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# ***For a Lost Drachma: Contesting Hindutva Subjectivation in India's Universities***

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*Abstract:* The aim of this essay is to apply Michel Foucault's ideas on power and the practice of freedom to the context of India's increasingly neoliberalized higher education landscape. The essay revisits Foucault's notion of subjectivation to analyze the cultural politics of the Hindu Right, which, through organized violence and self-disciplinary mechanisms, has attempted to masculinize, privatize, saffronize, and brahmanicize the nation-state (and the public university), erase the othered body from the nation (and campus spaces), and shape how individuals understand themselves, their identities, and their modes of being in relation to savarna-capitalist power and knowledge. This essay will also suggest how universities in India, through transformative pedagogies, can foster, rather than inhibit, agentive, constructive, critical, and self-creating subjectivities that interrupt and transcend Hindutva neoliberal subjectivation.

*Keywords:* Foucault, subjectivation, cultural politics, Hindu politics, identity, savarna

The analytical crux of Foucault's seminal body of writings is that power is not unitary and uniform but rather operates through multiplicitous channels in a decentralized, diffused, ubiquitous, and pervasive manner, through subtle, surreptitious, and calculative punitive and disciplinary mechanisms. Modern power works to "incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it," the rise of which has led to a burgeoning of institutions tasked to handle bodies by means of normalization, examination, ordering,

and perpetual surveillance.<sup>1</sup> What Foucault described as the birth of the prison implies that modern societies are based on correctional and disciplinary techniques aimed at securing physical, although not necessarily violent, control over human bodies.<sup>2</sup> The objective of discipline is not to destroy the body, but to make the body a tool for continuous and efficient production. Instruments of such regulation facilitate industrialization and make life the object and subject of politics.<sup>3</sup>

Higher education is an especially productive site to make visible the complex socio-material, affective, and spatial relationships tied to the biopolitical governance of life. This is owing to higher education's central role in the molding of laboring bodies, human capital development, and the formation of citizenship. Universities hold a particular significance as institutions dedicated to critical thinking, intellectual development, and knowledge production, making them influential sites of subject formation. India is witnessing an organized attack on its public education under Narendra Modi.<sup>4</sup> India's universities are increasingly functioning as disciplinary machineries that correct, modify, train, and transform bodies to ensure their docility, profitability, and utility. These developments are linked to the growth of neoliberalism and new modes of self/discipline and governmentality, a shift from standardization toward flexibilization, and the decline of progressive-secular values associated with the Left in India.<sup>5</sup>

Foucault's toolkit can provide insight into how the Indian state machinery has mobilized and hegemonized education in service of national interests (by which I mean the interests of the capitalist savarna class).<sup>6</sup> The biopolitical project of Hindutva involves the promotion of a Hindu nationalist ideology that seeks to shape and govern various aspects of life in service of the big bourgeoisie and landowning class.<sup>7</sup> Through dividuating means of control,

<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York City: Pantheon Books, 1978), 136.

<sup>2</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Body Politic," *Economic and Political Weekly* 17, no. 30 (1982): 1194.

<sup>3</sup> Hazel Marie Vitales, "Foucault and Beyond: From Sovereignty Power to Contemporary Biopolitics," *Mabini Review* 9 (2020): 162.

<sup>4</sup> Janaki Srinivasan, "The Persuasions of Intolerance," *Economic and Political Weekly* 51, no. 17 (2016): 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ajay Gudavarthy, *India After Modi: Populism and the Right* (New York City: Bloomsbury, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Savarnas are people who fall within the caste system, particularly upper-castes, whereas avarnas are people who were historically excluded from the caste system, particularly outcasts and Dalits.

<sup>7</sup> Prakash Karat, "The Rise of Narendra Modi: A Joint Enterprise of Hindutva and Big Business," *The Marxist* 30, no. 1 (2014), 1–2.

Hindutva actors distinguish inner and outer threats to normality which, in this case, is the savarna, Hindu, heteropatriarchal, family-oriented way of life. Biopolitical theorizing is particularly useful for studying identities in flux in a country undergoing neoliberal transformation. Education has been the primary vehicle that linked neoliberalism with Hindutva and allowed it to permeate through Indian society.<sup>8</sup> A Foucauldian framework can render the complex architecture of brahmanical and neoliberal oppression in India – the hidden faces or networks of biopower – visible.

The first section of this essay puts forth a conceptual framework of subjection, as formulated by Foucault. An understanding of power as both subjugating and subjectivating is useful for understanding how Hindutva neoliberalization fashions the Indian subject, making them self-fashioning in turn. The second section of this essay explores how the biopolitical Hindu state uses knowledge and social apparatuses to promote Hindu cultural dominance and steamroll unruly bodies, knowledges, and desires. I investigate how the ruling regime has normalized, pathologized, and hierarchized difference in service of big business. This section speaks to Hindutva in the context of neoliberal development and the related apparatus of nation-making, mediated by issues of religion, caste, class, culture, and gender. I also explore how Modi's concept-image of *vikas* serves to advance the brahmanical neoliberal agenda by reproducing a social order which serves the interests of the dominant class.

The third section of this essay examines the Indian state's control of public universities, paralleling this with Foucault's depiction of power, technocratic control, and oppression. This section traces the civic and despotic governmentalities contouring Hindu nationalism in colleges and universities, deploying Foucault's ideas to understand how disciplinary power is exerted to curb critical inquiry, regulate learning, manage the behavior of free citizens, punish difference, and ultimately serve capitalist interests. I illustrate how the Hindu Right has mandated tactics of prohibition and permission, including the policing of student bodies and scholarship through blasphemy laws, anti-terrorism laws, and colonial-era sedition laws, as well as through the beating, assault, detention, and jailing of dissident students and professors. I also explore how Hindutva discourses obscure neoliberalism's differential impact on non-savarna, casted, and gendered populations, while simultaneously casting student protests as divisive.

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<sup>8</sup> Marie Lall and Kusha Anand, *Bridging Neoliberalism and Hindu Nationalism The Role of Education in Bringing about Contemporary India* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), 125–126.

The final section of this essay uses Foucault's thoughts on working upon the self as a 'practice of freedom' to suggest how universities in India can foster, rather than inhibit, agentic, authentic, constructive, critical, emancipatory, and self-creating subjectivities that interrupt and transcend brahmanical capitalist subjectivation. In pursuit of alternatives to a pervasive savarna neoliberal mainstream, this section gestures toward an affirmative or positive biopolitics, one that is not oppressive and exclusionary but rather nurturing and inclusionary. In order to envision new conceptions of life, learning, and subjecthood, this section highlights several concepts associated with decolonial, Dalit, Queer, feminist, and Subaltern pedagogies, arguing for a radical re-appropriation of subjectivities in Indian higher education.

### ***Power/Knowledge Regimes of Subjectivation***

In his final years, Foucault directed his studies towards understanding the processes through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects within specific discourses, power relations, and social contexts. He became increasingly inclined to pay attention to the relation to oneself and to the techniques through which those relations have been shaped.<sup>9</sup> He stressed that power both subjugates and subjectivates, implying that subjectivity involves a reinforcement and subversion of structures of power. "There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to."<sup>10</sup> This idea is similar to Butler's argument that power "not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject."<sup>11</sup> The question of the processes of self/subjectivation was a kernel of Foucault's examinations of power.<sup>12</sup>

In his later work, Foucault examined the relationship between freedom and ethics, tracing the possibilities for working upon the self as a 'practice of freedom.' Foucault reminded that freedom is not a state but an ongoing practice, as each liberation opens up possibilities for fresh power dynamics.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Culture of the Self" (lecture, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, 1983), YouTube, 1:05:23, <https://youtu.be/aZZYlpfZ-iA>.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (Summer, 1982): 781, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197>.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 84.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 777.

He said, “God has confided us to ourselves, giving us, by this means, the possibility and the duty of being free.”<sup>13</sup> “If we are acted upon most effectively by power relations internal to our own sense of ourselves,” then the resistance to power must take the form ultimately of an unprecedented and “anarchic form of self-repudiation.”<sup>14</sup> The notion of subjectivation highlights the complex interplay between power, knowledge, and individual agency in the formation of subjectivities within specific social and historical contexts, and is conceptually useful for analyzing the process by which subjectivity is constituted as depth and also an available object of knowledge, care, and mastery by practices of self and others.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Brahmanical Neoliberal Biopolitics***

#### ***Hindutva biopolitics.***

Hindutva (which loosely translates to Hindu-ness), is a political ideology encompassing the cultural *raison d'être* of Hindu nationalism. To many Hindus, Hindutva signifies *sanatan dharma* and pride (ranging from nativistic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and brahmanical, to political, and national pride). However, for its critics and detractors, Hindutva has been described as a variant of right-wing extremism, a virulent ideology stoked during colonial India through contact with Italian fascist and German Nazi influences.<sup>16</sup> Hindutva actors played a central role in the violence of nation-building, the streamlining of ‘post’-colonial national identity, and the construction of a majoritarian culture in India.<sup>17</sup> Hindutva was aided by the state as it operated as legatee to its imperial colonizer to engage in a biopolitics of brahmanical naturalization and hegemonization.<sup>18</sup> Savarna-capitalist logic guided the nation’s development, establishing a narrative of nationalism privileging a neo/brahmanical worldview.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, “The Culture of the Self,” 23:00–23:08.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, “The Culture of the Self,” 1:04–1:1:26.

<sup>15</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Eviane Leidig, “Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 54, no. 3 (2020): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2020.1759861>.

<sup>17</sup> Leidig, “Hindutva as a Variant of Right-Wing Extremism.”

<sup>18</sup> Angana P. Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Chinnaiyah Jangam, *Dalits and the Making of Modern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

It was after the election of Modi in 2014 that Hindutva was mainstreamed, modernized, and weaponized, becoming harnessed as a tool to purge or reign in threats to the body politic. The Modi government usurped nationalism and transfigured it into Hindutva nationalism, using communalism (a divide-and-rule tool of the Raj) to segregate people based on their identities, question their loyalties, and enforce a hegemonic order.<sup>20</sup> For Foucault, modern power relations target the behavior of individuals and the biological phenomena of populations in order to subject, modify, and direct people's conduct according to a given system of norms, and Modi steered India towards "one race, one people, one language, one religion, one culture, one hope, and one nation," perpetuating cultural monolithicization.<sup>21</sup> Hindutva is, thus, "a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them."<sup>22</sup> While India is not a nation of Hindus only, Hinduism can be hegemonically read as synonymous to India.<sup>23</sup>

In a Foucaultian sense, the strength and purity of one caste or community demands the demise of another, which explains why the Hindu state, by marking certain bodies as internal threats "to the population and for the population,"<sup>24</sup> has carried out deaths (e.g., the execution of Burhan Wani) and 'political deaths' (e.g., the arrest of academic scholar Abdul Aala Fazili) to maintain hegemony. Such a configuration of life and death allows Hindu savarna capitalists to flourish and 'Others' to become subject to "the murderous function of the State."<sup>25</sup> Hindutva governmentality is the art of the conduct of conduct, calibrating conduct to normativity. Individuals are constructed variously according to their social location as bodies to be protected, discarded, exploited, placed under surveillance, morally and socially policed,

<sup>20</sup> Njoki N. Wane and Sarah Alam, "Beyond Integration of Indigenous or Tribal and Ethnic Minorities: A Case of India and Pakistan," in *Decolonizing and Indigenizing Visions of Educational Leadership*, eds. Njoki N. Wane, Kimberly L. Todd, Coly Chau, and Heather Watts (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2022), 175–191, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83982-468-520221011>.

<sup>21</sup> Amalendu Misra, "Hindu Nationalism and Muslim Minority Rights in India," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 7, no. 1 (2000): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718110020907873>.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 136.

<sup>23</sup> Nishant Upadhyay and Sandeep Bakshi, "Translating Queer: Reading Caste, Decolonizing Praxis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation, Feminism and Gender*, eds. Luise von Flotow and Hala Kamal (London: Routledge, 2020), 338, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315158938>.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 256.

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 256.

or targeted by organized and state-sponsored violence.<sup>26</sup> Intellectuals, environmentalists, and human rights advocates who contest capitalist or populist oppression regularly face crackdowns.<sup>27</sup>

In order to ensure capitalist security and normalize state surveillance, Hindutva actors have re/formulated the binary of national and ‘anti-national,’ the normal and pathological, establishing regimes of disciplinary practices devoted to the attainment of normative Indianness in order to cement Hindu savarna rule as both a form of sovereignty and governmentality. The projection of the ‘anti-Indian’ (all persons, labors, thoughts, and behaviors outside of ‘Indian’) provides Hindutva actors, including journalists and university administrators, with a mirror or counter-image according to which cultural normality can be oppositionally defined, the borders between ‘Indian’ and ‘anti-Indian’ drawn and policed, and the work of internal management and purification motivated. Whereas in the earlier days, actions were either permitted or prohibited, Modi’s *dispositif* (which includes Hindutva institutions, ideologies, laws, religious and cultural values, etc.) has established “a bandwidth of the acceptable that must not be exceeded.”<sup>28</sup>

The construction of Muslims and Christians as existential internal and external threats is perpetuated through discourses such as Muslims being [un]‘peaceful’ and Christians traitors. Religious minorities, like the Yavanas of the past, have been cast in the role of agents bent on disrupting existing hierarchical structures that ensure savarna privilege and power.<sup>29</sup> Foucault connected biopower to race, positing that racism was fundamental to the operation of the state, and we can extend Foucault’s analysis to caste/religion to understand Hindutva’s mechanisms for “a way of establishing a biological-type caesura within [the] population.”<sup>30</sup> Hindutva biopower “operates through and produces thresholds that render legible some populations while occluding (or rendering as non-populations) certain others” and

<sup>26</sup> Kalpana Wilson, Jennifer Ung Loh, and Navtej Purewal, “Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India,” *Feminist Review* 119, (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-018-0109-8>.

<sup>27</sup> Sumit Ganguly, “An Illiberal India?,” *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 1 (2020): 194, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0016>; Sumit Ganguly, “India Under Modi: Threats to Pluralism,” 84.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans., Graham Burchell (London: Picador, 2009), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Zaheer Baber, “‘Race,’ Religion and Riots: The ‘Racialization’ of Communal Identity and Conflict in India,” *Sociology* 38, no. 4 (2004): 705, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038504045860>.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.



relegating the latter to the status of “bare life.”<sup>31</sup> National identity-formation necessarily implies disciplinary practices of controlling and regulating human lives as a precondition for aggregating a population into a collective body.<sup>32</sup>

While Hindutva actors and state-based mechanisms – such as the Modi government’s controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) – are very often biopolitical, non-state institutions – including private colleges, businesses, and corporate media firms – can also be informed by a biopolitical rationality of fostering or disallowing life. For example, the news channel Republic TV popularized the term ‘*tukde tukde* gang,’ during a campus sedition row in 2016, where students raised slogans against Hindutva jingoism, militarism, and state-sanctioned brutalities in Kashmir. BJP-leaning news anchors spun malicious tales about left-leaning students to whip up public frenzy and cast dissenters as ‘anti-nationals’ seeking to break the nation.<sup>33</sup> The term ‘*tukde tukde*’ was picked up by Hindutva politicians, including Modi, to conflate anti-BJP with anti-India and puppeteer mechanisms of biopower that normalize subjugation, assimilation, and saffronization (i.e., “the reinterpretation of history, with an emphasis on Hindu cultural values”<sup>34</sup>).

I would also like to draw attention to something largely missing in scholarship on Hindutva: an examination of Hindutva, not on the level of the Hindu state and its actors, but the day-to-day minutiae of Indian subjects, and here I draw upon Foucault’s idea of the “reflected and voluntary practices by which men not only fix rules of conduct for themselves but seek to transform themselves.” Hindutva subjectivation shapes how Indians understand themselves, their identities, and their modes of being in relation to the Hindu nationalist power and knowledge that shape their existence. Consider, for example, the normalization of performative patriotism, exemplified through

<sup>31</sup> Seb Franklin, “Periodising (with) Control,” in *Control Culture: Foucault and Deleuze after Discipline*, ed. Frida Beckman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 49.

<sup>32</sup> Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, “Biopolitics and National Identities: Between Liberalism and Totalization,” *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 1 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2016.1225705>.

<sup>33</sup> Rajeev Gowda, “What would Gandhi say about the Indian Media?” *The Hindu*, October 2, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/what-would-gandhi-say-about-the-indian-media/article29568704.ece>.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Usha D’Silva, “Globalization, Religious Strife, and the Media in India,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 14, no. 3 (2005): 59.

mass calls to boycott ‘anti-national’ brands,<sup>35</sup> Bollywood,<sup>36</sup> and the film of an actor who displayed solidarity with protesting students.<sup>37</sup> Indians thus become active participants in their own subjection by adopting and internalizing the discourses, values, and modes of conduct prescribed within Hindutva’s social and cultural framework.

### ***Neoliberal biopolitics.***

In a neoliberal society, the directions of biopower formulate themselves to the logic of capital. Since the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-led economic reforms of the early 1990s, the Indian state has engineered a redistribution of income and assets in favor of finance capital and big business, mobilizing oppressive gender and caste ideologies in service of liberalization, privatization, and globalization.<sup>38</sup> At the outset, Hindutva and neoliberalism appear conflicting and contradictory, but a careful analysis reveals that the two forces serve the same agenda: capital accumulation in the hands of the ruling class. Hindutva and neoliberalism in India share deep, common political goals, and should be understood not simply as ideologies or policy packages but as hegemonic political projects that represent common class interests.<sup>39</sup> With Modi anointed as the preferred candidate of corporate capital, the BJP has melded cultural conservatism and economic liberalism through a paternalist political rationality.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Amarnath Amarasingam, Sanobar Umar, and Shweta Desai, “Fight, Die, and If Required Kill”: Hindu Nationalism, Misinformation, and Islamophobia in India,” *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 380, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050380>.

<sup>36</sup> Upma Gautam and Priya Das, “Twitter-generated Moral Panic and Its Effect on Pretrial Incarceration/ Bail: Contextualizing the Tale of ‘Folk Devil’ Aryan Khan,” *Journal of Victimology and Victim Justice* 6, no. 1 (2023), 108–124, <https://doi.org/10.1177/25166069231160433>.

<sup>37</sup> Shilpa Jamkhandikar, “Deepika Padukone Backs Protesting Students in Delhi, Faces Boycott Calls,” *Reuters*, January 8, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-student-protests-idINKBN1Z71D8>.

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, Loh, and Purewal, “Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India,” 1; Sanjay Ruparelia, “‘Minimum Government, Maximum Governance’: The Restructuring of Power in Modi’s India,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 28, no. 4 (2016): 755, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.1089974>.

<sup>39</sup> Shankar Gopalakrishnan, “Defining, Constructing and Policing a ‘New India’: Relationship between Neoliberalism and Hindutva,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 26 (2006): 2803.

<sup>40</sup> Priya Chacko, “Disciplining India: Paternalism, neo-liberalism and Hindutva Civilizationalism,” *International Affairs* 99, no. 2 (2023): 551–565, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia029>.

India, under Modi, is witnessing greater moves toward deregulation and strong austerity measures to significantly reduce public spending, with major shifts toward the privatization of the public sphere, including a change to a market-oriented model of higher education. Hindutva actors have deployed the concept-image of *vikas* to link Hindutva to neoliberalism and translate Hindutva as a vehicle for '*sabka vikas*,' which ironically translates to 'development for all.' This *vikas* is constituted and defined hegemonically as apolitical technocracy, and fueled and supported by global capital.<sup>41</sup> Hindutva development, then, comes to be defined by Hindutva nationalist terms and serves to advance the brahmanical neoliberal agenda by reproducing a social order which serves the interests of the dominant class. Modi's neoliberal growth strategy has entailed the extension and intensification of forms of caste, class, and gendered violence that were already deeply embedded in India's social and economic structures.<sup>42</sup>

Hindutva's convergence with neoliberal logics and its focus on the expansion and efficiency of life in service of the interests of the ruling class has resulted in increased moral and social policing.<sup>43</sup> Only certain identities and forms of labor are permissible in an envisioned Bharat, and deviant identities, deviant labor, deviant scholarship, and deviant love (e.g., lesbian or interfaith love) are punished. Women's sexual autonomy is violently targeted and controlled, Hindu women who are in consensual relationships with Muslim men are incarcerated, harassed, and blackmailed (through myths of 'love jihad'), and patriarchal, caste-supremacist institutions (such as *khap panchayats*) are sanctioned by the state.<sup>44</sup> These trends are occurring alongside and inextricably linked to a rising tide of attacks on religious minorities and Dalits by Hindu far-right militias, vigilante groups, and mobs promoted and legitimized by the state.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Madhavi Murty, *Stories That Bind: Political Economy and Culture in New India* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 48.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, Loh, and Purewal, "Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India," 2.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, Loh, and Purewal, "Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India," 3.

<sup>44</sup> Anurakti Sharma, "Caught on Cam: Muslim Youth Beaten in Surat College over 'Love Jihad' Allegations," *Times Now*, November 24, 2022, <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/caught-on-cam-muslim-youth-beaten-in-surat-college-over-love-jihad-allegations-article-95743334>.

<sup>45</sup> Irfan Ahmad and Peter van der Veer, "Muslim Bare Life in Contemporary India," in *The Nation Form in the Global Age: Ethnographic Perspectives*, eds., Irfan Ahmad and Jie Kang (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 135–138, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85580-2\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85580-2_5).

The neoliberal state's instrumentalisation of gendered, communalized, and classed surveillance and straitjacketing reveals that the Hindu nation has a deep hostility toward minority autonomy as a threat to neoliberal *vikas*. Within Hindutva, Islamophobia, brahmanical supremacy, and patriarchal values are intertwined with a commitment to supporting the interests of corporate capital.<sup>46</sup> While market logics do not always overtly operate against the interests of Muslims, women, Dalits, and other minorities, neoliberalism reinforces existing structural relationships of power and reinscribes patriarchal and brahmanical social norms. Modi's government has promised that India's moves to open up the economy to globalization will usher in modernity and empower minorities.<sup>47</sup> The state is thus discursively framing progress in neoliberal terms and mobilizing *vikas* for the Hindutva class project. The ability of the government to persuade the public that the economy is doing well serves the neoliberal agenda by taming the resentment of the poor and enabling concentration of wealth.<sup>48</sup>

Disempowered, fungible proletarians – a sizeable population of whom are Dalits, factory workers, farmers, migrant laborers, and other subaltern minorities – are expected to pull themselves by their bootstraps without causing trouble and conform to end-driven, market-like standards of productivity and usefulness in service of their capitalist overlords, or become discarded as dispensable. Neoliberal biopower 'governs at a distance' by shaping its subjects' conduct, constituting subjects as both free and responsible individuals who voluntarily conduct themselves in accordance with prescribed norms.<sup>49</sup> These strategies also indicate that Hindutva, merging with neoliberalism, has evolved from deploying "sovereign rationality and discipline to infinite flexibility as a new form of enslavement."<sup>50</sup> India's accentuated punitive functions, the criminalization and demonization of marginalized populations, and the

<sup>46</sup> Wilson, Loh, and Purewal, "Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India," 3.

<sup>47</sup> Kavita Krishnan, "Gendered Discipline in Globalising India," *Feminist Review* 119, (2018): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-018-0119-6>.

<sup>48</sup> Jayati Ghosh, "Hindutva, Economic Neoliberalism and the Abuse of Economic Statistics in India," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 24/25, (2020), 7, <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.6882>.

<sup>49</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 49–50.

<sup>50</sup> Carin Franzén, "Subjects of Sovereign Control and the Art of Critique in the Early Modern Period," in *Control Culture: Foucault and Deleuze after Discipline*, ed. Frida Beckman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 65, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474436779-007>.

targeted mobilization of moral panics characterize the governmentality of the Hindu neoliberal state.<sup>51</sup>

Hindutva maintains the subordination of Dalit, indigenous, and gender-minoritized bodies through a veil of freedom, self-determination, choice, and ‘rights’-based liberal discourses – hinged on the nationalist, ‘post’-colonial premise that India is a ‘free’ nation, and on the post-feminist, post-caste, capitalist premise that the ‘free’ market is freedom-granting. To prevent ‘lower’ castes from rebelling against a status quo that historically dehumanized them, decentered their lifeworlds, and profited from their uncompensated labors, Hindutva has attempted to bring Dalits into the Hindu fold and turn them against the Muslim ‘Other’ through promises of a ‘casteless’ modern Bharat. A recent example of such pandering was Modi’s effort to construct the Dalit Sant Ravidas as a bulwark against the Mughal ‘Other.’<sup>52</sup> The neoliberal subject is thus re/fashioned to win consent for a hegemonic project. Hindutva and nationalism are potent political discourses, independently, but by weaving them together with capitalist development, Modi has bound them into a formidable arsenal of his political offensive.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Hindutva Neoliberal Subjectivation in the Indian University***

The Hindutva neoliberal project is insidious, because while learning is re-designed to build public consent for free market reforms, the real motive is likely to ensure a steady flow of skilled human labor to the market; to produce “docile bodies” which can be “subjected, used, transformed, and improved.”<sup>54</sup> In 2000, the Ambani-Birla report recommended the removal of the subsidized system of higher education and its conversion into a controlled profitable market.<sup>55</sup> The report emphasized a market-oriented education system, one that produces human resources in accordance with the requirements of the market and “transforms higher education institutions to factory

<sup>51</sup> Wilson, Loh, and Purewal, “Gender, Violence and the Neoliberal State in India,” 1.

<sup>52</sup> Anand Mohan J, “As BJP seeks Dalit votes in MP, Modi hails Ravidas, says ‘held firm’ under Mughals,” *Indian Express*, August 14, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/political-pulse/bjp-dalit-votes-mp-modi-hails-ravidas-held-firm-mughals-8889893>.

<sup>53</sup> Suhas Palshikar, “India’s Second Dominant Party System,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 52, no. 12 (2017): 12.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, ed., Alan Shendan (New York City: Vintage, 1995), 136.

<sup>55</sup> Sandip Sengupta and Swami Divyagunananda, “Neo-liberal Capitalism in Indian Education System: A Critical Analysis,” *Palarch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology* 17, no. 9 (2020): 7261.

sheds producing reproducible skills, instead of promoting critical thinking that would influence social and political outcomes.”<sup>56</sup> Under the influence of this report, the University Grants Commission (UGC), a statutory body charged with coordinating, determining, and maintaining standards of higher education in India, recommended the restructuring of higher education into market-oriented enterprises promoting corporate values.<sup>57</sup>

Modi has repositioned the role of India’s higher education as a technology of government that facilitates “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production”<sup>58</sup> and mobilizes populations to serve the demands of the knowledge economy. The Indian university is becoming less a space for intellectual fervor and constructive debate, and more a skills factory for the technocratic workplaces owned by transnational capital.<sup>59</sup> Education is taking the form of techno-scientific-managerial information, a mere skill to be imparted for the creation of a skillful human resource required for knowledge service, industry, and market.<sup>60</sup> Higher education is being reduced to ‘hired’ education, an instrument to produce knowledge that can be used to produce a cheap skilled workforce to compete with other labor markets (such as China) and serve corporations and multinationals in the emerging Indian economy.<sup>61</sup> Neoliberal higher education thus functions as a Hindutva biopolitical project to serve the elite.<sup>62</sup>

Students are subjectivated to internalize the view of education’s purpose as a means to gain wealth rather than develop meaningful philosophies or challenge oppressions.<sup>63</sup> The increasing role of market rationality in

<sup>56</sup> Debashis Biswas, “Neo-liberal Reforms in Higher Education Accelerated by the Pandemic,” *Economic & Political Weekly* 55, no. 39 (2020): 44.

<sup>57</sup> Biswas, “Neo-liberal Reforms in Higher Education Accelerated by the Pandemic,” 44.

<sup>58</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 141.

<sup>59</sup> Mohan J. Dutta, “As Indian Universities Go Neoliberal, Protests by Students Offer a Ray of Hope,” *The Wire*, May 7, 2016, <https://thewire.in/education/amid-neoliberalisation-of-indian-universities-protests-by-students-is-a-ray-of-hope>.

<sup>60</sup> Dhiren Kumar Sahoo, “Educational Crisis, Critical Pedagogy and Alternative Institutions of Higher Learning in India: Some Visions and Possibilities,” *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 7, no. 8 (2017): 355–371.

<sup>61</sup> Preeti Oza, “Neo-liberal Ideologies in Higher Education,” in *Higher v/s Hired Education*, eds. Gurudutta P. Japee and Preeti Oza (New Delhi: Education Publishing, 2018), 44.

<sup>62</sup> Angela Martin, “Please Mind The Gap: Winners and Losers of Neoliberalism in India,” *E-International Relations*, March 11, 2017, <https://www.e-ir.info/2017/03/11/please-mind-the-gap-winners-and-losers-of-neoliberalism-in-india>.

<sup>63</sup> Julie Vardhan, “Shift to Market Orientation? The Changing Trend of the Higher Education Sector in India,” in *The Marketisation of Higher Education, Concepts,*

knowledge production causes a vicious cycle: it damages the social conception of citizenship, impoverishing certain social classes as it breeds inequality and displacement.<sup>64</sup> The growing material inequality, in turn, further hampers the idea of social citizenship, thereby leading to more exclusivity.<sup>65</sup> Hindutva's subjectivating techniques affect "the meaning [students] give to their own behavior,"<sup>66</sup> causing students to not only 'other' individuals, groups, and knowledges different from them and their thinking, but also to self-other aspects of themselves (i.e., their skills, labors, desires, and bodily properties) that do not conform to the norm of the 'rational,' 'patriotic,' industrious, able-bodied, pliant, 'Indian' (i.e., to discard neurodivergent, curious, critical, nonbinary, and non-normative aspects of themselves).

The Modi government is shaping universities into intensely standardized, controlled, and metric-driven spaces that prioritize efficiency and marketization over education's traditional values and social goals, and student subjectivities are being reconstituted as self-responsibilizing, entrepreneurial, individualistic, risk-taking, and hyper-productive. These actions concretize Foucault's view that disciplinary power targets human bodies as objects to be manipulated and trained. This reality brings to mind the notion of 'disciplinary neoliberalism,' which operates through two interrelated, reinforcing faces of power.<sup>67</sup> The first operates at a macro/transnational level and is associated with the structural power of capital to impose discipline on public institutions and to make governments accountable to markets. The other operates at a micro/local level, as a form of behavior power that controls and disciplines individuals through capitalist norms and practices that pervade the *gestes répétés* of everyday life.<sup>68</sup>

These trends have been accompanied by the tightening of controls over universities through politically appointed vice chancellors, philosophically impoverished techno-managers, new technologies of surveillance, and a

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*Cases, and Criticisms*, eds. John D. Branch and Bryan Christiansen (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 197, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67441-0\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67441-0_9).

<sup>64</sup> V. Bijukumar, "Interrogating Neoliberal Market Rationality and the Exclusivity of Higher Education," in *Critical Sites of Inclusion in India's Higher Education*, ed. Papia Sengupta (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 21, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8256-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8256-8_2).

<sup>65</sup> Bijukumar, "Interrogating Neoliberal Market Rationality," 21.

<sup>66</sup> Foucault, "Culture of the Self," 15:15.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism," *Millennium* 24, no. 3 (1995): 399, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298950240030801>.

<sup>68</sup> Gill, "Globalisation, Market Civilisation, and Disciplinary Neoliberalism," 399.



militaristic notion of discipline and punishment.<sup>69</sup> Neoliberal biopower entails “the seamless evacuation of political resistance” through “the technical integration of the brain into capitalist systems of circulation.”<sup>70</sup> Institutional autonomy is eroded through the appointment of unqualified Sangh Parivar and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) ideologues at the helm of universities and research institutions, who discipline students and lecturers who disagree with the ruling ideology.<sup>71</sup> These pliant and prejudiced vice-chancellors and their sycophantic aides and advisors use repression and intimidation to manage dissent,<sup>72</sup> emboldened to mold the university into an instrumentalist assembly line of well-calibrated workers serving as monotonous robots for the transnational workplace.<sup>73</sup>

Academic unfreedom and government repression of faculty has increased dramatically since Modi’s rise to power, and lecturers, including international faculty teaching in branch campuses in India, are pressured to tow Hindutva’s ideological line by refraining from presenting an uncomplimentary image of brahmanism, Hinduism, or India.<sup>74</sup> Lackey administrators have clamped down on campus protests, aiding the Hindu state in delegitimizing students’ and professors’ demands against corporatization and saffronization.<sup>75</sup> While Modi’s government was democratically elected, it has “exercised power against young students [...] through methods usually deployed against the

<sup>69</sup> Avijit Pathak, “The Threat to the Idea of a Public University,” *The Hindu*, November 20, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-threat-to-the-idea-of-a-public-university/article62108904.ece>; Pradeep Sharma, “RSS Ideologue Heads State Higher Education Council,” *The Tribune*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/haryana/rss-ideologue-heads-state-higher-education-council-743828>.

<sup>70</sup> Neel Ahuja, “Post-Mortem on Race and Control,” in *Control Culture Foucault and Deleuze after Discipline*, ed. Frida Beckman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 37, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474436779-005>.

<sup>71</sup> Rohini Hensman, “The Labour Movement in an Increasingly Authoritarian Hindu Nationalist State,” *Global Labour Journal* 8, no. 2 (2017): 176, <https://doi.org/10.15173/glj.v8i2.3221>.

<sup>72</sup> Mohammad Sajjad, “Why Students’ Unions at Universities Must Not be Curbed,” *Rediff*, July 4, 2016, <https://www.rediff.com/news/column/why-students-unions-at-universities-must-not-be-curbed/20160704.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Dutta, “As Indian Universities Go Neoliberal.”

<sup>74</sup> Vinayak Chaturvedi and Mark Levine, “University Campuses in India Will Be a Tool in the Hands of Hindu Nationalists,” *Jacobin*, March 31, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2023/03/india-university-academic-freedom-india-hindu-nationalism-israel-repression>.

<sup>75</sup> Nileena MS, “How University Administrations are Silencing Anti-CAA Protests on Campuses,” *The Caravan*, January 31, 2020, <https://caravanmagazine.in/education/anti-caa-student-protests-universities-ban-srcc-iit>.



dispossessed Other: the Palestinian, the terrorist, the refugee.”<sup>76</sup> Hindutva control, in order to maintain brahmanical power, relies on difference, (e.g., citizen versus Bangladeshi/Rohingya illegal immigrant), bringing to mind Deleuze’s notion of the ‘dividual,’ an individual mapped in terms of universalized, discrete predicates.<sup>77</sup>

The state, under neoliberal economic dictates, has also resorted to disempowering student unions, banning student clubs critical of the government, and curbing youth movements, such as Marxist movements.<sup>78</sup> The Ambani-Birla report explicitly recommended banning political activities at higher education institutions, another planned effort to detach these institutions from social tensions.<sup>79</sup> The securitization of dissent is a kernel of Hindutva’s restrictions of rights and liberties, with the reconfiguration of education playing a crucial role in achieving Hindutva state control over individual liberties.<sup>80</sup> After a top court upheld a government order barring the wearing of the hijab in schools and colleges in March, 2022, students marched against fascism, standing up to the state and contesting hegemonic Hindu masculinity and majoritarianism.<sup>81</sup>

On public university campuses like Jamia Millia Islamia, Jadavpur University (JU), and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), some of the last remaining bastions of critical thought, the intensification of privatization, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism has exacerbated student insurgency.<sup>82</sup> For instance, when JNU’s administration hiked fees in 2019, students took to the streets

<sup>76</sup> Rosinka Chaudhuri, “Song, Protest, the University, and the Nation: Delhi, 2016,” *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 76, (2018): 203, <http://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2018.76.014>.

<sup>77</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59, (Winter, 1992): 5. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/778828>.

<sup>78</sup> Kusha Anand and Laraib Niaz, “The Precarious State of Academic Freedom in Higher Education: The Case of India and Pakistan,” in *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, ed. Ralph W. Hood and Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 281, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004505315\\_016](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004505315_016).

<sup>79</sup> Biswas, “Neo-liberal Reforms in Higher Education Accelerated by the Pandemic,” 44.

<sup>80</sup> Nitasha Kaul, “Dissent and Democracy in Contemporary India: Visions of Education, Versions of Citizenship, and Variants of Jihad,” *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy and Civil Society* 7, no. 1 (2023): 24.

<sup>81</sup> Sameer Yasir, “Indian Court Upholds Ban on Hijabs in Schools,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/15/world/asia/india-hijab-ban-schools.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Nisha Thapliyal, “(No) Right to Protest? Student Activism at Public Universities in the Modi Era,” in *When Students Protest: Universities in the Global South*, ed. Judith Bessant and Analicia Mejia Mesinas (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 89.

in a civil resistance movement that came to be known as #FeeMustFall, as they believed the fee hike cut off access to higher education for deprived students.<sup>83</sup> In the wake of the suicide of Dalit postgraduate student Rohith Vemula, protests swept across India's campuses.<sup>84</sup> A bright student brimming with dreams, Vemula took his life on account of atrocities inflicted upon him because of his Dalit identity. Drawing attention to society's divduating practices, Vemula wrote in his suicide letter that "never was a man treated as a mind [...] the value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a vote. To a number."<sup>85</sup>

In response to student protests, the state has normalized and legitimized the use of extraordinary powers to criminalize, terrorize, and suppress campus activism through means such as brute force by police and political vigilantes, sedition and anti-terrorism laws, arrests, and a solidification of the surveillance state. For instance, following campus mobilizations against the CAA and NRC in 2016, the police used lathi charge, tear gas shelling, stun grenades, and water-cannon sprays to demobilize and demoralize students.<sup>86</sup> Kanhaiya Kumar, a JNU student leader, was arrested on sedition charges following a speech he gave that year.<sup>87</sup> His arrest was made under the pretext of anti-national sloganeering during a public demonstration held on a Kashmiri militant's execution by the state.<sup>88</sup> Seven students belonging to a theater group were also detained and interrogated, allegedly because they 'looked like' anti-nationals.<sup>89</sup>

During the infamous 2019 Jamia Millia Islamia attack, police stormed a minority educational institution and brutally assaulted hundreds of protesting students. The BJP appealed to recurring themes of 'jihadis,' 'urban Naxals,

<sup>83</sup> Mayank Mishra, "Contesting Spaces and Civil Resistance Movements: A Case Study on India's #FeesMustFall Movement," *Power and Education* 0, no. 0 (2023): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17577438221146650>.

<sup>84</sup> Rosinka Chaudhuri, "Song, Protest, the University, and the Nation," 197.

<sup>85</sup> Rohith Vemula, "My Birth is My Fatal Accident," *Outlook India*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/my-birth-is-my-fatal-accident/296429>.

<sup>86</sup> Michelguglielmo Torri, "India 2019: Assaulting the World's Largest Democracy; Building a Kingdom of Cruelty and Fear," *Asia Maior* XXX, (2019): 382–383.

<sup>87</sup> Sumit Ganguly, "India Under Modi: Threats to Pluralism," *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (2019): 85, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0006>.

<sup>88</sup> Saanya Gulati, "Why the JNU Ordeal is about more than just Intolerance," *LSE Blogs*, February 24, 2016, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2016/02/24/why-the-jnu-ordeal-is-about-more-than-just-intolerance>.

<sup>89</sup> Manoj Joshi, "Delhi Police Again Lands in Controversy," *Policy Commons*, February 16, 2016, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1351816/delhi-police-again-lands-in-controversy/1963974>.

‘Maoists,’ ‘separatists,’ ‘brainwashed’ students, and other threats to the ‘nation,’ to construct a narrative that furthered Hindu insecurity and justified power cloaked as protection.<sup>90</sup> Hindutva biopower “seeks to proliferate difference in order to modulate and contain its disruptive force.”<sup>91</sup> Hostile representations of dissenting students fit well with Hindutva biopolitics.<sup>92</sup> The ‘anti-Indian’ is representationally and practically needed for the operation of Hindutva biopower to operate. Non-Hindu, Hijabi, and Queer/ed students constitute hyper-visible targets, whose deviancy naturalizes the purification of savarna people and their ongoing subjugation of ‘Others.’ The identification of aberrant bodies demonstrates to the populace the necessity of maintaining institutions of power.

The discourse to increase and normalize surveillance and regulation across campuses functions to obfuscate the ways in which corporate-service sector relations operate to depoliticize student dissent and silence marginalized voices, especially those deemed counter-conservative and controversial.<sup>93</sup> Since students in India are not supposed to be political actors with group interests, they are rendered docile and disattendable (i.e., non-threatening, tolerable, and too insignificant to pose any sort of danger), and their scholarship is rendered toothless. Another concern is that the re-alignment of academic priorities, as outlined in the New Education Policy of India (NEP), with its focus on machine learning, AI, and big data analysis, makes India’s youth susceptible to big data surveillance and manipulation.<sup>94</sup> Attempts to privatize India’s public universities are symptomatic of the last vestiges of state-supported liberal education being pushed into the standardization module of the surveillance system.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Sagarika Ghose, *Why I Am a Liberal: A Manifesto for Indians Who Believe in Individual Freedom* (New York City: Penguin Viking, 2018), 62; Tanika Sarkar, “Who Rules India? A Few Notes on the Hindu Right,” *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 76, (2018): 231, <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2018.76.16>.

<sup>91</sup> Ahuja, “Post-Mortem on Race and Control,” 34.

<sup>92</sup> Mohinder Singh and Rajarshi Dasgupta, “Exceptionalising Democratic Dissent: A Study of the JNU Event and its Representations,” *Postcolonial Studies* 22, no. 1 (2019): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2019.1568169>.

<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Brulé, “Voices from the Margins: The Regulation of Student Activism in the New Corporate University,” *Studies in Social Justice* 9, no. 2 (2015): 159, <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v9i2.1154>.

<sup>94</sup> G. Arunima, quoted in K. M. Seethi and Elizabeth Abraham, “Surveillance Capitalism Threatens Public University in India,” *Global South Colloquy*, April 18, 2021, <https://globalsouthcolloquy.com/surveillance-capitalism-threatens-public-university-in-india>.

<sup>95</sup> G. Arunima, quoted in K. M. Seethi and Elizabeth Abraham, “Surveillance Capitalism Threatens Public University in India.”

Epistemic violence is another outcome of capitalist ‘development’ under Hindutva governmentality. Hindutva actors have attempted to shape curricula and textbooks in ways that promote a particular narrative of Indian history, culture, and identity.<sup>96</sup> This includes glorifying ancient Hindu texts, scriptures, and teachings as valid sources of knowledge, and invalidating Subaltern, Adivasi, Queer, and Muslim perspectives, literatures, and histories.<sup>97</sup> Critical or ‘useless’ disciplines, like Gender Studies, are viewed as unproductive, or to borrow from Foucault, “useless ‘expenditure,’ [...] wasted energy.”<sup>98</sup> They are also viewed as dangerous, because they demythify the Hindutva radical populist worldview and could potentially also interrupt the commonsense logics of the market. Critical, liberal scholarship risks being co-opted or short-circuited and “channel[ed] into the controlled circuits of the economy.”<sup>99</sup>

There also exists widespread general ignorance and denial of caste-based oppression and violence in academic disciplines.<sup>100</sup> Books critical of brahmanism, such as Wendy Doniger’s alternative history, have been banned through archaic defamation laws. Curricular saffronization involves a revisionist approach to disciplines, reinscribing heteronormative values into curricula, with implications for the generation, dissemination, and acceptance of knowledge. A recentering of Hindutva neoliberal logics perpetuates brahmanical agnosia in the academy. Writing about systems of knowledge, Foucault clarified that an episteme manifests a history which is “of its conditions of possibility,”<sup>101</sup> arguing that epistemes define what counts as valid knowledge, govern the formation of disciplines, and shape the construction of subjects. The promotion of a singular Hindu nationalist narrative undermines the inclusion and recognition of diverse epistemes, hindering a comprehensive understanding of India’s complex history and social fabric.

<sup>96</sup> Kritika Sharma, “RSS now looks to ‘Saffronise’ Higher Education,” *University World News*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20170512071040795>.

<sup>97</sup> Pravakar Palaka, “Teaching of Dalit Literature in Higher Education,” *Language Forum* 33, no. 1 (2007): 129; Sudipta Bhattacharyya, “Economics Education in India from Pluralism to Neo-liberalism and to ‘Hindutva’”, in *Advancing Pluralism in Teaching Economics: International Perspectives on a Textbook Science*, eds., Samuel Decker, Wolfram Elsner, and Svenja Flechtner (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 130, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315177809>.

<sup>98</sup> Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” 114.

<sup>99</sup> Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” 114.

<sup>100</sup> Upadhyay and Bakshi, “Translating Queer,” 338.

<sup>101</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York City: Vintage, 1990), xxii.

## *Discussion & Implications*

Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject implies an irreducible dimension of freedom, affirms emancipatory aspects of rationalization, and suggests that individuals possess incredible capacity to embody agency and enact resistance in the face of oppressive biopolitical projects like Hindutva and *Spätkapitalismus*. As his thought and work matured, Foucault became more aware that individuals can "transform themselves, modify themselves, [and] attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity" through "operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct."<sup>102</sup> Foucault did not regard power as purely repressive or deterministic, but rather as constantly negotiated and contested, emphasizing the potential for resistance, critique, and the emergence of alternative forms of subjectivity. If we are to follow Foucault's line of reasoning, then it appears that dismantling the Hindutva capitalist society/university would entail a repudiation of Hindutva technologies of the self.

Foucault stressed that "we are thinking beings, since it is through thought that we are beings who look for truth, who accept or refuse obligations, laws, coercions, and who are related to ourselves or to others."<sup>103</sup> Therefore, it is through cultivating reason, introspection, and truth-seeking that students might cultivate new relations to themselves, and new subjectivities. For Foucault, reconstituting the ethic of the self's relationship to itself "is an urgent, fundamental and politically indispensable task [...], as] there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself."<sup>104</sup> If the fundamental exercise of power is students' own interpretations of themselves, then students can resist self/enslavement and self/colonization by aspiring for truth and tapping into their innermost desires, thoughts, and sensations that exceed a signifying capacity. For Foucault, individuals must reach for truth and transform truth into an ethos to be masters of their selves and destinies.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth," *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (1993): 203, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/191814>.

<sup>103</sup> Foucault, "The Culture of the Self," 14:00–14:15.

<sup>104</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Self: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–82*, eds., Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, trans., Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 252.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume 1*, ed., Paul Rabinow, trans., Robert Hurley et al. (New York City: The New Press, 1994).

Foucault opined that individuals must retreat inward and within oneself, attend to oneself, know oneself, concern oneself with oneself, contemplate oneself, and retire into oneself, in order to care for oneself and thereby be pristine and free.<sup>106</sup> He suggested that one must develop a permanent and critical relationship with oneself through a set of practices of self, saying that “concern with oneself constitute[s] not only a principle, but also a constant practice.”<sup>107</sup> Individuals are not passive playthings of a biopolitical project but “active subjects who construct themselves through processes of self-constitution, recognition, and reflection.”<sup>108</sup> Since both privatization and saffronization train (rather than educate) the mind, students and scholars in India must actively strive to unshackle their minds and very souls from Hindutva’s neoliberal vise-grip, resist the self handed to them by state power, and reach for the self that God gave them the ability to become. Foucault described this process as bridging the “gap between [the] soul and [the] body.”<sup>109</sup>

Individuals must also recognize the ways in which they are produced as subjects, and give histories to things they normally consider as without history.<sup>110</sup> By fostering awareness of one’s current condition as defined and constructed by a given culture and historical moment, individuals can better confront and come to terms with their positionality. Such an awareness could help individuals embrace othered persons and groups, and also affirm aspects of themselves that do not conform to the ordained norm. By cultivating curious, compassionate, revolutionary, and community-oriented spaces and selves, individuals can stand in solidarity with “those disposed of and made disposable by latest capitalism,” and interrupt “a world constituted through the vertically distributed violence of [Hindutva] modernity.”<sup>111</sup> Since both privatization and saffronization rely on eviscerating bodies of autonomy, students and educators in India are encouraged to contest the brahmanical and capitalist social order, from the center and margins.

<sup>106</sup> Foucault, “The Culture of the Self.”

<sup>107</sup> Michel Foucault, “Lecture I. The Technology of the Self,” in *Speaking the Truth about Oneself: Lectures at Victoria University, Toronto, 1982*, eds., Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 8.

<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Houghton, “Becoming a Neoliberal Subject,” *ephemera* 19, no. 3 (2019): 617.

<sup>109</sup> Vemula, “My Birth is My Fatal Accident.”

<sup>110</sup> Stephen J. Ball, “Is Education Impossible? Foucault as Educator” (lecture, Summer School in European Education Studies, 2016), <http://www.susecs.eu/lecture-1-is-education-impossible-foucault-as-educator>.

<sup>111</sup> Eric Stanley, “The Affective Commons: Gay Shame, Queer Hate, and Other Collective Feelings,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, no. 4 (2018): 503, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-6957800>.

Students should also continue actively creating and maintaining spaces for dissent, in the spirit of movements like #HokKolorob. Hok Kolorob (Let there be clamor) was one of India's longest and most successful student protests, held against an alleged police attack on peacefully protesting students while they were demanding an inquiry into the molestation of a student on JU's campus. Students expressed their demands through bold forms of art and dissent, incorporating music, poetry, satire, theater, graffiti, posters, and social media. The agitation ultimately led to the forced resignation of a vice-chancellor.<sup>112</sup> Pinjra Tod was another creative and effective student-led movement, this time against curfews, moral surveillance, and other constraints imposed on women's bodies by universities.<sup>113</sup> These movements serve as important reminders of the power and agency that students possess, which, if retained and exerted, might not only subvert oppressive campus policies but also disrupt authoritarian systems.

India's universities, to work toward a reconceptualization of key subjectivities that exceed institutionalization, are encouraged to become 'pluriversities.'<sup>114</sup> This can be achieved by centering Dalit/Bahujan, Adivasi/Tribal, and Queer epistemes, developing theoretical-ideological alternatives to brahmanical capitalism,<sup>115</sup> and turning the androcentric, brahmin-centric 'rational' self at the center of *Manav Dharma* "upside down."<sup>116</sup> Faculty can foster strategies of refusal and intervention amidst neoliberal demands for hyperproductivity, one of which is for students to 'miscalculate' themselves – to refuse the ordered sequencing of work that promotes their dividuation and offers a deformed, insecure position in its place.<sup>117</sup> This idea resonates with Foucault's

<sup>112</sup> Supriya Chaudhuri, "On Making Noise: Hokokolorob and its Place in Indian Student Movements," *Postcolonial Studies* 22, no. 1 (2019): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2019.1568168>; Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha, Manas Dutta, and Tirthankar Ghosh, "New Grammar of Protests in Contemporary India: Few Case Studies," in *Social Movements, Media and Civil Society in Contemporary India* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 166, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-94040-9\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-94040-9_5).

<sup>113</sup> Paridhi Gupta, "Art(s) of Visibility: Resistance and Reclamation of University Spaces by Women Students in Delhi," *Gender, Place & Culture* 27, no. 1 (2019): 86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1586652>.

<sup>114</sup> Capucine Boidin, James Cohen, and Ramón Grosfoguel, "Introduction: From University to Pluriversity: A Decolonial Approach to the Present Crisis of Western Universities," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 10, no. 1 (2012): 2.

<sup>115</sup> Gopal Guru and V. Geetha, "New Phase of Dalit-Bahujan Intellectual Activity," *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 3 (2000): 130.

<sup>116</sup> Rajesh Kumar, "Contestation and Negotiation of Dalit Identities: A Perspective from Below," *Language Forum* 33, no. 1 (2007): 27.

<sup>117</sup> Benjamin Baez, *Technologies of Government: Politics and Power in the "Information Age"* (Charlotte: Information Age, 2014), 140.



analysis of the *Cynics*, philosophers who refused to be counted by traditional forms of governance and lived, instead, lives of truth-telling.<sup>118</sup> Pedagogies must foster “the care for the self that leads to the care for the others”<sup>119</sup> and promote *parrhesiastic* freedom, which entails “the right to express one’s opinion, and the courage to go against the opinions of others.”<sup>120</sup>

Transformative pedagogies in higher education can encourage students and scholars to cultivate moral imagination and empathy for the Other, as well as the courage and conviction to scrutinize and confront the power differentials between self and Other, in which they, too, are implicated. Condemning defective pedagogy, Foucault claimed that you need to take care of yourself if “education has been unable to teach you what you need to know”<sup>121</sup> Foucault exemplified, through a parable, the importance of occupying oneself with one’s soul:

For a lost Drachma, you must light a lamp, turn the whole house over, search in every corner, until, gleaming in the shadows, you see the coin’s metal. In the same way, in order to recover the effigy which God has printed in our soul and which the body has tarnished, one must take care of oneself, light the lamp of reason, and search every corner of the soul.<sup>122</sup>

A quick side note here: Neoliberal self-care is not the care of the self, because while Foucault’s care is critical, neoliberal care is uncritical and can be reduced to a *technē*.

If we are to resurrect a kind of radical Socratic critique in today’s culture and politics of protestation, then universities must empower students to ‘light a lamp,’ think critically about the world and themselves, question given knowledge, and begin the difficult and possibly painful process of recovering true(er), more virginal versions of themselves that have been erased, deprived, and systematically denied by power. Scholars can preoccupy themselves less

<sup>118</sup> Aaron M. Kuntz, “Refusal and Resistance,” in *Qualitative Inquiry, Cartography, and the Promise of Material Change* (London: Routledge, 2018), 124, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315173412-7>.

<sup>119</sup> Tamara Caraus, “The Horizon of Another World: Foucault’s Cynics and the Birth of Radical Cosmopolitics,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 48, no. 2 (2022): 245, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720987867>.

<sup>120</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth, The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, eds., Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson, trans., Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 35.

<sup>121</sup> Foucault, “The Culture of the Self,” 37:08–37:12.

<sup>122</sup> Foucault, “The Culture of the Self,” 19:56–20:32



with their “riches, with [their] reputation, with [their] honor,” and more with their virtue and their soul.<sup>123</sup> Faculty can foster pedagogical and academic agitations, and push back against pressures to commodify themselves and their labor. Reformulating selfhood may not negate the risks of becoming a social pariah or worse, being jailed for disobedience. But only when individuals are unfettered “both from the [Hindu capitalist] state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state”<sup>124</sup> might they escape the categories, identities, and roles imposed on them and create new lives, discover new worlds, and chart undisciplined futures.

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<sup>123</sup> Foucault, “The Culture of the Self, 18:19–18:28.

<sup>124</sup> Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 785.

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