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To cite this article: Ajay Gandhi (2021): Shock and shove: the embodied politics of force in India, South Asian History and Culture, DOI: [10.1080/19472498.2021.1878782](https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2021.1878782)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2021.1878782>



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Published online: 07 Feb 2021.



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# Shock and shove: the embodied politics of force in India

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## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the phenomenological and political dimensions of force in north India. Manifest as embodied experience, and as power and domination, force encompasses felt emotion and collective clout. Yet unlike other categories traversing the political and experiential, force has been comparatively understudied. This paper surveys ethnographic and historical examples where force is prevalent. We see it in urban life, as an idiom of moral states, as embedded in community narratives and social hierarchies, and as enacting political demarcations. A focus is on the 1992 nationalist destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, when force was invoked and expressed. Through this study, certain tensions and paradoxes are raised. Force is seen as indispensable to state authority and legal sanction. Simultaneously, it is a field of potentials irreducible to human intentions. While force is a recurring locus of impetus and influence, it is also volatile and delinquent. It gives us insight into moments of concatenation without presuming contained interest or enduring stability. Force, affective and effective, is also slippery and insurrectionary, illuminating processes of mutability and contingency, in India as elsewhere.

## KEYWORDS

Force; *dhakka*; embodied politics; potentiality; intentionality

## 1. Introduction

On 6 December 1992,<sup>1</sup> thousands of Hindu activists assembled in the Indian city of Ayodhya.<sup>2</sup> Wearing saffron, chanting slogans, riding loud motorcycles, they converged at the Babri Masjid. This was a mosque, built in 1528, and inaugurated during Mughal emperor Babur's reign. Nationalists claimed it the most egregious example of iconoclastic destruction by Muslim invaders. For them, the mosque usurped an 11th century Hindu temple consecrating Rama (or Ram), a central deity. Its carved pillars, it was said, were employed in the mosque's construction.

This contention over the site began in the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> British colonizers partitioned the site: Hindus worshipped in an external demarcated area, Muslims inside the mosque. Passions waxed and waned; quiet indifference was punctuated by disputes around joint worship and exclusive ownership. In 1949, Ram images were installed inside the mosque, catalysing regional riots. The state's response was instructive. The colonial regime instantiated pre-emptory forms – bans, censorship, curfews – that counterpoised law's rationality against public passions. Independent India maintained these imperious tendencies: the Babri Masjid was sealed through court and executive orders.

This deferred the dispute into dormancy. Decades later in the 1980s, nationalist organizations – organized around the ideology of *Hindutva* or Hindu hegemony – reawakened it. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), longstanding Hindu-first organs, led this campaign. They were bolstered by the electoral Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Indian

politics. Acrimony hinged on the braiding of religious patrimony, historical narration, and political legitimacy. Who rightfully claimed this ground for community and nation?

In the late 1980s, courts debated claims to the site; this dovetailed with nationalist agitation. Secular history and colonial archaeology, collective myth and community sentiment were discourses at play.<sup>4</sup> A 1986 court decision opening the site catalysed rioting in north India. In 1989, the VHP initiated nation-wide processions, inviting donations of consecrated bricks for the future Ram temple. These emotive gatherings were accompanied by violence against Muslims. The following year, passionate convoys to Ayodhya were stymied by state leaders opposed to the BJP.

What transpired in late 1992 was thus foreseen and yet also unexpected. Militant Hindus employed an affective archive built up over time and space, of ritual theatrics, symbolic aggrievement, and political animus. On December 6th, an unwieldy crowd at the mosque was energized by rousing songs and provocative speeches. A crucial catalyst was vociferous goading from an adjacent platform of *Hindutva* notables. Among them was a nationalist preacher, Sadhvi Rithambara. She danced, chanting, ‘deliver more force and break the Babri Masjid’ (*ek dhakka aur do, Babri Masjid tod do*) (Jaffrelot 1996: 456).

Hours into this, the agitating throng stormed the site. They scaled the monument and disassembled it. With ropes and hammers, rods and pickaxes, they un-built the edifice. A quarter century later, an activist or *kar sevak* recounted: ‘There was no strength in the structure . . . we applied force and took it down’ (*usme koi dum tha nahin . . . dhakka dete the nikal diya*).<sup>5</sup> One dome collapsed, then the other two; little remained of the mosque by dusk. The undoing of the Babri Masjid precipitated country-wide riots, the brunt borne by Muslims. Afterwards, attention was given over to premeditation: was the mosque’s razing deliberately engineered or the unintended spillover of mass energies?

Nearly three decades later, in November 2019, the Supreme Court decided the site’s future. Its owner was now a government trust vested to build the Ram temple long-desired by nationalists. Looking at this trajectory, one is struck by the relationship between brute force and political authorization. The aggression of the demolition – embodied and collective – has a relationship to institutional sanction. One might say that the illegitimate application of physical energy, in Ayodhya in 1992, transmuted decades later into official endorsement. The unbounded exercise of somatic force was converted into rationalized legal approval.

This essay examines this embodied politics of force in modern India. I examine the analogy between the Hindustani concept of *dhakka* and the political category of force. We began and will end with force’s manifestation in 1992. In between, I draw on ethnography from north India, and historical and anthropological literature, to specify the stakes of force.

Ayodhya’s centrality for Indian nationalism opens up the questions which animate my inquiry. What is the relationship between the phenomenal experience of force, its socialized distribution, and political validation? Why did retrospective commentary on the Babri Masjid’s destruction dwell on whether it was planned or inadvertent? How does force come to be seen as intentional instrument ascribed to specific agents? Conversely, when is force a distributed phenomenon, volatile and disobedient, borne of collective sentiment?

These questions are important to pose in the context of contemporary India. Hindu nationalism’s political naturalism is manifest in the dilution and diffusion of responsibility. Specific actors and officials enact or enable the violence that afflicts Muslims. Yet the routine evasion of accountability, in collusion with the police and judiciary, is effective insofar as violence is conducted by, and on behalf of, general categories: the ‘Hindu community’ or ‘the people’ (Hansen 2018, Chatterjee 2020).

This is relevant beyond the inflamed aversion of nationalists for Muslims. Force also underwrites how regional players and disenchanted minorities articulate grievances and aspirations. Political life in India is less beholden to the normative figures of liberal thought – the deliberative agent, the rights-bearing subject, the intentional citizen – than the indeterminate and shifting locus of the collective. In this logic, mass energies and communal sentiment are continually provoked and invoked (Benei 2008, Ghassem-Fachandi 2012).

Building on such insights, I propose a prism through which to understand the embodied politics prevalent here. Force is one underexplored means by which we can understand how disparate elements – crowd passions and electoral mobilization, mob violence and institutional entitlements – converge.

Force is pervasively invoked yet fuzzily defined. For example, observers have long discussed notions of power, sovereignty, authority, hegemony, influence, and domination. These ideas are adjacent to – but not the same thing as – force. And yet force, despite its conceptual opacity, lurks around them. We understand intuitively that force is indispensable to potency and persuasion. It is performatively effective and affectively inarguable. Force thus saturates collective action, state organization, and social hierarchy. Yet we lack clarity on the thing itself.

This essay analyzes force as an embodied politics. I describe its play in ordinary encounters, institutional settings, and political spectacles. My empirical focus is the Hindustani concept of *dhakka* in north India. *Dhakka* is fairly synonymous with the English term force. Both have visceral connotations and are deeply felt. They are experienced from a specific perspective and enacted upon others. *Dhakka*, like force, evokes sensations of pushing, thrusting, jolting, flattening and jarring.

The next section outlines the contribution of force to the literature on emotion and experience, and political and public life in India. The proceeding sections unpack *dhakka* in its myriad aspects. We see how it manifests urban encounters in tactile form; how it is a felt experience, and moral critique, of hierarchy and institutions; and how it becomes constitutive of collective energies and political community.

I depart from research conducted in Old Delhi, where we see force's ubiquity as an urban affect. Then force is historically emplaced; as a longstanding idiom in north India, it animates political action, moral horizons, and institutional hierarchies. Finally, we turn to how force was experientially mobilized during the Babri Masjid 1992 demolition and narrated afterwards. The mosque's destruction reverberates decades later. This makes it a useful lens through which to probe how extra-legal force relates to political authorization.

Theoretically, an analysis of force shows how events and practices exceed individual intentions. Of course, force can be an engineered outcome of certain desires. Yet seeing force as the pre-programmed output of agents is conceptually limited and empirically inaccurate. Namely, we cannot account for how force may elude and escape willed objectives. Force illuminates how authority is directed and influence is validated. But *dhakka* is more analytically useful for showing how an embodied politics engulfs actors in unforeseen ways. Force may both map onto and exceed prescribed designs.

Thus I argue that that force is indispensable but delinquently mobile. It is an intensity that is not merely contained self-interest. We may understand it as an accumulation of atmosphere and influence that exceeds sociological lines. Finally, force shows how bodily experience and emotional expressions are fundamental to collectivity and politics. They are not epiphenomenon, or side effects, or surface-level expressions of interests and agendas. I suggest, in contrast, that force – at certain moments – is those things themselves.

To get to those claims, we must start from lived experience. We unspool our analysis from how force exists as an ordinary potentiality and available intensity in India. After the next theoretical section lays out the stakes of this study, we turn to this realm.

## 2. Conceptual Terrain

My purpose in this essay is to stimulate scholars interested in the conjunction of two dimensions. The first concerns subjective experience: the realm of the phenomenological, embodied, affective, and emotive. The second regards the political and collective: the domain of power and domination as they are manifest in social life. Force, I suggest, offers a useful means to stitch together these realms.

Writings on India have probed the embodied and emotive from different angles: from violence (Das 2006) to sexuality (Shah 2014) to play (Kumar 1988) to love (Trawick 1992) to education (Benei 2008). The writing on politics is also extensive: we have dissections of sovereignty (Hansen

and Stepputat 2005), dominance and hegemony (Guha 1997), citizenship (Jayal 2013), the state (Fuller and Harriss 2001), and corruption (Gupta 2012).

Where these realms intersect is in writing on masses, crowds, and the popular (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, Cody 2015, Mazzarella 2017, Chakrabarty 2007, Chatterjee 2020). In this literature, the upsurge of intensity, the irreducible concentration of affect, makes collective politics possible. The emotional registers here include effervescence, anger, and pain. In such works, the analytical focus is often on the contingent moment, the isolated episode, whereby a certain collaboration or expression is possible. Such studies point to social and political realms beyond established form, institutional structure, or official authority. These analyses of crowds and multitudes, masses and publics, underline what is emergent and excessive, and yet has lasting imprints.

This essay contributes towards these studies by offering an optic – that of force – that contracts and expands across realms. *Dhakka* bridges deeply felt individual experience as well as public sentiment and political mobilization. And it opens up these transverse sites without the presumptions of predictable directionality or contained self-interest. To anchor this proposition, I employ Simone Weil's classic study of force in the *Iliad* (1965). Written during the Nazi takeover of France in 1940, it is instructive for our own times.

Weil states that the 'hero', 'subject,' and 'center' of the *Iliad* is force: 'force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away . . . the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to' (1965: 6). Four aspects of Weil's discussion relate to this essay. First, force is something people apply; it is part of social action. Second, force subjects people; to submit is to enter political hierarchy. Third, force transforms what is; it alters existing states.<sup>6</sup> Finally, force exceeds and distorts certainty; it dissolves intentions and undermines will. For our purposes, then, force has elements of activity, submission, metamorphosis, and contingency.

Weil talks of force as 'that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing' (ibid., italics in original). Force intrinsically has the capacity to instrumentalize and objectify; subject becomes object.<sup>7</sup> At this primary level, force is a latent potential: 'it merely hangs, poised and ready, over the head of the creature it *can* kill, at any moment, which is to say at every moment' (ibid., 7, italics in original). At this altitude, force is experienced as 'orders and abuse' (ibid., 11) or as humiliation and 'the shameful experience of fear' (ibid., 12). At an amplified level, in its 'grossest and summary form,' force kills (ibid., 7). Weil writes, 'exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him.' (ibid., 6).

Thus for Weil, force is a gradient or spectrum, without and within, that is morally debasing and biologically threatening. Those deploying force exercise a tyranny akin to extreme hunger: 'the power of life and death' (ibid., 11). Supplicants such as slaves, for example, are biologically animate but 'another human species; a compromise between a man and a corpse' (ibid., 9). They merely 'imitate nothingness in their own persons', having a 'life that death congeals before abolishing' (ibid., 9).

Force is not a stable property. It cannot be lastingly owned, nor mapped along fixed coordinates. Weil emphasizes that force 'is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates . . . nobody really possesses it.' (ibid., 11). Force thus induces blindness to fluctuating circumstances. One's capacity is distorted by the momentariness of enacting, rather than receiving, force. This is not an object owned by a subject, nor property held by possessor. It is an indiscriminate externality; force engulfs all 'enmeshed in its machinery' (ibid., 18).

Anticipating affect as a political catalyst and indeterminate atmosphere, Weil talks of this as an inward and outward conversion. We have an oscillation between 'blind force, which is pure momentum' and 'inert matter, which is pure passivity' (ibid., 22). Force is not a concept or strategy, but a set of 'transmutations' that disobey species and subject-object distinctions (ibid.). The *Iliad's* similes liken 'warriors either to fire, flood, wind, wild beasts . . . or else to frightened animals, trees, water, sand, to anything in nature that is set into motion by the violence of external forces' (ibid.). Thus force inheres not in the cognitive realm of reason, nor as a deliberate expression of agency. There, it could be

sharply demarcated from embodied emotion or collective affect. Rather, force manifests action and reaction that mutates and vacillates, like the dynamic co-dependency of wind and water.<sup>8</sup>

How can we situate Weil's discussion of force within a wider theorizing of politics? It potentially refigures the binaries foundational in psychology, political science, sociology, and anthropology. In the intellectual genealogy of the social sciences, the realm of brute power, reactive violence, and animal beastliness contrasts with the normalizing – and civilizing – human domains of law, reason, and creation.<sup>9</sup> The Enlightenment bequeathed a desire to supersede what was internally dangerous (the irrational domain of the unconscious) and to emancipate humans from primordial nature (the unpredictable and threatening cosmos). Yet we might query whether force executes or undermines these divisions.

Hannah Arendt, parsing notions of power, authority, and force, designated the latter as not worthy of sustained inquiry (1970). Force, she maintains, should be reserved for the 'forces of nature' or 'force of circumstances', 'to indicate the energy released by physical or social movements' (Arendt 1970: 44–45). For her, force belongs to the metabolic realm, whereas the political proper is defined by creative transcendence and the human-made.

With force's full dimensions thus sidestepped, it has more generally been discussed as that which takes the inscrutably emotive and stabilizes it as rational community. That is how we might read Max Weber's discussion of force in his classic essay, 'Politics as a Vocation' (1946). Agreeing with Trotsky – 'every state is founded on force' – Weber emphasizes the kinship between violence and modular sovereignty: 'force is certainly not the normal or only means of the state – nobody says that – but force is a means specific to the state. Today the relation between the state and violence is an especially intimate one . . . a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory' (1946: 78, emphasis in original). Here, the problem of force is not its existence but its unboundedness: successful states disarm competitors and consolidate their violent capacities.

Weber echoes other thinkers that see force as the fundament of authority. In Walter Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence', force is simultaneously generative and transgressive; it founds law even as it breaks law (1978). Force is at once the extra-legal means of instituting law and its ultimate aim: 'lawmaking is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence' (1978: 295). Jacques Derrida also sees law's inaugural moment, and subsequent truth-claims, as hinging on force (1990). For him, the 'origin of authority' and the 'position of the law' are ultimately based on arbitrary, 'mystical' bases, a 'violence without ground' (1990: 945).

These analyses illuminate the relationship between the extra-legal application of force in 1992 in Ayodhya, and the subsequent state authorization of its nationalist capture. Undoubtedly, force, as an adamant expression of embodied sentiments, has a generative and intimate relationship to institutional sanction. Yet can we say that these analyses of force as the genesis of authority also reinforce anthropocentric privilege? In them, force serves to enact human intention and political privilege.<sup>10</sup> We lose the confounding slipperiness that Weil underscores. Her essay, in fleshing out the braiding of felt experience and political aspiration, offers a prism for us to return to India and see how force manifests in lived reality.

### 3. Force's embodiment, emotion, and experience

In this section, I employ ethnographic material from Old Delhi and secondary literature on north India, to ground force as an embodied politics. I suggest that force yokes together the personal and political, the emotional and the collective. Yet to understand its public efficacy, it is necessary to establish its felt immediacy. The somatic dimension of force, we will see, binds disparate individuals, while potentially exceeding their aims.

Old Delhi is a dense space par excellence; it has numerous bazaars, shrines, historic sites, and temples. Most of these can only be experienced with one's feet and eyes and nose; it is difficult to alienate one's corporeal self. The area dates to the 17th century, when it was Shahjahanabad, the

Mughal empire's epicentre. Old Delhi preceded the colonial city's thoroughfares, and the neoliberal ascendance of the automobile. It can be a remarkably still space: a cloister of silence, as experienced in madrasas and temples, tea-stalls and rooftops. Yet equally, beeps and laughter, chatter and horns, and people – sitting, standing, walking, hawking – define the area. The old city, as a hive of commercial activity, is synonymous with *bhir* (crowdedness).

Of course, crowds are not passive entities but active ones. Such assemblies are aggregates of tinier agendas; the crowd is a diffuse character. At the same time, crowds instantiate powerful physical effects. They channelize energy and induce reactions. A crowd is force as noun and verb: it hosts latent potentials, and simultaneously imprints upon.

A pleasure of conducting fieldwork is to discover local nomenclature.<sup>11</sup> I learnt this grammar – the ethnographer's bruised induction to local realities – in my fieldwork commute from South Delhi to the old city. One term I encountered for Delhi's crowd compulsions is *dhakka mukki*. *Dhakka*, as mentioned, means to push, shove, shock or jolt. *Mukka*, from which *mukki* is derived, means to be punched or poked. The conjunction of both words linguistically doubles-down. The 'shove-punch' or 'shock-poke' verbally exaggerates what is experientially amplified. In this case, that is sensorial magnification itself.

Thus, *dhakka mukki* denotes the stress of metropolitan navigation.<sup>12</sup> In Delhi, this may mean anonymous hands and feet tattooing one's body while entering or exiting a bus. Or being tossed to and fro, by sweaty and sticky others, while clambering aboard the Metro. The daily grind of commuting, the clotted congestion of bazaars, is ground zero for everyday force. Interestingly, force can be individually intentional and collectively diffuse. Let me illustrate with a vignette, from late 2007, of an observed exchange. It unfolded while waiting to board a bus near the old city's Delhi gate. I watched a fractious back and forth while an impatient assembly jockeyed for the door's entry.

In this scene, on the one hand, force is isolated as an outcome of intentions. A middle-aged woman said to a boisterous commuter, 'don't push me!' (*dhakka mat do!*). She sought to pinpoint force's origins. Yet force's authorship was immediately dissolved and displaced. The seeming aggressor, a bespectacled man, responded, 'what am I to do, the force is coming from behind' (*kya kare, piche se dhakke aa rahe hain*). The complaint locates force's genesis: that person purposefully acted for a certain outcome. The response reroutes force as originating in nameless others. Force in this sense is simultaneously channelled and distributed; it is comprised of multiple elements even while manifest as singularity. Force, like density, is among urban affects that impinge on the individual while dispersed among many (Rao 2007).

Another aspect of force is worth mentioning: as a sensorial fact, it is subject to schooling. Scholars have noted how colonial and postcolonial authorities anxiously eyed urban locales with mass crowds (Pandey 1992, Tambiah 1996). Today, invoking *dhakka* or force, state authorities still see crowds as hotbeds of disturbance.

The crowd's potential unruliness was evident to me in a police announcement heard in Old Delhi. The Meena Bazaar lies adjacent to the Jama Masjid. Most days, it has innumerable hawkers and vendors, and thus dense pedestrian traffic. The speakers in the bazaar, manned by local police, play nationalist anthems and public-service announcements. Distorted from over-amplification, squeaky and scratchy, they nevertheless constitute an authoritative soundtrack. One recurring admonishment is about the dangers of force: 'please do not push and shove; please do not push and shove' (*dhakka mukki mat kijiye; dhakka mukki mat kijiye*). Bumping and shoving: the respectable citizen must learn not to indiscriminately employ force.

These ethnographic vignettes illustrate points worth underlining. The first is that *dhakka* is a deeply embodied sense. For example, 'to eat force' (*dhakka khana*) means to suffer a professional or personal setback. The figurative dimension acquires palpability for implying 'ingested misfortune'. Force here is not an abstract entity or distant object, but inside one's viscera. Similarly, to say 'I got such a shock' (*mujhe itna dhakka laga*) implies not a second-hand fact but a first-hand experience ('to feel', *laga*).

After *dhakka*'s manifestation as embodied experience, the second aspect to highlight is its transitive character. It is often used in conjunction with an object to which force is applied. Force is not merely actionable but is tethered to something and applied to someone. It acts upon, or is manifested against. For example, a first-person narrator can describe 'feeling stunned' (*dhakka lagna*) by external circumstances. And a third-party observer can watch someone 'give the boot' (*dhakka dena*) to another.

Third, *dhakka* exists in a semantic constellation of analogous terms. It has consonance with related affective notions in English – such as *force*, *shock*, or *pressure* – interwoven into Indian language sentences. For example, the term *force* (as an emic, not analytic term) means both physical strength and social aptitude. In north India, it is related to drive or cunning in social navigation (Jeffrey 2010: 84). The word *shock* is sometimes employed in similar terms to *force*. *Pressure* may be used to describe professional and social compulsion. This may include directives enacted by hierarchical superiors. Then there are Hindustani terms denoting forcefulness. These include *zabardasti*, meaning to do something involuntarily or coercively. One can hear of hierarchical diktats and severe compulsion as *zor-zabardasti*.

An ethnographic example may illustrate the constellation of shared meanings around force. In the Meena Bazaar, I observed the political theatre of urban beautification. This entailed arbitrary police 'raids' on hawkers and shopkeepers. Low-level officers were generally reluctant to conduct them. As one constable told me, they felt forced into raids by professional superiors. Only 'when pressure comes from above' (*jab upar se pressure aate hain*) did officers feel duty-bound to conduct these raids.<sup>13</sup>

Fourth and finally, *dhakka* – beyond being an embodied experience, transitively unfolded, and embedded within a constellation of related terms – is part of a repertoire of moral reflection and collective animation. Let us examine two ethnographic examples from north India. They illustrate how force figures into ethical terrain and shores up the grounds of community.

In the first, I draw on Christopher Pinney's vivid ethnography in an industrializing milieu in Madhya Pradesh (1999). He elicits reflections on how capitalism, technology, and modernity figure into cosmologies of the past and present. Residents there, as elsewhere in modern India, invoke the contemporary moment as an immoral 'era of darkness' (*kaliyug*). In one man's understanding:

"The *kaliyug* is not a *dharmic* age. In the *dharmyug* people were good and honest (*imandar*). In the *kaliyug* lots of people speak lies, pick pockets (*jeb kat dena*), deceive (*dhoka dena*). There is tumult (*hallagulla*), pushing and shoving (*dhakka mukki*)" (Pinney 1999: 103).

Here, the humdrum friction of pushing and shoving is conflated with ethical assessment. Force is not the ordinary churning of society; rather, it is emblematic of treachery and turbulence. Force becomes an idiom of moral degeneracy within a cosmology of degraded sociality.

In the second example, from the Punjab, the carnal incorporation of force underwrites collective solidarity. In a discussion of emotional landscapes, Radhika Chopra discusses how the state suppression of Sikh militancy in the 1980s drew wounds opened again and again. She writes that 'Punjabis use the term *thes* or *dhakka* to convey a sense of bodily injury' (2011: 16). Force is not merely one person's experience of physical assault. Rather, it animates collective woundedness. The invocation of force signals group hurt, a politics of aggrievement that binds together. Force is simultaneously physical immediacy and metaphorical embodiment. Force is first-hand humiliation for those who endured counter-insurgency. It is second-hand pain for those who vicariously imbibed it thereafter. *Dhakka* encompasses both violence's searing sting and the imaginative hurt rippling across time and space. Such hurt sentiments have become a leitmotif in Indian politics (Hansen 2018). The community must display its scar; pain is the public fundament.

This section has outlined the prevalence of force in north India. Beginning in Delhi, we saw it manifest as the somatic intensity of the city, as in the push-and-shove of commuting. It indicates the discomfort of unknown bodies impinging on oneself. I suggested that force is generated by individual intentions as well as by distributed activity; it is a singularity containing multiplicity. Finally, force is shaped by authorities, as in the police admonishment to mass publics not to push and shove.



Thereafter, I underlined points relevant to scholars of emotion or affect, and politics and publics in India. We saw how deeply embodied *dhakka* as force is: it can be felt and eaten, given and taken. The transitive aspect of force was underscored: it is applied to or experienced from. Thus it has a subject or object to which it relates, rather than existing abstractly. Force can further be semantically viewed in a constellation of related English and Hindustani terms. And finally, the experience of force is not singular and contained but relational and unbounded. To be subjected to force is to be humiliated or wounded. This hurt is a means by which moral horizons are articulated and collective sentiments mobilized. How can we further probe the life of force in India? In the next section, I examine the relation of force to Indian social and political hierarchies.

#### 4. Forceful segmentation: the *Dhakka* of society and politics

My fieldwork in Old Delhi revolved in part around the lifeworlds of male migrants (Gandhi 2011). These men worked as manual labour and in the old city's bazaars. They lifted sacks and boxes, pushed handcarts, painted and soldered. They circulated between natal villages or towns and metropolitan centres. Their lives were precarious in many senses: in terms of their health, the duration and quality of income, and their ties in the city. Working short-term gigs, dependent on fragile and strained ties for friendship, food, and housing, these men tenuously inhabited the city.

For them, authorities were a vexing source of concern. Police constables could shake them down for bribes, and arbitrarily and harshly remove them from pavements. Hospitals were also regarded with apprehension. Some migrants have chronic health issues such as tuberculosis.

Others have shown this to be a general condition: migrants often feel fear and insecurity when dealing with authorities (Ramaswami 2007, Shah 2014). There are existing frames we can use to describe such encounters. These include inequality and exploitation. Yet while such terms conceptually label a situation, they elide how they are experienced. I suggest that what is embodied, what is emotionally activated, in migrants and the urban poor, is force.

Imagine a bureaucrat who demands a bribe, or a doctor who brusquely denies treatment. The first is an extractive gesture, the second an expression of indifference. Yet what unites and animates them is force. Force underwrites the authority figure's belief that they can act with relative impunity. Behind their credentials and networks is institutional might and symbolic weight. Those subject to such force cannot be unaware of this heaviness and imprint. To experience force in its fullness, then, is to feel degradation and helplessness.

Let us examine the following anecdote from a Planning Commission of India report on homeless urban populations. An impoverished widow of a rickshaw puller describes her husband's treatment at a government hospital.

“... doctor bhi bolta hai, kahta hai, ye koi dharamshala hai jo dawai free main milega. Ghuma deta hai. Nurse ne dhakka diya. Admi mar jata hai. Mera admi mar gaya ilaj ke bina.” (“The doctor sounds off, saying this is not a charity with free medicine. They spin you around procrastinating. The nurse shoves you aside. People die there. My husband died due to improper treatment”) (Mander 2009: 223).

The woman describes the commonplace experience of government hospitals by India's urban poor. She observes the callousness of the doctor's statement. She describes the confusion and obfuscation in getting illness addressed. She claims her husband's life was lost due to deficient care. And she describes the nurse's lack of compassion as *dhakka* or force.

The sense of state institutions as places of force is not confined to hospitals. Ward Berenschot writes of Ahmedabad residents in their frustrating dealings with officials. As others lacking contacts or money know, getting cases registered or licences approved is an ordeal. Their experience of bureaucrats is of circuitous navigation and unexpected obstruction. Like the widow described above, residents encounter implacable force:

“there is a Gujarati expression that describes the experience of repeated visits to government offices before anything gets done”: *dhakka khaavadave chhe* (being pushed around’, or, literally, ‘being made to eat’ your repeated attempts.” (Berenschot 2014: 201).

In both cases, *dhakka* is an embodied politics. Force is viscerally felt: in the first instance as shoving and the second as pushing and swallowing. The somatics of force manifest a strong demarcation: between authorities and subjects.

Arguably, force is a better analytic than commonplace ones of ‘corruption’ or ‘exploitation’. The latter terms suggest a clear locus of intentional agency: as if the official behind the desk, or doctor roaming the ward, is a transactional beneficiary. Yet remember my anecdote from Old Delhi on pressure’s compulsions. Policemen do not merely deploy but are also subject to the force of hierarchy. The gravitational imprint of force indiscriminately enacts coercion and compulsion. It therefore dissolves the polemical binary of corrupt and non-corrupt or exploiter and exploited. Force becomes a field of entanglement that ensnares all, rather than a property or capacity that is possessed.

This does not mean that officials or authorities do not abuse their privilege. Nor do I downplay the tangible injustice felt in dealings with the state. What I do suggest is that force engulfs those expressing power and those lacking it. It is slippery and unbounded by nature. It implicates everyone: those on the dependent side of the transaction, and those who hold more cards.

Furthermore, force is an embodied politics that avoids presentism. The grammar of ‘corruption’, for example, has its own genealogy in India (Gupta 2012). It is often understood as a contemporary pathology of bureaucratic and political life previously absent. Yet to stay with corruption is to be hemmed into a vocabulary that unevenly explains how power unfolds. It is useful that *dhakka* as force is not simply an ordinary affect. Nor is it just a contemporary label for social hierarchy and institutional authority.

It has rather been around a long time. Its employment as a way to navigate asymmetry and conflict anchors us in an immanent frame. We move into a conceptual space that evades normative prescriptions for how states should function and citizenry should behave. We are instead moored to the long life of sway and supremacy on the subcontinent.

Let me draw on a piece by Francesca Orsini, on pre-colonial administration in north India, to demonstrate (2012). She underlines the use of vernacular expressions in Persian-language administration. A private letter from 1548 is instructive: ‘written by a courtier of Islam Shah [it] warns the addressee against using force (“*dhakka nakunand*”) against a local Sheikh with good contacts at court.’ (Orsini 2012: 233).

My interest in this archival fragment concerns force as a political idiom in north India. Note how the courtier’s invocation of force is not about formal authority or institutional power. He suggests a field of action and reaction whereby capacities and potentials are distributed. Force is fluid: it exists in the addressee’s manoeuvres vis-à-vis another, and is also present in the Sheikh’s relations with courtly power.

Both the letter’s addressee and the Sheikh inhabit – rather than possess – the field of force. They can be aware of and shape the workings of force, but not own it. Force fluctuates; not containable in one-off action, it spurs knock-on effects. That is why Islam Shah’s courtier warns against using force. It may not instantiate desired outcomes. Rather, force can catalyse injurious consequences. In the next section, I elaborate this idea by reference to force’s display during the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition. Beforehand, I offer a final example of how force instantiates hierarchies and makes segmentations visible.

In a study of caste politics, Anupama Rao discusses visceral demarcations between relative others:

“My friend’s elderly father, Vasantrao Kamble, had spent his working life in a government office. While speaking with him in Aurangabad in March 1997, I casually asked him about caste discrimination. His response was illuminating. He said that when caste Hindus at work came to know his caste identity, they reacted as if they had received an electric shock. The term Kamble used, *shock basane*, replaced the more common expression, *dhakka basane*, which means to experience a physical jolt. By describing contact between

untouchables and caste Hindus through the metaphor of electric shock, Kamble emphasized *his* impact on upper-caste persons . . . ” (2009: 265, emphasis in original).

In Rao’s description of *dhakka* and *shock*, we see the elements of force discussed earlier. For an upper-caste person, a lower-caste person in physical proximity induces a ‘physical jolt’ or ‘electric shock’. Force is unpleasantly felt, an external impact that is interiorized.

Furthermore, force is experienced in multiply transitive terms. Lower-caste individuals may be socialized to anticipate or evade such transgression. This would be a fraught self-consciousness, aware of the upper-caste capacity for arbitrary violence and ritualized ostracism. Dalits who know they may shock likely truncate themselves to avoid such recrimination. They have been transitively moulded by the force of caste privilege. Yet the irony of the anecdote is that it is the purportedly high-born who feel acted upon, rather than acting upon others.

In other words, higher castes somatically perceive transgression and react adversely. Lower castes witness this recoil, and understand that their social self – as opposed to individual presence – has adamant effects. Key to this is the distribution of force. There is shock and retreat, proximity and presence, anger and absence. All of this produces caste. The embodied politics of force instantiates a certain kind of hierarchy. Arguably, without such forceful feeling, group demarcations would not exist in quite the same way.

Yet our study cannot rest with force as synonym for extant sociological lines. In the next section, I suggest that what makes force analytically useful in understanding the interface of emotion and politics is how it exceeds parameters of community or interest. Force’s indiscipline – its insurgent confounding of intentions – sheds light on embodied politics in India today.

## 5. Force’s inadvertent reverberations

I have suggested that *dhakka* or force provides an entry point into life in north India. We departed by describing force as an ordinary affect – the pushing and shoving of big-city life. It is embodied and experienced; felt as jostle and bump. And force is enacted: upon someone from without; by a subject to another. Yet force goes further than the city’s empirical grind and hectic jockeying. It figures into moral reflections and social and political demarcations. In north India, force is an immanent frame for influence and impetus, a way that collective entanglements are narrated. Communities bind themselves through its imprint and reckon with its stress-impacts.

Force, at one level, manifests existing sociological or political realities. It is found along the groove of established segmentary identities. It also conditions how subjects engage with official authority – state institutions are places of involuntary inducement. We can well imagine force to cement what is already prevalent: it overlaps reliably enough with abiding privileges. As such, force seems a synonym for agency: a medium for sedimented interests. At another level, though, force is evasive and confounding.

In this section, I suggest we delve into these troubling qualities. That force is restlessly mobile and cannot be contained. That it exceeds domestication in how it is concentrated and represented. In other words, force expresses intentions yet potentially undoes those same intentions. And to this important political and ethical questions – of culpability and accountability – can be posed.

I unpack this train of thought via Ayodhya in 1992 at two levels, and dig deeper than the introductory sketch. First, I consider its real-time experiential unfolding. Second, I explore the retrospective narration of events. What emerges is force as animating energy and force as uncontrollable reverberation. We thereby see how an embodied politics mobilizes and expresses relations, and simultaneously allow that force may escape purposes.

As Weil discusses, human intentions are the grounds on which force operates, and what it sweeps away. In this sense, force attends to social demarcation and political power. But it does so outside the fragile premises of stability or possession. Force allows us to see the contingent expression of mass

energies and affect. They work in and through – but are not restricted by – institutions and lineages. These usual social science frames take us only so far. To understand ordinary pressures and eventful atmospheres, we must attend to how force unfolds across time and space.

To recap, by December 1992, thousands of Hindu activists assembled in Ayodhya. Despite their heterogeneity, this large assembly was unified by hurt and anger. Pain around the Ram temple's apparent destruction was twinned with animosity against Muslims. Both structure and community, object and subject, became putatively alien: action was necessary to purify the nation.<sup>14</sup>

In many readings, the mosque's downfall on December 6th was a singular act of frenzy, an intentional act of destruction. Yet it is worth slowing down the tape, as it were. By doing so, we can apprehend how it experientially unfolded. Only then can we grasp how force operates: what makes it overlap with and exceed intentionality.

On that day, in the morning, a crowd assembled at a platform, next to the police-protected and cordoned-off mosque. A steady flow of speeches and songs made the atmosphere festive. By all accounts, the space accumulated energy. Elsewhere in Ayodhya, Muslims were attacked and their homes set ablaze. By mid-morning, a number of hard-core *Hindutva* activists swarmed the site's cordon. They pelted the mosque and security forces with stones.

The activists were armed with rudimentary weapons, including pickaxes, shovels, and hammers. The security perimeter now breached, they used rope to climb the mosque's domes. Once atop, their iron rods, blow by blow, weakened the structure. Activists below dissolved the structure's integrity with hammers and axes. The security forces fled; journalists were attacked. A crucial part of this scene was goading from nationalist notables on an adjacent platform. It was there that Sadhvi Rithambara sang out while the assault proceeded, *ek dhakka aur do, Babri Masjid tod do* ('deliver more force and break the Babri Masjid') (Jaffrelot 1996: 456).<sup>15</sup> The like-minded crowd watching this spectacle waved flags and sang victory songs. By mid-afternoon, the left dome collapsed. The right and central domes gave way later that day. Once the mosque was destroyed, activists cleaned the site and erected a temporary temple. Upon it, they placed images of Ram and nationalist icons.

It is striking that *dhakka*, as force, is the concatenation of disparate elements that day. This exhortation is commented on in a number of appraisals of the event (Jaffrelot 1996: 456, Guha 2008: 635, Cush et al. 2008: 74, Nandy 1995: 195). There is even a historicity to force's invocation by nationalists. The somatic solicitation – 'deliver more force' (*ek dhakka aur do*) – informed provocations before and since. A version, employed by Hindu rioters in Uttar Pradesh in the early 1980s, for example, is 'give another push and break Pakistan' (*ek dhakka aur do, Pakistan tod do*) (Engineer 1984: 268).

Let us return to the moment of the mosque's dissolution. It is as if Ritambara's refrain is force as singularity and multivalence. The strength of her speech act feeds into the directionality of action. There is a feedback loop between the raised voice and the bodily activity. The one provides impetus for the other. The demand for *dhakka* does not instigate – as in originate – the physical destruction. The meeting of hammers and iron rods on Babri Masjid's face – aggregations of many singular blows – are already unleashed. Rather, the vocal plea bolsters the hammering already evident. Thus force does not stem from the speech. Nor does force emanate from the men dismantling the structure. Rather, force is a distributed field. It emerges and amplifies through atmospheric speech and bodily aggregation and energetic animosity. Force cannot belong to any one party or be localized in any single activity. Both the speaker who witnesses, and the person who assaults, are entangled in force.

Of note here are the aspects of force outlined earlier. The chant and the activists' blows are both deeply embodied. The one who exhorts force is tethered to the ones who, standing on and around the mosque, drill force. Neither the stalwarts ensconced on their platform, nor the activists undoing the mosque, are alienated from their senses. The vocal cords chanting are the same body politic as the ligaments flexing. Force fuses speech and blow, spectator and doer, cheerleader and actor. The *dhakka* of intensity and impetus animates this collective corporeality.

Note too how force is transitively enacted. Rithambara's call for *dhakka* is a form of interpellation. It exhorts in the literal sense: it urges someone to do something. Force works here by compelling an exterior other. It is not an inward-residing affect, but applies pressure to those outside oneself. The activists imbibe her chant, and channel it into physical assault. At the same time, their bodily exertions on the mosque call upon Rithambara. Their muscular force spurs her throaty goading. The transitive workings of force upon a subject slide into the workings of force upon an object; and vice versa. Noteworthy here is how nationalist violence is manifest not as a dour obligation but as effervescent excess (c.f. Ghassem-Fachandi 2012).

A close look at force shows how the visceral and political converge in India's public and political life. They produce strong affects and effects. In real-time, in December 1992, force stitches together disparate bodies into singular collaboration. It is voiced as prodding, and banged out as blows. Force sweeps a spectrum of Hindus into singularity. It works antagonistically to homogeneously conjure an equally diverse Muslim community. Force's workings symbolically evict them from history and eject them from territory.

We also see how force interconnects and disperses; it is an embodied politics that is concatenation and distribution. Force, having dissolved the Babri Masjid, radiates outwards. It is demonstrative and enabling; the moment that the mosque comes down, other militants take their cue. From Ayodhya, it ripples out to Bombay and Delhi, to Bhopal and Surat (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012). Force here is localized in the bounded radius of the the Babri Masjid; and it is diffused far beyond those precincts, taking life in alleyways and homes thousands of kilometres away. Force is in this secondary sense an affective catalyst, 'triggering' thousands of deaths and injuries (Basu 2000: 274).

What happens when we swivel from inhabiting the moment to retrospectively narrating its unfolding? Does the neat proximity between force and intentionality, embodied experience and engineered outcome, get shaken? Immediately after December 6th, social commentary in India dwelt on premeditation. A locus of inquiry was whether the mosque's demolition had been engineered. Another line of thought had it that the swell of affect – the crowds, songs, speeches, flag-waving – spun out of control. As Christophe Jaffrelot notes, 'the recurring question in the aftermath of the demolition was: had it been planned in advance?' (1996: 455). Or as Ramachandra Guha writes: 'Was the demolition of the Babri Masjid planned beforehand? Or was it simply the result of a spontaneous display of popular emotion and anger?' (2008: 635). Thus the question of intentionality was central for arbitrating politics in Ayodhya's aftermath.

The response of various players is revealing. A white paper by the BJP argued against premeditation: 'The demolition of the disputed structure was an uncontrolled and, in fact, uncontrollable upsurge of spontaneous nature' (Jaffrelot 1996: 455). Leaders like L.K. Advani said that the events 'impaired the reputation of the BJP and RSS as organisations capable of enforcing discipline' (ibid., 456).

How do we understand force's reverberations from a contemporary vantage point? Since 1992, Hindu nationalism has become ubiquitous and normalized. With the BJP's elections in 2014 and 2019, vilification and violence against Muslims is commonplace. And 1992's actors have not been undermined by force or chastened for their hubris. Ayodhya's adherents evaded prosecution and comeuppance. Yet perhaps nationalism framed around force is saddled with self-defeating volatility.

Might the exhortation to push and shove Muslims lead only to collective self-injury? Can we say that force animated by retribution leads to eternal retaliation and even mutual destruction? Force ostensibly consolidates power and clarifies supremacy. Yet, as Weil suggests, it blinds and deforms, ultimately exceeding one's grasp. Remember how the Babri Masjid's demolition catalysed riots and bombings throughout India. From Ayodhya, force cascaded outwards, impelling bombings and burnings in other cities. The force that briefly unified the Hindu body politic ricocheted and tore asunder many – including Hindu – bodies. Force's ripples do not discriminate; they potentially sink everyone in their wake.

My aim here is intellectual exploration and not political reckoning or moral accounting. We cannot litigate or exonerate; we must raise the question of culpability but bracket it aside.<sup>16</sup> It is striking to review the government report on 1992 (Liberhan 2009). It emphasizes how embodied

experience – leaders’ speeches and activist slogans and crowd excitement – provided an impetus for demolition. Yet force remains slippery and confounding. The report only confirms that historically patterned and politically organized energies resulted in destruction. Force eludes both real-time intentions and post-facto judgement. Wily and restless, force defies design and attribution.

Thus far, this essay has looked at force in terms of its dominant iteration: as an expression of violence that underpins power. One can therefore ask: is force so resounding, so emphatically successful, or can we recover other lineages of force that inform alternative imaginings of ethical life and political cohabitation?

In line with how this essay has proceeded, we might pursue this in the wider conceptual literature, and also look for resonances in Indian thought and practice. Weil’s essay highlights the ways in which Greek tragedy contains a kind of moral mathematics. For Weil, the *Iliad*’s perpetual oscillation of fortunes, its tacking back and forth of supremacy and degradation, ‘has a geometrical rigor, which operates automatically to penalize the abuse of force’ (1965: 14). Retribution is seductive and seems definitive; but its outcomes are fleeting and inevitably entail blowback. Weil suggests that the Greeks, like those ‘Oriental’ countries where Buddhism is prevalent, understand this ‘continual game of seesaw’ as akin to karma (ibid., 15). Vengeance, in Weil’s understanding, underpins the interminable play of action and reaction, of violation and retaliation. And we have seen how the mindset of Hindu nationalism recuperates pride by vanquishing foes.

But there are other paths possible, different gestures that can be made. For example, Judith Butler, in a reflection on Walter Benjamin’s thought, discusses his ideas around forgiveness. For Benjamin, misdeeds are ‘countered not in the world of law, where retribution rules, but only in the moral universe, where forgiveness comes out to meet it. In order to struggle against retribution, forgiveness finds its powerful ally in time. For time . . . is not the lonely calm of fear but the tempestuous storm of forgiveness’ (Benjamin 1996: 287 in Butler 2006: 721). Butler notes: ‘forgiveness, which we might ordinarily understand as a capacity achieved upon reflection when passions have quieted down, is here figured as a storm, a storm with a hand and voice, and so a divine force, but *not* one that is based on retribution. Importantly, this storm of forgiveness constitutes a radical alternative to the closed economy of atonement *and* retribution’ (Butler 2006: 721, emphasis in original). In other words, forgiveness, in its storm-like quality, is available as a counter-force.<sup>17</sup>

How might we think about such counter-lineaments of force in India? Shankar Ramaswami notes in the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi ‘the existence of other forces in the world besides brute force, of soul-force and truth-force (*satyagraha*), exhibited in non-violent activities which non-cooperate with perceived wrong or injustice’ (2012: 69).<sup>18</sup> In Gandhi’s thought, the immanence of truth or being (*satya*) is conjoined to *agraha* which can be translated as ‘force, firmness, insistence, or even seizing’ (Skaria 2016: ix.) ‘But *agraha* is not just any force – it carries the connotation of overpowering force. *Agraha* is thus the force that occurs as a seizing, a taking hold, or a firmness’ (ibid., 2).

In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi outlines such different aspects of force. What we have mostly discussed in this essay is brute force, or what Gandhi variously glossed as ‘body-force’ (*sharirbal*), ‘gun-force’ (*topbal*), and ‘force of arms’ (*hatyarbal*) (1997: 79). Yet these are not the only forces that humans can exercise: there is ‘soul-force’ (*atmabal*), ‘love-force’ (*prembal*), ‘truth-force’ (*satyabal*), ‘compassion-force’ (*dayabal*), ‘suffering-force’ (*tapbal*), and ‘justice-force’ (*nitibal*) (ibid., lvi). For Gandhi, despite that apparent efficacy of brute force, ‘the force of love and pity is infinitely greater than the force of arms’ (1997: 84). Here we see a resonance with Walter Benjamin’s discussion of forces beyond anger and retribution. Benjamin’s ‘storm’ of forgiveness meets Gandhi’s ‘force’ of love and truth.

## 6. Conclusion

Recent years have seen South Asianists take up the idea of emotion and affect (Mazzarella 2017). Vitalities, energies, and sensations constitute an expanding terrain for historical and social science analysis. Building on these studies, this essay has focused on what I term the embodied politics of force. I departed from some ethnographic vignettes from Delhi, and broadened the analysis to

incorporate historical and comparative examples from north India. I traced out how force is found in the stickiness and unpleasantness of pushing and shoving in the city. Force as an ordinary aspect of the urban hustle is viscerally felt and transitively enacted. I further suggested that force is an aspect of collective reflection, whether on moral horizons, or group persecution, or the immediacy of how one caste encounters another. I finally used the 1992 example of the Babri Masjid demolition, to show how force maps onto social community and political agendas, but also eludes them.

In doing so, my interest has been to engage with scholars in two respects. First, I echoed others who find the conceptual language for social action to be limited. Instead of humans as predictable agents of social conditioning, I have suggested that force escapes the bounds of intentionality. What makes force a recurring locus of impetus and influence also makes it volatile and delinquent. It can sweep up disparate people into common cause. But force also turns against those who wield it.

This latter point leads to my second main argument. *Dhakka* as force is not just about phenomenology but about politics. It gives us a way of thinking of moments of concatenation, whether commuting in the city, or rallying around around a historical cause. These moments cannot necessarily be seen as ones where power is clearly defined, where sovereignty or authority is a contained expression of underlying interests or agendas. Rather, force is too slippery and too insurrectionary to abide by settled scholarly terms. And in this sense, force opens a window into the political's vexing mobility and contingency, in India as elsewhere.

## Notes

1. I thank Stefan Binder, Michaela Dimmers, Margrit Pernau and the journal's two reviewers for their detailed engagement with this essay. I also benefitted from feedback at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, especially by Yining Chen, Yang Chen, Arndt Emmerich, Frank Korom, Nicole Iturriaga, Sabine Mohamed, Patrice Ladwig, Salah Punathil, and Peter van der Veer.
2. Corresponding author: Ajay Gandhi. Email: [ajay.gandhi@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:ajay.gandhi@mail.mcgill.ca)
3. This survey draws on detailed backstories to the 1992 events by Peter van der Veer (1987, 1994) and Christophe Jaffrelot (1996, 2007).
4. No primacy can be claimed for the particular epistemological authority of these discourses. What is relevant is how social histories tether linear or stratigraphic to religious or scriptural time, and thereby naturalize claims to power. Court rulings, for example, have invoked Archaeological Survey of India claims that the mosque was built on an indigenous – and putatively non-Islamic – structure. In this way, the rational-bureaucratic and mythic-religious is conjoined. Furthermore, Hindu proponents self-constitute as caretakers of an anterior state returned to through political action. Archaeology consolidates this 'historical grammar of recovery' (Abu El-Haj 2001: 44), by mirroring Hindu reform movements of the 19th century that certified their actions as scientifically rational. In this way, the demolition of the Babri Masjid links to the 'deep politics' of monuments whereby 'the narrative of a project of architectural submergence that Muslims had allegedly undertaken . . . has to be unpeeled from the top to reveal a kind of landscape' (Appadurai 2001: 39).
5. 'Revisiting Ayodhya 25 Years After Demolition of Babri Masjid', *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHmAIXAN07E>, accessed 22 January 2020.
6. See the resonance in Deleuze's writings: "a power is an idiosyncrasy of forces, such that the dominant force is transformed by passing into the dominated forces, and the dominated by passing into the dominant – a center of metamorphosis" (1997: 134).
7. This instrumentality is akin to Tzvetan Todorov's distinction between two distinct ethical and political postures: the "other-as-subject" and "other-as-object" (1984). Todorov writes, "the discovery of the other knows several degrees, from the other-as-object, identified with the surrounding world, to the other-as-subject, equal to the *I* but different from it" (1984: 287, emphasis in original).
8. Deleuze, in his Nietzschean reading of the dynamic interplay constitutive of the world, writes analogously while considering conflict. For him, the will to power is manifest not as destructive war but as ordinary 'combat', 'a powerful, nonorganic vitality that supplements force with force' (1997: 133). The 'combat-against tries to destroy or repel a force', but 'the combat-between, by contrast, tries to take hold of a force in order to make it one's own' (ibid., 132). This dissolves the apparent fixity of subject and object, powerful and powerless: 'it is the combatant himself who is the combat: the combat is *between* his own parts, between the forces that either subjugate or are subjugated, and between the powers that express these relations of force' (ibid., emphasis in original).

9. See Claudia Baracchi's insightful online essay (2012) on Weil and the wider intellectual genealogy of force.
10. Along similar lines, Ajay Skaria suggests that Mahatma Gandhi's notion of 'truth-force' (*satyagraha*), in foregrounding struggle and activity, proceeds outside of modern conceptions of sovereignty and liberal notions of individual autonomy (2016). Force, whether in its brute physical manifestations, as Weil discusses, or in alternative conceptions, such as those of Gandhi, disrupts Enlightenment ideas of rational beings with intentional agency.
11. This section builds upon a wider study of urban affect in Old Delhi (Gandhi 2016).
12. An important component of this visceral politics in the city is gender. Women experience *dhakka* not merely as what is physically taxing. Rather, force militates against them inhabiting urban spaces. An ethnography of female workers in Kolkata notes, 'Just as there are bumps (*dhakka*) on the road, there are pushes (*dhakka*) from men in spaces from which women are typically excluded' (Kar 2017: 309).
13. Shah's analysis of *majburi* or compulsion (2014) suggests an interesting analogue to *zor-zabardasti* and *pressure*. In both cases, constraint and complicity entangle actors in actions vis-à-vis others. Scholars conventionally disaggregate agency and incapacity: the enduring analytical schism between power and resistance is testament to it. Yet in practice, everyday sociality does not allow for such parsing. As I suggest, force is useful to consider in two ways. It is first an outward-directed energy that mobilizes public sentiment. Second, it unpredictably ensnares and even confounds those seeming to possess it. It is an embodied politics that hovers at the borderline of the intentional and the uncontrollable.
14. In the example discussed here, force purifies by dematerializing alien elements in one's midst, and symbolically extruding what does not belong. However, force has also been understood by Hindu nationalists such as M.S. Golwaker and V.D. Savarkar in terms of a fantasy of total incorporation. Both ideologues employed the metaphor of digestion to reflect on how to incorporate Muslims without dissolving Hindu integrity. As Savarkar asked, 'Why has the digestive power of the Hindu become so feeble? Now we must develop the power of digestion ... so powerful and inflamed an appetite that is capable of digesting the whole world' (Sharma 2009: 165). In this vision, force works not by expelling the troublesome other, but by thoroughly assimilating them into the body politic; in both instances, force is an uncompromising somatic energy that subdues threats.
15. A striking aspect of this exhortation is its gendered aspects: a woman prods a predominantly male assembly to recuperate their masculinity. Rithambara, along with another prominent *Hindutva* activist, Uma Bharati, recorded cassettes during the early 1990s. These recordings jeer Hindu men for their lack; provocation invites exaggerated rebuttals. In one cassette, they exhort: 'Discard the cloak of cowardice and effeminacy and learn to sing the song of bravery and heroism ... They took your virility, purity, and your greatness to be cowardice and effeminacy.' (Basu 2000: 276–277).
16. Here it is worth noting how much of the discourse on affect, in its embrace of the sensorial and vitalistic, and focus on the pre-conscious and pre-symbolic, evades the question of responsibility. I have hesitated to utilize affect theory because, in its focus on the evanescent and fragmentary, I do not see grounds for a meaningful discussion on justice and accountability.
17. See by way of parallel Skaria's dissection of Gandhi's conception of forgiveness and its relationship to sovereignty (2016: 259–286).
18. Constraints of space disallow a deeper conceptualization of force in India. See Kumar for a comparative treatment of force that counterpoises Gandhi to the writings of Dalit intellectual and drafter of India's constitution B.R. Ambedkar (2015: 59–162).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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