People's Conceptualization of Government, Governance and Legitimacy: Some Reflections Based on Urban India[1]

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Cities are known for their internal heterogeneity and differences, usually mapped out on the city's geographical pattern. Who gets to live where and what kind of resources are available to people living in the different spatial locations is largely determined by the power differentials and structural inequalities often rooted in past but informed by present norms of demarcation. Delhi is a city that has evolved from past roots and, although at present a modern, global city strongly influenced by commerce and financial considerations, still retains vestiges of inherited normative patterns such as those of caste and religion. A moot question is the location of the untouchable castes and also the religious minorities. While the Old City had demarcated areas for both, the modern city, too, even while expanding and undergoing gentrification, still reflects these values in its residential patterns and choice or lack of choice of residents for living in particularly favourable areas of the city. What are the factors, social, economic and political that determine who gets to live where in a city where the normative universe is a curious mixture of progressive and conservative values.
Keywords: Residential patterns, normative universe, caste, religion, Delhi

Indian Democracy: Some Questions?

The success and failure of a government in a democracy is solidly based on its legitimacy in terms of collective approval from the people, its tenure dependent on a public voting system. However, once in power, they attain legal legitimacy to rule for the length of their tenure, but that does not mean that the collective approval is maintained. As described by scholars such as Pardo and Prato (2019), legitimacy goes beyond the Weberian concepts of rational-legal authority and often depends more on the charismatic and moral component of leadership. The public may perceive the incumbent ruler as exceeding its limits in terms of exertion of power or not fulfilling its obligations as a ruler. At times, the personal charisma of a leader may continue for a longer time than the loss of moral legitimacy and significant public approval. At times, having acquired power, the leadership may take recourse to deviant methods to hold onto it, thereby creating a hiatus between the legitimacy granted to them and the use of illegal and sometimes brute force. The recent rise and dominance of populist governments across the globe, as well as the prevalence of right-wing nationalism that in many cases goes against the otherwise liberal and inclusive constitutions and existing legal systems, also raise points to be pondered on.

The writing of this paper has been significantly stimulated by the recently held national elections in India (Summer of 2024), in which the ruling regime led by a leader, recognized to be very popular,[2] in the persona of Narendra Modi, suffered a setback. The data for this paper has been collated from newspaper reports, the media, the conversations I have had with local people in Delhi

[1] I acknowledge the contribution of the scholars who attended the meeting where this paper was read and in particular I am grateful to Italo Pardo and Giuliana Prato for their valuable comments.

[2] Some global polls showed him as the most popular leader in the world.

of all classes. I have been asking people's opinions on main events, on the prospects of various political parties, and also about certain leaders and what they expect from the state. An additional factor has been my immersive experience as a citizen of India and a resident of Delhi and as a voter. The present regime had acquired power in 2014, before which they were sitting in the Opposition benches. They have held onto their power since 2014, by both fair and foul means.

Prior to the elections, the ruling party was flushed with confidence and had projected they would win more than four hundred seats in Parliament (claim they made on the various hoardings put up across the city), or in other words would attain a thumping majority. During the earlier part of his rule, Modi, along with his party and his close advisors, had shown high levels of complacence and an intolerance of any opposition either in the form of a person or in the form of a political party.[3] It was becoming obvious that the ruling BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) was wanting to rule autocratically and without any hindrance to the imposition of any of their policies and programmes. In their two terms (ten years) of rule, certain dominant characters of their ideology and goals had become clear. These were, firstly, to push India's growth primarily in terms of GDP and to favour the corporate and market sector above all other considerations, including those of environment and social justice. In this goal, they had achieved considerable success, pushing India's formal growth rate to double digits and also securing India's place as a global destination for safe investment and a stable economy. Various global economic leaders have come out in public endorsing Modi's capability as an economic leader. India's success story in the economic sector was, however, achieved at the cost of significant environmental damage, leading to excessive climate change and warming (the summer of 2024 being the worst in India's known history). (Even as the paper is being written there are reports of devastating floods from areas of scant rainfall, massive landslides from the Himalayas, and from Kerala, where the region of Wayanad has been almost wiped off the map).

Displacement and harassment of marginal populations in the name of "development" and projects of "national" interest has been rampant. People were not only displaced in the name of building dams and roads and for projects with apparently economic benefits, like factories; they were also displaced for making, for example the Statue of Unity, a giant statue of Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, the ideal of the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Patel has been idealized for several reasons, and apart from his yeoman's work in uniting India, post- Independence, by force wherever necessary, he was a Gujarati, from the same community as Mr Modi and he was also a political opponent of Jawaharlal Nehru, although they belonged to the same political party. Patel took a strong hand in integrating India and subjugating the fringe areas like Nagaland and the earlier royal principalities. To build his statue a large amount of land was vacated, many people, mostly tribals were displaced,

[3] The elected representatives of the popular Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are languishing in jail, including the chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, and his deputy and many other opposition leaders are facing legal persecution in one form or the other.

their nature- based livelihoods destroyed and most of them are now doing menial jobs at the tourist centres that have come up around the Statue of Unity, a major tourist attraction of this region.

The Modi government has also been accused of disproportionately favouring the corporate sector, to whom many of the benefits of the so-called "development" projects have been passed on. While unemployment has been rising in India the number of billionaires has been rising steadily.

Although the nation and nationalism have been at the forefront of the party rhetoric, the definition of "nationalism" was narrowly constricted to Hindu nationalism and that too upper caste, ritualistic and vegetarian (Leidig 2020, Shani 2021, Channa 2023). The second major goal of the BJP was to make India into a Hindu nation, and for this they were ready to change the constitution that declares India to be a Secular and Socialist Republic. There were murmurs about changing the name of the country, to reject the anglicized India and replace it with a more indigenous Bharat. While Modi kept giving the slogan of Viksit Bharat (Developed India), most of the elections were fought more on the Hindu agenda than the economic agenda, which was probably seen as taken for granted. To push forth the Hindu agenda, there has been considerable demonization of Muslims and they have been branded as "outsiders", "invaders" and so on. Although openly the BJP has maintained its front of having respect for all religions, during its rule there has been considerable marginalization as well as persecution of poor and vulnerable Muslims. Several of them have been mob lynched or otherwise harassed with their houses demolished and even those in higher positions have been marginalized, demoted or not given what was due to them. As Baviskar (2003) has pointed out, the BJP has instituted the fear of the "illegal immigrants" in the form of Bengali Muslim refugees (from Bangladesh and later the Rohingyas) to gather support for the imposition of a system of vigilance, which is basically aimed at "cleansing" spaces, especially urban and metropolitan, like Delhi. The Hindu urban middle class have been inundated with spectres of "criminal mindset" of the dangerous minorities and made to seek the government's help in getting rid of them. In this sense, a large section of the public has been misinformed into supporting the state's coercion in taking away identity proofs, or not granting them to marginal Muslims, to also prevent them from voting. Such acts of seeming protection of their rights to the city have also prompted many upper caste/class Hindus to vote for the BJP.

However, not all such efforts have been made without criticism. Many intellectuals and historians have been decrying the efforts to erase history (Channa 2022) by the change of place names and public places. For example, the name of the famous city of Allahabad has been changed to Prayagraj. Another point that has been taken critically has been the isolation and persecution of all intellectuals who have taken up issue with the present government (Shah 2024), including raking up year's old cases, like the one against Medha Patkar, a much-revered environmental activist, known globally for her activism for proper resettlement of the Narmada River Dam project refugees. Several prominent writers and intellectuals, even of global fame, are being persecuted and sometimes even punished, jailed or not allowed to function. There have also been reports of constant

interference in academic matters, in the formulation of the syllabus and the implementation of a National Education Policy that aims to change the entire educational system. Although the overt aim is to make education more compatible with present-day needs, make it more environment friendly, more suited to skill development, there is also a plan to make it more indigenous. It is at the latter point that the radicalization is aimed, as history, philosophy and all aspects of humanity are now being Hinduized with the mythical reconstruction of a "glorious Hindu past".

Failed Legitimacy

This background was necessary to give some insight into the electoral debacle faced by the BJP in the 2024 elections. By the beginning of the campaign, Modi was flushed with what he considered his success and his status as a world leader. He was the recipient of the label of the most popular leader in the world. India was seen as emerging as a superpower under his leadership. In India, he was supposed to have attained "God", like an image. In a television interview, some women were interviewed who said to the camera that they "worshipped" Modi, that he was their God. His followers were labelled as "*bhakts*" which means devotees and not just followers. An election trump card was the building and consecration of the Ram temple, a religious structure with its history. This controversial and also much coveted temple has been built on the site of the demolished Babri Masjid (mosque), that had embroiled several political parties, a multitude of ideological opinion, but which from the point of view of the BJP was going to be a symbol of their proposed Hindu Nation, an ideal they believed all the Hindus of India would aspire for. The very inauguration of the temple was mired in controversy, even of a religious nature, when all the four Sankaracharya, refused to attend the inauguration saying that it was ritually inappropriate to inaugurate an "incomplete" temple. These Sankaracharya are the Brahmin priests, who are guardians of the Hindu religion, much in the way the Pope is guardian of the Roman Catholic faith. They are the ultimate religious law givers and protectors. But Mr Modi was in a hurry to inaugurate the temple with an eye on the elections. Not only was the temple inaugurated, it converted the hitherto sleepy little town of Ayodhya into a major tourist hub with a State-of-the-Art airport, magnificent hotels and other facilities. It was expected that the people of Ayodhya would be overjoyed and vote *en masse* for the BJP. The television coverage for the event showed Mr Modi being treated as if he was the God incarnate. It was a massive theatrical spectacle aimed at evoking awe and further ideological fervour in favour of the BJP.

However, the election results shattered all hopes, the BJP, aiming at a four hundred plus majority was barely able to get a measly 240 seats but managed to secure a bare majority with the help of its allies, of 292 seats to form a government with Mr Modi as the prime minister for a third term. The cruellest blow to them was the loss of the seat of Ayodhya as well as a poor showing from the entire state of Uttar Pradesh, the heart of the Hindi belt from which the BJP had drawn much of its support.

Shaken Faith and loss of Legitimacy

The 2024 election results have shown that a large number of people have lost faith in the ruling party, and although it has come back to power, it has had its wings clipped and has had to make many compromises with its allied parties. It is believed that during its next session, it will no longer be able to maintain the autocracy and impudence of its previous rule. To analyse what caused the setback to the Modi charisma, one needs to examine closely the people's concept of governance and their expectations of their ruler.

India has had an urban civilization with a hierarchical society from ancient times. The separation of the people and the ruler, *praja* and *raja*; is an accepted one, and has again prevailed for thousands of years to become a part of the indigenous world view. But the entire universe according to South Asian cosmology is ruled by the principles of *dharma* and *karma.* Some of the opinions of the people that I gathered in Delhi pointed to the bad karma and loss of dharma that has led to divine retribution for Mr Modi. A spectacular defeat for the party had been in the constituency of Ayodhya, where the Ram temple had been built with so much fanfare, but which did not vote for the party that built it. Some of the visuals that went around on social media, made the reasons clear. It was shown that a large number of old residential houses of ordinary people were being demolished to make way for the grand roads and fancy buildings that accompanied the making of the temple. The entire effort to convert a sleepy old town into a modern tourist centre, it seems had caused immense suffering to the local people, many of whom, mostly women, were captured on camera, giving vent to their resentment at being made homeless, and also losing livelihoods as their shops and other establishments had also been demolished. The BJP had lost much ground in its earlier bastion, Uttar Pradesh, that has the maximum seats for the Indian Parliament, because of what people felt was the heavy-handed rule of the BJP, especially its demolition drives, where large numbers of houses and business establishments had been demolished using bulldozers, in the name of "modernisation" and getting rid of "illegal" structures. Most saw it as political vindictiveness and a Hindu upper caste hostility against poor Dalits and Muslims, as they were more often than not the victims of demolition. The increasing insecurity being faced by the minorities and lower castes, in the face of what they feel was an upper caste Hindu supremacy, was reflected in the votes, much of it going to the Samajwadi Party that favours the local middle and lower-level caste groups as well as Muslims.

Just before the third round of elections, there had been a concentrated effort on part of the ruling regime to give a divine glory to their leader, sometimes even projecting him as, if not God, as an emissary of God. Yet, it was this very claim to divinity and the religious angle to politics that found maximum rejection from the people, of all faiths. As soon as the Ram temple was completed, at an enormous cost, the people on the streets were resentful. As one young boy, who is a dog-walker, remarked to me, "they could have done something for poor people like us instead, like

making a hospital". The very pomp and show and theatre of extravagance, did not go down well with the masses, struggling with rising inflation and shortage of most basic resources such as drinking water, affordable medical care, sufficient housing and other basic amenities.

In India, the state has always been personalized. No matter what the political structure is actually like, people think of the state as a person. The name "Sarkar", as also described by Mathur (2016), is a polysemic word, which means the person in charge as well as any institution that has power. People who are in power are referred to as "Sarkar", just as the entire state machinery is also referred to in the same manner, and also treated like a person. The people will, for example, say, "The Sarkar has demolished our houses", or "the Sarkar is not listening to us". The vast majority of Indian people have no idea of the actual administrative structure through which they are ruled but will apply the term Sarkar to all levels of power with which they come in contact. The Sarkar is therefore a sovereign who must take responsibility in the same way as the king or ruler was supposed to care for the people and most importantly take responsibility for them.

The ancient text of Manusmriti, widely regarded as the rule book from which Hindus draw the guidelines for performance of their dharma, has certain guidelines for the king. "According to Manusmriti (VII, 35), the kshatriya holds the next rank after the brahmanas and from the kshatriya hails the king who has been created to protect the varnas" (Chattopadhaya 2018: 62). Dharma does not refer to religion but to appropriate conduct, according to one's varna or station in life. The king is seen as a protector of everyone and not just of some. He is also not the supreme authority and must act in accordance with the advice of the brahmana, who are ritually superior to him. "Giving protection to the people was considered to be the most noteworthy function or karma of the kshatriyas" (ibid). Further the textual material tells us, "The bureaucracy was composed of the first two varnas and while the brahmins as counsellors framed state policy, the kshatriyas were vested with executive powers" (Chattopadhaya 2018: 63). No doubt these texts being written by brahmins gave the most superior status and role to themselves. But historically speaking, the Indian people had never idealized or tolerated an autocratic ruler. All successful kings, and regimes, even historically were of those kings who had counsellors, had a democratic set up and most importantly who *listened to the people*. The mythologically ideal king Rama, whose temple was to have symbolized Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation), is often evoked by politicians in India to serve as an ideal script for acceptable and legitimate governance. One of the most popular stories of the Ramayana tells us that Rama banished his queen, Sita, on hearing a low caste *dhobi* question her virtue. The story has been interpreted in many ways, certainly not appreciated by feminist scholars, yet the main lesson to be learnt by any ruler was that even the humblest voice in one's kingdom is not to be ignored. Such myths do not stop at Hindu scriptures but carry on to other rulers. There is a similar story about Jehangir, the Mogul emperor, who hung a large bell at the gate of his kingdom, which anyone with a grievance could ring and the emperor would listen. In a major film

made in the early part of the twentieth century, it was shown how he listened to a lowly washerwoman and was prepared to sacrifice his own life for the sake of justice.

Although these may be just stories, the very fact that they are narrated and appreciated indicates that the people expect the Sarkar (government) to be caring, and they should be able to communicate with the rulers on a personalized basis. The common word used for the ruler (or government) is "*Mai-Baap*"; our parents. The people expect that the government (Sarkar) will take care of them and take full responsibility in case of any exigencies. Similar expectations existed during the pandemic as well, and unlike in many other countries, the resistance against the vaccine was almost non-existent in India, people taking it as an order from the government, and something to be obeyed, like the command from one's parents. At the same time, if anything goes wrong, it is always the Sarkar who is to be blamed.

Who is Sarkar? How do people view the Government?

The people on the Indian continent and by extension in the entire South Asia are accustomed to being ruled by a variety of rulers of different ethnicity, religion and appearance. As already mentioned, the rulers are seen as belonging to the Varna of Kshatriya, a wide term that included both those who are ruling and anyone who can usurp power and assume the role of the ruler. In other words, it does not imply any specific category or person but is more representative of power. Scholars of Indian history have reiterated that in the past there have been several significant instances of people of various ethnicities and of caste ranking other than kshatriya having been credited with the kshatriya status, having assumed control over the state. Greek chieftains have ruled parts of Northern India in the past, Chandra Gupta Maurya is supposed to have risen from the rank of a pig herder to be the emperor of large parts of India; Shivaji, a Maratha warrior, likewise assumed the title of king and claimed kshatriya status (O'Hanlon 1997). The caste or jati ranking is now well known to have been dynamic and not, as earlier assumed, static and closed identities. Bayley (1999) has noted, and it is also common knowledge in India, that the East India Company, the British merchant company that assumed control over most of India, in the seventeenth century, was addressed as "Company Bahadur" or "John Company"; in both cases anthropomorphized into a person.

More importantly, for the masses, who have seen clans and communities come and go, the important aspect is not about "Who is ruling?", but "How they are being ruled?". In my childhood, which was a few years after the Independence of India from British rule, I have heard many people saying that "the British were better", or "the Sahibs had better sense of how to rule". These remarks were often made when these people had some grievance against the present government. It is also to be noted that most people had accepted British rule, unless there was some major issue that shook their faith in the rule. An interesting fact comes to light (Mitra 1912), from an inscription at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, about what people believed to be a divine phenomenon. The

inscription is in English.[4] One can read in this inscription the attribution of good rule to the British Crown and making them a party to the miracle that seemed to have happened, and which has been taken as a sign of divine blessings. A prominent Sikh place of worship, the Golden Temple, is paying homage to the British Crown and that too in the context of a divine miracle. This is indicative of the legitimacy and faith of the people, in the sovereign, and it is also indicative that the identity of the sovereign is not as important as the nature of its rule. This incident occurred at 4.30 a.m. on 30thth April 1877, about 20 years after the British took over India as their colony in 1857.

However, in the same place, Amritsar, on 13th April 1919, the Jalianwala Massacre took place that shook the entire British rule over India. On this day, a large crowd had gathered in a kind of park (*bagh*) to celebrate Baisakhi, a major Hindu festival in this region and to protest peacefully against the Rowlett Act[5] . General Reginald Dyer, then in charge of the Punjab, closed the only gate for exit/entry of this park and opened fire on a crowd of unarmed men, women and children, killing more than a thousand people. This incident shook the entire India and people otherwise sympathetic to the British Crown lost their faith in it. From this incident onwards, the

[4] "It should be generally known that a wonderful event took place lately in the Golden Temple. This building was erected by the great Guru Ram Dass, King of Kings, and incarnation of Ram who gives blessings and receives worship from all creatures. The following is an account of what occurred on the 30th of April 1877 at 4-30 A.M. About 400 persons, according to ancient custom, were praying in this Sri Durbar Sahib and listening to psalms whose music was almost drowned by the roar of thunder. Suddenly a flash of lightning fell from heaven and entered the holy place by the northern door close to the singers and musicians, A ball of fire of about two seers in weight burst in the temple shining with dazzling and terrible brightness. Then immediately after shining before the holy book it returned to the sky through the southern entrance and although it fell with such awful violence and so loud a report yet there was no injury caused to the Durbar Sahib or to human life. Therefore, all who were assembled joined in ascribing this miracle to Ram Dass, who dedicated this temple to Hari. !We think it is also a sign of the great prosperity of the British rule; also, we are thankful to the Empress of India; we pray to the Creator of all things for a daily increase in their happy influence and for the destruction of all the enemies of Her Imperial Majesty". The Government Inspector waited on the Commissioner and informed him of this remarkable event. The following gentlemen, viz., the Commissioner Rajah Surat Singh, Sardar General Gulab Singh Bhagowalia, Sardar Mangal Singh Ramgharia and all the worshipers agreed: -That money being collected by friends of the Golden Temple, half should be given towards the support of the sacred edifice and half to pay for a dinner to the poor. Sufficient money was gathered to pay for seven readings of the Granth Sahib and to feed some thousands of poor people who all expressed their gratitude. This notice is also intended as a memorial of the superintendence of Sardar Mangal Singh over the Sri Durbar Sahib of Hari and as a remembrance of the miracle of Guru Ram Dass and the prosperity of our Rulers which we pray may last to the end of time B. K." (Mitra 1912)

[5] The Rowlett Act prescribed that any Indian could be arrested by the British police, without having to give any justification.

Quit India movement gained ground. In other words, a government that was seen as legitimate in 1877 completely lost its credibility.

Collating the incidences of the present and the past, we see clearly that the legitimacy of the government in India is vested in its deeds and not in its identity. Therefore, the playing of the Hindu card by the BJP regime, did not work out for them. Most people were and are still interested in what the government is doing for their welfare and only a few include religion as part of their welfare. Most people who are religious see their religious activities as a direct communion with their deity, and the state is not seen as an entity (person) who should interfere with their religious/ritual activities. The government or state should be concerned with the welfare of its people, it has to take responsibility for feeding, clothing and sheltering.

Moving On in the Neo-Liberal Era

Even though in India a large number of people still think within the framework of the ancient sayings and mythology, the contemporary world has moved into an era of global markets and a neo-liberal economy. Moving beyond the rhetoric of Ram Rajya (the ancient conceptualization of an ideal state), Mr Modi also catered to the needs of the modern middle and upper-class people by declaring, just before the elections, that if his government came to power, the stock markets would boom! Such a statement had never been made before by any Indian candidate for a top political position as overtly, India has always declared itself as a socialist republic and all politicians declared the poor as overtly the target of their election agendas. By mentioning the stock market, Modi had made public what was always known covertly as his leanings towards the corporates and the market economy. In her book, *The Incarcerations: BK-16 and the search for Democracy* (2024), activist scholar Alpa Shah has revealed significant data about how the present regime is overtly criminalizing all activism that is seen as detrimental to the interests of the corporates as "anti-national". She has shown that all those who are taking the side of the marginalized, especially those ousted in the name of "development" and who are being made homeless and losing their livelihoods to fulfil corporate interests such as mining, making dams and building infrastructure like ports and roads. Although corporate interests had been protected and promoted by earlier regimes, the present is ruthless in its intolerance and the impunity with which it eliminates all dissent. In the case described by Shah, the government agents had used high-level technology, bought from USA based firms, to hack into the computers of activists and plant incriminating documents to make them appear as criminals and persecute them as such. A large number of intellectuals, university professors, journalists and writers are languishing in jail on trumped up, often planted charges.

The public support for the regime is divided in this respect. There are those who belong to the corporate groups and finance institutions whose interests are being protected, and they are all

out to support this government as legitimate and excellent. A case in point is the BJP winning all the seats in metropolitan Delhi while it lost in nearby smaller towns and villages.

In a telling article in a newspaper Saxena (2024) has written about the official apathy, corruption and lack of political help to do something for the ordinary people that has led to India been ranked low on the WGI (World Governance Indicators) that ranks 215 countries among which India has been ranked at the 68th position with a score of 48.9 out of 100. Without the help of any official statistics, most people on the ground are aware of their problems, such as rising unemployment, increasing impact of weather changes on the marginal populations and rampant corruption at the contact points of the government with the people. Again, as pointed out by Saxena, the concerted efforts of the government agencies are to counter the statements made by all intellectuals and think tanks and not to do anything to improve the situation. For example, the Principal Economic Advisor (PEA) to the Ministry of Finance, gave a retort to the WGI, challenging their ranking, by countering the, "negative commentary on India by think tanks, survey agencies and international media" (Saxena 2024:6) rather than showing any actual data on work being done by the government. In other words, even officially, the government gave a populist counter to the charges against them by their anti-intellectual stand.

What we refer to as "people" are also obviously internally divided. It is, however, the numerical majority, the ordinary people on the streets, with their daily struggles who are usually the ones to decide on the "ruler". An "empty signifier" (Laclau 1977) like nationalism, religion, or the building of a temple represents an effort by those in power to unite people across all real issues, like caste, class, livelihood, poverty and environment, and this is what most populist governments aim at doing. However, the actual conditions of existence sometimes become so pressing that the empty signifiers are revealed to be what they are, "empty"; and at this point of realization a hitherto popular government may lose its legitimacy.

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***Comments on the Paper Given at the Seminar* on** Thursday 9 November 2023
(in alphabetical order)

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I hope my contribution will add to the discussion, although I don't feel I have the expertise of literature on perceptions and constructions of governments. During the talk, I was wondering whether legitimacy would be discussed, and it was, but from my perception, only at the end. I understand that it was not the complete focus of the paper and presentation, but I wonder whether the construction of government as part of a "family" would not require a wider discussion on cultural construction of legitimacy of authority within actual families.

If I could possibly make it clearer, if we are viewing government as possibly benevolent, or wise (or at the contrary malevolent or unjust) parental figures, it would be interesting to understand how people of the culture we are analysing respond to actual parental figures when they are benevolent or unjust. In a family setting in India, how possible is it to resist a parental figure in what is considered dominant cultural practices? And what are the ways in which a parent can be held accountable for their (possibly perceived) mistakes?

If we could then translate this and connect it to modern forms of protests and analyse which are the main arguments that unite modern protest movements and what are the claims brought forward by these movements (I'm thinking about the more recent and wide scale strikes), could we then understand better this construction of government as being almost kin to their populations?

I hope my comments make sense (possibly, I come from too much of a criminological background but I hope I can contribute to the wider discussion).

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During the Covid-19 pandemic in Quebec, the state was observed taking on a paternal mantle similar to that described in Channa's article. Francois Legault, the premier of Quebec, became known for his "Papa Legault" delivery of daily updates and admonitions to follow the shifting regulations. As the social solidarity of the early phase of the pandemic waned, however, there was less carrot and more stick in the government's approach (there was more formal enforcement in the form of a curfew, etc.).

The questions arise: Did the state follow the same pattern in India, or did this association of the state with the paternal role continue throughout? What was the relationship to the formal enforcement of measures? According to the author's response, there is flexibility built into this parental role to embody of variety of emotions, which helps ensure its persistence and viability. This does raise another important question to consider: where does legitimacy fail?

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Channa addresses several interrelated questions about people's perception of the state and government and their roles, and the relationship between people and state institutions. I would encourage Channa to expand on the ramifications of the "personification" of the state, which raises interesting aspects for comparative analysis, especially on how such personification may differ from other ethnographic realities. For example, Channa explains that the legitimacy of state

institutions is linked to the actions of the person who occupies a specific institutional role, and the importance of normative values in granting legitimacy, which, we know, is not idiosyncratic of the Indian situation. Also, the metaphor of the state (or government) as a big family brings to mind other ethnographic realities. I am thinking, for instance, of the Albanian situation during the Communist dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. Although Hoxha saw the tribal links as particularly dangerous for his totalitarian regime, he was well aware of the importance of kin relations (at clan and brotherhood levels) in the Albanian culture and normative system. He used, therefore, the family metaphor to gain people's consensus, presenting the country as the "mother" land and himself at times as the "father" of the nation, at other times, as a benevolent "uncle". However, this tactic failed to foster legitimacy based on shared values.

Another aspect that I would encourage Channa to expand on is whether people relate to the state (and government) differently in times of crisis. It would be interesting to know more about people's reactions to the tracking system during Covid, and other forms of electronic/digital control more generally. For example, are people aware of the implications of such forms of control? Also, is electronic control leading to governing by algorithms, as it seems to be happening in other countries?

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This was a fascinating paper with very thoughtful theoretical-conceptual and empirical dimensions. Channa's account of people's understandings and expectations of government in urban Delhi was rich and detailed, and I found the notion of a moral universe of kinship vis-a-vis government/governance especially interesting. Alongside key questions around legitimacy, this assertion provides a strong underpinning to the paper's analysis. In listening to the paper, I thought about the performative aspects of parenting which have clear parallels in formal governance — with different emphases and inflections depending on the cultural setting. Furthermore, these performative aspects are clearly shaped by concerns about legitimacy. For example, many of the "on-stage" utterances of politicians are flatly contradicted by their actions in private, just as parents will act, talk and behave differently when away from the prying eyes of their children. In the event of any contradictions in their performances coming to light, parents and politicians alike will attempt to shore up their authority — and legitimacy— through variations on the injunction, "Do as I say, not as I do". I wonder whether using Goffman's frontstage vs backstage distinction in relation to kinship, legitimacy and governance as a performance, would be of use in analysing this intriguing case.