, a British and American dominated cast, and the focus on a 'global Gandhi' rather than on the Indian *bapu*.¹⁵³ Notably, in her letters to friend Dorothy Norman, Mrs Gandhi expressed

¹⁴⁷ Malcolm Bradbury quoted in Gagne-Hawes, *Shadows of the Raj*, pp. 244-5.

¹⁴⁸ Oliete-Aldea, *Hybrid Heritage*, p. 248.

¹⁴⁹ Dwyer, 'The Case of the Missing Mahatma', p. 359.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 358; Vasant Sathe, Minister of I&B between 1980 – 1982, reveals in his memoirs that the proposal for making a film on Gandhi's life was first put before Mrs Gandhi in 1965 when she was I&B Minister. After she became PM, Attenborough received the necessary permission, and the desired funding from the GOI. Sathe adds: 'I take pride in stating that one of the tasks accomplished during my tenure as I&B Minister was the making of the film, *Gandhi*'. Sathe, *Memoirs of a Rationalist*, p. 221.

¹⁵² Ministry of External Affairs, External Publicity Division, 'Annual Report 1983-84', <https://mealib.nic.in/?2512?000#IIIEA> (5 August 2018).

¹⁵³ Dwyer, 'The Case of the Missing Mahatma', pp. 358-9.

disappointment in what she considered was a ‘tragedy’ that no Indian filmmaker had been ‘inspired by the greatness and the drama of that magnificent mass movement’ to produce a similar biopic.¹⁵⁴ She felt that although the film was a spectacle, grand and powerful, it still lacked some essential quality – ‘the spirit that is India’.¹⁵⁵

Then Minister of I&B, Vasant Sathe, reveals that in reality, many Indian directors had approached Mrs Gandhi directly, claiming that they could make an ‘excellent film’ with less than half the amount of money sanctioned for Attenborough’s project.¹⁵⁶ Crucially, they objected to a ‘foreigner, and that too an Englishman’ directing a film on the ‘Father of the Nation’.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, they protested against the idea of a non-Indian actor, Ben Kingsley, playing the role of the Mahatma. Sathe writes that Mrs Gandhi, considering the above perspectives, asked him to review the entire case, including the task of entrusting Attenborough to make the film. Finally, Sathe convinced her that Attenborough’s in-depth research on Gandhi’s life made the project worthwhile. Moreover, they were also impressed with how the film was directed keeping in mind an international audience.¹⁵⁸ As a government advisor on the *Gandhi* project precisely noted:

¹⁵⁴ Gandhi and Norman, *Letters to a Friend*, p. 168.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.; The first state-sponsored film on Gandhi, a fourteen-part documentary series, was a collaboration between the Films Division of India and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in 1969. The director, Vithalbhai Jhaveri, argued at the time that the Ministry of I&B was not taking sufficient interest in the commercial distribution of the film, noting: ‘The world is waiting for an opportunity to know Gandhi. There has been already much delay, much dilatoriness and the spirit of obstruction seems to be prevalent... We have a duty to see that he is preserved and presented to future generations without being bowdlerised by bureaucrats. The ministries and others should see the film in full to realise that it makes use of it to present Gandhiji vividly and inspiringly. It is this Gandhi that can live in people’s minds, not the truncated versions imposed by foreigners to whom Gandhi was alien’. (‘Quarterly Progress Report’, Gandhi Films Committee, 3 July 1969, ‘Film on Mahatma Gandhi’, I&B (Film Production). NAI PMS 12-1/61-FP); It is ironic that Gandhi himself claimed on numerous occasions that he had never seen a motion picture in his life (except Vijay Bhatt’s 1943 *Ram Rajya*), and had compared cinema to ‘vices’ such as betting, gambling, and horse racing. See R. Jeffrey, ‘The Mahatma Didn’t Like the Movies...’, *Global Media and Communication*, 2/2 (2006), pp. 204-24.

¹⁵⁶ Sathe, *Memoirs of a Rationalist*, p. 222.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 222-3.

‘If India (or any country) wanted to get into the international market, this, clearly, was the way to go. A film on Gandhi made either by [Satyajit] Ray or [Shyam] Benegal with an all-Indian cast and crew would, at best, run at the art cinema houses like the Academy in London – rather like Ray’s *The Chess Players*.’¹⁵⁹

Gandhi was also favourably received by viewers in India. Indeed, the nationalist theme of the film provoked some to defend its commercial success, such as the following reader of the London *Economist*:

‘Your Indian correspondent states that the film “Gandhi” is only “a modest commercial success” in India. The reverse is true. Over 10[million] people have already bought a ticket...The initial public showing of “Gandhi” took place in Bombay, where in its 15th week the film is running to full houses. By now the previous all-time hit from the West has been outgrossed several times over.’¹⁶⁰

Selling the Festival

Although there exist several critical reflections on the ‘Raj revival’ genre in literature and film, FOI is yet to be examined as a part of this cultural rediscovery in Britain. As the Festival’s inauguration approached closer, the Committees in India and Britain turned their attention to the publicity for the mega-event. In a letter to the editors of several British newspapers, Festival Consultant, Tom Petzal, explained that several ‘high-level Festival Committee organisations’ had been set up to develop publicity plans.¹⁶¹ In Britain, the Festival was advertised via television, newspaper, and BBC radio.¹⁶² Notably, these were supplemented by a FOI ‘souvenir book’, bi-monthly editions of a ‘Festival Review’ newsletter, unique merchandise sold in departmental stores and local corner shops (Figure 3.6), and several thousand orange and green coloured brochures.

¹⁵⁹ M. Bhaktavatsala, ‘Attenborough’s Experiment with Truth’, *IWI* (21 November 1982), p. 42; *The Chess Players*, or *Shatranj ke Khilari*, was Ray’s critically acclaimed 1977 film based on a short story by the famous Hindi writer, Munshi Premchand.

¹⁶⁰ D. Bevilacqua, ‘Gandhi’, *Economist* (7 May 1983), p. 4.

¹⁶¹ Tom Petzal to Editors of *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Telegraph*, *Observer*, and *Sunday Express*, 9 April 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*



Figure 3.6: Souvenirs of the Spectacle – The Festival commodified¹⁶³

Early on, the Indian Committee suggested selling television rights to broadcast the opening ceremony for the benefit of an international viewership, including in India.¹⁶⁴ It further argued that it was ‘essential’ to include individuals representing the ‘media world’ on the Media Sub-Committee, and suggested hiring a Public Relations agency to handle the ‘large-scale’ promotion of the Festival for ‘commercial purposes’.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, innovative marketing techniques were employed to inform the local public about the theme of the Festival, such as through the sale of Festival merchandise by travel company Thomas Cook, which also strategically began advertising their various holiday packages to India.¹⁶⁶ Another travel company, Cox & Kings, was chosen to distribute merchandise along with their holiday promotions.¹⁶⁷ Keeping with

¹⁶³ Source: Festival Review, second edition (May 1982), p. 20. MSS Eur F215/231.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Other Committees’, 6th meeting of the FOI Committee, 23 April 1981. MSS Eur F215/145.

¹⁶⁵ 2nd meeting of the Media Sub Committee, 10 April 1981. MSS Eur F215/145.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Publicity Committee’, 11th meeting of the Publicity Committee of the FOI, 15 April 1982. MSS Eur F215/144.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

the theme of ‘Raj revivalism’, tourism advertisements claimed to offer unique explorations of the famous sights of the subcontinent such as the Taj Mahal and the royal palaces of Rajasthan, especially attractive to a foreign audience.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, as air travel for leisure became more affordable, GOI-owned airline, Air India, also increased the promotion of its flights between London and Delhi which flew ‘six times a week’:

‘Services on Air India – Royal pomp, hospitality, and very homely services. Also, sari clad beautiful air hostesses will welcome you, take care of you, and serve you delicious Veg and Non-Veg European creations.’¹⁶⁹

Air India advertisements (both in Indian and British sources) made clever use of clearly identifiable cultural and religious imagery such as the scientific myths propagated in ancient Hindu scriptures (Figure 3.7) or Mughal miniature paintings (Figure 3.8) to invite foreign travellers. The visual and textual design of these advertisements thematically supplemented the Festival’s characterisation of Indian culture as ‘traditional’ (for instance in the trope of Indian hospitality), and ‘modern’ (as ancient flying technology).

Interestingly, in an interview with *India Today*, Air India’s then commercial director, Bobby Kooka, revealed the inspiration behind the airline’s famously turbaned and regal mascot, the ‘Maharaja’, which appeared in all its advertisements and sales campaigns (Figure 3.9):

‘It struck me that we needed something to symbolise eastern hospitality and a potentate seemed ideal for that purpose. After [Tata Sons] became Air India, we

¹⁶⁸ Numerous tourism-related advertisements began appearing in Indian newspapers around this time which catered specifically to the middle class. Packaged tours for nuclear families of four, in line with the ‘small family, happy family’ sloganeering, and honeymoon packages for couples were routinely advertised. Interestingly, an opinion survey conducted in 1982-83 revealed that almost 60% of households in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi, and Madras went on holidays, 40% for ‘tourism first’ and 25% for ‘visiting friends and relatives’. The average size of the touring party was just below 4, and ‘family tourist’ was a dominant element of domestic group traveling. IIPO, ‘The structure of household domestic tourism: 1982-1983’, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 29/3-4 (Dec – Jan 1983-1984), p. VIII.

¹⁶⁹ Translated from Hindi, advertisement in *Navbharat Times* (17 December 1983).

realised that we had to be different; it was simply impossible for a small airline to compete with [Trans World Airlines], Air France and the big shots on their own terms. So we expanded the Maharaja image to include “the magic carpet service” and tried to create a distinctive Indian identity for ourselves.’¹⁷⁰

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Advertisement in *Economist* [London], 28 November 1981, p. 25.

Figure 3.7: Ancient Science of Flying – Air India 3000 B.C.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ V. Sanghvi, ‘Pretty girls now find their way into ads...’, *IT* (1 May 2015), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/interview/story/19770228-pretty-girls-now-find-their-way-into-ads-for-almost-everything-bobby-kooka-818746-2015-03-09> (24 August 2018).

¹⁷¹ Advertisement in *Economist* [London], 28 November 1981, p. 25.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright.
The image was sourced at Advertisement in *Economist* [London], 31 October 1981, p. 155.

Figure 3.8: 'My Guest is as My God' – Air-Indian hospitality¹⁷²

¹⁷² Advertisement in *Economist* [London], 31 October 1981, p. 155.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Asia Ad Junkie, <https://brandinginasia.com/25-vintage-air-india-posters-new-maharajah/> (24 August 2018).

Figure 3.9: An Air About India – The ‘Maharaja’¹⁷³

That Mrs Gandhi and the Indian Committee attached special importance to the positive promotion of India by such means is also revealed by the ‘proposal notes’ taken for the Festival’s ‘souvenir book’. This book was envisioned as a ‘visitor’s memento’, a ‘prestige and glossy publication in hard cover’ that would ‘make liberal use of full colour and black and white photography’.¹⁷⁴ The Publicity Committee in Britain under

¹⁷³ Source: Asia Ad Junkie, <https://brandinginasia.com/25-vintage-air-india-posters-new-maharajah/> (24 August 2018).

¹⁷⁴ Minutes of the Meeting: Publicity Committee, 2 September 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

Edmund Swinglehurst, who was also Press Officer for Thomas Cook, recommended that all material related to the Festival bear its official logo (Figure 3.10), and use ‘handmade Indian paper’ to appear authentic.¹⁷⁵ This attention to stylistic detail suggests that the material was primarily intended for a visually literate, middle and upper class audience with a ‘taste’ for the fine arts. A separate sixteen-page edition, which was to be ‘considerably cheaper’, was also considered for distribution amongst the general public.¹⁷⁶ An Editorial Sub-Committee was established which included the Press Counsellor from the Indian High Commission in the U.K. solely for the purpose of compiling the book. The final edition included special contributions from Mrs Gandhi and Thatcher as joint patrons of the Festival. Additionally, Air India took responsibility for its publication in return for staging its own exhibition, *See India*, to promote tourism.¹⁷⁷



Figure 3.10: Official Festival Logo – The lotus flower image was taken from a first century Buddhist stupa from Central India¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Minutes of the Meeting: Working Committee of the Arts Council, 8 December 1981 and 28 July 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁷⁶ Minutes of the Meeting: Publicity Committee, 2 September 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Source: Festival Review, second edition (May 1982), p. 5. MSS Eur F215/231.

Notably, the ‘souvenir book’ contained several articles on the development of science and technology in India to ensure that ‘full promotional value’ was given to modern Indian achievements, including a special section on modern art ‘to give the reader a full positive impression of the country’.¹⁷⁹ The Publicity Committee ‘strongly recommended’ that the book not use titles that directly referenced the Festival such as ‘Indian Festival Guide’ as it was intended to ‘have a life beyond the duration’ of the spectacle.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, the book was envisioned as a tourist catalogue describing India’s major attractions, including shopping for handicrafts to ‘whet the potential visitor’s appetite’, and to promote Indian commercial exports.¹⁸¹ The Editorial Committee proposed that the majority of articles be written by ‘Indian specialists’ in various fields, ‘the more famous the better’ to lend it greater credibility.¹⁸² For instance, the section on Indian commerce and industry was personally compiled by Mrs Gandhi’s economic advisor, L.K. Jha.¹⁸³ The Asiad, which was expected to ‘naturally attract a large number of visitors’, was also advertised through this medium.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Publicity Committee, ‘Proposal of book to be published in association with the FOI’. MSS Eur F215/144.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ ‘Air-India book’ notes. MSS F215/84.

¹⁸⁴ Publicity Committee, ‘Proposal of book’.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Advertisement in *Economist* [London], 25 December 1982, p. 61.

Figure 3.11: ‘World’s Most Fascinating Playground’ – Promoting leisure and the nation¹⁸⁵

The Festival found its way into the classroom through a special programme commissioned by the Education Department of the Commonwealth Institute. A special package for British schools was designed to aid teachers in spreading awareness about the Festival. It was emphasised that the event was not merely London-based but was rather an opportunity for schools throughout the country to organise and present their own Indian-themed performances and exhibitions.¹⁸⁶ Thus a high school in Worcestershire was transformed into a ‘miniature Rajasthan’ where dancers, storytellers, and artists from the State camped for a week.¹⁸⁷

As noted in the official Festival booklet, the single most important medium of publicity was the ‘Festival Review’ newsletter which included official schedules, articles by

¹⁸⁵ Advertisement in *Economist* [London], 25 December 1982, p. 61.

¹⁸⁶ Festival of India, Great Britain, Official booklet (London, 1982), pp. 4 – 6.

¹⁸⁷ R. Guha, *India after Gandhi* (London, 2008), p. 550.

Festival organisers, and impressions of attendees.¹⁸⁸ The newsletter also advertised smaller Festival-related activities such as ‘mother tongue courses’, lectures on Hinduism and Sikhism, and even an essay competition on the ‘Delhi Durbar spectacle’ for students to win a free holiday in India.¹⁸⁹ Although the Review’s circulation was deemed successful in numbers, the Publicity Committee was unsure whether the ‘right people’ were reading it.¹⁹⁰ For instance, in an exchange between two Committee members, it was revealed that some sections of the Indian community (Gujarati ‘business people’) had no knowledge of the Festival whatsoever.¹⁹¹ Subsequently, promotional material was included in local community-run magazines in the months leading up to the spectacle. At a meeting to discuss the issue, Jayakar also suggested publicising the event in countries with a sizeable diasporic population such as in Germany, Canada, and the U.S. as it was expected that readers in those countries would encourage their kin in Britain to attend the Festival via word of mouth.¹⁹²

Despite these efforts, there were many amongst the community in Britain who were unhappy with the degree of participation open to them in the actual production of the event. This sentiment was vocalised by CAA UK which had shown keenness in the idea of a ‘special event involving the Indian community’ when the Festival was first proposed in 1977.¹⁹³ CAA UK’s chairman at the time, Madhav Sharma, recalled in a report that in early 1979, the organisation had submitted a paper titled ‘A Case to the Arts Council for expanding the scope of the Festival of India’. The report criticised the

¹⁸⁸ Festival of India, Official booklet, p. 4.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Festival of India Festival Review’ (March, August, October 1982). MSS Eur F215/231.

¹⁹⁰ Publicity Committee, ‘11th meeting of the Publicity Committee of the FOI’, 15 April 1982. MSS Eur F215/144.

¹⁹¹ Tom Petzal to Bhikhu Parekh, 2 April 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁹² ‘Minutes of the Meeting Festival Committee and Working Committee’, 4 June 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁹³ M. Sharma, Chairman’s report, CAA UK, 29 March 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

‘top-down’ organisation of the event by ‘so-called experts who [were] very rarely artists themselves or even community leaders’.¹⁹⁴ Almost 700 individuals and organisations joined CAA UK during this period, particularly to protest against the word ‘fringe’ used by the British Committee to advertise activities associated with the Festival outside of London.¹⁹⁵ It was argued that ‘fringe activity’ suggested ‘something minor, subsidiary and of little account’.¹⁹⁶ After some contemplation, the word was later replaced with ‘other events’ in official Festival material.¹⁹⁷

A particularly contentious issue was the Indian Committee’s singular focus on ‘traditional’ themes, encompassing both ‘classical’ and ‘folk’ artistic forms. In the above report, Sharma referred to a ‘confidential paper’ that was submitted to the British Committee, which he alleged included several ‘prejudiced, misleading, dismissive and arrogant’ statements about Indians in Britain, and the quality of their art.¹⁹⁸ In his strongly worded report, Sharma urged:

‘We do not see much point, to put it bluntly, in a Festival in which a Ravi Shankar or Ustad Bismillah Khan can be feted as a great man as long as he is safely domiciled in India while his ex-compatriot in Leicester or Coventry who practices Asian arts is considered to only just qualify for human status. We also felt that there was a need to display not only traditional arts and art forms but also the arts of those who know where they live (without forgetting where they came from) and who respond to their new environment with new forms and new style...So, the struggle continues.’¹⁹⁹

Similarly, although the Indian Committee was keen to showcase India’s techno-scientific achievements at the Festival, it was argued that the same principle of ‘modernity’ was not applied to its various art exhibitions. Brown notes that compared

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ravi Jain to Tom Petzal, 13 March 1981. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁹⁷ 3rd Sub-Committee Meeting, Arts Council, 4 February 1981. MSS Eur F215/145.

¹⁹⁸ Chairman’s report, CAA UK. MSS Eur F215/140.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

to contemporary and modern art, Festival authorities (led by Jayakar and Kapila Vatsyayan in particular) preferred to showcase ‘folk’ themes including displays of living art and craft traditions from India’s villages partly to enhance their export potential in foreign markets where the subcontinent was associated with an ‘exotic’ aesthetic.²⁰⁰ Guha-Thakurta, writing in the context of similar festivals in the 1980s, similarly observes:

‘[...] an earlier set of preoccupation with the primordial, non-urban forms of popular peasant cultures still held sway among different circles of scholarship [in India]. One face of this was manifest in the continuing consecration of the many regional folk traditions of painting, sculpting, storytelling, song, dance, and theatre as uncorrupted living traditions and an endangered natural resource of the nation. Coming out of a long nationalist history of anthropological research, collection and conservation of the folk, this trend moved in these years into new forms of national and international promotion. The ‘folk’ took its place side by side with the ‘classical’ within new circuits of global corporate capital in the age of the Festivals of India held in several Western capitals.’²⁰¹

On this point, CAA UK’s vocal agitation was supported by prominent South Asian artists in Britain such as sculptor Avtarjeet Dhanjal, and painters Avinash Chandra and Balraj Khanna.²⁰² Moreover, their close ties with artists in India helped publicise the issue, and mobilised support for their cause. For instance, M. F. Husain, arguably India’s most renowned contemporary artist, criticised the Indian Festival Committee arguing that Pupul Jayakar ‘only thinks anything which is 5,000 years old is art’.²⁰³ Such lively debates around contemporary art positively influenced the selection of

²⁰⁰ R. M. Brown, ‘A Distant Contemporary: Indian twentieth-century art in the Festival of India’, *The Art Bulletin*, 96/3 (2014), pp. 344-5. As Brown notes, ‘Despite a stated desire to include “today’s India”, only a handful of the seventy-seven major art exhibitions staged during the series of events featured mid to late twentieth-century, gallery-driven, urban-centred Indian art’ (Ibid.).

²⁰¹ T. Guha-Thakurta in Chatterjee, Guha-Thakurta and Kar ed., *New Cultural Histories of India*, p. 6; Elsewhere, Guha-Thakurta notes that the popularity of such Festivals gave international recognition to ‘culture brokers’ such as Jayakar and Vatsyayan who were ‘a formidable mix of scholarly and bureaucratic authority’ on cultural representations of India. Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, p. 230.

²⁰² Brown, ‘A Distant Contemporary’, pp. 344-5.

²⁰³ Ibid., Footnote 64, p. 355; In Jayakar’s words, the Festival was the ‘commencement of a major people-to-people dialogue... a germination, a new beginning. It was an attempt to discover the authentic face of India – an ancient people with young minds, capable of answering the challenges of science and technology, of social change and democracy’. Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 433.

artists ultimately showcased in London, and at subsequent festivals. Notable artists whose works were displayed included M. F. Husain, F. N. Souza, Akbar Padamsee, Satish Gujral, and A. Davierwalla, amongst others.²⁰⁴

One of the biggest attractions at the Festival, an exhibition simply called *India and Britain*, was organised by the Commonwealth Institute in collaboration with the India Office Library and Records. Fred Lightfoot, Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Institute, remarked that the exhibition was much more than a show of historic exhibits – ‘It was a voyage of discovery that set out to tell the story of four centuries of contact between the two peoples right from the early days of the East India Company to modern day Indo-British relations’.²⁰⁵ The displays captured historic moments such as the consolidation of the Company, the war with Tipu Sultan, the 1857 Mutiny, establishment of the Crown government, and the nationalist struggle for Independence. The final section attempted to depict ‘history’s wheel having turned full circle’ as the impact of Indian migrants on contemporary British life was put on display, and their contributions were portrayed as ‘both positive and life-enhancing’.²⁰⁶ Special emphasis was given to the South Asian community’s paramount role in saving the local corner shop from extinction.²⁰⁷

A photographic exhibition titled *Indians Here and There* similarly sought to depict how well the Indian community had integrated in Britain. In the official Festival booklet, it

²⁰⁴ K. G. Subramanyan Archive, ‘Festival of India: Contemporary Indian Art Exhibition – A small note on the exhibition’ by Geeta Kapur, 1982, <https://aaa.org.hk/en/collection/search/archive/k-contemporary-indian-art-an-exhibition-of-the-festival-of-india-london-1982/object/festival-of-india-contemporary-indian-art-exhibition-a-small-note-on-the-exhibition> (27 April 2018).

²⁰⁵ F. Lightfoot, ‘The Festival of India: Its imports and perspectives’, *Museum*, 34/4 (1982), pp. 216-17.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 217.

was argued that this exhibition would offer British-Asians, who had never themselves been to India, a chance to discover their roots through the photographic lens, and would ‘may well be the most interesting part of the exhibition’.²⁰⁸ The booklet even stressed that in areas like Southall, English residents were ‘on the whole very happy’ living with their South Asian neighbours, and that news of racial tensions were largely fabricated by outside trouble-makers.²⁰⁹ *Indians Here and There* was thematically supplemented by an art exhibition called *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists 1760 – 1860*, which traced growing British interest in Indian landscape and scenery. The exhibition gave an account of ‘Oriental works’ that showed India as it was observed by ‘delighted, amused, or fascinated Britons’.²¹⁰

A special section of the *India and Britain* exhibition depicted what was described as the ‘shared heritage’ of the two countries.²¹¹ However, the emphasis was on the one-way transfer of ideas and institutions as the displays highlighted Britain’s contributions to the development of Indian society through the influence of the English language, architecture, and sport, thus reiterating the rhetoric of imperial benevolence associated with ‘Raj revivalism’. This theme did not go unnoticed by exhibition attendees, as one reader from London complained in the *Times of India*:

‘I am an Indian brought up and educated in Britain and I have been back home a couple of times. When I first read and heard about the Festival...I was thrilled and excited and I thought at last something positive was going to be done in Britain. But after having been to the festivals I feel it is doing more harm than good. For example, the purpose of the India and Britain exhibition...seems to be to glorify the British Raj and convey the British view of history. It trivialises the Independence struggle and totally ignores the suffering inflicted before Independence...’²¹²

²⁰⁸ Festival of India, Official booklet, p. 21.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ See M. Archer and R. Lightbown, *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists 1760 – 1860*, Victoria and Albert Museum, Festival of India 1982.

²¹¹ Lightfoot, ‘The Festival of India’, p. 217.

²¹² Z. Motala, ‘Festival of India’, *TOI* (4 August 1982), p. 8.

A newspaper report alluded to similar motivations, stating:

‘...we have a gallimaufry of English and Indian feelings strongly felt but ill-defined and to which we try to give some shape by describing them as a “special relationship”. This is a latter-day version of the Raj mystique and like so many features of the Indo-British experience evades definition though it is vaguely sensed to be real enough. Both Mrs Thatcher and Mrs Indira Gandhi are doubtless aware of it but it has no place on the agenda of problems and issues that are collectively the substance of Indo-British relations.’²¹³

In a much stronger vein, ‘an Englishwoman in India’ criticised the media attention on this ‘special relationship’, arguing:

‘There has never been anything in it to write home about. During the Raj it had no meaning whatever, as the British were the overlords. Afterwards, except for those who would like to cadge on the English, it should have been a non-issue. Does a Vietnamese, or for that matter an Algerian, bother about France?’²¹⁴

In light of such sentiment, a newspaper report rightly concluded, ‘The Festival of India is actually a Festival of Britain. It is a voyage of rediscovery, a sentimental re-enactment of the empire, a reminder of their own glory, and all the splendour stuff that was at their bidding’.²¹⁵

Interestingly, on the reception side, unfamiliar with museum-centric ‘high culture’ in general, some noted that the intellectual content of the majority of exhibitions was unappealing to a largely working class audience in Britain. For instance, the centrepiece of the Festival, an ‘awe-inspiring, almost terrifying spectacle’²¹⁶ called *In the Image of Man* at the Hayward Gallery showcased hundreds of exhibits of stone sculpture spanning 2,000 years of history, which left many visitors confused and ‘bewildered’.²¹⁷

²¹³ N. J. Nanporia, ‘We Love and Hate Each Other’, *TOI* (19 April 1981), p. SMI. Nanporia further reflected on the colonial ‘inheritance’ in modern day Indo-British relations, noting: ‘(...) we have Enoch Powell venting his racialist doctrines, James Callaghan speaking generously of Indian democracy, Richard Attenborough working on a Gandhi film, conducted nostalgia tours to India, Plain Tales of the Raj, and young hooligans inserting excreta into the letter boxes of Indian residents in Britain. Clearly, at varying levels of the British consciousness the Indian presence cannot be and is not regarded with detachment.’

²¹⁴ L. V. Moore, ‘Indo-British Ties’, *TOI* (5 April 1982), p. 8.

²¹⁵ ‘Acute and Obtuse’, *TOI* (19 March 1982), p. 8.

²¹⁶ Desai, ‘The Festival of India in Britain’, p. 288.

²¹⁷ G. M. Morley, ‘A Brilliant Concept Realised’, *Museum*, 34/4 (1982), p. 230.

Oriyan writer and painter, and member of the British Festival Committee, Prafulla Mohanti, similarly noted in his review that the millions spent on organising ‘elite extravaganzas’ and ‘Satyajit Ray seasons’ would do nothing to promote racial harmony and understanding amongst ‘the poor whites of Britain’s blighted circles’.²¹⁸

* * *

It must be emphasised, however, that a nascent cultural industry in India did indeed benefit from a market in Britain preoccupied with all things Indian. On the one hand, the Festival offered a visual exposition of Indian culture through painting, sculpture, and photographs. On the other hand, the promotion of culture and history took more commodified forms such as handicrafts, live performances, and even ‘heritage tourism’. Back in India, this was visible in the rising popularity of urban trade and craft *melas* that were frequented by Mrs Gandhi with foreign dignitaries by her side, or the inauguration of the luxurious ‘Palace on Wheels’ in 1982 that targeted foreign tourists seeking ‘historical fantasy’ (Figure 3.12).²¹⁹ The official description of the ‘Palace on Wheels’ captures this sentiment perfectly:

‘Though times have changed and the winds have shifted, the Palace On Wheels cruises along in royal style, the kind only the Maharajas of yesteryears could have perpetuated and enjoyed’.²²⁰

²¹⁸ P. Mohanti, ‘You don’t need a PhD to see the Festival’, *TOI* (11 April 1982), p. III; Similar concerns are outlined in Dwyer’s work on Hindi cinema who notes that the realism in the cinematic productions of Satyajit Ray, for instance, was very different from the popular cinema consumed by mass audiences in India. See R. Dwyer, ‘Bollywood’s India: Hindi cinema as a guide to modern India’, *Asian Affairs*, 41/3 (2010), p. 383; For an engaging discussion of high versus popular culture as constitutive of ‘citizenship’, see L. Konig, *Cultural Citizenship in India – Politics, Power, and Media* (New Delhi, 2016). Konig examines culture as determined by ‘discourses of power’, and ‘cultural citizenship’ in India as the ‘product of a political project surrounding issues of provision of cultural facilities and regulation of cultural industries, including electronic and print media, music culture, heritage parks, museums and public libraries’ (pp. 134-5, 230).

²¹⁹ For a discussion of the crafts industry and heritage tourism in India, see P. Greenough (pp. 216-48), and B. N. Ramusack (pp. 66-89) in Breckinridge ed., *Consuming Modernity*.

²²⁰ ‘Palace on Wheels Exotic Rail Journeys’, Official website, <http://www.palaceonwheels.net/new/home.htm> (27 May 2016).



Figure 3.12: Garlanded Tourists On-Board the ‘Palace on Wheels’ – Note the painting around the carriage windows that imitate the *jharokha*-style balconies popular in Rajasthani architecture²²¹

Ashis Nandy argues that staged exhibitions, folk performances, and tourism transform culture into a consumable resource that is largely separated from everyday life.²²² Culture as a commodity further brings it within the ambit of an urban, modern market, making it ‘more manipulable from the point of view of the modern state’.²²³ In this context, and on the role of the state in exporting culture, Mrs Gandhi in a speech made to the All India Handloom and Handicrafts Board in June 1982 urged:

‘A great deal of work has to be done on the propaganda level. Handicrafts and handloom material are very welcome abroad where society has become highly mechanised. But in our country, people still think that artificial material is better than hand-made and it becomes, in some places, a status symbol. Now this is a matter of persuading people and I think that it will not be difficult to do so. At the same time, we have to think of new areas in which crafts can find a place and how we can integrate crafts into other things like architecture, packaging, production of consumer goods such as paper-cloth for wall covering, new types of floor covering and so on. The uses are endless.’²²⁴

²²¹ Source: Palace on Wheels, <http://www.palace-on-wheel.com/indian-luxury-trains-photo-gallery.asp> (1 May 2018).

²²² Nandy, *The Romance of the State*, pp. 151-3.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ I. Gandhi, ‘Importance of handlooms and handicrafts’, *Selected Speeches and Writings 1982-84 Volume V*, p. 116; In his memoirs, Mrs Gandhi’s former media advisor, B. G. Verghese, discusses the development of heritage tourism in India, particularly the conservation of the popular Jaisalmer Fort area

Noting the success of the Festival in this respect, she remarked:

‘The Festival which has succeeded beyond our wildest hopes, has been not just a show-window for India but it has actively created an interest in Indian products and specially I am told in durrees, herbal products and so on. Probably you know that at least three very prestigious and well known shops in London had India departments and had excellent sales...With more imaginative marketing, the handicrafts will have far greater sale in the country and even abroad.’²²⁵

Interestingly, a motion was raised in the Lok Sabha in July 1982 to establish an independent Department of Handloom and Handicrafts within the Ministry of Commerce.²²⁶ Although a separate department was not created, special provisions were made to promote the sale of handicrafts abroad. For instance, the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development granted concessions to individual artisans and craftspeople to profitably market their products internationally.²²⁷ Similarly, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) envisaged an increase in the export of handicrafts from Rs 835 crores in 1979-80 to Rs 1315 crores in 1984-85.²²⁸ The Plan further stressed the need to reorient training programmes for craftspeople ‘to meet the changing demand patters in the international market’.²²⁹

It is hardly surprising that these initiatives received the whole-hearted support of the middle class in India as they viewed such ‘commodities’ as symbols of their own cultural capital.²³⁰ The emerging trend of international Festivals of India thus fulfilled

in Rajasthan, and the Nizamuddin complex and Mehrauli ruins in Delhi in the 1970s. On Jaisalmer, Verghese writes: ‘A visit to Jaisalmer impressed me with the cultural and tourist potential of the desert. I urged conservation of the tawny-gold city of Jaisalmer clustered around the citadel that rose above the plain, its magnificent havelis, and the abandoned Bishnoi settlements not too far away as a heritage complex that might be declared a National Treasure. What better locale than this for an annual desert festival, when the marvellous music and dance and arts and crafts of the region of the region could be on display?’ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 112.

²²⁵ Dhawan ed., *Selected Thoughts of Indira Gandhi*, pp. 114, 137.

²²⁶ Translated from Hindi, *LSD*, 9th session, 30/15, 30 July 1982, pp. 212-13.

²²⁷ *Ibid*

²²⁸ Planning Commission of India, ‘6th Five Year Plan, Chapter 12’, <http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html> (25 August 2018).

²²⁹ *Ibid*.

²³⁰ C. Brosius, *India’s Middle Class: New Forms of Urban Leisure, Consumption and Prosperity* (New Delhi, 2010), p. 327.

their own ambitions of a revival of India's past, whilst exporting a visual 'international' idea of India.

Red Carpet Welcome for Mrs Gandhi

Appadurai and Breckenridge note that consumers of cultural spectacles are not passive 'objects and recipients' but important 'agents and actors' who produce and attach their own meanings to visual representations.²³¹ The above discussion has sought to demonstrate how cultural production and consumption on an international scale necessarily entailed conflicts and compromises between administrators, artists, and audiences in Britain and India.²³² Although lively debates around various conceptualisations of 'Indian culture' reproduced in newspaper articles contributed to the public's interest regarding the Festival itself, there were many who observed that the informative aspects of such discussions had assumed secondary importance to Mrs Gandhi's presence at the event.²³³ Indeed, the media reporting primarily focused on Mrs Gandhi as the real star of the spectacle.

Dubbed as her biggest 'image-refurbishing exercise', major newspapers reported Mrs Gandhi's red carpet reception to inaugurate the Festival in London, pointing out how 'even the iron lady Mrs Thatcher had proved flexible', and gone beyond protocol to personally receive her at the airport.²³⁴ Official correspondence reveals that in reality this was an 'awkward' problem for the British who felt that Mrs Gandhi perhaps expected a personal welcome as a reciprocal gesture for when she had done the same

²³¹ Appadurai and Breckenridge in Breckenridge ed., *Consuming Modernity*, p. 3.

²³² See H. S. Becker, 'Art as Collective Action', *American Sociological Review*, 39/6 (1974), pp. 767-76.

²³³ 'Who knows there is a Festival?', *The Indian Express* (23 March 1982). MSS Eur F215/232.

²³⁴ B. K. Joshi, 'PM will brighten festival of India', *TOI* (20 March 1982), p. 9.

for Thatcher in Delhi in 1981.²³⁵ Regardless, Thatcher's presence was duly and positively noted. One report described how Mrs Gandhi was 'received with an *aarti* by an Indian girl and garlanded by an Indian boy dressed in Jawahar *achkan* followed by the presentation of a guard of honour by the Royal Air Force'.²³⁶ Another claimed that it was inevitable that the visit of a politician of Mrs Gandhi's 'standing and eminence' would 'transcend the long-range objectives of the festival'.²³⁷ A lengthy and flattering profile of 'The Last Empress of India' in the *Observer* concluded:

'True, the Prince of Wales will be there and so will Mrs Thatcher – but both are likely to find themselves cast into shadow by the overpowering presence of India's own Prime Minister',

adding that Mrs Gandhi's 'presence' and her 'magical aura' were her 'main gifts'.²³⁸

The Festival was jointly inaugurated by the two Prime Ministers on 22 March 1982 in the presence of the royal family at an opening concert by celebrated artists including M. S. Subbulakshmi, Pandit Ravi Shankar, and Zubin Mehta. As the ceremonial progressed, newspapers in India enthusiastically discussed Mrs Gandhi's meetings with Queen Elizabeth and with Thatcher, noting that the latter was 'devoting a wholly unusual amount' of time with her Indian counterpart.²³⁹ Commentators saw their friendship as a step towards bridging North-South dialogue on trade, and strengthening Indo-British economic relations. In this context, a potential collaboration between the recently nationalised Maruti Motors and British Leyland made several headlines.²⁴⁰ In her biography of Mrs Gandhi, Jayakar remarks that the Prime Minister was 'at her most gracious' during her time in London, and 'did all the right things' including hosting a

²³⁵ R.M.J. Lyne, 'Visit by the Prime Minister of India', 8 January 1982. PREM19/800 f49. MTFDA.

²³⁶ 'PM leaves for U.K., hopes for better ties', *TOI* (22 March 1982), p. 1.

²³⁷ Joshi, 'PM will brighten festival of India'.

²³⁸ 'As the others see Mrs Gandhi', *TOI*.

²³⁹ 'UK Press focus on visit', *Statesman*, 23 March 1982. MSS Eur F215/232.

²⁴⁰ See 'Telegram to Michael Walker from Delhi' in MSS Eur F215/2 'Mrs Gandhi's visit to UK'.

private dinner at the Claridge's, all the whilst appearing 'exquisitely groomed and radiant'.²⁴¹ This reception with members of the British Academy and the Royal Society raised some eyebrows. British correspondence reveals that Mrs Gandhi requested a list of 'intellectuals' who were expected to be present at the reception beforehand.²⁴² This suggests her desire to appear well-informed in her interactions with those whom she considered to be 'opinion-moulders' in Britain, as well as to add prestige to her publicised visit. Ironically, a report in the *Hindustan Times* noted:

'Her desire to meet intellectuals raised smiles and also one puzzlement since no other people in the world hold the word "intellectual" in such hilarious disrepute as the British.'²⁴³

Ian Jack of the *Sunday Times* was more personal in his attack:

'When she moves graciously around the room...the leader of the world's largest democracy will taste the cream of British thought and letters: Not bad going for a girl who herself flunked out of Somerville College Oxford after only a year'.²⁴⁴

Nonetheless, the *Statesman* in Delhi described the fanfare as 'a personal triumph for Mrs Gandhi', noting that her 'foreign forays' were significant not only to affirm her 'position and influence' but to remind 'a neglectful world just how large a place India occupied on the map and of redefining that place for India itself'.²⁴⁵ Along similar lines, an article in the *Patriot* argued that Mrs Gandhi's statements were 'more than a public relations exercise':

'It cannot but have done some good for the British public to have...been reminded that when the developing countries press for serious North-South dialogue they are not asking for a favour or condescension, but partnership in an effort which alone offers a way out of the deepening economic recession.'²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 434.

²⁴² A.J. Coles to J.E. Holmes, 'Visit by the Prime Minister of India', 9 February 1982. PREM19/800 f49. MTFDA.

²⁴³ 'UK red carpet for Mrs Gandhi', *HT* (22 March 1983). MSS Eur F215/232.

²⁴⁴ Quoted in 'Who knows there is a festival?', *Indian Express*.

²⁴⁵ 'A personal triumph for Mrs Gandhi', *Statesman* (27 March 1982). MSS Eur F215/232.

²⁴⁶ 'Home Truths', *Patriot* (26 March 1982). MSS Eur F215/232.

Echoing this sentiment, then leader of the opposition, Michael Foot, declared that ‘[Mrs Gandhi’s] visit here every time does us good’ (sic).²⁴⁷

However, Mrs Gandhi’s visit was not free from controversy as her arrival sparked off several demonstrations led by a group of Khalistani Sikhs associated with the Akali Dal, members of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, and the ‘Ananda Marga’ organisation. Although no personal attacks on Mrs Gandhi were anticipated by the Home Office, strict security was maintained throughout her stay, especially during her visits to prominent South Asian neighbourhoods.²⁴⁸ As the *Indian Express* noted, ‘There are some eight lakh Indians living here and not all of them are friendly to [Mrs Gandhi’s] regime’.²⁴⁹ A notable exception was the Ramgarhia Sabha whose General Secretary, Jaspal Singh, strongly condemned the protests. Singh declared that ‘Khalistanis [are] not even Sikhs’, and further praised those who did not join the demonstrations ‘despite the house to house approaches made by protesters’.²⁵⁰

Remarkably, a group of over four thousand ‘pro-Mrs Gandhi Hindus’ from across the U.K. appealed to her, ‘as custodian of national destiny’, to take action against the alleged conversion of Hindus to Islam in India ‘through foreign money’.²⁵¹ They urged that ‘this gross anti-national activity will prove disastrous to the nation if it is not crushed with a firm hand’.²⁵² It is noteworthy that this issue was also raised in the Indian Parliament on several occasions where the role of ‘Arab money’ and Christian missionaries was questioned in the case of mass conversion of ‘Harijans’, most

²⁴⁷ ‘West urged to cut rich-poor gap’, *TOI* (25 March 1982). MSS Eur F215/232.

²⁴⁸ J. F. Halliday to C. A. Whitmore, ‘Mrs Gandhi’s Visit’, 19 March 1982. MTFDA.

²⁴⁹ ‘PM arrives in London amid tight security’, *Indian Express* (22 March 1982).

²⁵⁰ ‘Sikh leader condemns demonstrations’, *HT* (24 March 1982). MSS Eur F215/232.

²⁵¹ ‘Rift in community shows at meet with PM’, *TOI* (27 March 1982).

²⁵² *Ibid.*

famously in the village of Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu in 1981.²⁵³ It is significant that Mrs Gandhi's publicised meetings with the leaders of several British-Hindu organisations reflected her sympathetic postures on similar concerns raised by the middle class in India at the time.

In her *Sunday Times* piece, controversial columnist Shobha Kilachand wrote at length about the Festival and the Asiad hosted the same year as having 'salvaged' India's pride on the international stage.²⁵⁴ On the Festival in particular, Kilachand noted that 'it had redeemed our self-esteem and chalked a respectable international score...regaining lost prestige over the years'.²⁵⁵ From New Delhi, High Commissioner Thomson also wrote to Chairman Walker describing the positive media coverage of the Festival in India:

'The visit dominated the front pages of the Delhi papers for three days...The festival has also attracted unprecedented coverage on radio and TV including the first half of the inaugural concert which was televised in colour. The warmth of the reception accorded to Mrs Gandhi and the elaborate programme prepared for her were favourably noted. Several noted that Mrs Gandhi had rarely looked happier and more relaxed than she did at the concert.'²⁵⁶

A relatively moderate piece in the *Hindustan Times* noted that although Mrs Gandhi had experienced 'more than ordinary hospitality' in Britain, the 'traditional differences' between the two countries were not expected to be resolved during the Festival.²⁵⁷ Others were more critical of the Indira-centric focus of the media, arguing that the Festival's cultural agenda was completely overshadowed by Mrs Gandhi's social engagements in London. More specifically, the Festival's objective of improving race relations was felt to be at odds with Thatcher's rhetoric of Britain being 'swamped' by 'coloured immigrants'.²⁵⁸ In this context, many noted the long standing ideological

²⁵³ *LSD*, 6th session, 19/14, 2 September 1981, p. 202; and 7th session, 23/23, 23 December 1981, p. 179.

²⁵⁴ S. Kilachand, 'In proud plumage', *TOI* (19 December 1982), p. III.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ 'Telegram to Michael Walker', date unknown. MSS Eur F215/2 'Mrs Gandhi's visit to UK'

²⁵⁷ 'UK red carpet for Mrs Gandhi', *HT*.

²⁵⁸ A. S. Abraham, 'Indo-British Relations', *TOI* (26 March 1982), p. 8.

differences between the two Prime Ministers to be at the heart of growing Indo-British divergence.²⁵⁹ Still, many others acknowledged that although the Festival had represented India positively, the average Indian back home was left untouched by the spectacle. As the common man in R. K. Laxman's cartoon in the *Times of India* cynically exclaimed, 'But for such a festival we wouldn't have known how great we and our achievements are!'²⁶⁰

A Festival for the Indian Pravasi

In November 1982, as Mrs Gandhi prepared to inaugurate the Asiad in New Delhi, the Festival concluded with another string of musical performances at a finale event, described by Chairman Walker as 'extremely well attended with a 95% occupancy of the house'.²⁶¹ To the Committee's surprise, the Festival Trust was left with surplus funds as the event came to a close. Walker recommended that the total amount of £55,000 be spent on a 'cultural and charitable purpose' so as to 'perpetuate the memory of the Festival'.²⁶² The Trust received applications from a number of Indian and British institutions including the British Academy, the School of African and Oriental Studies, the V&A, the British High Commission and the British Council in India.²⁶³ In the end, it was agreed that the funds were to be allocated to the British Council's Charles Wallace Trust to enable an Indian student to pursue their study in the U.K. in the field

²⁵⁹ Amidst such reactions, demands to return the famous Kohinoor diamond to India also found space in newspaper editorials and debates in the Lok Sabha. See, for instance, *Navbharat Times* (25 December 1983), p. 13.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Sen, 'Bullock Cart', p. 436 (Note 92).

²⁶¹ Minutes of the Meeting of Festival Trust on 23 November 1982. MSS Eur F215/131.

²⁶² Michael Walker to Pupul Jayakar, 29 November 1982. MSS Eur F215/131.

²⁶³ 'Use of residual Trust funds', Note by S. E. Hodgson (Festival Director), 9 November 1982. MSS Eur F215/131.

of arts. It was hoped that an art scholarship would in the future ‘carry some label recalling the Festival of 1982’.²⁶⁴

Indeed, the success of the Festival set the stage for similar cultural shows in the U.S., Russia, and Japan in the 1980s. Festivals of India have since been organised by the Department of Culture all over the world in the name of cultural diplomacy ‘waged with sitars, Rajput paintings, saris, [and] Maurya sculptures’.²⁶⁵ Four decades on, state spectacles showcasing Indian art, architecture, and cuisine continue to project India’s ‘soft power’ in international relations.



Figure 3.13: Festival of India in Uzbekistan – Note the strategic placement of the Char Minar in Hyderabad next to the Chor Minor in Bukhara. The Char Minar along with the Taj Mahal, both recognised as examples of India’s Islamic heritage, are intended to reflect India’s historic and cultural ties with Muslim-dominated Uzbekistan.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ S. E. Hodgson to R. E. Cavaliero (Deputy Director General, British Council), 19 May 1983. MSS Eur F215/131.

²⁶⁵ Quoting L. Sweeney, ‘America gives India its due...’, *The Christian Science Monitor* (7 June 1985), <https://www.csmonitor.com/1985/0607/zrajiv.html> (2 May 2018).

²⁶⁶ Source: Ministry of Culture, <http://www.indiaculture.nic.in/festival-india-uzbekistan-poster> (7 April 2018); Recently, the Uttar Pradesh government under the BJP published a State tourism booklet from

Since 2003, the Indian community overseas has found an official voice through the annual government sponsored spectacle, *Pravasi Bhartiya Divas* (henceforth PBD) ('Overseas Indians Day'). The diasporic community has increasingly become an indispensable source of political and financial support for parties in India.²⁶⁷ According to the website of the Ministry of External Affairs, PBD is celebrated on 9 January every year 'to mark the contribution of [the] Overseas Indian community in the development of India'.²⁶⁸ Notably, co-opting Gandhi as the ideal 'pravasi', the website claims:

'January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India's freedom struggle, and changed the lives of Indians forever.'²⁶⁹

PBD is a unique cultural program organised under an official theme 'depending on the intention of the government for that particular year'.²⁷⁰ Its objectives include informing Indians abroad 'about policies, developments and opportunities of contemporary India'.²⁷¹ In 2015, on the occasion of PBD's thirteenth anniversary coinciding with the hundredth anniversary of Gandhi's return to India, Prime Minister Modi described the diaspora as a 'great capital' for the country, adding that 'if we focus on this segment, we can create a lot of respect for the country globally'.²⁷²

which the Taj was conspicuously absent. Seen as the most prominent example of India's Islamic heritage, this caused much controversy and debate. S. Khalid, 'Taj Mahal dropped from tourism booklet of Uttar Pradesh' (9 October 2017), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/taj-mahal-dropped-tourism-booklet-uttar-pradesh-171008161648332.html> (13 August 2018).

²⁶⁷ See, for instance, C. Jaffrelot and I. Therwath, 'The Sangh Parivar and the Hindu Diaspora in the west', *International Political Sociology*, 1(2007), pp. 287-9, on the constitutive role of fund-raising in diasporic nationalism, and sustaining ethno-religious movements (in this case of the RSS 'Sangh Parivar').

²⁶⁸ 'Pravasi Bhartiya Divas', 'Introduction', <https://pbdindia.gov.in/introduction> (15 October 2016).

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ PBD India, <http://www.pbd-india.com/2017/theme-of-the-15th-edition/> (1 May 2018).

²⁷¹ PBD, 'Mission', <https://pbdindia.gov.in/mission> (15 October 2016).

²⁷² '10 things Modi said at Pravasi Bhartiya Divas', IT (14 January 2015), <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/10-things-narendra-modi-said-at-pravasi-bharatiya-divas/1/412207.html> (15 October 2016).



Figure 3.14: Performing Culture – PBD, Bengaluru (2017)²⁷³

Arguably, the mobilisation of the diaspora has taken its most spectacular form at state-sponsored extravaganzas centred around Prime Minister Modi himself, from him addressing large crowds at Wembley Stadium in London or Madison Square Garden in New York, to intimate town-hall style debates. Sen observes how Modi has secured a position that is ‘seemingly above partisan politics’, and suggests that this has something to do with his presidential style of politics, which has strong parallels with Mrs Gandhi’s leadership style.²⁷⁴ Sen argues that like the 2014 elections, the 1971 vote was turned into a ‘referendum on Indira’s leadership’.²⁷⁵ Along similar lines, Jaffrelot notes that in their political campaigns, both Mrs Gandhi and Modi bypassed party traditions and veterans, and instead chose to engage directly with the masses by relying on new

²⁷³ Source: Ministry of External Affairs, ‘PBD India’, https://pbdindia.gov.in/photo-gallery-pbd/24?sort_by=title&page=1 (10 August 2018).

²⁷⁴ R. Sen, ‘Narendra Modi’s Makeover and the Politics of Symbolism’, *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 9/6 (2016), p. 98.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

techniques of communication that ‘saturated the public space’ at the time.²⁷⁶ In her final years in office, Mrs Gandhi primarily relied on traditional media like the radio and the press whilst experimenting with new visual media like the colour television. Similarly, Modi’s 2014 campaign saw the effective use of social media to ‘connect’ with millions. The use of mass media in both cases was accompanied by a strategic collaboration between government institutions and private actors to enhance publicity. Finally, both vocalised the cause of development and good governance in their campaign slogans, whilst often alluding to the communal question which specifically appealed to the urban Hindu middle class, and the diasporic Indian.

For the middle class in India and for British-Indians in particular, another historic platform to project ‘Indianness’ on a global scale is the Commonwealth of Nations. Over the years, the Commonwealth in India has been viewed variously as an evocative vestige of colonialism, a strategic conglomeration of states for international trade, and more recently the controversial Commonwealth Games that catalysed the Congress Party’s electoral defeat in 2014. In the past, however, both Nehru and Mrs Gandhi used the Commonwealth to advance India’s ideological position on various international issues as well as to demonstrate their leadership on the world stage. For Mrs Gandhi, this was particularly evident when she led the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in New Delhi in November 1983. The personal friendship between Mrs Gandhi and Thatcher was once again at the forefront of international dialogue and exchange, which traversed issues ranging from apartheid in South Africa to the American invasion of Grenada. However, CHOGM was preceded in 1983 by another

²⁷⁶ C. Jaffrelot, ‘The Modi-centric BJP 2014 Election Campaign: New techniques and old tactics’, *CSA*, 23/2 (2015), p. 154.

mediatised spectacle, the Seventh Non-Aligned Movement summit, to which I turn my attention in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 4 – Champion of the Third World: NAM Summit

‘She brought India back to the centre of the international stage from the periphery. I watched with joy as the daughter of India, as Chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement, recaptured the spirit of the fifties when her father initiated the Movement along with other such political giants of that time such as Marshal Tito and President Nasser...She was fully aware that certain Western powers were alarmed at her growing strength, her forthright condemnation of imperialism, [and] her refusal to be pressurised by any big power.’

Aruna Asaf Ali in G. Parthasarathy ed., *Indira Gandhi Commemorative Volume* (New Delhi, 1985), p. 47¹

‘The fact is that India, today, has about as many friends as any other country. How we keep those friends or whether they remain friends is not dependent merely on how we act, but also on what happen to be their national interests at any given time. If it is in their interest to be friendly, they will be so, but, if they believe their national interest lies elsewhere, they will not be our friends no matter what we do. So, while we must try to multiply our friendships, we must always be prepared for situations when, conversely, a hostile one may decide for various reasons to become our friend. Our attitude must be flexible in all these matters.’

Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 127

The spectacles and performances analysed thus far, I have argued, positioned the state at the centre of the making of ‘middle classness’ in early 1980s India. Various manifestations of the state – from giant stadia and magnificent museums of art to the small passenger car and miniature colour television set – were consumed as commodities to reproduce a state-sponsored middle class culture. Moreover, this culture was in many ways a reflection of already prevalent middle class aspirations and consumption practices that in turn became a rallying point for Mrs Gandhi and the Congress Party in the 1980s.

This chapter examines political performance more specifically in an international context where the state’s policies and its public pronouncements became tied to middle

¹ Asaf Ali was a former Mayor of Delhi, and noted activist in the Independence movement.

class identity as a source of national pride on the one hand, and personal prestige for Mrs Gandhi on the other. It is noteworthy that in matters of foreign affairs and diplomacy, decision-making is often not consultative or democratic but is restricted to a small number of ‘experts’ and political leaders at the top. Further, as Ravinder Kaur observes, the ‘intense securitisation’ and secrecy surrounding many aspects of foreign policy means that its ‘spectacular qualities cannot be directly enjoyed’ in most instances by a physically present public.² At the same time, although the average spectator-citizen may not have sufficient knowledge or interest in the particularities of foreign policy per se, the projection of a certain image of the nation is of significance with respect to their sense of self-worth and participation in an increasingly globalised world. In other words, it is most often the ‘performative’ dimensions of foreign policy that elicit an emotional response from the public. For instance, in the Indian context, Kapur observes:

‘...policy elites appear to be mindful of latent public opinion wherever sensitivities of certain sections of the population are at play, be it religious minorities (in shaping India’s Middle East policies), regional groups (such as Tamils towards Sri Lanka), and the majority (Hindu) community (often reflected in hard-line positions vis-à-vis Muslim Pakistan).’³

Broadly, as Abraham argues, ‘[the] state is...the primary source of political identity in a competitive international world. Where India stands in the international pecking order matters hugely to a globally oriented middle class who identify as natural embodiments of the nation’.⁴ All this makes the task of selling foreign policy to the domestic audience crucial.⁵

² R. Kaur, ‘The Many Lives of Nuclear Monuments in India’, *South Asian Studies*, 29/1 (2013), p. 133.

³ D. Kapur, ‘Public Opinion’ in D. Malone, C. R. Mohan, and S. Raghavan ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy* (Oxford, 2016), p. 307.

⁴ I. Abraham, ‘From the Commission to the Mission Model’, *JAS*, 76/3 (2017), p. 18.

⁵ Recent years demonstrate a more direct link between public opinion and foreign policy. As Kapur argues in his analysis of contemporary India: ‘Relative to earlier years, foreign policy is evolving from being the preserve of political elites into an arena in which a more diverse range of actors plays a larger role, from business to media. The advent of 24/7 cable news, the internet, social media, and other platforms for the rapid and constant dissemination of information has irrevocably weakened

Keeping the above in mind, controlled images or ‘snippets’ of the state’s spectacular performance on the international stage have traditionally been distributed via mass media such as newspapers, radio, and television in the form of congratulatory reports, photographs, speeches, and press interviews. Kaur notes that these ‘public displays and performances’ are the sites that ‘become the prime means with which the larger populace can engage’ with the phenomenon of foreign policy.⁶ This chapter does not seek to discuss Mrs Gandhi’s foreign policy at length, although I refer to particular events and the Indian response to these events as a necessary context to Mrs Gandhi’s speeches and interviews, her state visits, and her performance as the chairperson of the 1983 Non-Aligned Movement summit (henceforth NAM summit) in New Delhi. By analysing its performative aspects, I thus examine *foreign policy as spectacle* as an important mode of Mrs Gandhi’s statecraft to portray herself as an influential world leader in her final years in office.

* * *

It can be argued that Mrs Gandhi’s image as a ‘shrewd’ politician on the one hand, and a ‘strong’ leader on the other was in many ways a result of her performance in the

government’s control over information.’ (D. Kapur, ‘Public Opinion’ in *Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, p. 298); Historically speaking, Mansingh notes that the tone set by the Indian government in its foreign engagements was not always echoed by the public. For instance, although the post-Independence Indo-Soviet relationship had predominantly been warm and friendly, relatively fewer Indians were ‘attracted’ to Soviet methods and society, whereas whilst official Indo-U.S. pronouncements were ‘often cool and sometimes critical’, the Indian middle class was more ‘drawn to emulate, study in or emigrate to the U.S.’. S. Mansingh, ‘India and the Superpowers: 1966-1984’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 22/3-4 (1987), p. 267.

⁶ R. Kaur, ‘The Many Lives of Nuclear Monuments in India’, *South Asian Studies*, 29/1 (2013), p. 133. Kaur explores the dual feature of ‘nuclear monuments’ such as test site craters, nuclear reactors, and ballistic missiles as monumental sites in and of themselves on the one hand (‘a phenomenal sight to behold, as part of the picturesque aesthetic’), and as historic, non-functional ‘monument[s] to something’ on the other. The term ‘nuclear monument’ is noteworthy in that it does not merely seek to commemorate the past, but rather articulates a forward-looking modernity of the state. As Kaur remarks, ‘nuclear constructions subscribe more to an aspirational model of monumentality than they do to ones based in memory(ies). They present an open potential rather than a contained vessel, a forward-looking celebration rather than a commemoration’ (p. 132).

international arena. Indeed, in her own words, she described her approach to international affairs as requiring ‘a certain shrewdness’:

‘Diplomacy and the conduct of foreign affairs are generally thought to require a certain shrewdness. Perhaps this is important: Machiavelli and Chanakya certainly thought so’,

adding:

‘A country’s foreign policy is shaped by many forces – its position on the map and the countries which are its neighbours, the policies they adopt and the actions they take, as well as its historical experiences in the aggregate and in terms of its particular traumas.’⁷

The spectacular victory of the Indian Armed Forces in the Bangladesh Liberation War, which saw the withdrawal of Pakistani troops and the American military from the Bay of Bengal, was the first and perhaps most significant of attempts to define such a ‘historical experience’ in postcolonial India.⁸ In the months leading up to the Indian military advance into East Pakistan in December 1971, Mrs Gandhi displayed what Inder Malhotra describes as ‘masterly diplomacy’ as she embarked on a world tour across the Western world where she was ‘listened to with respect and sympathy’.⁹

Mansingh writes:

‘...the Prime Minister launched an unprecedented public relations as well as diplomatic campaign to educate international opinion on the humanitarian issues at stake in the military repression of East Pakistan. Mrs Gandhi herself undertook two international tours for the purpose of awakening the conscience of the world. She elicited public sympathy in Europe. Meeting an antagonistic Nixon in the United States she appealed over his head to the American public.’¹⁰

⁷ Speech on 30 October 1981, School of International Studies (JNU) Delhi in I. Gandhi, ‘India and its Foreign Policy’, *International Studies*, 21/2 (1982), p. 95.

⁸ Apart from the partition of the subcontinent, the 1962 Sino-Indian War had similarly been a ‘traumatic’ event for the nation to witness collectively. However, India’s unpreparedness and defeat against the Chinese offence left a deeply negative impact on public opinion at the time. In contrast, Mrs Gandhi’s actions in 1971 demonstrated a decisive and well-prepared leadership which reflected in India’s publicised victory over West Pakistan.

⁹ I. Malhotra, ‘Rear view: Tours and treaties’, *Indian Express* (14 April 2014), <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/rear-view-tours-and-treaties/> (27 September 2018).

¹⁰ S. Mansingh, ‘Indira Gandhi’s Foreign Policy: Hard Realism?’ in *Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, p. 107. Mansingh goes on to argue that Mrs Gandhi’s actions were in reality not only motivated by humanitarian concerns for the ten million refugees that fled East Pakistan. Rather, at the United Nations, she voiced distinctly middle class anxieties that ‘stressed national security reasons for military action, claiming self-defence from Pakistan’s “refugee aggression” that was creating enormous social and economic tensions in India’ (p. 108).

Back in India, the Directorate of Public Relations put into effect several publicity plans to relay information about the Army's daily movements to the Indian public, and to the opposing camp. Information Officer at the time, I. R. Rao, reveals in his memoirs that photographs and film coverage were utilised in 'psychological warfare', both in the battlefield and through air-waves and newspapers, as 'a support weapon to achieve India's objectives in East Pakistan'.¹¹ Similarly, Mrs Gandhi's media advisor, H. Y. Sharada Prasad, describes her diplomatic manoeuvring through publicity campaigns during the Bangladesh spectacle as 'war by other means'.¹²

Shortly after Bangladesh, the successful nuclear tests of 1974, ostensibly conducted for peaceful purposes, and hence symbolically codenamed Operation Smiling Buddha, similarly had an international dimension, this time causing even greater alarm across nuclear and non-nuclear communities. Indeed, in his history of the atomic bomb in India, Abraham argues that the nuclear programme at the time had little to do with national security concerns, and everything to do with establishing the legitimacy of the independent nation-state, and its political leadership.¹³ Mrs Gandhi was also known to have justified the test as an experiment 'for our scientists to know what they're capable of'.¹⁴

¹¹ I. R. Rao, *Conflict Communication: Chronicles of a Communicator* (New Delhi, 2016), pp. 29–33; Rao also served as the Director of Public Relations during the 1983 NAM summit.

¹² Prasad, *The Book I Won't Be Writing*, p. 108; Notably, P. N. Haksar, Mrs Gandhi's principal secretary at the time, dwelt at length on the subject of public opinion informing foreign policy. In a lecture given at the India International Centre in New Delhi in 1986, Haksar observed: 'The trouble with foreign policy in our times is that, as my dear friend Henry Kissinger observes regretfully, it can no longer be conducted unmindful of public opinion...In the world of today, public opinion – which means the cumulative effect of the aspirations of millions of people whose consciousness is heightened by the political process itself and by the modern communications system – beats against the international structure which might be erected.' (P. N. Haksar, *India's Foreign Policy and its Problems* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 55-6); In retrospect, this statement is revealing of the motivation behind the publicity campaigns of 1971 as Haksar is widely regarded as the prime strategist of Indian efforts during the war.

¹³ I. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb* (London, 1998).

¹⁴ Quoted in S. Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, p. 71.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at IT (23 February 2013), <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indias-first-nuclear-test-was-a-failure-says-secret-us-cable-154700-2013-02-23> (12 February 2018).

Figure 4.1: Nuclear Arrival – Mrs Gandhi inspecting the nuclear test site at Pokhran (1974)¹⁵

Arguably, Mrs Gandhi's sporadic statements on foreign policy were often coincident with a loss of confidence in her regime at home. External threats to India's territorial sovereignty, and in response her own vocal commitment to peaceful co-existence were routinely publicised in order to distract from economic and social hardships at home.¹⁶

Foreign policy rhetoric was also expected to reap immediate political dividends in times

¹⁵ Source: IT (23 February 2013), <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indias-first-nuclear-test-was-a-failure-says-secret-us-cable-154700-2013-02-23> (12 February 2018).

¹⁶ This argument is examined in depth in B. Wariavwalla's article, 'Indira's India: A national security state?', *The Round Table*, 72/287 (1983), pp. 274-85. Wariavwalla explores the relationship between foreign policy and the 'domestic political structure' during Mrs Gandhi's time in office, which he describes as a 'national security state' (p. 275). The security state favoured high defence expenditure, mobilisation of national energies against external threats, and an expansionist foreign policy. As Wariavwalla notes: 'When domestic problems seem daunting, and they often do in much of the Third World, foreign policy is one domain for the exercise of charisma. The Third World's charismatic leaders of the 1950s, Nasser, Nkrumah, Sukarno, all found the international stage far more attractive and rewarding than the national stage... Besides, victories abroad, dramatic diplomatic *demarches*, hosting large international gatherings, and these days the pursuit of plutonium 239, bring rich domestic dividends' (p. 277).

of domestic crisis. Soon after her re-election in 1980, an article in the *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys* conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion lamented:

‘Mrs Gandhi herself, like Richard Nixon, has never really been interested in economics. She would rather be busy replacing State governments, fixing foreign policy, and improving India’s “image”. When economic problems, which she has promised to solve, remain unsolved, politics will again be “in command”. National and international scapegoats will be found.’¹⁷

Tellingly, another survey conducted in April 1980 by the same organisation observed:

‘Never before had India’s foreign policy become an electoral issue in the battles of the ballot except in the 1980 elections...Indira Gandhi, for reasons better known to her, chose to make Janata Government’s foreign policy one of the electoral issues. She charged the Janata Government that it had diluted the main thrust of the non-aligned movement which India has spearheaded ever since its inception earlier. As a proof of the change in India’s traditional foreign policy, she also cited the appeasement of India’s small neighbours, sacrificing India’s national interests in the process. In fact she used Janata Government’s aberration – the meeting of Israel’s then Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, with Morarji and Vajpayee – as one of the examples of the departure from support that this country had been extending to the Arab cause.’¹⁸

Ironically, Mrs Gandhi’s attention to international affairs was not based on a commitment to foreign policy principles of any kind. For instance, she never really articulated a deep commitment to the ‘Arab cause’ on any ideological grounds in her lifetime.¹⁹ In fact, her overall approach to foreign policy can be summed up as one that

¹⁷ R. Krishna, ‘Post-Election Blues’, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 25/4-5 (1980), pp. 19 – 20.

¹⁸ The survey conducted amongst ‘literate households’ across four Indian cities concluded that the majority of respondents believed that there had not been a change in India’s foreign policy stance in the Janata years. However, a large number of ‘university educated correspondents’, government officials, and business executives agreed that there had been a change in foreign policy after Mrs Gandhi’s return. City-wise breakdown showed that a larger number of respondents in Delhi accepted this view, whereas elsewhere the majority rejected it. (IIPO, ‘India’s Foreign Policy: Popular perception of impact of Indira Gandhi’s comeback’, *Monthly Public Opinion Surveys*, 25/7 (1980), pp. 3–4); A similar observation of Mrs Gandhi’s attack on Janata’s foreign policy is found in Jayakar’s biography wherein she notes: ‘[Indira] charged the government with weakening the secular foundations laid by Gandhi, of surrendering the sovereign right of India to use nuclear technology for India’s vital interests, diluting Non-Aligned Movement, denigrating indigenous science and technology, inviting multinationals surreptitiously to control the commanding heights of the economy. Above all, she charged the government with tarnishing her image, [and] of lowering India’s prestige in the world’. Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 370.

¹⁹ The Indira Gandhi years displayed continuities with Nehru’s pro-Arab stance based on cultural and historical factors such as solidarity against Western imperialism and colonialism on the one hand, and the close friendship between Egyptian President Nasser and Nehru, and later Mrs Gandhi. Friendship with the Arab states was also important to India given its difficult relations with neighbouring Pakistan, and the large community of Muslims in India. The 1970s further saw the relationship affected by economic factors such as the depletion of foreign exchange reserves during the oil crisis, and the remittances sent home by Indians in the Gulf.

advocated *flexibility* – allowing India to pick and choose the best course of action aligned with ‘national interests’ at any given time. This is also revealed in the opening quotation to this chapter where Mrs Gandhi seemingly reduces ‘friendship’ with sympathetic and hostile nations to mere political calculation. Elsewhere, she argued that friendship and peace were not moral principles at all but ‘had a utilitarian dimension’, thus reducing international relations literally to practical statecraft.²⁰ Even more telling is the following remark which shows the inconsistencies in her thought on pragmatic foreign policy versus commitment to ideology:

‘While we must have arms to defend our country from any aggression, military strength must be supported by conviction in our ideals and confidence in ourselves. Both are equally potent weapons and, without them, other weapons can be dangerous to ourselves and also useless to our defence. This is the essence of our foreign policy. If we can understand and keep it, we have a certain amount of manoeuvrability. *Why does Government of India not wish to make categorical statements sometimes? Because it is not in our interest to be known as rigidly confined in any given position. When we are inflexible, it helps our enemies. They can move about while we are stuck, and we become a good target. Flexibility and manoeuvrability must however always be consistent with our national interest and honour.* We cannot manoeuvre or fluctuate where basic convictions, ideals, aims and objectives are concerned. If we keep this in view, then I think India will not only keep its position in the world but be able to enhance it.’[emphasis added]²¹

Rather than a commitment to ‘basic convictions’, the above quote shows Mrs Gandhi’s preoccupation with safeguarding ‘national interest and honour’, and a flexible approach to best serve India’s ‘position in the world’.²² Her dislike of worldviews is also brought out in the following, rather subdued, comment about the India ‘of her dreams’:

‘As for the future of India, what is the point in prophetizing (sic). We all have ideas about our children; some parents do all they can to force their children to develop in a particular way. But they cannot. Each child has its own personality and it develops with him. All you can do is look on. Tagore said: “Your children are not your children, they are the children of your dreams.” They have something of our dreams but, nevertheless, they develop quite independently. This also applies to one’s country. No matter what one wants and what one does for it, it develops in its own way. Its development is influenced by whatever is happening

²⁰ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, pp. 84, 93.

²¹ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, pp. 131-2.

²² Surjit Mansingh notes that unlike Nehru Mrs Gandhi saw national interests ‘in terms of tangible power rather than morality’. Aware of India’s shortcomings in the economic and military arenas, she was keen to build up tangible sources of power as quickly as possible, more on which later. Mansingh, ‘Indira Gandhi’s Foreign Policy’, p. 114.

and also by the trends of the ordinary people. I should not waste time foretelling India's future...²³

Here, in addition to 'flexibility', Mrs Gandhi introduces the concept of 'independence'.

Contrary to her passive stance in the statement above, in an interview with Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, she articulated her ambitions for India's 'place in the world':

'We want India to be self-reliant and to strengthen its independence so that it cannot be pressurised by anybody, because that is the only kind of independence which I call independence. And we wanted [India] to be able to grow in its own way – to choose its own direction, to choose its own personality...We have no...desire to have more territory, or to have more influence, or any of those things. All we want is to be strong enough to solve our own problems.'²⁴

In the context of the Cold War, Mrs Gandhi vocally opposed physical, material, and intellectual pressures by the two 'big powers', and instead stressed the need for nations to be able to make decisions on internal and external matters independently, and in line with their respective national interests. Her negative attitude towards material dependency in particular was evident in her dealings with the United States and international lending institutions in the late 1960s when India had to rely on American food imports and aid for its many development projects. On foreign aid, Mrs Gandhi pointedly remarked in December 1971:

'Aid, is not aid at all; it is a long-term credit, and India has so far paid back every cent, penny, paisa of what we owed to other countries; so it is not really aid as such; it is merely a loan. As I said before, we are trying to be fully self-reliant; with every passing year we do more things ourselves; we have greater know-how, and greater capacity. And today if countries want to stop their so-called aid, we will have hardship in some areas...but it is not going to push us back. We can manage. It will mean greater hardship but it is something that we can manage.'²⁵

The arrogance of this statement reveals Mrs Gandhi's understanding of 'optics' in diplomacy, or alternatively, the desire to portray an independent image of India that it could indeed 'manage' without external aid, and was 'strong enough' to solve its own problems. This desire is clearly revealed in Jayakar's biography wherein Mrs Gandhi

²³ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 15.

²⁴ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, p. 88.

²⁵ Dhawan ed., *Selected Thoughts of India Gandhi*, p. 15.

is quoted as saying, 'If we have to take aid, which we will be forced to do, we have to play our dependence down. The weaker we are, the more strength we have to show'.²⁶

When she did allude to abstractions and ideas, Mrs Gandhi often invoked her father, Jawaharlal Nehru, borrowing from his vocabulary on the Indian 'cultural tradition' of peaceful co-existence with other nations of the world, which later paved the way for a formal adoption of non-alignment as a basis for Indian foreign policy. Mansingh remarks that Mrs Gandhi added to Nehru's 'high-flown phrases' her own ambiguously defined terminology such as security, territory, power, and prestige – betraying the realist bent in her foreign policy.²⁷ Here it is worth noting that perhaps more than anybody else, it was P. N. Haksar who as Mrs Gandhi's principal secretary between 1967 and 1973 influenced her rhetoric and approach to international affairs, at least in her early years. Noting the importance of hard realism in foreign policy, Haksar once remarked:

'There is a way in which a nation expresses itself, its own self-estimate, its position in the world, and its relationship with other countries as an aspect of reality which must be taken into account. [But] these perceptions are of over-riding importance, if we are to have a realistic foreign policy which does not draw heavily, as it were, upon what might be called perceptions which are inherited as a set of beliefs, including a set of myths – which every country weaves around itself. That is why...I have been of the view...that India's foreign policy to be realistic, and for us to perceive it in realistic terms, has to be cleared of the entire gamut of ideas and emotions (particularly emotions) which have gathered round the rather simple words the "Non-Aligned Movement".'²⁸

Interestingly, non-alignment, which was intended to offer flexibility to its adherents in their relationship with the two military blocs, was also first and foremost viewed through the lens of independent action. Beyond their principled critique of colonialism, militarism, and imperialism, advocates of non-alignment sought to avoid or minimise

²⁶ Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 178; This comment was made in reference to American aid in the late 1960s.

²⁷ S. Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy, 1966-1982* (New Delhi, 1984), p. 26.

²⁸ Haksar, *India's Foreign Policy and its Problems*, p. 55.

superpower interference in their internal affairs. For Mrs Gandhi particularly, non-alignment was a policy but ‘not an objective by itself’.²⁹ Like Haksar, she argued:

‘Some people take the word “non-alignment” to represent the whole of our foreign policy. In a way we are not so attached to the word “non-alignment” as to what it stands for, namely, we believe in judging all issues independently. We do not wish to be tied to any group or to any country.’³⁰

Further articulating her pragmatic considerations, she observed:

‘We have seen another very subtle change coming over the world, a rather dangerous change: colonialism – open, frank, honest colonialism – has given way to a veiled neo-colonialism...Therefore, the difficulties before the developing countries are still considerable. *And to face them we need more than mere idealism, or mere sentimentalism, we need very clear thinking and hard-headed analysis...* I am sure anybody who looks clearly at this picture will immediately come to the conclusion that it would not be in our interest to join any bloc. *Therefore, we come back to the third position, which is outside of blocs.* I do not think it is an idealistic position. I think it is the only hard-headed, practical path that is open to any country which wants to keep its independence.’[emphasis added]³¹

It is noteworthy that in the run-up to the NAM summit in 1983, Minister of External Affairs during the Janata interim, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, critiqued this ‘opportunistic’ bent in Mrs Gandhi’s understanding of the concept:

‘True or genuine non-alignment should not be interpreted as a concession to opportunism and cynicism in foreign policy in the name of defence of national interests. The movement has to observe certain principles without which it will crack up sooner or later. Its weakness during the last few years has really been its inability to define clearly its irreducible principles as distinguished from general rhetoric. The struggle against imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, racism and all forms of interference and intervention in internal affairs of states, continues to remain the essence of the policy of non-alignment...’³²

Similarly, Mrs Gandhi’s information advisor and speech writer between 1966 and 1969, B. G. Verghese, reveals in his memoirs that he too was ‘disappointed’ and surprised by

²⁹ Gandhi, ‘India and its Foreign Policy’, p. 97.

³⁰ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 122.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² A. B. Vajpayee, ‘Seventh Non-Aligned Summit: I – Need for Principled Stand’, *TOI* (28 February 1983), p. 8; At the 1983 summit, Pakistani President, Zia-ul-Haq, similarly iterated the movement’s commitment to its original principles: ‘If principles are compromised to suit the individual interests of state, the Movement could at best have memories of the past, but not visions of the future’. (Y. Qureshi, ‘The Seventh Summit of Non-aligned Nations’, *Pakistan Horizon*, 36/2 (1983), p. 55); Ironically, this statement was made at a time when Pakistan was seen as firmly belonging to the American ‘camp’ as it received heavy military and financial assistance from the United States to counter potential Soviet pressures in the region.

the ‘haphazard manner in which the government functioned’, and the ‘PM’s inexperience in so many matters’ relating to foreign policy.³³ Citing several meetings with foreign dignitaries on important issues such as Vietnam, Kashmir, and Indo-Soviet relations, Verghese notes that he ‘discerned no world view’ in her expositions, ‘only tired slogans’, and argues that the ‘meetings were too narrowly focused and geared to discussing immediate problems and crises’ that were ‘not sufficiently forward looking’.³⁴ Concluding his account of foreign affairs in the late 1960s, he writes:

‘More foreign dignitaries visited India and the PM continued going on foreign tours; but I was not certain how well those occasions were used, as much time was spent in trite exchanges.’³⁵

In his analysis of Mrs Gandhi’s search for ‘independence’, Tharoor argues that although she strongly resisted manipulation by both the United States and the Soviet Union, she simultaneously disliked ‘great power indifference’: ‘Mrs Gandhi clearly wished to be noticed and valued. India should neither be ignored nor equated to lesser powers.’³⁶ Indeed, contrary to her championship of non-interference, she aspired for India to play a role in influencing world affairs as a stable independent power at least in the immediate South Asia region:

‘Because of our size and geographical position and resources in materials and men, we cannot but play a fairly large part in international affairs and that role will always be on behalf of peace. People recognise us as a power, even as a potential great power...’³⁷

³³ Verghese, *First Draft*, pp. 98-99.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99; Verghese describes how interviews with foreign journalists was a difficult exercise even though Mrs Gandhi could be ‘disarmingly frank’, and often spoke ‘with brutal candour’: ‘She was generally brevity itself, often monosyllabic, and would doodle while listening to long-winded speeches, occasionally looking up to smile to indicate she was still there. Seasoned journalists, Indian and foreign, would seek interviews and plead with me for a half-hour slot, at least. They would be greeted with cryptic answers or a cute look.’ (p. 108).

³⁶ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, pp. 70-71.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

In this context, Mansingh observes how Mrs Gandhi encouraged ‘beneficial bilateralism’ as a mode of conflict resolution as well as to minimise the scope for international intervention in the region.³⁸ On India’s immediate neighbours, for instance, Mansingh writes:

‘She treated [disputes with neighbours] as bilateral matters, almost domestic, which could be and should be handled bilaterally...Her interpretation of Indian civilisation – with which India’s neighbours are intimately connected – stressed its tolerance, diversity, wide reach and its fundamental unity in a metaphysical sense.’³⁹

The wars with China and Pakistan, however, made it plain that external ‘meddling’ to some extent was unavoidable. Moreover, the domestic situation altered the meaning of independent action in foreign policy as India had come to rely extensively on foreign aid and technical assistance from both the United States and the Soviet Union, especially during wartime. The conditionalities placed on aid shaped India’s position on various international matters, and the economic and social policies adopted at home.

That Mrs Gandhi would still maintain that India could be a ‘potential great power’ illuminates the third feature of her foreign policy that advocated acquiring and *displaying power* in an overt and tangible sense, thus enhancing its flexible and independent character. This argument has been introduced in Chapter 1 in the context of the development of India’s economic and defence capabilities in the 1970s.⁴⁰ Interestingly, in her final years, Mrs Gandhi began to publicly acknowledge the inadequacy of India’s economic and military resources. However, she championed Indian strengths in other spheres that legitimised its unique international role. For instance, during her state visit to the United States in July 1982, she remarked:

³⁸ Mansingh, *India’s Search for Power*, pp. 261-2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ See pp. 62-64.

‘If India were considered in economic or military terms, it would not count. Yet our voice is heard, because in spite of our poverty and economic backwardness and often looking beyond our immediate interests, we have fearlessly spoken up for the rights of the underprivileged and the threatened and have championed the cause of peace and freedom. We have always viewed our problems in the much larger perspective of global problems.’⁴¹

Elsewhere, she claimed:

‘[...]in devising the foreign policy of any country – and perhaps especially that of India – certain intangible elements can be extremely important or decisive. It may be easier for a rich and powerful nation to press forward its policy and to fashion relations with other countries. India is neither rich nor powerful, and we have to keep that in mind. Nevertheless, we have made up for our lack of riches and power with some other qualities.’⁴²

Similar statements put forward India’s historic contributions as a moral and cultural authority, and the frequent allusion to ‘soft power’ on such occasions was significant in warming India’s ties with much of the Western world in the early 1980s as well as in the development of state-diaspora relations, as I note in the previous chapter.

Foreign Policy as Spectacle

Thus far I have argued that Mrs Gandhi’s foreign policy was developed as a ‘tool’ to establish India’s flexibility, independence, and power in her conduct of diplomacy. This section examines a fourth end to which foreign policy was frequently, and indeed successfully employed during the Indira Gandhi years – to secure *legitimacy via personal branding*.

When B. G. Verghese offered his resignation in 1970, he wrote the following note to Mrs Gandhi explaining what he believed was the essential role of the information advisor:

⁴¹ The American Presidency Project, ‘Toast of the President and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India at the State Dinner’ (29 July 1982), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=42800> (27 January 2018).

⁴² Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 125.

‘Information is an integral part of decision-making...The information man has a role in the *public presentation of decisions in a context and language that is most conducive to understanding among different segments of the population and through different media*. [GOI], however, has never had such an information policy...The I&B Ministry is perhaps the least ‘informed’...Speech writing has also been inhibited by the absence of a strong commitment to clearly defined programmes...*PM has not been keen on regular press conferences and broadcasts*. This is a pity. But these things must be adjusted to the style of the person concerned.’[emphasis added]⁴³

Vergheese’s assessment of Mrs Gandhi’s handling of the I&B Ministry, her ineptness in matters of external affairs, and her lack of keenness to hold press conferences early in her career is noteworthy when juxtaposed with her spectacular politics and employment of mass media in later years.

Indeed, it is worth pointing out that although Mrs Gandhi did not articulate a principled foreign policy, she was aware of the media attention given to foreign visits, diplomatic summits, and press conferences, which made them potential occasions for political performance. Mrs Gandhi’s earliest exposure to foreign publicity and public relations in general was during her travels with her father who, as P. C. Alexander remarks, was the ‘original author and authentic interpreter of India’s foreign policy’.⁴⁴ As his own Minister of External Affairs for the entire length of his Prime Ministership, Nehru had mastered the art of ‘face to face’ diplomacy by state visit, and was at the heart of the Non-Aligned and Commonwealth Movements in the 1950s, the workings of which Mrs Gandhi observed at close quarters. Given his deep interest in international affairs and foreign policy making, Nehru took charge of setting up the Indian Foreign Service in its early years. Moreover, as Judith Brown notes, he was closely involved in

⁴³ Vergheese, *First Draft*, pp. 138-9.

⁴⁴ Mrs Gandhi’s principal secretary between 1981 – 1984. Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, p. 57.

establishing the conventions for diplomatic behaviour and protocol, from the formal dress code for Indian diplomats to the interior design of Indian embassies worldwide.⁴⁵

In her own words, Mrs Gandhi recalled her experiences traveling with her father to numerous countries around the world as the de-facto ‘First Lady’, and playing hostess to important international figures at home:

‘In 1950 the policy of non-alignment secured for India a world status far higher than that to which her military strength and economic resources might otherwise entitle her. It meant continuous contacts with a wide cross-section of nations and their leaders. *I had the opportunity to observe the finest points of summit diplomacy from the inside.* I went with my father on some of the trips. Before we visited the United States, people like Sukarno, Hatta and others had come and stayed with us. The Asian Relations Conference took place before we moved to Teen Murti House and we were still in the small York Road house. This is where many leaders from Asian countries visited us. The Chiang Kai Sheks were among them...Some of us women took Madame Chiang Kai Shek round the city...In 1953 we went to China. *I met Chou En-Lai and Mao Tse-Tung. Mao didn’t come to India. I was told later that he was waiting for an invitation. If only we had called him, many things would have been different...*In 1955, I returned to the Soviet Union – officially and with my father... *We had a tremendous welcome. Of course, in China we had had a very warm welcome from the people, and I believe the Soviet leaders looked at the film of that trip and thought that they shouldn’t do less than the Chinese. Then, our people saw films of our welcome in the USSR. That is why Bulganin and Khrushchev had such a tumultuous welcome in India. I was chairman of the Committee which made all the arrangements of the visit...*’[emphasis added]⁴⁶

⁴⁵ J. M. Brown, Personal Conversation, Oxford, 14 February 2018; Media advisor to Rajiv Gandhi, I. R. Rao, describes the ‘great deal’ one could learn from Nehru’s press conferences in his time: ‘He used to take great pains to explain the national and international policies of the government...He would speak at length on the policy of non-alignment, planned development, the Kashmir issue, and international events like the Suez Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Nehru would conduct the press conference himself...Occasionally, he would get provoked and burst out with remarks like “fantastic nonsense”. Pressmen would wait for such moments’. I. R. Rao, ‘PMs’ press meets: ‘Indira used to prepare, Rajiv was lively’, Rediff News (25 May 2010), <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/pms-press-meets-indira-used-to-prepare-rajiv-was-lively/20100525.htm> (15 February 2018)).

⁴⁶ Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, pp. 67-8.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Keystone/Hulton archive/Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/pictures/nikolai-bulganin-93883#left-to-right-first-secretary-of-the-soviet-communist-party-nikita-picture-id109000576> (12 February 2018).

Figure 4.2: First Lady: (l-r) Nehru, Nikita Khrushchev, Mrs Gandhi, Nikolai Bulganin, and S. Radhakrishnan, New Delhi (1955)⁴⁷

The above recollection shows Mrs Gandhi's keen observation of diplomatic protocol particularly with regard to ceremonial visits, and the media attention caught on 'film' during such spectacles. It also reveals a sensitivity towards the degree of official importance attached to leaders of different states, and how that had bearing upon India's relations with them. The careful following of such protocol was visible in the numerous state visits Mrs Gandhi hosted and made as Prime Minister herself. Indeed, she even imbibed the spirit of performance in her dressing style on these occasions, as Verghese observes:

'At home she wore simple cotton or khadi saris with no more than a dark-beaded necklace, and kept her head covered. On state occasions, and especially when traveling abroad, she would dig into her rich wardrobe and appear elegantly attired, wearing high heels, her face lightly made up, and hair smartly styled...While touring the countryside by car she would insist on turning up the

⁴⁷ Source: Keystone/Hulton archive/Getty Images, <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/pictures/nikolai-bulganin-93883#left-to-right-first-secretary-of-the-soviet-communist-party-nikita-picture-id109000576> (12 February 2018).

floor lights, so that she could be seen to advantage by the crowds and photographed by the media.⁴⁸

Verghese's description reveals Mrs Gandhi's attention to appearing visibly 'stately' on foreign occasions where she would often wear the finest of Indian silks (Figures 4.3 and 4.4), and almost 'goddess-like' when granting *darshan* to a mass audience at home (Figure 4.5). It was also critical to get photographed in the middle of the act for the benefit of a wider spectatorship – to 'be seen to advantage by the crowds' at a later point in time.⁴⁹ Indeed, her travels across the country are archived in photographs where she appears as a brand ambassador for regional handloom *saris*, including the symbolic *khadi*, which were often hand-picked by her close friend, Pupul Jayakar.⁵⁰ Incidentally, Jayakar also details Mrs Gandhi's preparations for her first state visit as Prime Minister to the United States in 1966:

'She was as meticulous about her clothes as with her speeches. Her sari, her blouse, her shoes, her bag were selected for every single function. She was anxious to appear at her best, had written to a few of her friends in the US to locate the latest makeup that would lessen the shadows under her eyes and make her long nose less prominent. The white streak in her hair over the years was carefully groomed to give her a touch of distinction. She was very much a woman.'⁵¹

⁴⁸ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 107.

⁴⁹ Writing in reference to M.K. Gandhi, Breuilly makes an excellent observation about the capacity of charismatic leaders to use the 'modern' technological apparatus of rail and road transport, print, and visual media such as photography to tap into 'traditional' belief systems (such as *darshan*) to legitimate their authority. On this point, see Breuilly, 'Max Weber, charisma and nationalist leadership', pp. 483-4.

⁵⁰ S. Vasudev, 'Power dressing: Exhibition-cum sale of Indira Gandhi inspired saris', HT (25 November 2017), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/art-and-culture/power-dressing-exhibition-cum-sale-of-indira-gandhi-inspired-saris/story-N7A3UtaUEaAJ5CS5YF4MfL.html> (14 September 2018).

⁵¹ Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi*, p. 189.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Associated Press/CNN (11 February 2014), <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/11/politics/white-house-state-dinners/index.html> (3 July 2018).

Figure 4.3: First Families – Nehru and Mrs Gandhi with the Kennedys, Washington D.C. (1961)⁵²

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Richard Nixon Presidential Materials/White House Historical Association, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/india-state-dinner-president-and-mrs-nixon-with-guests> (13 February 2018).

Figure 4.4: Mrs Gandhi with the Nixons and New York City Ballet Performers, Washington D.C. (1971)⁵³

⁵² Source: Associated Press/CNN (11 February 2014), <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/11/politics/white-house-state-dinners/index.html> (3 July 2018).

⁵³ Source: Richard Nixon Presidential Materials/White House Historical Association, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/photos/india-state-dinner-president-and-mrs-nixon-with-guests> (13 February 2018).

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Corbis/Outlook India (11 March 2010), <https://www.outlookindia.com/photos/people/indira-gandhi/7895/?photonono=20> (2 August 2018).

Figure 4.5: *Darshan* – Mrs Gandhi campaigning in India (1977)⁵⁴

Interestingly, Verghese remarks that the ‘question of how India looked at and was looked upon by the world’ became a matter of serious discussion especially after the wars in 1962 and 1965:

‘I was asked to head a committee consisting of the heads of the government’s internal and external information and publicity departments and make appropriate recommendations. Our report, “The Indian Image” argued that: Publicity, like goodwill, is an intangible asset whose gains will far outweigh the costs involved...There has to be a high level and well-integrated information policy which is lacking at present...We have to harness the revolution in mass communications to tell the world how India lives and thinks and what it is doing. There is a tremendous story to tell and there is a worldwide audience waiting to be told it.’⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Source: Corbis/Outlook India (11 March 2010), <https://www.outlookindia.com/photos/people/indira-gandhi/7895/?photonono=20> (2 August 2018).

⁵⁵ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 126.

The ‘story’ of postcolonial India had arguably, most forcefully, been articulated on the world stage by Nehru himself, particularly during his meetings with leaders of the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movements.⁵⁶ Mrs Gandhi knew that her father was well-regarded in international circles for his eloquent speeches on India’s struggles and successes, and for his contributions to concepts such as non-alignment, having herself edited several volumes of his written works and letters. Verghese notes, however, that unlike Nehru she was not a great speaker herself but ‘could be both eloquent and passionate when roused. For quite some time she needed props: either a learned saying or a reference to her father’.⁵⁷ In an amusing account, he recalls, ‘She even went to Teen Murti House...and sat in Jawaharlal Nehru’s chair in the study (which was preserved exactly as he left it), when she needed his strength and inspiration’.⁵⁸

Perhaps aware of her intellectual and oratorical limitations, Mrs Gandhi kept her speeches short and simple. Indeed, her personal secretary between 1981 and 1984, P. C. Alexander, describes her as a ‘compulsive editor’, arguing that getting a draft speech approved was ‘the most difficult part of the work’ of senior officers working with her:

‘Indira Gandhi was a great perfectionist as far as the English language was concerned and believed in the utmost economy in the use of words. Rhetorical flourishes and embellishments in the drafts were mercilessly cut out in favour of short and simple sentences. Sometimes, we felt that her editing, while improving the language, destroyed the impact, but she would insist on her own language and style to be retained...She would go through each sentence very carefully, examine the aptness of a phrase used, debated whether it could be substituted by a better phrase, cut out sentences which she thought were repetitive or unnecessary, add

⁵⁶ To a lesser but significant extent, India’s views on international matters were also communicated on the world stage by Nehru’s younger sister and Mrs Gandhi’s aunt, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. In the first decade after Independence, Pandit was one of India’s most important diplomats as the ambassador to the Soviet Union, United States, and United Kingdom amongst other countries. She also headed the Indian delegation at the United Nations before becoming the first woman President of the UN General Assembly in 1953.

⁵⁷ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

new sentences, change the order of paragraphs or of sentences within the same paragraph and finally make the text typically “Indiraise”.⁵⁹

When speaking at home, Mrs Gandhi often spoke extempore in Hindi. Her speeches, although couched in Nehruvian rhetoric, made use of a simpler vocabulary, and were thus more comprehensible and impactful for a mass audience. In this context, Verghese writes that Mrs Gandhi also ‘agreed to a monthly “person to person” broadcast’ on All India Radio ‘to reach out to a wider audience’.⁶⁰ He adds, ‘I also wrote a weekly Opinion Survey in which I scanned the national and international media and brought to her notice important, interesting or amusing views and comments’.⁶¹ This suggests that Mrs Gandhi was conscious of public opinion, and the general consensus around her policies at home and abroad. Frequent interactions with the foreign press also became commonplace in later years with a great deal of preparedness on Mrs Gandhi’s part, as noted in Chapters 1 and 3.⁶²

The above overview has sought to establish the importance Mrs Gandhi accorded to the particularities of media coverage if not to actual foreign policy itself – the strength of crowds, ceremonial protocol, speech drafts, and personal aesthetics. As Shimazu notes in her analysis of the ‘theatre of diplomacy’, ‘accoutrements’ such as ‘speech-delivery, dress, and bodily comportment such as posture and gesture, are all part and parcel of creating a demeanour appropriate to a “person in power” and “person of power”’.⁶³ Keeping this in mind, the next section examines Mrs Gandhi’s conduct during the 1983 Non-Aligned Movement summit hosted in New Delhi. In particular, I analyse how she

⁵⁹ Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁰ Verghese, *First Draft*, p. 108.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² See pp. 119-22, 205-8, 219-21, and 258-63 of this thesis.

⁶³ Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as Theatre’, p. 242.

used the mediatised platform of the summit to advance her personal prestige amongst the middle class at home, and within political circles abroad.

Finally, a word on the title of this chapter. Speaking on the occasion of awarding the 1981 ‘Third World Prize’ to Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere, Mrs Gandhi remarked:

‘Before I start, I hope you will not misunderstand if I indulge in one of my pet peeves! I have long fought against such phrases such as “Third World”. It is undeniable that the developing countries have a common bond in that they are industrially backward and are discriminated against. But why should one group of countries claim to belong to the First World? Studies have shown how language subtly projects images which condition our thinking towards groups of people, women for instance, or for a long time, black people. Thus are social attitudes and feelings of inferiority imbedded in our subconscious. On this occasion, I don’t want to sound polemical, but to stress the point that we should not allow words and phrases to divert us from the fact that whether some of us like it or not, ours is one world and while equality is often denied, we are equals at least in our potential, even though some consider themselves more equal than others.’⁶⁴

Elsewhere, she similarly urged:

‘I have always viewed and continue to view the world as one. I dislike terms which have a divisive connotation. In current parlance, the world is fragmented into various segments – four so far, and redivided (sic) into East and West and North and South. Why should some consider themselves the First World?...But fashions in phrases are no less compelling than those in clothes, and in spite of one’s better judgement, one cannot always avoid such clichés.’⁶⁵

These are typical examples of Mrs Gandhi’s speeches at prominent international forums. First, they show her frequent referencing of Nehruvian terminology in passing, such as ‘one world’, without a proper articulation of her own understanding of the idea. By invoking Nehru and his legacy, which she had naturally inherited, Mrs Gandhi attempted to make her own claims to legitimacy as a serious, influential world leader. Moreover, they reveal her knowledge of specific imagery and language, and their subtle impact on the collective consciousness, morale, and prestige of developing countries.

⁶⁴ Speech on 22 February 1982, Ministry of External Affairs, *Statements on Foreign Policy Volume 1*, p. 129.

⁶⁵ Speech on 23 March 1982, Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings 1982-1984 Vol. V*, p. 351.

Here, by advocating against the use of what many considered to be a pejorative term, she sought to portray herself as the well-informed, sensitive, and thus rightful champion of the ‘Third World’. I use the term in the title to acknowledge, and to highlight both Mrs Gandhi’s awareness of discrimination, and its purposeful assertion to reflect the ‘common bond’ between discriminated nations. As the central argument of this thesis contends, a vocal defence of such charged vocabulary was important for Mrs Gandhi in the aftermath of the Emergency when her own democratic credentials were questioned by ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ alike.

Reviving Non-Alignment: The New Delhi Summit

‘It has intimations of an epic Greek drama, with a hundred characters, draped in appropriate robes of non-alignment, searching for a relevant role in the hazy whirlpool of world politics. It is also the largest and most glittering extravaganza of international politics to be held on the rugged soil of Delhi.’⁶⁶

The seventh Non-Aligned Movement summit that took place between 7 March and 12 March 1983 in New Delhi was, as journalist Inder Malhotra remarked, a fortuitous event.⁶⁷ The summit marked the end of a contentious period of chairmanship by the Republic of Cuba, which under President Fidel Castro Ruz had given the diplomatic talks an anti-American, or rather an overt pro-Soviet bias. Furthermore, the designated host of the seventh summit, Baghdad, had withdrawn at the last minute due to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in late 1980. Both circumstances presented a challenge to the Non-Aligned Movement (henceforth NAM) as Cuba, deviating from its professed ‘independent’ path, championed the Soviet Union as a ‘natural ally’ of the movement, whilst a full-fledged war between two non-aligned countries threatened a potential split along ideological lines amongst other member states. As its membership grew to 101

⁶⁶ S. Sethi, ‘New Delhi NAM Summit’, *IT* (27 May 2014), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19830315-new-delhi-nam-summit-india-proposes-end-to-great-power-confrontation-and-cold-war-770489-2013-07-24> (8 February 2018).

⁶⁷ I. Malhotra, ‘The Colourful March of the Non-Aligned’, *TOI* (6 March 1983), p. A1.

countries by 1983, Yasmin Qureshi, in an article published soon after the summit, argued that ‘what apparently seems to be its strength is in fact its foremost weakness. A conglomeration of states with varying ideologies and political loyalties, NAM has become an amorphous entity incapable of acting decisively’.⁶⁸

It was in July 1982 when then Chairman of the movement, Fidel Castro, asked Mrs Gandhi if India would agree to host the summit.⁶⁹ At the time, preparations were already underway in New Delhi for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (henceforth CHOGM) scheduled to take place in November 1983. Natwar Singh, later appointed Secretary General and Chief Coordinator of the NAM summit, writes in his autobiography:

‘My reaction was “thanks, but no thanks”. NAM Summits needed three years to plan and prepare. Vigyan Bhavan was not even adequate for CHOGM, let alone a NAM Summit. [...] serious deliberations were held to consider Fidel Castro’s proposal, and it was finally accepted. The Indian Prime Minister would have the unique distinction of presiding over two summits in the same year.’⁷⁰

That India’s selection as the host was fortuitous is explained by two reasons. First, as described above, circumstances had called into question the unity and relevance of NAM as a legitimate ‘third front’ in Cold War politics. Apart from the Cuban stance and the Iran-Iraq War, disagreements on the recognition of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea as the successor to the Pol Pot regime in present-day Cambodia, and on the

⁶⁸ Y. Qureshi, ‘The Seventh Summit’, *Pakistan Horizon*, p. 65.

⁶⁹ Singh, *One Life is Not Enough*, p. 218; Castro and Mrs Gandhi shared a warm friendship which went back to Nehru’s time. At the 1983 summit, on Mrs Gandhi’s personal invitation, Castro was accompanied by the Colombian Nobel laureate, Gabriel García Márquez, who later recalled: ‘When we landed at the airport I decided to stay on the plane in order not to disturb the protocol. Suddenly, I looked through the window and saw Indira Gandhi getting off the presidential rostrum and coming up the steps of the plane. When she entered the plane she cried, “Where’s García Márquez?” From that time on, we were inseparable. She spoke French, and by the third day I felt as if Indira had been born in Aracataca. She invited me to go on a tour of India, organised by her, and I accepted. She said she would be in touch. Then I heard the news that she had been assassinated, and that was why I promised I’d never go to India again.’ ‘Gabo and a Gandhi’, *India Abroad* (22 August 2014), p. A4.

⁷⁰ Singh, *One Life is Not Enough*, p. 218. At the time, Singh was a diplomat with the Indian Foreign Service, and had represented India at the United Nations and Commonwealth meetings.

Soviet invasion in Afghanistan (also a non-aligned member state) revealed long standing ideological differences within the movement.⁷¹ Soviet action, in particular, had reignited and brought the Cold War to South Asian borders which presented an opportunity for an otherwise dormant NAM to play an influential, mediatory role in the conflict. However, India's restraint and later abstention from a United Nations resolution condemning Soviet action complicated its role as chair, further adding to the charge that Mrs Gandhi was quietly allied with the Soviets.⁷²

Conversely, by downplaying criticism of the United States on contentious matters that had previously arisen at the 1979 Havana summit, Mrs Gandhi attempted to project her neutrality between the two blocs and that of the movement as a whole. In fact, the NAM summit was an important occasion for Mrs Gandhi to demonstrate that India was indeed 'equidistant' from the Americans and the Soviets, and thus establish her own image as a genuinely independent-minded leader.⁷³ To ensure this, as chairperson, she sought to keep at bay divisive issues such as Kampuchea and Afghanistan during the main summit proceedings. Instead, the points of deliberation were limited to less controversial subjects like North-South dialogue on trade, the New International Economic Order which advocated favourable terms of trade for developing countries, nuclear disarmament, support for decolonisation, and recognition of liberation movements around the world. By and large, consensus was reached on each of these

⁷¹ For a discussion of similar challenges to NAM in its early history, see A. Appadorai, 'Non-Alignment: Some important issues', *International Studies*, 20/1-2 (1981), pp. 3-11. Also see A. S. Abraham, 'Future of Non-Alignment: Challenges and Hazards', *TOI* (11 September 1981), p. 8 for an analysis of the international situation affecting NAM in the early 1980s.

⁷² As noted in Chapter 3 (pp. 223-24), Mrs Gandhi's quiet opposition to the Soviet invasion was known to both the United Kingdom and the United States. Yet, her unwillingness to publicly condemn the Soviet Union weakened her position in international deliberations at the time.

⁷³ Interestingly, Atal Bihari Vajpayee acknowledged Mrs Gandhi's move to a posture of genuine non-alignment, but 'not one of equidistance but of equal proximity to both superpowers'. He argued, 'Here is a case of double dependence and violation of the basic principles of non-alignment'. A. B. Vajpayee, 'Seventh Non-Aligned Summit', *TOI* (28 February 1983), p. 8.

issues although they elicited at least a surface level criticism of Western powers, more on which later.

The revival of NAM and Mrs Gandhi's branding of herself as its legitimate spokesperson form an important backdrop to the New Delhi summit. As a cover story in *India Today* magazine from March 1983 remarked:

'If Mrs Gandhi's initial actions are any indication, she is clearly determined to shake the movement out of its lethargy. NAM, described by the new chairperson as "history's biggest peace movement", has never been more in need of rejuvenation and recharging of its batteries...Now with Mrs Gandhi at the helm, there is obviously new awakening, a new optimism and a new sense of purpose. As Professor G.L. Bondarevsky, one of the three Soviet experts on non-alignment and international relations in New Delhi during the summit, predicted: "The seventh summit will be the most crucial in the history of the movement. You now have the right lady at the right place and the right time".'⁷⁴

The report went on to quote then Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore, S. Rajaratnam, who praised Mrs Gandhi's mediation of the potentially divisive talks:

'Singapore's crusty Deputy Prime Minister S. Rajaratnam, who created a storm when he roundly criticised the movement's "growing impotency", later told *India Today* that New Delhi had injected a breath of fresh air into the movement. "We are now assured of strict impartiality", he remarked...a snide reference to former chairman Castro's controversial decision to keep the Kampuchean seat vacant during the Havana summit.'⁷⁵

A similar point of view was acknowledged in a now declassified report of the CIA on the prospects of India's chairmanship for the United States in particular. A section of this document is worthy of being quoted at length:

'As India assumes the chairmanship of the Nonaligned Movement, New Delhi's efforts to promote unity and moderation in the movement will – in our view – serve also to further Prime Minister Gandhi's foreign policy objectives: Restoration of India to a position of recognised international leadership in the Nonaligned Movement which Gandhi's father helped to found. We believe that the rapid growth and regional diversification of the membership has enhanced the movement's importance as a forum for Indian diplomacy...Gandhi has reportedly chosen the issue of disarmament as a platform for projecting her leadership. She

⁷⁴ D. Bobb, 'NAM: India takes charge of Non-aligned Movement with uncustomary authority', *IT* (31 March 1983), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19830331-india-takes-charge-of-non-aligned-movement-with-uncustomary-authority-770551-2013-07-25> (4 February 2018).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; Incidentally, the Kampuchean seat was also left vacant at the New Delhi summit as consensus had not been reached within the movement regarding the situation in Vietnam/Kampuchea.

will also continue to seek a central role for her government as a mediator in disputes between NAM countries; *Her pursuit of a more consistent nonaligned policy has added momentum to her efforts to expand India's foreign policy flexibility.*'[emphasis added]⁷⁶

On Mrs Gandhi's careful criticism of the United States at the summit, the report observed:

'Concerned over India's isolation as a result of its close identification with the USSR, Gandhi has improved relations with Washington. She has worked to strengthen political, military, and economic ties with West European states, which provide her with an alternative to superpower sources of military and economic assistance...*Gandhi's aspirations for leadership in the Nonaligned Movement have constrained New Delhi's close association with the Soviets; her muted opposition to Moscow's Afghanistan policy signals her determination to pursue Indian interests even at some potential cost to Indo-Soviet ties...*At the same time, Gandhi and her senior officials have been careful to avoid the appearance of a shift to pro-US positions...Gandhi will continue to use nonalignment as a basis on which to criticise the US presence in the Indian Ocean and US security assistance to Pakistan.'

Mrs Gandhi had long raised objections to the presence of foreign troops in the Indian Ocean, particularly the expansion of American military facilities on the British island territory of Diego Garcia. The NAM summit witnessed her urgent call for all foreign powers to withdraw from the region, and to reconvert the Indian Ocean into a 'zone of peace'. It is worth pointing out that it was in a similar context of regionalism that Mrs Gandhi had first defended Soviet presence in Afghanistan:

'I think the U.S. presence in Vietnam destabilised the whole area. Regarding Soviet presence in Afghanistan, I am not saying that it will have no effects. We don't like foreign presences in Afghanistan. *But there is a very big difference. Afghanistan happens to be on the Soviet border, it's a neighbour. The U.S. had to go clear around the globe to get to Vietnam. What did the U.S. have to do with Vietnam?* Now I'm not justifying the Soviet presence in Afghanistan. I have talked

⁷⁶ CIA Directorate of Intelligence, 'The Nonaligned Movement: India's Chairmanship and Relations with the Superpowers', 1 March 1983, pp. 8–9, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00287R000700650001-5.pdf> (14 September 2018).

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 9; As noted in Chapter 3 (pp. 224-25), Margaret Thatcher made a similar reading of the Indian situation when she visited Mrs Gandhi in April 1981. She later remarked: 'The strategic importance of India was now greater...It was one of the leading countries in the non-aligned movement – still more so since the death of Marshal Tito...India could be an even more powerful source of difficulty than benefit if she chose. Her traditionally close relations with Russia and hostility to Pakistan, at a time when the latter was the main base for the Afghan anti-Communist guerrillas, meant that the West had to be sensitive to the Indian government's feelings and needs'. Quoted in Malik, *India and the United Kingdom* (London, 1997), p. 57.

publicly and privately about the need for withdrawals. But do you think the manner in which the West has handled it has helped the situation?'[emphasis added]⁷⁸

Explaining India's abstention from the UN resolution against the Soviet Union, she argued:

'Yes we did because there was nothing done about it when there was equal interference in other countries in other parts of the world. Now, if you're willing to do it with every country, OK, we'll do it in this case too. But we don't think that one country should be singled out and people should shut their eyes to what others are doing.'⁷⁹

Similarly, on the American supply of weaponry to Pakistan on the pretext of bolstering Pakistani capabilities 'to resist growing Soviet pressure',⁸⁰ she remarked to Arthur Gavshon of the Associated Press:

'It has nothing to do with Afghanistan because Pakistan's request for weaponry predates Soviet entry into Afghanistan. It is only being used as an excuse...[for the] general hawkish policy of your government. Anyway it suited Pakistan. I am sure that Pakistan does not want the Soviets out of Afghanistan as long as they are getting more military out of the whole situation.'⁸¹

These statements illustrate Mrs Gandhi's deeply calculating approach to foreign policy as outlined in previous sections. According to her, the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan was somewhat justified due to its geography whilst the resolution against the Soviet Union was viewed as 'unfair' precisely because the United States had not been condemned similarly for its actions in Vietnam.

⁷⁸ 'Interview with Steve Patton of U.S. News and World Report, 13 January 1982', Ministry of External Affairs, *Statements on Foreign Policy Volume 1*, pp. 21-3; Elsewhere, Mrs Gandhi noted the importance of geography in India's foreign policy: '[...]we see the world from where we stand. Each country sees the world from where it is located. So we cannot possibly have exactly the same angle. Certain countries are our neighbours. So our relationship with them is especially important. If we are a long way from other countries, we can look at them from different angles.' Gandhi and Pouchpadass, *My Truth*, p. 125.

⁷⁹ 'Interview with Steve Patton...', pp. 21-3.

⁸⁰ CIA National Security Decision Directive 147, 'U.S. Policy Toward India and Pakistan', 11 October 1984, p. 1, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90B01370R001501920022-0.pdf> (14 September 2018).

⁸¹ Interview on 11 January 1982 in Ministry of External Affairs, *Statements on Foreign Policy Volume 1*, pp. 6-7; Mrs Gandhi believed that Pakistan's military build-up with American assistance was a direct attempt to threaten India in a future war scenario. Tellingly, a CIA report dated 11 October 1984 noted: 'We cannot exclude the possibility of an Indian pre-emptive strike on Pakistani nuclear facilities which would probably lead to an all-out Indo-Pak war'. CIA, 'U.S. Policy Towards India and Pakistan' (see footnote 82 above).

Going back to the summit, controversial subjects that threatened to disrupt the talks were either excluded from or underplayed during the main conference.⁸² Indeed, the organisers were keen to make the summit a spectacular demonstration of the renewed unity and progress of NAM under Mrs Gandhi's watchful leadership. That a successful summit was also instrumental in enhancing national prestige felt by Indian spectators is suggested in former President Pranab Mukherjee's memoirs. On the 1983 summit and its significance for India and NAM at the time, Mukherjee remarks:

'Having...consolidated the party's hold, [Mrs Gandhi] focused on the world, to make India a respected member of the global community. She successfully staged India as a leader of the third world through some landmark international events, notwithstanding the difficult economic situation in the country...[During the NAM summit] Mrs Gandhi personally supervised every detail of the arrangements and helped iron out many of the protocol and security issues that arose from time to time. [It] was an important moment for Indira Gandhi and India. Speaking at the summit, the Prime Minister highlighted the relevance of the Non-Aligned Movement in terms of its overarching message of cooperation and peace....'⁸³

'Asiad'82 somehow seemed a lesser event.'⁸⁴

As Mrs Gandhi prepared for her role as chairperson, it was Natwar Singh who was responsible for ensuring that the 'largest ever such gathering in history' of foreign dignitaries leave the summit with a positive image of India.⁸⁵ To achieve this task, a 'high powered team' headed by Delhi's Lieutenant Governor and head of the Emergency's urban 'beautification' programme, Jagmohan, was called into action, as a report in *India Today* reveals:

⁸² Some of the more contentious issues were debated during the Conference of Foreign Ministers of Non-Aligned Countries which shortly preceded the main summit. On this conference, see Bobb, 'India takes charge...'; and Sethi, 'New Delhi NAM Summit'.

⁸³ P. Mukherjee, *The Turbulent Years: 1980 – 1996* (New Delhi, 2016), pp. 12-17.

⁸⁴ Borrowing from 'Hospitality matched picture of beauty...', IT (31 March 1983), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19830331-hospitality-matched-picture-of-beauty-and-serene-elegance-for-non-aligned-summit-in-delhi-770550-2013-07-25> (4 February 2018).

⁸⁵ Quoting from Bobb, 'India takes charge...'. For a complete list of summit representatives of member countries and guest delegations, see United Nations General Assembly/Security Council, '7th Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement' (April 1983), http://cns.miiis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/7th_Summit_FD_New_Delhi_Declaration_1983_Whole.pdf (6 February 2018), pp. 7-8.

‘Delhi administration and New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) worker teams transformed eye-sores into beauty spots, remodelled roads for smooth driving, improved road lighting and redeveloped all gardens around the hotels for heads of state for one week. [...] according to an unofficial estimate over Rs 1 crore was spent on improving 23 roads, providing sodium road-lights and raising welcome arches. Jagmohan would not have succeeded without the unstinted support of the Centre which authorised him to clear any financial commitment without delay. The enterprising Lt-Governor authorised the hiring of over 3,000 temporary hands – mostly beggars – who were assigned specific areas. A monitoring cell at his house monitored progress on the projects twice a week.’⁸⁶

Another report pointedly noted:

‘In its organisation, management and presentation, the summit drew upon the widest range of Indian skills and services, and applied them so effectively that even last year’s Asiad ’82 somehow seemed a lesser event.’⁸⁷

Incidentally, Singh reveals that Mrs Gandhi was keen to utilise the flats built in the Asiad Village housing complex as accommodation for summit dignitaries. ‘Why can’t we do this in an austere way?’, she argued, adding, ‘My accommodation in Lusaka [at the 1979 CHOGM] was nothing to write home about’.⁸⁸ To this, Singh politely replied:

‘Madam, New Delhi is not Lusaka. The Zambians did the best they could. You were given a villa, as were the other Heads of State. I was with you in Lusaka. All delegates were put up in five star hotels, not university hostels.’⁸⁹

Singh then describes his attempts to arrange a more ‘appropriate’ venue by communicating his concerns with Rajiv Gandhi:

‘I told [Mrs Gandhi] of Baghdad, Belgrade and Havana to look at the arrangements these countries had made for the NAM Summit. We could not do worse than them...She was not convinced. She decided that a large group including Rajiv Gandhi (...) and I should visit the Asiad Village...Rajiv first had a look at the dining room which resembled a college canteen – no benches to sit on, and long tables without tablecloths. Rajiv said nothing and we proceeded to look at the flats for the athletes. There were three small bedrooms with a common bathroom and no telephone...I emphatically told Rajiv that not even first secretaries would be happy with these hostel facilities. How could we expect NAM foreign ministers to share bathrooms?...The Ambassadors of the NAM countries got wind of the

⁸⁶ P. Chawla, ‘Delhi converted into show-piece NAM venue for developing world’, IT (31 March 1983), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19830331-delhi-converted-into-show-piece-nam-venue-for-developing-world-770533-2013-07-25> (4 February 2018).

⁸⁷ IT, ‘Hospitality matched picture of beauty...’.

⁸⁸ Singh, *One Life is Not Enough*, p. 219; Tellingly, a report in *Navbharat Times* commented on the lack of interested buyers for flats advertised in the Asiad Village despite advertisements printed ‘in colour’ for ‘foreign NRIs’. The report argued that the flats were ‘too expensive’, ranging from 7 to 18 lakh rupees. Translated from Hindi, ‘No buyers for Asiad Village Flats’, *Navbharat Times* (29 December 1983).

⁸⁹ Singh, *One Life is Not Enough*, pp. 219-20.

Asiad proposal and told my deputy, S.K. Lambah, that if the rumour about the Asiad was true, then their Presidents and Prime Ministers would not attend the summit. I conveyed this to Rajiv and the Prime Minister and, to my relief, status quo was restored...It was probably one of [Rajiv's] inexperienced friends who had proposed this silly idea and then convinced Mrs Gandhi....'⁹⁰

In the end, four five-star hotels in the heart of the capital – the Ashok, Taj Mahal, Maurya Sheraton, and Oberoi Intercontinental – were chosen to accommodate the delegations. In contrast to the 'modest' Asiad Village, the refurbished facilities of the luxury hotels gave off the appearance of 'princely fantasy':

'Four days before the summit's start, the 13 presidential suites at the Oberoi looked like dream palaces. Designers Rina Singh and Sunita Kohli in a matter of 10 weeks had produced the kind of luxury last seen during the heyday of the Maharajas: massive Art Deco bathrooms of polished granite – each fitted with a bathtub with built-in Jacuzzi imported at a cost of Rs. 80,000 – furniture and furnishings so opulent they had to be matched with new gold-and-white plasterwork ceilings, and individually handpicked antiques from far corners of the country casually displayed.'⁹¹

Another report detailed the high security arrangements made at the hotels:

'Several security precautions have been taken. Each hotel will be "swept" by intelligence and bomb dispersal units of the army, every now and again. Hotel kitchens have been provided with laboratories to check out every morsel of food a head of state or delegate will consume, to prevent anything from food poisoning to intentional poisoning.'⁹²

The report then described preparations made for the personalised welcome and timely movement of dignitaries at the airport supervised by Mrs Gandhi herself along with President Giani Zail Singh:

'Before the conference actually commences on March 7, the Indian President and Prime Minister will be in attendance for two days – March 5 and 6 – to personally receive each head of state as his plane lands at the newly-constructed and renovated terminal at Palam Airport...At exact intervals of half an hour, a plane carrying a foreign head of state will land; every half an hour the Indian President and Prime Minister will move to the main entrance to receive him; in precisely half an hour the customs and security staff will be expected to clear passports, health papers and baggage and deposit the entire delegation into waiting cars to be taken to its hotel... In the case of Mrs Gandhi receiving the foreign dignitaries, for

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ 'Hospitality matched picture of beauty...', IT; On 12 December 1983, the following advertisement in the *Hindu* similarly described the facilities at the Ashok Hotel: 'New restaurants and sprawling lobby, guest list who's who...Luxurious extras in every room! Like a closed circuit TV with a 51 cm screen and 3 channel entertainment, a well-stocked refrigerator, and luxury toiletries!' (p. 14).

⁹² Sethi, 'New Delhi NAM Summit'.

instance, they have counted the exact number of steps she will have to walk from her waiting lounge to the terminal head.⁹³

It is important to note that such reportage found space in several newspapers and magazines in the run-up to the summit, and continued to receive attention even after its conclusion. The highly visual and deliberately detailed descriptions of luxury hotels as well as the variety of food, drinks, and entertainment arranged for summit guests played a crucial role in creating a spectacular picture of the event in the imagination of readers who were not permitted to witness the spectacle in person. Indeed, as Guha-Thakurta writes, the combination of newspaper reports, television footage, and radio programmes detailing preparatory activities provide an ‘index of the media takeover’ of such spectacles, and of the ‘competitive publicities’ that collectively give the spectacle legitimacy as an event involving the whole city, and each of its inhabitants.⁹⁴ In particular, reports of road blockages, airport closures, and strict security protocol put in place for the summit added to the fantasy of imagining the nation and the city at the centre of the high profile event despite inconveniences caused to the public in its daily activities. As the above report in *India Today* precisely remarked:

‘Unlike last year’s sports spectacular, Asiad ’82, which was a public event designed to attract as wide a viewing audience as possible, NAM is a high security-risk meeting of 80 heads of state – prime ministers, presidents and kings – to be held strictly behind closed doors. The NAM secretariat’s primary effort has been channelised, in Natwar Singh’s words, to “ensure that as few people as possible see what is essentially a working [summit]”.⁹⁵

Guha-Thakurta, writing in the context of mass festivities that engulf the city of Kolkata annually during *Durga Puja* season, argues that although a significant portion of the production of the spectacle ‘proceeds in cordoned-off spaces, away from public view’,

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ T. Guha-Thakurta, *In the Name of the Goddess* (Delhi, 2015), p. 41.

⁹⁵ Sethi, ‘New Delhi NAM Summit’.

organisers invest in specific strategies of self-promotion that deliberately invite consumers:

‘...through posters spread across the city, selectively wooing reporters, sponsors...for privileged previews of the promised spectacle, while pointedly shutting out others.’⁹⁶

In an attempt to overcompensate for secrecy, and to offer a glimpse of the summit activity taking place ‘behind closed doors’, newspapers and magazines with privileged access published numerous articles, photographs, and interviews with organisers, some of which even spectacularised mundane details such as the ‘deluge’ of white paper (‘5 million pieces of paper’) that was especially ordered to archive the all-important ‘working summit’.⁹⁷

The inauguration ceremony on 7 March 1983 was similarly described as a ‘spectacular show of pomp [and] pageantry’ for the millions who consumed the spectacle via mass media.⁹⁸ Official press releases gave ‘snippets’ of the opening proceedings where well-coordinated performances of Indian cultural and diplomatic traditions were cheered on as direct reflections of an image-conscious middle class. For instance, one report in the *Times of India* observed:

‘Several heads of state and government of the non-aligned countries witnessed a “spectacle fit for kings” at Vijay Chowk... The grand galaxy of the leaders of two-third humanity who watched the spectacle and heard the fascinating music of the bands included presidents, prime-ministers and their ladies. It was a proud presentation for the services bandmen when they played for 60 thrilling minutes for the world’s most distinguished audience. The presentation included a special composition “Amar Panchsheel” – the external five principles of peaceful co-existence – as if to remind the distinguished spectators of Nehru, who was one of the founding fathers of both “panchsheel” and the non-aligned movement.’⁹⁹

Following the opening pageantry, the dignitaries proceeded to Vigyan Bhavan, the government’s ornate conference venue where the summit talks were to take place. A

⁹⁶ Guha-Thakurta, *In the Name of the Goddess*, p. 45.

⁹⁷ Sethi, ‘New Delhi NAM Summit’.

⁹⁸ ‘Spectacular show of pomp, pageantry’, *TOI* (9 March 1983), p. 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

newspaper report once again described how Mrs Gandhi received a standing ovation as she approached the podium to make her speech as chairperson, ‘Her speech was warmly greeted. She was interrupted by applause ten times as she spoke with feeling on the problems facing the movement and the tasks ahead’.¹⁰⁰

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Frontline (1 September 2017), <http://www.frontline.in/cover-story/from-nonalignment-to-strategic-partnership/article9820890.ece> (12 February 2018).

Figure 4.6: Standing Tall – (left to right) Mrs Gandhi, Fidel Castro, and Natwar Singh, New Delhi¹⁰¹

Addressing her audience in the capital city, Mrs Gandhi proudly exclaimed:

‘I welcome you to Delhi, a city which in its time has seen much history, witnesses of which are strewn among the dwellings of today. But it is a new experience to have such a large and eminent galaxy of spokesmen of sovereign nations, representing more than half the world all at the same time...All of you are aware of the circumstances in which the honour of holding this Conference came to us. In spite of the shortage of time and many difficulties, we accepted the unanimous suggestion of our brothers of the non-aligned family, who felt that any further delay in holding the Seventh Summit would only have pleased the critics and opponents of the Movement.’¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ ‘Sartorial pageantry at Delhi’, *TOI* (8 March 1983), p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Source: Frontline (1 September 2017), <http://www.frontline.in/cover-story/from-nonalignment-to-strategic-partnership/article9820890.ece> (12 February 2018).

¹⁰² United Nations General Assembly/Security Council, ‘Keynote address by Shrimati Indira Gandhi: Prime Minister of India’ in ‘Seventh Summit...’,

In her speech, Mrs Gandhi stressed non-aligned cooperation in advocating the five principles of decolonisation, development, disarmament, détente, and democratisation. Amongst these, economic recovery and development in ‘Third World’ countries, and the dangers of a nuclear arms race between ‘super powers’ were specifically highlighted. Mrs Gandhi argued that economic weakness in times of recession coupled with internal discord within the movement made non-aligned countries easy targets of outside interference. With this sentiment, she appealed to Iran and Iraq to end their ‘tragic war’.¹⁰³ Furthermore, she urged leaders to uphold the unity of the movement, and to honour their commitment to certain shared principles, reminding them of the ‘sacrifices’ made by the movement’s founding fathers in the same spirit:

‘Some people might have wished the Movement to quarrel and divide. We have disappointed them. We may not agree on everything – who does? – but we are of one mind that we must keep together and work together – for peace, for development and for equality among nations and peoples, women and men of all races and creed. Unity is the best homage we can pay to the far-sighted founders of our Movement: Jawaharlal Nehru and Ahmed Sukarno of reawakened Asia, Gamel Abdel Nasser of the resurgent Arab world, Josip Broz Tito from independent Europe, Kwame Nkrumah from Africa astir. Indomitable fighters all, their message was one of struggle and sacrifice. They dared and suffered, they won and built.’¹⁰⁴

In the midst of serious deliberations, a memorable moment captured by the media was when Fidel Castro, whilst handing over the gavel to Mrs Gandhi, embraced her in an unexpected hug. *Times of India* described this spontaneous gesture– ‘the zeitgeist of the 1980s’ – in particular detail:

‘The very formal and very reserved Indira is taken aback, but she smiled gamely and extricates herself quickly but gracefully. Cameras whirr and flash. The heads of states and representatives of 140 countries present erupt with applause. The next day the whole world sees the photograph. It becomes an enduring symbol of 140

http://cns.miiis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/7th_Summit_FD_New_Delhi_Declaration_1983_Whole.pdf (6 February 2018), p. 143 (Appendix II).

¹⁰³ Qureshi, ‘The seventh summit’, pp. 55-6.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly, ‘Keynote Address...’, p. 150 (Appendix III).

countries thumbing their noses at the US and at Russia (sic), the two Cold War protagonists.’¹⁰⁵

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Congress Archives/Deccan Chronicle (27 November 2016), <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/271116/castro-indiras-meet-was-of-a-bear-hug-and-strong-message.html> (20 February 2018).

Figure 4.7: Moment Made for the Media – Mrs Gandhi and Fidel Castro¹⁰⁶

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at Desibantu (27 December 2012), <https://pedia.desibantu.com/india-post-year-1983/> (3 July 2018).

Figure 4.8: Indian Stamps Commemorating NAM Summit¹⁰⁷

The impact of such media coverage on public opinion at the time can be assessed by the hundreds of letters to the editor that appeared in English and vernacular newspapers at the conclusion of the summit. These capture feelings of national pride invoked by

¹⁰⁵ S. Neelakantani, ‘When Fidel Castro embraced Indira Gandhi in a huge bear hug’, TOI (26 November 2016), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/When-Fidel-Castro-embraced-Indira-Gandhi-in-a-huge-bear-hug/articleshow/55634522.cms> (7 February 2018).

¹⁰⁶ Source: Congress Archives/Deccan Chronicle (27 November 2016), <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/271116/castro-indiras-meet-was-of-a-bear-hug-and-strong-message.html> (20 February 2018).

¹⁰⁷ Source: Desibantu (27 December 2012), <https://pedia.desibantu.com/india-post-year-1983/> (3 July 2018).

the congratulatory reporting on the event, the successful staging of which was seen as crucial for the nation's image:

'The Prime Minister and her team deserve kudos for the marvellous non-aligned summit conference. The arrangements, hospitality and Mrs Gandhi's leadership have earned accolades from all. The sapling planted by Nehru, Tito and Nasser will be ably nurtured by Mrs Gandhi. All Indians are one today in congratulating the Prime Minister for bringing honour to India by her farsightedness, experience and deft handling of the summit meeting. To my generation which could not witness the era of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mrs Gandhi embodies the principles and values of the great statesman.'¹⁰⁸

In equally revering sentiment, a book on Mrs Gandhi's foreign policy noted:

'...Indira Gandhi has raised the country's prestige to a level not reached since the Nehruvian era. With her elevation as Chairperson of the NAM during the New Delhi Summit in 1983, Mrs Gandhi gave notice to the world at large that global affairs can no longer be decided exclusively by the rich and the affluent among the comity of nations. The fact that India was able to host without the slightest blemish such international events...came as an eye-opener to the world and successfully reinforced the reputation India had gained by faultlessly conducting the Asian Games.'¹⁰⁹

Notably, a survey of urban middle class households conducted shortly after the summit revealed similar perceptions. For instance, 46.5% of respondents in Delhi, Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta thought that the summit was 'successful', whilst 19.2% thought it was 'very successful'. 45% thought that Mrs Gandhi's new leadership was 'strong', whilst 18.8% thought it was 'very strong'. Moreover, 83% respondents believed that Mrs Gandhi's chairmanship of the movement had enhanced India's prestige.¹¹⁰

However, the pageantry also prompted criticism by some public commentators and the political opposition. Although acknowledging its significance for diplomatic gains, many questioned the summit on grounds of financial excess. The summit was also satirised by R. K. Laxman in his popular cartoon strip in the *Times of India*:

¹⁰⁸ A. Verma, 'Delhi Summit', *TOI* (23 March 1983), p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ S. S. Sisodia, *Foreign Policy of India* (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 175-6.

¹¹⁰ IIPO, Monthly Public Opinion Surveys, 'International Images and Opinion on Super Powers', 28/7-8 (1983), p. 12.



Since the oil price crisis hit us I've gone in for a dozen small cars like that one.

Figure 4.9: 'You Said It' by Laxman (March 1983)¹¹¹

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A reader noted in agreement:

'Mr. R.K. Laxman has so aptly exposed the hollowness of the summit promises for removing poverty. At one single meal the delegates must have spent as much per head as most citizens in most of the non-aligned countries earn in one full year! The summit is one of these new 'international clubs' where those in power in the member countries can have a few days of wining and dining and praising each other...As far as India is concerned, this has been our tradition of hospitality since historic times. Our rulers used to host sumptuous banquets for state guests. The new rulers have outdone them all!'¹¹²

Another satirical piece by commentator Bharat Karnad in the *Hindustan Times* questioned the lavishness of spectacles such as the NAM summit and the CHOGM, adding that their spectacular imagery was wrongly exaggerated by the media:

“Everybody who is anybody in Delhi”, wrote a Gulliver of the Press, “has hugely enjoyed the spectacle and splendour connected with the royal visit as well as the conference of Commonwealth Heads of Government” (This is an astute observation of the fact that circuses are best enjoyed from the inside). That leaves the rest of us, our noses squashed to the panes looking in or peeking under the tent covers so to say, free to be thrilled to distraction by intimations (courtesy, the media) of high drama, international intrigue, and skulduggery under the big

¹¹¹ R. K. Laxman, 'You Said It', *TOI* (10 March 1983), p. 1. Image produced by ProQuest LLC as part of ProQuest® Historical Newspapers. www.proquest.com

¹¹² J. S. Bika, 'Delhi Summit', *TOI* (23 March 1983), p. 8.

top...The greater thrill however is thoughtfully reserved for the lowly Indian taxpayer. The bill is going to be a scream. Then again, what are 250 million rupees in return for a justly gained reputation, but for what? At the very least, as the foremost Third World convention site. Staging the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers' shindig, the Non-Aligned Movement summit, the Queen's visit and now the Commonwealth meet in a period of less than three years is no joke.¹¹³

Incidentally, the issue of inflated costs was raised in the Lok Sabha on several occasions. In one instance, it was alleged that a large number of luxury cars imported to facilitate the movement of foreign dignitaries were found 'lying in [the] open', 'dumped' recklessly at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. In response, the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, A. A. Rahim, assured that the 'forty five Mercedes Benz' that were imported were still in good condition, and would indeed be put to good use during similar spectacles staged in the future:

'(i) 4 cars to be transferred to Rashtrapati Bhavan; (ii) 6 cars to be transferred to the Ministry of External Affairs to be used by visiting foreign dignitaries to whom the government hospitality is extended; (iii) Raj Bhavan of States and Union Territories who have not imported a car in the last two years to be offered the facility of acquiring one car each and (iv) after providing for the above, the balance of the fleet to be handed over to the State Trading Corporation of India for disposal in open auctions according to the normal STC procedure.'¹¹⁴

False Images and Non-Aligned Media

For the timely broadcast of the summit worldwide, elaborate arrangements were made to accommodate foreign media channels and their reporters (1024 visiting correspondents, 59 Indian journalists working for foreign papers, 150 foreign correspondents based in India, and 500 India-based Indian journalists).¹¹⁵ The media centre was set up at Vigyan Bhavan itself, which housed the 'Main Hall' where summit deliberations were to take place. The External Publicity Division along with the Directorate of Audio-Visual Publicity organised an exhibition in the building which put

¹¹³ B. Karnad, 'On CHOGM Candid Time – "Circus Come, C'cus Go"', *HT* (30 November 1983).

¹¹⁴ *LSD*, 12th session, 39/4, 28 July 1983, pp. 297-8.

¹¹⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, External Publicity Division in 'Annual Report 1983-84', <http://nnsnis.org/> (5 August 2018).

on display photographs of earlier NAM summits, the Asian Relations Conference, and the Bandung Conference. Moreover, a ‘Press Kit’ was distributed to all correspondents highlighting India’s progress and role in the movement.¹¹⁶

Joint Secretary in the External Publicity Division, Mani Shankar Aiyer, and Director Generals of All India Radio and Doordarshan, Suresh Mathur and Shailendra Shanker respectively, announced at a press conference shortly before the summit:

‘...At least twelve satellite circuits would be available round the clock for the media...Radio journalists would also have access to recordings of the summit proceedings whenever required. All India Radio would also prepare 30-minute capsules on the summit proceedings. The joint editorial board...would produce at least one newsreel every day besides special features and commentaries...*Member countries of the movement have also been requested to supply tapes on their history, culture and economy to create greater awareness among the Indian public about them.*’[emphasis added]¹¹⁷

The emphasis on creating greater awareness about the historic and modern achievements of non-aligned countries is noteworthy. Early on, the question of developing an independent media outlet to exchange and circulate news, and to highlight the achievements of non-aligned countries was discussed by the leaders of the movement. In the 1960s and 70s, it was argued that the worldwide monopoly of four ‘Western’ news agencies – Agence France Press headquartered in Paris, Associated Press in New York, Reuters in London, and United Press International in Washington D.C. – had led to systemic biases against developing countries and the wider ‘Third World’.¹¹⁸ Righter, in her book on the subject, argues that the attack on Western media was based on three grounds – First, it was powerful financially and politically, and ‘penetrated too widely and effectively’ into the information and communication

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ ‘Media facilities at Delhi summit’, *TOI* (21 January 1983), p. 22.

¹¹⁸ C. Vukasovich and O. Boyd-Barrett, ‘Whatever Happened to Tanjug? Re-loading memory for an understanding of the global news system’, *The International Communication Gazette*, 74/8 (2012), p. 695.

networks of developing countries; second, it represented an ‘alien viewpoint’ that was impressed ‘upon nations trying to build an independent, modern identity’; and third, it lacked accuracy and objectivity in news reporting.¹¹⁹

More specifically, as Mrs Gandhi often claimed, Western media tended to ‘play up the worst aspects – real, exaggerated or imaginary’ of the developing world such as violent crime, disease, and poverty, whilst ‘totally ignoring constructive and developmental activities’.¹²⁰ The impact of media coverage on individual perceptions and on international relations was not unknown to her. For instance, in his analysis of Indo-British ties in the 1980s, Malik discusses the role of the media in negatively affecting bilateral relations, an issue Mrs Gandhi brought to Thatcher’s attention several times as noted in the previous chapter. Quoting noted commentator, Bhikhu Parekh, Malik remarks:

‘The prevalent view in India and among Indians in Britain, summed up by Bhikhu Parekh, is that: The press coverage of India in Britain is often extremely poor, and displays a remarkable lack of insight and understanding... Even the serious articles in the quality press fail to display the kind of intuitive understanding and cultural sensitivity one is entitled to expect in a country that ruled India for nearly two centuries... One often finds perverse and almost deliberate ‘misunderstanding’ and a systematic attempt to infantilise India.’¹²¹

In the wider context of an imbalance in international news flows, Malik argues:

‘Between [the four Western news agencies] they control not only the flow of news from the developed world to the developing countries but also between the developing countries themselves. Second, during the Cold War period the world was seen in terms of ‘us’ and them and since the media took its cues largely from foreign offices, how the media viewed the world was determined by the international agenda set by the global agencies.’¹²²

¹¹⁹ R. Richter, *Whose News? Politics, the Press and the Third World* (London, 1978), p. 23; Interestingly, Richter observes that the expectation of objectivity from Western media sources was partly based on a ‘traditional’ understanding of the Western ‘liberal approach’ as being non-ideological and factual. Conversely, Soviet-style news was largely accepted as a form of propaganda, thereby making it difficult to apply the same standard of objectivity in its case (pp. 15-19).

¹²⁰ ‘PM lashes out at distortion by Western media’, *HT* (10 December 1983).

¹²¹ Malik, *India and the United Kingdom*, p. 197.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 198-9.

Malik cites the example of Cuba which received far greater press coverage than countries like India due to its unique position in the Cold War. Indeed, news reporting was often determined by Cold War politics in which many ‘larger’ non-aligned countries did not always play a significant role. This was acknowledged by early non-aligned thinkers, particularly Josip Broz Tito who sought to develop a channel to disseminate various perspectives from the non-aligned world to itself and to the rest of the world. In their study of the Yugoslavian news agency, Tanjug, which Tito helped found, Vukasovich and Boyd-Barrett note:

‘Tanjug sought to represent countries of the Non-Aligned Movement specifically, and among these it had sympathetic purchase on the perspectives and struggles of the socialist countries...Tanjug’s work foreshadowed by over 20 years the 1970s debates leading to the UNESCO-endorsed calls for a New World Information and Communication Order (henceforth NWICO).’¹²³

Interestingly, UN’s call to establish a NWICO in 1983 came on the heels of the declaration of a New International Economic Order championed by Mrs Gandhi and other leaders from the developing world in the 1970s. These were recognised as necessary initiatives to address the global dominance of, and the direct linkages between Western financial capital and the news media.

Tanjug in Yugoslavia was made the coordinating body of the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool (henceforth NANAP), which was established in 1974 as an alternative umbrella agency to gather news from non-aligned countries. The primary objective of NANAP was to circulate information from an independent and ‘counter-hegemonic’ perspective, as Vukasovich and Boyd-Barrett argue:

‘Such initiatives might be inspired not just by a desire for independence in news, but independence of the empires that were represented, directly or indirectly, by

¹²³ Vukasovich and Boyd-Barrett, ‘Whatever Happened to Tanjug?’, p. 694; Also see B. Bissio, ‘Bandung, the Non-aligned and the Media: The role of the journal “Third World” in South-South dialogue’, *Austral: Brazilian Journal of Strategy & International Relations*, 4/8 (2015), pp. 21-42 for a discussion of Latin American contributions to non-aligned media development.

the hegemonic agencies. A subaltern agency, finally, might turn on the hegemon, in partnership with government, media and other clients, establishing an alternative, possibly in partnership with a rival to the hegemon.¹²⁴

As I have argued previously, the ‘truthful’ depiction of events versus ‘false’ images allegedly circulated by Western media was a personal issue for Mrs Gandhi. She forcefully articulated her views on this matter at numerous international gatherings, and also communicated directly with heads of state. Ironically, when press censorship was in effect during the Emergency, Mrs Gandhi addressed the 1976 New Delhi Conference of the Non-Aligned Ministers, wherein she accused the Western press of depicting:

‘...the governments of their erstwhile colonies as inept and corrupt and their people as yearning for the good old days. This cannot be attributed entirely to the common human failing of nostalgia. To a large extent, there is a deliberate purpose. Leaders, who uphold their national interests...are denigrated and their image falsified in every conceivable way.’¹²⁵

In the same spirit, at the Media Conference of the Non-Aligned in New Delhi in December 1983, Mrs Gandhi reiterated the importance of information and communication flows in shaping the image of nations and their leaders:

‘In the media of the West, or indeed in our own and maybe elsewhere, there is hardly any news about developing countries unless it be of disaster or disturbance. The stupendous task of development, the changes being brought in our villages and our towns, amongst our women, our workers, our farmers and others might as well be non-existent...The developing do not have the means to gather and disseminate more information about other countries. So, they have to rely on powerful transnational news agencies and media organisations. These organisations have their own motives in selecting and interpreting events. This bias may be national or ideological or merely that of self-interest. It is perhaps impractical to expect total objectivity. But it is not too much to ask for fairness.’¹²⁶

Mrs Gandhi’s speeches on India’s image in the ‘West’ struck an emotional chord with the middle class at home. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, the colonial

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 696; For a critical analysis of NANAP and Tanjug in particular, see E. T. Pinch, ‘The Flow of News: An assessment of the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool’, *Journal of Communication*, 28/4 (1978), pp. 163-71; Ironically, Pinch observes that news stories published by NANAP were ‘evaluated on the basis of [their] potential appeal to Western media outlets’, where those rated ‘high’ were judged to possess the qualities of credibility, timeliness, and style to have a ‘reasonable chance of being used by a Western newspaper, news magazine, radio, or TV station.’ (p. 167).

¹²⁵ Righter, *Whose News?*, p. 42.

¹²⁶ Speech on 9 December 1983 in Gandhi, *Selected Speeches and Writings 1982-84*, pp. 292-5.

experience itself as well as the ‘external’ representations of India and Indians shaped middle class perceptions of self-worth in the decades after Independence. Gradually aligning with an emerging ‘global elite’ at the time, the middle class paid close attention to Western media, and its critical portrayal of India as a poor, underdeveloped nation. Keeping this in mind, the importance of staging international spectacles such as the NAM summit cannot be underestimated.

After the summit, the External Publicity Division expanded its all-round publicity efforts in many ways. Notably, it sought to improve ‘the production values of the principal organ of the Ministry [of External Affairs]’, augment the printing capacity of the Division, maintain a steady supply of visual material, ‘particularly good documentaries [and] colour photographs’, and, as a report pointed out, aid Indian Missions abroad in organising special shows of Attenborough’s *Gandhi*.¹²⁷ Between 1983-84, for instance, 567 prints of documentaries produced by the Films Division of India were sent to international Missions that depicted various aspects of India’s industrial development, cultural heritage, and places of tourism.¹²⁸

* * *

When P. C. Alexander was appointed Mrs Gandhi’s principal secretary in May 1981, one of his first tasks was to accompany her on a string of state visits across West Asia and Europe. Alexander recalls in his memoirs:

‘[She] had been out of power for three years and during this period her political adversaries had been carrying on a vilification campaign against her in foreign countries, making her out to be a cruel dictator and destroyer of India’s infant democracy. Her views or statements received very little notice in foreign media during this period and a highly distorted image of her, therefore, had been built up in the west.’¹²⁹

¹²⁷ MEA, ‘Annual Report 1983-84’, <http://nsnis.org/> (5 August 2018); The visual quality and editorial content of the Ministry’s fortnightly *India and Foreign Review* was ‘upgraded substantially’ with prints ‘on art paper with an increased number of colour illustrations’ (Ibid.)

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Alexander, *My Years With Indira Gandhi*, p. 65.

Mrs Gandhi's state visits to countries big and small, in the East and the West, enabled her to engage with sympathetic and previously hostile leaders from around the world, and to personally explain to them the political compulsions that led to the Emergency. On these visits, Mrs Gandhi also met with local citizens, especially those of Indian origin, and established a personal relationship with them by listening to and articulating their grievances. One of Mrs Gandhi's most successful visits in terms of mobilising diasporic opinion was to the Middle East. She travelled to Kuwait and the U.A.E in May 1981 followed by a visit to Saudi Arabia in April 1982. Perhaps it was hoped that India's strained relations with Pakistan could somehow be reversed by developing bilateral ties with Gulf countries. Positive relations with the Arab states was also seen as crucial to uphold the secular image of the nation in the face of Mrs Gandhi's visible appeasement of the Hindu middle class not least due to India's ambiguous stance in the ongoing Soviet-Afghan War.¹³⁰ In addition to these political developments, the growing community of Indians working and residing in the Gulf, primarily in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, added an economic dimension to the relationship.¹³¹ Under these circumstances, Mrs Gandhi's visit to Saudi Arabia in 1982 was an 'exceptional' event, as former Ambassador to the Kingdom, Talmiz Ahmad, argues:

'The one exception in the arid terrain of political ties with the Arab sheikhdoms was the visit of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in April 1982...the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the kingdom since 1956. During this visit, an attempt was made to build up a solid partnership that would link the two Asian giants while excluding foreign forces from the Gulf and the Indian Ocean.'¹³²

¹³⁰ This view is corroborated in a confidential telegram from John Thomson, British High Commissioner to India between 1977–82, to Margaret Thatcher, wherein he notes: '[Mrs Gandhi] is concerned to stay close to the Arabs both because of the security and price of oil imports and because of the potential effect of Islamic sentiment of the communal situation in India'. 'Mrs Gandhi's India', Telegram Number 26, UKE Delhi to FCO, 26 March 1981. MTFDA.

¹³¹ For an excellent ethnography of the Indian diaspora in Dubai, see N. Vohra, *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora* (Durham, N.C.; London, 2013).

¹³² T. Ahmed, 'The Gulf Region' in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, p. 442.

An article in *India Today* similarly described the visit in its usual congratulatory prose, noting, in particular, Mrs Gandhi's carefully planned attire and body language:

'Mrs Gandhi, ever the consummate politician, dispensed with the usual finery she dons on visits abroad and emerged dressed in a dotted green cotton sari with her head covered and wearing a full-sleeved blouse in keeping with local tradition. She also wisely dropped her usual habit of shaking hands in favour of the more demure Namaste. These gestures were widely appreciated by Fahd and the distinguished gathering of sheikhs and top brass of the Saudi armed forces. As an aide remarked to Mrs Gandhi: "The entire Saudi Arabia is here to meet you".'¹³³



Figure 4.10: Mrs Gandhi with Saudi Ministers, Riyadh (1982)¹³⁴

The domain of foreign policy offered Mrs Gandhi a unique platform to address a spectatorship beyond the middle class in India. This chapter has examined Mrs Gandhi's use of *foreign policy as spectacle* as a legitimating tool to mobilise public opinion which was facilitated by various forms of mass media via the circulation of

¹³³ 'Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gets a red carpet welcome in Saudi Arabia', IT (15 October 2013), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19820515-prime-minister-indira-gandhi-gets-a-red-carpet-welcome-in-saudi-arabia-771795-2013-10-15> (21 February 2018).

¹³⁴ Source: Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Republic of India, <http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/india/EN/AboutHostingCountry/SaudiRelations/Pages/default.aspx> (21 February 2018).

photographs, newspaper reports, and speeches. The consumption of these ‘public displays and performances’, quoting Raminder Kaur, influenced middle class opinion by deepening their sense of belonging in an increasingly competitive global world. Finally, the ‘secret’ spectacular sights created and circulated by the mass media secured Mrs Gandhi her position as the rightful spokesperson for India and for its middle class spectators on the world stage.

Conclusion

‘Somehow, India will never be the same again, such was the presence and the power. She was a giant among pygmies; a woman who left an indelible visual impression upon the collective consciousness, larger than life itself. Her power was reflected in the image, so profoundly imprinted in the minds of every Indian that whatever their station in life may be or however uncompromising their differences with her, it became impossible to reconcile India without Indira.’

S. Sethi, ‘Indira Gandhi’s assassination plunges India into shock and sorrow’, IT (30 November 1984)¹

On 31 October 1984, the evening news bulletins on All India Radio and Doordarshan belatedly announced the death of Indira ‘Priyadarshini’ Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi was assassinated by her two bodyguards earlier that day at her Safdarjung Road residence in New Delhi. Fuelled by speculation, crowds had gathered in large numbers across the capital, almost as if in preparation to collectively mourn the news that was yet to come. Later upon confirmation, queues of thousands of spectators formed outside Teen Murti Bhavan where Mrs Gandhi’s body was placed to lie in state for one final *darshan*. A report in *India Today* described the sight:

‘Those passing past the front entrance were humble in their expression of grief and infinitely more determined to get there despite the odds. There were hundreds who had braved the curfew to come from far corners of the city; mourners who came from other towns and cities despite dreaded rumours of butchery on trains. Waiting for hours for a glimpse of a leader they had little personal contact with, their reaction was neither extreme like the reported cases of self-immolation in parts of Tamil Nadu, nor ingratiating to prove loyalty to her son and family. It was merely to offer silent condolence, to mourn the passing of what she stood for.’²

With a career spanning nearly three decades, Mrs Gandhi was the primary protagonist in independent India’s political landscape, variously assuming the roles of the Congress Party President, Prime Minister, and Leader of the Opposition. Whilst occupying the

¹ Accessed at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19841130-passing-of-an-era-indira-gandhi-1917-1984-820754-2015-11-02> (29 July 2018).

² Ibid.

highest seat of electoral office as well as during her years away in ‘political wilderness’,³ her presence and power were felt in every corner of the country in the form of spectacular images reproduced as posters, advertisements, and life-size cut-outs. Similarly, her voice reached millions as well-crafted speeches and slogans that narrated her numerous victories in the name of ‘the people’ of India. As an editorial in the London *Economist* noted, for the Indian masses, Mrs Gandhi had been ‘the dynast, the goddess-figure, and the warrior queen’,⁴ just as she had been the daughter, the mother, and the young widow. Her characterisation as the potentially destructive but generally benevolent goddess ‘Durga’ captured these gendered identities perfectly, as a poem in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* dedicated to Mrs Gandhi – the ‘presiding deity of the country’s fate’ – claimed:

‘Without pride and rancour, fear and hate, with
Faith in her cause; of noble grace and looks
And yet defiant, thunder in her eyes,
Inspiring all with courage, love and hope.’⁵

Susan Wadley explains that the concept of the female in Hindu ideology plays on an ‘essential duality’ – ‘in times of prosperity she indeed is Lakshmi, who bestows prosperity in the homes of men; and in times of misfortune, she herself becomes the goddess of misfortune’.⁶ Quite aptly, Mrs Gandhi was popularly represented as the heroic ‘Durga’ who defeated Pakistan, conducted nuclear tests, and imposed the Emergency, and as the benevolent ‘mother’ Indira (another name for goddess ‘Lakshmi’) who championed the cause of poverty with full force despite her petite and

³ C. Karadia, ‘After 15 months in political wilderness, Indira Gandhi...’, IT (updated 23 February 2015), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19780630-after-15-months-in-political-wilderness-indira-gandhi-fiercely-on-the-comeback-trail-823277-2014-04-04> (23 August 2018).

⁴ ‘Death of an Empress’, *Economist* (3 November 1984), p. 13.

⁵ J. N. Dhamija, ‘The Rising Star’, *IWI* (30 January 1972), p. 21.

⁶ S. S. Wadley, ‘Women and the Hindu Tradition’, *Signs*, 3/1 (1977), p. 113.

benign appearance.⁷ Notably, rarely did Mrs Gandhi herself invoke her womanhood in public speeches or in her support of specific women's movements even though her femininity was at the very core of her constructed image, her public persona, and indeed public perceptions of her leadership often caricatured in literature, art, and film. The significance of gender in legitimating or subverting the authority of female figures deserves further study not least in the case of India where the lives of charismatic leaders such as Mayawati, Jayalalithaa, Mamata Banerjee, and Mrs Gandhi amongst many others have long been a subject of public fascination and speculation.

The image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The image was sourced at 'The glory that was Indira's', *Economist*, 12 January 1980, p. 39.

Figure C.1: 'Indira is India' – Mrs Gandhi as 'Durga' and the anthropomorphised map of India⁸

⁷ K. Thapar, 'Indira Gandhi: The Durga with delicate, fragile hands', HT (12 August 2017), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/columns/indira-gandhi-the-durga-with-delicate-fragile-hands/story-vDtfBiQLruzd467jIBacsM.html> (31 July 2018).

⁸ Source: 'The glory that was Indira's', *Economist*, 12 January 1980, p. 39; Also see S. Ramaswamy, 'Maps, Mother/Goddess, and Martyrdom in Modern India', *JAS*, 67/3 (2008), p. 827.

Mirroring the above duality, the initial solemnity and grief in the aftermath of Mrs Gandhi's assassination was followed by extreme violence and destruction. The many oral and visual histories of the anti-Sikh pogroms carried out across north India suggest that Mrs Gandhi's death was constructed as a violent spectacle by the Congress leadership precisely in order to legitimise Rajiv Gandhi's 'peaceful' succession immediately after. Former member of Mrs Gandhi's cabinet, Pranab Mukherjee, reveals in his memoirs that at the time he believed that:

'Mrs Gandhi's passing away should not be officially announced till a new government was sworn in. To avoid any confusion or uncertainty we had decided that both Rajiv's appointment as Prime Minister and Indiraji's assassination should be announced simultaneously [...] so there would be no need for an interim arrangement.'⁹

Rajiv was sworn in as PM the very same day without any significant opposition. When he did contest in the general elections two months later, he was also given a democratic mandate in the form of an overwhelming majority over the next big contender, the Telugu Desam Party led by its own charismatic leader, N.T. Rama Rao.

It is now widely acknowledged that the attacks against the Sikhs were not spontaneous, but were carefully targeted by the Congress Party with the help of official state institutions including the Delhi Police who sought 'to teach Sikhs "a lesson"'.¹⁰ It is also noteworthy that the spectacle of martyrdom fabricated upon Mrs Gandhi's death was only conjured up once before following the assassination of Gandhi in 1948. The Mahatma's assassination was contextualised with respect to ongoing Hindu-Muslim violence, and the fragility of the Congress leadership under Nehru just a few months

⁹ Mukherjee, *The Turbulent Years*, pp. 71-2.

¹⁰ 'Delhi Police officials were complicit in 1984...', IT (22 April 2014), <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/1984-anti-sikh-riots-cobrapost-sting-delhi-police-officials-complicit-189976-2014-04-22> (24 August 2018); Also see the Report of the Justice Nanavati Commission of Inquiry into the Anti-Sikh riots (Volume 1), <https://archive.org/details/JusticeNanavatiCommissionOfEnquiry1984Anti-sikhRiots> (26 August 2018).

after Independence. However, as Yasmin Khan observes, it was precisely under these circumstances that Gandhi's death, and more significantly the collective mourning that accompanied his official martyrdom, became the 'critical moment' that enabled 'the ascendancy of secularism and democracy as the legitimate ideological foundations of the Indian state'.¹¹ In almost complete contrast, Mrs Gandhi's assassination thirty six years later marked the moment when violent communalism and dynastic succession secured roots as permanent features of Indian social and political life.

Although this thesis does not directly comment upon the 'communalisation' of state spectacles and their visual vocabularies in the early 1980s, it traces the emergence and growing assertiveness of an urban middle class spectatorship that was in fact predominantly Hindu and upper-caste in its composition. The political comeback of the RSS, and the rise of Hindu nationalism visible in the successful campaigns of the BJP from mid-1980s onwards can indeed be examined in light of Mrs Gandhi's changing socio-economic strategies and cultural agendas that betrayed her accommodation if not outright employment of 'soft-Hindutva' politics.¹² As noted in preceding chapters, Mrs Gandhi's selective endorsement of Hindu narratives such as the conversion of Dalits to Islam through 'Arab money', the loss of a Hindu 'national' character brought by 'Western' television programmes, and the alleged threat to Hindus posed by Muslim and Sikh agitations in various regional disputes established previously absent 'communal idioms in the political discourse' of the Congress Party.¹³ Furthermore, Mrs Gandhi's frequent claims of being a personal target of attack by the CIA and Pakistan

¹¹ Y. Khan, 'Performing Peace: Gandhi's assassination...', *MAS*, 45/1 (2011), p. 60.

¹² See, for instance, C. Jaffrelot, Chapters 7 and 10, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (London, 1996); A. Rajagopal, 'Sangh's Role in the Emergency', *EPW*, 38/27 (2003), pp. 2797-8; T. B. Hansen, Chapters 4 and 5, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (New Jersey, 1999); and Maiorano, Chapter 3, *Autumn of the Matriarch*.

¹³ Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, p. 332.

aggravated specifically Hindu middle class anxieties regarding national security at a time when the ‘threat’ of separatist demands within the country was indeed very real.

In the context of state spectacles, the conspicuously Hindu imagery used in the promotion of the Asian Games (for instance the use of Jantar Mantar in the official emblem, or the characterisation of Appu as ‘Ganesh’) and Maruti (another name for god ‘Hanuman’), and the push to showcase ancient Hindu classical and folk cultures at the Festival of India – all reveal the gradual export of religious themes as profitable constituents of the national ‘visual scheme’ produced for a global cultural market. Most significantly, Mrs Gandhi’s engagements with religious personalities, including her controversial relationships with notorious ‘godmen’ and *yogis*, alongside her association with the VHP’s *Ekatmata Yatra* were not mere demonstrations of her personal religiosity but were strategic public performances that conveyed her championship of specific Hindu middle class causes. A deeper examination of these ‘communal’ trends might reveal other nuances about Mrs Gandhi’s constructed spectacles in her final years.

Another important theme that is not captured adequately pertains to the spectacles’ regional character. Admittedly, the official narratives produced by the state as part of their publicity, and thus examined as such in this thesis focused largely on urban centres (Delhi and Bombay in particular). Although the spectacles were ‘national’ events in that their successful organisation was seen as crucial for ‘national’ prestige or ‘nation-branding’ in general, it will be worth exploring how they were publicised in different parts of the country for different audiences. The discussion of region-specific imagery in the production of state spectacles, and of ‘vernacularized’ political vocabularies in

general requires comment because national leaders seek legitimacy by projecting themselves as representative of diverse populations and cultures. A closer look at the content and effect of Mrs Gandhi's speeches whilst campaigning in smaller regional centres, for instance, will perhaps better reflect her multifaceted communication strategies. This argument is just as relevant for performances directed at the Indian diaspora. As I suggest in Chapter 3, state spectacles did not simply play up nationalist-nostalgic themes that were intended to resonate with Indians abroad. Rather, there was a concerted effort to include messages that were receptive to the ideas and 'tastes' of other audiences in foreign lands including those of cultural administrators and politicians whose support was just as crucial for the successful staging of the spectacle. At the Festival of India, this was made evident in the popularisation of the 'Raj Revivalist' genre. In recent years, as the financial, cultural, and political networks of the diaspora have expanded their reach and influence back in the 'homeland', a proper look at state-diaspora relations as an important element of domestic and foreign policy making is necessary. Moreover, the instrumental role of state-sponsored spectacles as unique occasions that mediate these relationships in their own unique ways deserves attention.

To put it simply, spectacles as 'mega-events' are indeed central to any leadership's image making or *re-making* efforts. At its core, this thesis has critically examined the production of four mediatised state spectacles that sought to project Mrs Gandhi as a leader of the Indian middle class in her final years in office. The fragility of her political position immediately after the Emergency motivated the use of the spectacle as the appropriate visual medium, which was precisely intended to reverse negative perceptions of her leadership in India and abroad as being 'authoritarian' on the one

hand, and ignorant of middle class demands on the other. The intended effect of these spectacles was thus notably different from that of the mass populism that characterised Mrs Gandhi's spectacular politics in the 1970s. Indeed, they were orchestrated keeping in mind middle class opinions and aspirations that in many ways directly challenged the promissory benefits of 'socialism' espoused by the Congress Party up until that point. Mrs Gandhi courted this influential demographic by staging performances that specifically, albeit cautiously, referenced ideas and images of the nation's participation in a global economy not merely in material terms but also on the basis of its 'soft power' (as cultural or non-aligned diplomacy). That they were exclusive to the middle class is further made evident by the targeted use of specific types of mass media such as colour television sets and lifestyle magazines which were primarily consumed by the urban elite at the time.

However, in my examination of these 'middle class spectacles', I am cautious not to overstate the state's self-promotion as an ideologue of full-fledged consumerism, or 'Western' style liberalism as understood in the 'neo' sense of the 1980s. The 'integrated spectacles' ultimately sought to establish a set of values as norms that were likely to be accepted and reproduced by a predominantly conservative (Hindu) middle class at the time. Here, the focus on the *middle class family* as a collective consumer category has been central to my analysis, and indeed to the spectacular forms in which the state 'marketed' itself. At the 1982 Asiad, for instance, the 'modern' state was rendered visible in the massive sports stadia, and the residential enclave of the Asiad Village that it built as a site of disciplined consumption and leisure for wealthy middle class families. Public campaigns advocating cleanliness, health, and fitness also vocalised notions of urban aesthetics keeping in mind the role of the housewife as the caregiver

of the family. The nuclear family, in particular, was chosen as a model for social emulation as examined in the promotion of the Maruti 800 ‘family car’, and in the direction of India’s first state-broadcast soap opera, *Hum Log*. The government’s collaboration with Suzuki further influenced changes in the work place environment wherein discipline, collectivity, and loyalty were championed as ideal qualities of the new ‘consumer-citizen’, a message which was strategically communicated using familiar concepts such as envisioning the ‘company as family’. The representation of Indian culture at the Festival of India similarly offered British-Indian families an opportunity to explore their colonial and postcolonial histories, and to travel together to the exotic sites of the subcontinent.

To reinstate the above, the early 1980s did not witness a withdrawal of the state from the economic or cultural spheres, but rather set the stage for successful collaborations between public and private institutions especially in the fields of tourism, advertising, and publicity. This is noteworthy in that it shows that government communication itself ceased to be conceived of as one-sided propaganda, and was instead reformulated to engage with and win the consent of its spectator-subjects. Similarly, my intent behind studying the reception of the spectacles via letters to the editor, for instance, is to challenge the notion of passivity commonly attributed to the phenomenon of spectatorship. Indeed, as noted in various examples throughout the thesis such as the ‘small car’ concept or Doordarshan programming in the early 1980s, the accommodation of pre-existing middle class norms and practices was crucial to self-representations of the state via its spectacles at the time.

Much has been written about Mrs Gandhi's flair for *realpolitik* on the one hand, and her 'real' connection with the Indian masses on the other. As a conscious departure from these characterisations, this thesis has attempted to shed light on her engagement with the urban middle class, a nebulous yet increasingly assertive constituency in Indian politics since the Emergency. As noted in the Introduction, there is little that can be concluded with certainty about Mrs Gandhi's intellectual motivations that ultimately shaped her association with each of these groups. The unavailability of access to Mrs Gandhi's private papers in New Delhi is to an extent a discouraging factor. This methodological challenge can be somewhat circumvented by consulting published and unpublished correspondences and speeches, memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies of her advisors. However, until the above valuable archive is opened to researchers, it is perhaps constructive to examine the distinct forms and media through which Mrs Gandhi projected her thoughts and aspirations onto different audiences.

With this in mind, this thesis seeks to motivate further research on the 'spectacle' as a useful analytical tool to deconstruct histories that are often archived as carefully constructed images. The concept of the spectacle, whether understood as an extraordinary 'event', as a powerful 'medium', or simply as an adjective for 'something' that is visually impactful, has been relatively understudied in modern South Asian history and politics. The specific visual vocabularies that characterised Mrs Gandhi's years in office, for instance, enable us to question how she desired to be seen by the people of India as well as by an international spectatorship that grew more conscious of her position over the years. Mediatized spectacles in particular, and visual material in general should thus be examined as powerful tools of legitimation within

and beyond national territories, not least in the case of charismatic leaders whose power is reflected in imagery, and mapped as such onto the national imaginary. An article in *India Today* magazine published soon after Mrs Gandhi's assassination concluded:

'For almost two decades she alone symbolised India. Its politics, its stability, its image, its morality. It was a dominance that has few parallels in democratic history. And, as she lived, so she died, shrouded in controversy, bequeathing the country she dominated with an uncertain legacy.'¹⁴

Indeed, as the state of the Indian state became entwined with the spectacular politics that characterised Mrs Gandhi's years in office, her death too signalled new possibilities to transform the ways in which Indian politics could be done or 'undone'.

¹⁴ D. Bobb, 'To the final tragic end...', IT (30 November 1984), <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19841130-to-the-final-tragic-end-the-indira-enigma-remained-intact-796832-1984-11-30> (2 August 2018).

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