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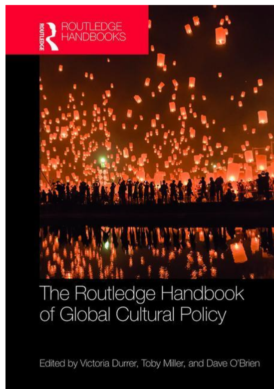

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Cultural policy in India

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31

Cultural policy in India

An oxymoron?

Yudhishthir Raj Isar

Introduction

In India, cultural policy is not an academic discipline or congeries of disciplines. This is surprising, for the country's 1.25 billion inhabitants enjoy a flourishing and variegated cultural life. Their government(s) – the federal or 'central' government as well as those of the Indian Union's 29 States and 7 Union Territories – ostensibly subsidise the arts and heritage. Identity politics has always existed in India and has become increasingly vehement today, but the tensions play out in connection with religion, caste and class rather than ethnicity. Yet there is little scholarly exploration of these issues; analytical speculation of the sort long practiced in Western Europe (and increasingly nowadays in other regions, notably East and Southeast Asia), is practically non-existent. Nor has cultural policy in India become a favoured terrain of foreign researchers, as it has in East Asia.

Hence it is next to impossible in the Indian case to address one of the main overarching themes of this volume, namely issues that emerge from the ways in which cultural policy is dealt with by different academic disciplines. In India, there is no such relationship. Hence producing an informed analysis is not an easy task for an external observer, although the research on the Indian practice of international cultural relations carried out by the present author in 2013 has provided him with a small head start.[1] Infinitely more useful in filling the knowledge gap, however, was a substantive *Country Profile: India* published in 2013 – albeit not as the outcome of indigenous agency but as part of the *WorldCP-International Database of Cultural Policies*.[2] Were it not for this 188-page study, the short overview below of what different layers of government (as well as Indian non-state actors) envision and enact as cultural policy would have been impressionistic and impossible to verify.[3]

Despite the lack of an explicit strategy, the federal and state governments provide patronage and funding for selected arts and heritage activities that conform to an established high culture canon. This may be seen as a largely implicit cultural policy (Ahearne, 2009), of which many aspects are ripe for deeper analysis than can be provided here. In view of the comparative purposes of this volume, this chapter explores two Indian specificities: (i) the largely instrumental terms in which governmental patronage is critiqued by the Indian intelligentsia and (ii) the absence of the Western European 'creative economy' discourse that has become so hegemonic elsewhere, notably in East and Southeast Asia.

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That the ends and purposes of state patronage have remained largely unquestioned reflects the consensual, 'settled' idea of how the elite envision 'Indian culture', at least so far. There has been scant consideration of cultural policy understood as 'the clash of ideas, institutional struggles and power relations in the production and circulation of symbolic meanings' (McGuigan, 1996, p. 1), in other words as the 'politics of culture'. In India today, while such clashes of ideas have become frequent, they are not seen within a category recognised as 'cultural policy'. As it is elsewhere, the terrain of contested meanings is bound up with ideas of the nation and its cultural selfhood. Rather more than elsewhere, however, there is a strong conflation between the 'arts and heritage' and 'ways of life' understandings of culture – which is hardly surprising, given that Hinduism is a diverse collection of orthopraxis rather than just a system of belief and observance. Out of this conflation, a good deal of journalistic and scholarly commentary has emerged.

This has occurred as the majoritarian vision of an essentially Hindu India (although 15 percent of the population is Muslim and there are 28 million Christians, as well as Sikhs, Jains and Parsees) is being championed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) governments at the 'Centre' (i.e. the national government) and in many states. This stance seeks to displace the secularist, generally Leftist, yet liberal pluralism that has been the reigning ideology of the intellectual and cultural elite. The BJP's idea of India on the other hand is monist, in ways that stem from a 'semitization' of Hinduism – the reduction of plural Hindu belief systems to a single corpus (Thapar, 1993). This accompanies the belief system usually described as 'Hindu nationalism'. The term 'Hindu chauvinism' for such a view of 'true' Indian-ness purely in terms of Hindu religious values or *Hindutva* (or 'Hindu-ness', a term coined by one of the movement's founders) would be more appropriate, however, given the plural make-up of the country's population (Guha, 2014). In this context, the chapter takes up two issues that are salient today: (i) the challenges to the freedom of expression, notably freedom of artistic expression, posed by non-state actors driven by *Hindutva* ideology and (ii) the manner in which the ruling party is placing its loyalists in leading positions in the arts and heritage sector (and of course beyond). Before doing so, however, it would be opportune to explore the origins of the Indian upper caste urban elite's terms of engagement with a certain idea of the 'national culture' – an explicitly 'high culture' canon, accompanied by token gestures towards 'folk cultures'.

Culture: a special and reserved domain

The political theorist Partha Chatterjee argued many years ago that anti-colonialist nationalists in India produced their own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before beginning their political struggle with the imperial power. While the material domain was that of the colonizer's sovereignty, the nineteenth-century nationalists staked a claim to the cultural in the broad sense of the term, including arts and heritage to be sure, but more prominently the spiritual sphere, represented by religion, institutions such as caste, family practice, the un-westernized peasantry, etc. Throughout the twentieth century and still today, Indian culture – that is, essentially Hindu culture – has been self-consciously articulated and invented as the privileged expression of this inner domain, often through processes of revival and reconstruction. While the outer, or material, world of public and political life, business, science and technology was dominated by the colonizing West, the Bengali middle class Hindus of the nineteenth century drew strength from a cultural world, a 'distinctive, and superior spiritual culture' (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 121) that could not be so annexed. These middle-class elites first imagined the nation into being via this spiritual dimension and then readied it for political contest.

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The strength of subsequent Indian nationalism, Gandhi's in particular, was largely based on this process, while also drawing freely on western political and cultural ideas. Witness his often-quoted affirmations (1921, p. 170):

> I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.

This refusal, reaffirmed in the 1950s by the leaders of independent India, was accompanied by deep attachment to the flourishing of a particular construct of Indian-ness, as a way of life that also subsumed the arts and heritage. As Rajadhyaksha et al. put it (2013, p. 7),

> so pervasive is the representation of culture as national legacy, as both *sanskriti* (being cultured) and as *parampara* (tradition), that no corresponding practice or corresponding policy statement involving the Arts could exist without in some form incorporating (or at least adequately accounting for) prevailing definitions of *sanskriti*. This imbalance has been incarnated into the very substance of all prevalent arts & culture policy ever since this period and well into the present.

From the early twentieth century, during colonial rule, a range of arts institutions such as Tagore's *Shantiniketan* or Rukmini Devi's *Kalakshetra*, had paved the way for the subsequent adoption by the elites of independent India of a broadly modernist arts agenda in the service of Indian nationalism. As we shall see further on, this nationalist location of culture was and is broader than the arts and heritage. Yet the performance scholar Anita Cherian (one of very few academics whose work informs our topic), in her exploration of the fashioning of a national theatre in post-independence India, has noted how the arts and heritage 'were perceived to be a critical site reinforcing the idea of the nation' (Cherian, 2009, p. 33). The folding of them into the frameworks of development was an affirmation 'of the seemingly contradictory desire for both an authentic Indian aesthetic and a planned progression towards a post-colonial modernity'. Cherian has suggested therefore:

> that the braided histories of colonialism, nationalism, Independence and post-colonial state-formation are the conditions of possibility for a context wherein modernity is represented and performed through the institutions of the State, its acts of planning and, its multifarious forms of governance. Yet, the State's performances of modernity are based on an understanding of culture as both the locus of the traditional and, as the imagined foundation of a social solidarity that makes the modern State possible.
>
> *(pp. 33–34)*

Cherian also tracked the evolving rhetoric of culture understood as arts and heritage in India's Five Year Plans: in the First, identity was evoked to work and produce for the nation; the Second made provisions for institutionalisation; the Third opened up the discourse of retrieval and protection, 'its staging as a sign of the past' and as the site of the traditional (p. 37). As regards the performing arts, 'the idea of the classical allows the nation-state to acquire the aura of the sacred'. The state has constituted a classical canon by nationalising dance forms such as Bharata Natyam, Kathakali, Kathak and Manipuri, 'making these forms iconic of *its* cultural antiquity' (pp. 48–49) – a process that has played out as well in the

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federal states whose populations are entirely or largely made up of distinct ethnic groups. She pointed out, however, that also at stake was the 'revitalizing' of the folk arts, which added a dimension to the rhetoric of "unity in diversity", 'by drawing the marginalised, "folk" and/or tribal peoples into the nation's representational framework', completing an aesthetic paradigm founded on the recovery of 'elements thought to embody the traditional and the authentically Indian' (p. 51).

The arts and heritage: the engagement of the state and civil society

The absence of cultural policy as a theme of public debate is apparent from the lack of publications on the topic, apart from a 44-year-old monograph entitled *Some Aspects of Cultural Policy in India* written for UNESCO's 'Studies and documents on cultural policies' series by Kapila Vatsyayan, an accomplished Indian art historian and cultural bureaucrat. The UNESCO effort was far more an exercise in national representation than in objective analysis, however.[4] Vatsyayan's long, lyrical and conceptually dense introduction explores the exceptionality of Indian culture and civilization.[5] The tone is characteristic of the upper-caste Hindu elite vision mentioned earlier (another striking example is provided in Singh, 2009). While the structure of cultural institutions and mechanisms described in the monograph has not changed (although it has been considerably enriched) many other developments have taken place in the last few decades. These have been expertly reviewed in the *Country Profile: India* referred to above. The Indian film scholar Ashish Rajadhyaksha was the lead author of this profile; he was based at the time at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore, which between 1998 and 2014 was the sole Indian entity wholly dedicated to cultural policy research but has since significantly reduced the scope of its activities.[6] Another publication, encouragingly entitled *Towards a Cultural Policy*, was published in 1975 as the proceedings of a seminar held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in 1972 at which an interdisciplinary group of scholars was asked to 'take stock of the cultural situation in the country', analyse emerging trends and try to 'evolve the broad outlines of a cultural policy for the country' (Saberwal, 1975, p. v). The volume disappoints, however, for it contributes little to our understanding. Most of the participants dealt with broad 'ways of life' issues such as inequality, language policy, social exclusion and the like in orthodox Marxist terms that appear simplistic and dated today. Besides, these issues are discussed far better by Rajadhyaksha et al. A notable exception was the contribution of the sociologist Rajni Kothari, which concluded with a plea for autonomy and dignity for the country's creative people but affirmed that while 'there is great need for the involvement of intellectuals and creative people in the general process of policy-making in economic, social and other matters, by the same token there is no room for a "cultural policy". For culture is not a matter of policy – except the policy of leaving it alone' (Kothari, 1975, pp. 30–31). This manner of throwing the baby out with the bathwater still characterises elite Indian thinking – it is of course also redolent of earlier attitudes in the UK and still current in the US: the arts are no business of government. Particularly ours, the Indian argument would go, which is inept, corrupt and managed by ignorant bureaucrats incapable of understanding or nurturing the ineffable. End of story. … A case in point was the judgement of a 2008 national level committee set up by the ministry of culture that in India's plural society any clearly enunciated policy would be exclusionary.[7]

Nevertheless, given the high degree of cultural self-awareness among the ruling elite, the central government ('the Centre') put in place between the early 1950s and the 1960s a range of institutions under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture to provide patronage and

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disburse funds. This configuration is duplicated at State level and in some cities. The central Ministry of Culture's mandate is for the protection and promotion of 'cultural diversity and heritage' seen as 'important pillars of inclusive national development'.[8] The mandate emphasises the right of all sections of Indian society to conserve their language and culture as the rich heritage of its composite culture. Its efforts mainly involve establishing museums, libraries and arts institutions and protecting ancient monuments and archaeological sites. The Ministry has numerous organisations under its jurisdiction, some of which had been created long before by the British colonial government. The 'Subordinate Offices' include the Anthropological Survey of India, the Central Reference Library, the National Gallery of Modern Art, the National Museum and the National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property. The 'Attached Offices' include the Archaeological Survey of India (created in 1961), the Central Secretariat Library and the National Archives of India. 'Autonomous Bodies' include various Museums, Libraries, *Akademis*, Zonal Cultural Centres and Buddhist Institutions.

Through the 1950s and into the 1960s, the government of India founded institutions that provided the 'dominant paradigms for the "arts and culture" field as a whole' (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2013, p. 5; Isar, 2014). These were, in New Delhi, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (1950); the *Sangeet Natak Akademi* or academy of the performing arts (1953); the National Museum, the *Sahitya Akademi* or academy of letters, the National Gallery of Modern Art and the *Lalit Kala Akademi* or academy of fine arts (all set up in 1954, following an initiative of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and its first Education Minister, Maulana Azad) and the National School of Drama (1959). Then came the Film Institute of India (1959) in Pune and the National Institute of Design (1961) in Ahmedabad. Mirroring the central *Akademis* that are the apex arts bodies in New Delhi are state equivalents in the fields of literature, music and dance, sculpture, visual arts, folk arts, etc.

As in other countries, other ministries fund different dimensions of cultural life – and the slogan of 'joined up' policy making is as hard to apply here as it is elsewhere. The Ministry of Education deals with arts education and technical education relating to crafts, while the Ministry of Human Resource and Development deals with 153 educational and cultural institutions including notably the Indian Council for Historic Research (ICHR), the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT). The Ministry of Commerce and Industry runs the National Institute of Design (NID), and the Ministry of External Affairs oversees the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). In addition, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports deal with cultural issues. The country's 29 states and 7 Union Territories either have a department of culture or a department for culture, focusing understandably on local languages, 'folk cultures' and contemporary arts. As Rajadhyaksha et al. observe, all this does not constitute 'a coherent or unitary cultural policy. Instead, the policy has covered a range of complex, and often mutually contradictory, definitions. … These do not necessarily add up to a coherent "arm's length" policy, or even necessarily to a "federal" policy, but can sometimes resemble aspects of both' (p. 12).

It is no surprise, therefore, that only a tiny proportion of public funds goes to the arts and culture. In the central government's budget for 2016–2017, for example, the culture ministry's budget, which has gone up by 17.2 percent, comes to but 0.3 percent of total government outlay. Over 30 percent of the budget is allocated to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the custodian of a limited number of protected monuments and sites around the country.[9] The ASI's principles of conservation and management are considered

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to be completely outdated by heritage professionals, notably members of INTACH (see below), while its functioning is as inefficient as that of all the other state-run cultural bodies. Rajadhyaksha et al. cite the 'tensions arising from the fact that the understanding of cultural heritage management is largely state-led with little or no…policy or legal provisions that help assert the rights of local communities in the management of heritage' (p. 66). In 1984, an Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) was created under the aegis of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as a non-profit membership organisation that would act as a counterweight. It has functioned in this capacity ever since with considerable official backing as well as active civil society participation.

In the judgement of the cross-section of representative civil society, stakeholders interviewed for the EU project mentioned above, the Indian State has done little more than dispense patronage to a small circle of practitioners favoured by the bureaucracy (Isar, 2014). In the view of some, the 'nationalistic model of patronage has created a plethora of inefficient institutions unable to adapt their vision, strategies, and activities to the major changes that have taken place in Indian society since the economic liberalisation of the 1990s or address the cultural needs of new generations of stakeholders. In the 1970s already, the rural-urban divide, for example, prompted the theatre director Habib Tanvir to state that:

> while the occasional dark areas in our rural cultural traditions can be overcome easily, to my mind the influence of the ultra-modern obscurantism of the urban elite is far more pernicious. To fight it we have to nurture our rural art forms. These would gain from exposure to the urban cultural milieu but, more important, the latter needs the revitalising influence of rural art forms. Their mutual interaction will give us the synthesis we need.
>
> *(Tanvir, 1974, p. 144)*

The country's high economic growth rate in recent years and growing urban affluence have in no ways increased governmental spending; in some instances outlays on culture have even declined. The rapid growth of an urban and globalized so-called 'middle class' (the term is a misnomer, since it refers to an extremely privileged class in socio-economic terms that by no means occupies the middle range of income distribution) has heightened demand for cultural provision. This demand is being met increasingly by civil society and private initiatives, making the arts and heritage scene today far denser and more diverse than previously.

Grant-giving private foundations are rare, however, although a few operating foundations have been created by and for wealthy benefactors, particularly in the visual arts. The best known of the independent foundations and the only one whose scale of operations is financially significant is the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA), which disbursed almost 2 million dollars in 2010–2011 in a range of arts disciplines (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2013). Others include the Sanskriti Foundation, founded in 1979 by a philanthropic former businessman, with its programme of international residencies for artists, and the Raza Foundation, set up in 2005 by the eminent painter Syed Haider Raza (which also provides grants).

By and large, the Indian corporate world conforms to the international norm of supporting the arts as an essentially promotional strategy. It therefore prioritises the visible, influential, safe and respectable, drawing on advertising budgets for *ad hoc*, one-off commitments to cultural presentations and products. As observed by a former head of the India Foundation for the Arts,

> even when the goals of corporate patronage and product promotion are aligned, support tends to go out to art that needs it the least … the arts are defined for corporate

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> leaders and marketing executives by the elite social circles in which they move. As long as product promotion remains their principal justification for supporting the arts, business houses will continue to give no attention to creative processes, constraints and innovation.[10]

Although recent legislation includes the arts and culture as a recognised category of 'Corporate Social Responsibility', it does not appear that arts and culture projects and programmes have been favoured recipients.

The interactions of Indian cultural operators with counterparts in the rest of the world have grown organically in recent years, despite many difficulties of funding, infrastructure and organisation. A noteworthy aspect of these interactions is the way in which the European national cultural institutes operating in India such as the British Council, the *Institut francais* and the *Goethe-Institut*, have stepped in to encourage issues and/or engage in practice that neither the Indian government nor the private sector interest would support, e.g. new, experimental or hybrid forms.[11] This foreign intervention, in other words, compensates for official indifference to these dimensions. A key role has been played by myriad cultural sector 'movers and shakers', individuals as well as non-governmental organisations, many of them operating in smaller cities and towns, but generally with little or no municipal support.[12] Their efforts have made for better cultural provision and vivified relations with partners in other countries. Despite this vibrancy, the sector is fragmented and very precarious financially. It lacks professionalism, apart from a few exceptions that prove the rule. It is against this backdrop that cultural entrepreneurship has developed apace in both the not-for-profit and for-profit cultural sectors. The contemporary visual arts are thriving commercially, with many galleries in the major cities catering to the demands of an expanding new stratum of extremely affluent Indian patrons, as shall be taken up in more detail further on.

As is often the case elsewhere, media and communications policy is not generally seen as 'cultural policy' by Indian commentators. The governance of the media comes under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; matters concerning satellite communications and linked technologies under the Ministry of Science and Technology. The *Country Profile: India* foregrounds recent civil society resistance (sometimes successful) to IP legislation and/or regulation that could have had negative implications for copyright holders and/or freedom of expression. Also contested were governmental intentions to pre-screen user content of networking sites such as Yahoo, Facebook and Google, embodied in an IT Act of 2000, when a BJP-led coalition was in power. These measures were seen as 'draconian'; efforts to block passage of the new raft of regulations did not succeed, however.

Instrumental rather than deontological critique

Deontological issues such as access and participation, or choosing between democratization and democracy in the cultural realm, are rarely evoked in the grumblings of the Indian intelligentsia, some of whose more vocal members have stated categorically, echoing Kothari's judgement cited earlier, that there should be no official cultural policy because politicians and bureaucrats are too inept. In January 2014, the Ministry of Culture constituted a 'High-Powered Committee' (HPC) to examine the functioning of the cultural organisations operating under the aegis of the Ministry, to imagine pathways for synergies amongst them and to review their 'management problems, lack of clarity of vision and policies, unclear distribution of authority powers and responsibility, transparency, elitism, coordination and strategy' (Government of India, 2014, p. 5). In accordance with the customary Indian

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pattern, the group was made up of a recently retired senior civil servant, one serving bureaucrat (as secretary) and five members from the arts community. Strangely enough, no doubt in view of pending general elections (these swept the ruling alliance out of power in May 2014) the HPC was given only three months in which to submit its report. It appears to have thought deeply and in novel ways about the *performance* of these apex state-supported cultural bodies, in other words the *means*. It also appears to have consulted relatively widely with independent cultural actors (albeit all drawn from the same elite circles as the commissioners themselves). Yet nowhere in its report is there any reflection on *ends*, rhetorical references to 'vision' notwithstanding. The report's Preamble closes with the following acerbically critical paragraph:

> The representatives of Government often believe that theirs is the power and right to receive obeisance. On the other hand, our ambassadors of culture are sometimes so uncultured in their ways; some of them do not know the difference between self-actualisation and self-aggrandisement … [T]hey must realize that they are answerable to the public, to the ordinary citizen; they are responsible for the honest utilization of the taxpayer's money. How does one then find a balance, in practical ways, between benign patronage and excessive control, between creativity and accountability, between a stolid bureaucracy and cultural freedom?
>
> *(Government of India, 2014, p. 3)*

The Report also notes that similar committees had been mandated in 1964, 1972 and 1990 but that no 'significant changes in the bureaucratic systems and the style of functioning of our institutions' had resulted (Government of India, 2014, p. 6). While the stress is on the absence of positive change, what is more significant is that such change is envisaged only in 'nuts and bolts' terms, related to 'basic issues of structure and processes' (p. 8). This is clearly a pattern in Indian thinking about arts policy. Thus the *Country Profile: India* identifies the key issues public debate as: the search for different models of arts funding, involving the creation of a series of 'zonal cultural centres' for the arts in order to surmount regional divides and the creation of a National Culture Fund, a trust that is a new avenue enabling institutions and individuals to partner with government to support arts projects. Related to this thrust is 'the perception that governmental interference often did more harm than good; and that the government should only make such infrastructure available to independent and credible not-for-profit agencies who would be better able to run it if left to themselves' (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2013, p. 137).

Policy and practice in the small state of Goa, home to just 1.3 million people, which belonged to the Portuguese overseas empire until 1961, appears to be an exception to this picture, however. The *Country Profile: India* does not examine state patronage of the sector in the country's federal states apart from making passing reference to the *Akademis* and other mechanisms of the southern state of Karnataka. Having spent the last few months in Goa, however, the author has observed a rather different picture there. A clear policy has been enunciated in *State Cultural Policy 2007*, which boldly asserts the intention to 'launch an experiment in Cultural Democracy in Goa' (Government of Goa, 2007, p. 1). Invoking Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the document also sets out principles that would be familiar in Western Europe, such as the promotion of individual creativity, equality of access to cultural life, freedom of expression, cultural renewal and quality, 'to make it possible for culture to be a dynamic, independent and challenging force' (p. 1). It identifies the following key 'thrust areas': preservation; dissemination; research;

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training, education and animation; empowerment and gender justice and even advocates an 'inter-sectoral approach' as regards cultural administration. The following sectors are to benefit from grants, job creation and the provision of facilities: folklore; dance and music; drama and theatre; languages and literature; arts and crafts; architecture and sculpture; fairs, festivals and markets; food and beverages; costumes, dress and fashion; journalism, television and radio; cultural industry, photography, films and popular media; IT and culture; event organisation; cultural heritage, tourism and museology; paintings and cultural education.

The crafts sector: more 'culture' than 'art'

The country's vast handicrafts sector has been an arena of intensive policy making over the years, initially framed in developmentalist terms, i.e. incomes and livelihoods, under the country's Five Year Plan process that began in 1951. The sector comes under the Ministry of Textiles, which runs the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation (HHEC), the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum. The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises runs the *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission. The condition of the artisan has been central in the nationalist location of culture (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2013). The nineteenth-century ruin of the Indian handicrafts sector (notably the spinning industry) at the hands of British colonial exploitation is a key theme in Indian economic history; it has moulded policy in this sector. Thus, the elaborate programmes that were developed in connection with an early 'development' vision may well be unique. Craftspeople were seen as a repository of 'true' Indian culture; they were integral to the nationalist project of identifying and protecting a 'national heritage', yet their economic importance gave their uplift great visibility, 'informing the most ambitious and difficult aspect of national development: the agenda of agrarian reform' (Rajadhyaksha et al., 2013, p. 8). At the same time, support to the artisan presented a real synergy with the nationalist goals of industrialisation and an emphasis on the development of science and technology.

Culture in the development project

Rajadhyaksha et al. lay great stock by the fact that the role of culture was foregrounded in India's first three 'Five Year Plans', during what they call the 'period of development' as regards the state's engagement with the cultural domain. Indeed language in those Plans prefigured the 'culture and development' discourses that were to emerge internationally only in the 1970s. By the Third Plan (1961–1966), a more specific claim was articulated for cultural values as resources for planning under a synthesis of tradition and modernity. Similar objectives were laid out for 'village industries', the reorganisation of village economies, the links between cottage industry with large-scale industrial production and research and marketing. The documents also stress helping the economically disadvantaged and the tribal people of India, who 'needed to be enabled to develop along the lines of their own genius, with genuine respect and support for their own traditional arts and culture and without pressure or imposition from outside' (Third Five Year Plan, cited on p. 19). In fact, however, while governmental support to the crafts has always been highly organised, subsidies to craftspeople have never been as great as is commonly believed (Dhamija, 2008). There has always been a considerable gap between Plan ambitions and their execution. The Plans have been largely discursive gestures, built into the nation's narrative strategies in Bhabha's sense (1994), both pedagogical and performative, long on rhetoric but short on implementation.

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These authors also conclude that 'the role of the State in cultural terms today has credibility mainly in its ability to support those who cannot receive support otherwise: i.e. the truly disadvantaged: the poor, the economically marginalised…' (p. 24), yet curiously they fail to point out that in reality governmental provision does no such thing. There is a direct link here with the social and cultural capital, in Bourdieu's sense, accumulated by the Indian elite and the distance it has established vis à vis the peasantry and the lower castes, seen as ignorant and backward. The 'newly formed institutions explicitly acknowledged the reality of castes as part of the "given cultural material" with which the nation was constructed' (Schech and Haggis, 2000, pp. 134–135) and embodied Indian national culture as the culture of the new so-called 'middle class'. Hence Chatterjee's assertion that:

> the story of national emancipation is also a story of betrayal. Necessarily so. Because it could only confer freedom by imposing at the same time a whole set of new controls, it could only define a cultural identity for the nation by excluding many from its fold, and it could only grant the dignity of citizenship to some because the others always needed to be represented; they could not be allowed to speak for themselves.
>
> *(Chatterjee, 1992, p. 214)*

Indeed, many groups in India are excluded from the processes of inventing the national culture. While they cannot identify with this project, there are few signs yet of their frontally challenging it (Bhabha, 1994). Particularly as regards the aboriginal or 'tribal' people of India, formally known as the 'Scheduled Tribes' and officially included among the 'backward classes', the paternalistic upper-caste vision has re-appropriated a good deal from prior colonialist attitudes. Thus the Backward Classes Commission recommended in 1955 that 'we offer certain concessions and help to the Scheduled Tribes in their effort to come up to the general standard. While the state should help tribal people to modernize, it should also recognise that they have 'certain good things to offer to us – such as folk-dances, folk-songs and many customs' (cited by Schech and Haggis, 2000, p. 126). Yet there has been scant support for the 'welfare of the weak', notably in the light of development. Witness this recent comment on the ways in which environmental depletion and economic development have together disrupted the lifeworlds of the traditionally self-employed, notably craftspeople:

> Particularly badly hit are nomadic groups, their migratory routes disrupted, their lifestyles and cultures marginalized, misunderstood or denigrated, and their own younger generations turning away under myriad influences. The Anthropological Survey of India estimated that there were at least 276 non-pastoral nomadic occupations (hunter-gatherers and trappers, fishers, craftspersons, entertainers and story-tellers, healers, spiritual and religious performers or practitioners, traders and so on). Most of these are threatened, some already extinct or dying, and the people displaced from these livelihoods are either getting absorbed into the insecure, undignified, low-paid and exploitative sector of unorganized labour, or left simply unemployed.
>
> *(Shrivastava and Kothari, n.d., p. 10)*

No 'creative economy' discourse

The success of the 'global script' of the 'creative industries' in East and Southeast Asia is now widely acknowledged (see in particular Kong et al., 2006; Kong, 2010). In India, a different picture has emerged (UNESCO-UNDP, 2013).[13] A commercially triumphant private media

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and entertainment industry serves a huge consumer market (as in China). The television market in India is the third largest in the world; other segments include a major print publishing and newspaper sector, television and radio, not forgetting a film industry that produces over 800 films annually, not just in Hindi, the language of Bollywood, but also in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi and Malayalam. PricewaterhouseCoopers brought out a series of annual reports, published initially in cooperation with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), that have mapped this vast sector, mainly for the benefit of prospective private investors, both Indian and foreign. A 2006 report, entitled *The Indian Entertainment and Media Industry. Unravelling the Potential*, recognised the (limited) measures taken to liberalize foreign investment and resolve regulatory bottlenecks in certain segments of the industry. It held that 'with concerted efforts by industry players on deterrents such as piracy and other challenges, the E&M (entertainment and media) industry has the potential to evolve into a star performer of the Indian economy' (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2006, p. 5). In like manner, Ernst & Young's 2012 *Film Industry in India. New Horizons* (produced in co-operation with the Los Angeles India Film Council) reviewed the flourishing of the broader media and entertainment industry, its potential for growth and for collaborations between Bollywood and Hollywood. None of these stakeholders use the creative economy terminology at all, nor does the government, which acts mainly as a facilitator by gradually introducing regulatory and fiscal reforms to encourage growth and enhance investment and export.

In 2005, UNESCO organised with much fanfare a regional symposium in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, expressly designed to promote the development of 'creative economy' policy. While there appears to have been some positive follow-up elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, in India itself the lessons of the symposium did not 'take'. Although the following year the Planning Commission did use classic British creative industries formulations in several of its documents, these references applied to the traditional arts and crafts sector that provides livelihoods to well over 10 million people – in other words the arguments were couched in craft-intensive rather than technology-intensive terms (Srinivas et al., 2009). The Commission's executive head wrote that 'a dynamic global business using creativity, traditional knowledge and intellectual property to produce products and services with social and cultural meaning, points to the next Big Idea' in the development-planning context, but his real emphasis was on livelihoods in the crafts sector, one that is 'self-organized and not un-organized' and whose importance lay in its 'critical human resource component'. Furthermore, he argued, this resource needs recognition and 'ground level support, similar to that given for IT and other empowered initiatives – not handouts' (Ahluwalia, 2006, p. 3). The task would be to turn cultural industries (traditional arts and crafts) into creative industries with the help of the 'design and media industry' and thus 'create original inroads into the global market' and produce 'distinctively Indian products and services… our own original contribution that can hold its own against the best the world has to offer'. As part of this process, the star designer Rajeev Sethi, named Vice-Chairperson of the Planning Commission's Task Force on Cultural and Creative Industries, proposed a shimmering scenario for the employment of vast numbers of currently unemployed/underemployed people, especially in rural areas. But practically nothing has come of these ideas.[14]

On the other hand, a contemporary visual art market flourishes. New Delhi's India Art Fair is a private initiative, organised under the aegis of the auction house Sotheby's since 2008; its 5th edition in 2013 presented the work of 104 galleries from 24 countries, including many in Europe. Till that year, it was estimated to have attracted over 300,000 visitors, from India, other Asian countries and the rest of the world. More recent figures are not available, but reports concur that its footfall and notoriety have increased significantly. Late 2012 also

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saw the launch of the country's first art biennial, the 'Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012', whose two highly successful editions have been financed through a mix of public and private-sector support.[15] Aware of the potential of this field, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) established a Committee on Art and Business of Art composed of artists, gallery owners, auctioneers, art historians, tax experts and policy makers so as to 'add momentum of the growth of the visual art sector in India… [and] to engage Indian corporates in bringing about holistic development in arts.' Its 2010 report, entitled *Art Industry in India: Policy Recommendations* assessed Indian legislation and taxation for the visual arts. In 2012, FICCI also published *Art and Corporate India*, whose principal focus was again the visual arts.

Other initiatives could be cited in other domains that would be labelled 'creative industry' in most other settings. For example, the DSC Jaipur Literature Festival produced by *Teamwork*, the leader among several private entertainment companies now operating in the country.[16] There is a growing number of private cultural businesses, notably in publishing and the book trade. The Oxford Book Store chain (with more than 30 stores across the country) has co-publishing and translation agreements with publishing houses in Europe; it has also created the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, which introduces Indian readers to contemporary writing, both European and Indian.

'Creative economy' is not a term of choice used in relation to any of these initiatives. The 'creative' has not become the talismanic notion it has become elsewhere. Why is this so? The answer is no doubt to be found in a number of factors. Most importantly, perhaps, the Indian film industry – now known as Bollywood – developed largely as a commercially viable business, as did other pursuits such as book publishing. Somewhat as is the case in the USA, it is taken for granted in India that mass-produced cultural goods and services are commercially produced and do not require direct state support. Nor, being less noble than the high culture forms that embody tradition and identity, do they warrant it. A concrete contributing factor has been the scale of *informality*, in terms of both the number of enterprises and jobs; the informal economy has been estimated to contribute as much as half of total GDP and informal employment an even higher proportion of total employment. Hence, there has been no deliberate positioning of the cultural sector in 'creative industry' terms that was introduced in the UK in the late 1990s and adopted elsewhere (Isar, 2012). In the view of the present author, this is not itself a bad thing, given the tedious tendentiousness of so much of the reigning 'creative industry' or 'creative economy' discourses.

Threats to cultural freedom

We turn now to cultural politics. Threats against artistic freedom – and against freedom of expression in general – now occupy centre stage in public debate. While the threats concern arts policy, the societal anxieties and insecurities driving them have far broader purchase. Their principal agents are non-state actors: Hindu and Muslim fundamentalist movements who are introducing novel forms of 'cultural policing', i.e. 'all attempts at imposing ways of thinking and behaving on behalf of value systems pertaining to religion or morality that resort to symbolic or physical violence, blackmailing or any other form of constraint' (Gayer et al., 2010, p. 148).

Writers, painters and filmmakers are increasingly attacked for 'blasphemy and outraging religion' in their work or for tackling issues such as homosexuality and widow remarriage. This alarming trend was initiated by the Bajrang Dal, the armed wing of the Hindu right-wing Rashtriya Sevak Samaj (RSS), which has taken the latter from a policy of example to

one of constraint.[17] Founded in 1925, the RSS has assigned itself the principal task of defending the Hindu community against Muslim threats, real or imagined. Hence its paramilitary overtones, which, however, went together for many years with a quietist attitude: the RSS hoped to spread its message through example, not constraint. Things changed in the 1990s with the rise of the Bajrang Dal. Artists, particularly when they were Muslim, were its first targets.

The emblematic case has been that of the celebrated painter M.F. Husain. In 1996, BD militants attacked a show of his works in Ahmedabad (Gujarat), destroying canvases and wall hangings in retaliation for a 1976 depiction of the goddess Saraswati – she was too scantily clad in their eyes. Two years later they ransacked the painter's Bombay apartment in protest against his canvas, 'Sita Rescued', that depicted the famous scene in the Ramayana epic where Sita is freed from the demon Ravana – again because she was scantily dressed. An exhibition of reproductions of Husain's works and photographs, organised to protest the artist's exclusion from the India Art Summit in August 2008, was vandalized by another right-wing group. As the mere presence of Husain's work in the public sphere seemed to invite a violent reaction from these quarters, he went into self-imposed exile soon afterwards and died abroad in 2011. The intolerance has extended to Hindu artists whose work is thought to 'hurt Hindu sentiments' as well as to obscure amateurs operating in purely local settings.

In the year 2000, Indian/Canadian director Deepa Mehta was shooting her film *Water* on the fraught lives of Hindu widows in Benares in the 1930s, condemned to celibacy, begging and prostitution. The screenplay envisaged an 'illicit' relationship between a Brahmin widow and an untouchable and the rape of another. A BJP dignitary declared that the film insulted 'ancient Indian culture and traditions' and threatened 'more violent protest' if Mehta tried to shoot in India.[18] She proceeded to do so nevertheless, after having secured all the necessary authorizations, but the set built on the banks of the Ganges was ransacked by Bajrang Dal militants and she was prevented by force from shooting elsewhere.

Some artists have even made the poignant decision to end their public lives because of attacks on their work. In January 2015, a well-known Tamil language writer announced on Facebook: 'Perumal Murugan, the writer, is dead. As he is no God, he is not going to resurrect himself. He has no faith in rebirth. As an ordinary teacher, he will live as P. Murugan. Leave him alone' (cited in Vari, 2015). His decision was prompted by virulent protests by Hindu and local caste-based groups against his novel, *Madhorubhagan*, which, they complained, denigrated Hindu deities and women. The protestors were mainly troubled by its critique of the caste system, particularly the inhumane treatment of the untouchables by caste Hindus. The same modus operandi is in force among Muslim fundamentalists, it must be said, although Indian Islamists have no coherent organisation like the RSS network. But this has not prevented them from launching recurrent campaigns against 'deviant' artists.[19] 'For a country that takes great pride in its democracy and history of free speech, the present situation is troubling, 'says Nilanjana Roy, a columnist and literary critic. 'Especially in the creative sphere, the last two decades have been progressively intolerant' (cited in Vari, 2015). Beyond the arts, fringe groups such as the *Sri Rama Sena* (army of Rama) in Karnataka, not all of which are formally associated with the RSS, have launched violent attacks on minorities and women.

Life on university campuses has also been affected, in large part through the exertions of the *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (ABVP—Indian Students' Association), the country's largest student union in terms of membership, founded by the RSS in 1948, whose primary aim initially was to combat communist influence, but has now taken on the cause of *Hindutva* as well. Confrontations between ABVP militants and student leaders on the

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Left have led recently to two high-profile dramas: the January 2016 suicide of Dalit student Rohith Vemula at Hyderabad University and the February 2016 arrest on charges of sedition for 'anti-national' statements of Kanhaiya Kumar, President of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (and a leader of the All India Student Federation, the student wing of the Communist Party of India).

Towards counter-hegemony in the apex institutions?

Today, the question arises of whether and in what way BJP governments will begin policing cultural institutions directly. Will they applying Gramscian principles and strategies of hegemony? In 2013, the authors of the *Country Profile: India* noted the government's loss of credibility in the arts but detected attempts to overcome the crisis of credibility in the then Congress Party-led coalition's support for autonomous initiatives such as arm's length bodies, new cultural foundations, etc. Today, however, the very idea of autonomy is contested. Already in 1990, however, the Haksar Committee had found autonomy to be either nullified or rendered toothless by governmental interference that starved institutions of funds or delayed appointments. But content was by and large spared (the secularist and left of centre doxa was never challenged, it must be said).

Things changed when the BJP was in power earlier, between 1998 and 2004. The policy of the then minister for human resources and development, Murli Manohar Joshi, was entirely in tune with *Hindutva* leanings: he appointed personalities who had been close to the movement to key positions in the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), as well as the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and entrusted them with the task of designing a new school curriculum. For one of Joshi's priorities was to create new textbooks – including those dealing with Indian history – rewritten in line with Hindu chauvinist ideology (Jaffrelot, 2015).

These efforts went only so far. But today, they appear to have been revived and given even broader scope and depth. 'We will cleanse every area of public discourse that has been westernised and where Indian culture and civilisation need to be restored—be it the history we read, our cultural heritage or our institutes that have been polluted over years', the current Minister of State for Culture is quoted as saying.[20] This ambition goes well beyond the pattern that is familiar, not just in India, of new ruling parties placing their friends and followers in high places in a spirit of cronyism rather than of ideological command. In 2015, for example, students at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) were on strike for 139 days, protesting the appointment of an undistinguished series-B actor, Gajendra Chauhan, whom they saw as grossly unqualified, as the chairman of the institution. He was the BJP national convener for culture, responsible for promoting 'the party's ideology through cultural activities', as he put it in an interview with *The Indian Express* (cited in Bhattacharya, 2015). Equally troubling was the selection of other unqualified people to the FTII's governing council.

Conversely, in *The New York Review of Books*, the economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen described how the government had pressured him to step down as chancellor of the newly formed Nalanda University – most likely because of his criticism of Prime Minister Modi before the elections (Sen, 2015). Sen also listed the ways in which the government had interfered in the management of other academic institutions – the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, IIT Delhi, IIT Bombay and the National Book

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Trust. It had proposed a bill that would give it direct control of the 13 Indian Institutes of Management. 'The caliber of two recent appointments is also alarmingly questionable: Lokesh Chandra, the newly selected head of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, has said Modi is an incarnation of God, and Yellapragada Sudershan Rao, the new head of the Indian Council of Historical Research, has praised the caste system' (Bhattacharya, 2015, accessed 20 April 2016).

In April, 2016, the Minister of Culture dissolved the board of the prestigious Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi (admittedly a grossly underperforming white elephant created by earlier Congress governments), removing several members before the end of their tenure and installing some of his own candidates. He appointed as president a veteran Hindi language journalist who had been the organising secretary of the ABVP during the 1974 Bihar movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan against governmental misrule and corruption. As the government places its loyalists at the head of the cultural institutions, and the process has continued with a variety of other recent appointments, those in the secularist/pluralist camp wonder how soon its pursuit of the larger agenda, which is a transformation of the very idea of Indian civilization, will be put in place.

Conclusions

This account has sought to reveal, in broad brushstrokes, how state patronage for the arts and heritage has been conceived in India and how it has unfolded, the institutions it has created for this purpose, as well the themes and registers it has privileged and ignored. All this is in the absence of any meaningful concern with expanding the capacities of the cultural sector or promoting cultural expression in a spirit of cultural democracy and inclusiveness. The patronage has been guided by and has in turn reinforced a sense of how Indian high culture can and should embody a certain national idea. Although it has been defined secularist and pluralist terms so far, this has nevertheless been an essentially elitist articulation, whose exclusionary nature has been largely unchallenged. Equally unquestioned have been its aims: critique focuses purely on the efficiency – or rather, the inefficiency – of the state-sponsored institutions. Today, non-state cultural sector actors are partially compensating for these inadequacies.

Recent years, however, have seen the secularist and pluralist idea of India challenged by the current ruling party and by civil society groups that support *Hindutva* ideology, often by means of symbolic and physical violence, notably on behalf of a version of Indian identity based exclusively on Hindu references. Cultural policing has become commonplace and the current administration clearly seeks to control the 'commanding heights' of the political economy of the culture sector, in a positively Gramscian deployment of power viewed as domination plus intellectual and moral leadership. But this kind of religion-based majoritarian thinking in a society where pluralism is a core value and a diversity of diversities is taken for granted by the majority will be difficult to impose across the board. It is likely, therefore, that as far as conceptions of India's 'cultural identity' is concerned, the coming years will see increasingly acute clashes of ideas, institutional struggles and contests for power, in other words an increasingly fractious politics of culture.

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Notes

1 Preparatory Action Culture in EU External Relations. http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/.
2 Modelled on the *Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*, the profiles cover some 80 categories and indicators organised under 9 main chapters. For the full structure, see: www.worldcp.org/profiles-structure.php.
3 www.worldcp.org/profiles-download.php.
4 The 51 monographs were descriptive rather than analytical; at the time, however, they nevertheless provided the only information available to scholars.
5 The opening paragraph captures the complexity of the Indian cultural scene very adeptly:

> …it is essential to keep constantly in view the complex, intricate and multilayered, multidimensional cultural fabric of the country, both in time and space. Such a framework would be necessary for the study of any civilization but is imperative in a situation of incredible cultural continuity which has survived through 5,000 years of history marked by periods of unrest, invasions, wars, political subjugation, economic underdevelopment and one which has conditioned, guided and governed the value-system of a whole people, today numbering 531 million, spread over an area of 3,276,141 square kilometres comprising a bewildering multiplicity of races, castes, ethnic groups, sub-cultures and religious sects.
>
> *(Vatsyayan, 1972, p. 9)*

6 The CSCS website is still active: http://cscs.res.in/. The author had speculated that CSCS downsized in 2014 mainly for lack of funding, reflecting the limited interest in cultural policy as a field, but a founding member of the Centre, S.V. Srinivas, has explained in an oral communication that while funding was indeed always difficult, the Centre was more severely challenged by India's changing higher education environment, including the creation of private universities and the increased activity of government-sponsored research centres, which made it difficult for the CSCS to sustain its research and teaching.
7 See: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Panel-members-against-one-cultural-policy/articleshow/3089531.cms (Accessed 10 May 2016).
8 As stated in the Citizen's/Client's Charter for Government of India (Ministry of Culture). http://indiaculture.nic.in/sites/default/files/citizen%20charter/mculture%20citizens%20charter.pdf (Accessed 20 April 2016).
9 Source: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/et-cetera/union-budget-2012-13-culture-ministry-gets-rs-67-crore/articleshow/12292630.cms.
10 Anmol Vellani, 'The Case for Independent Arts Philanthropy, website of the India Foundation for the Arts. www.indiaifa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20&Itemid=17 (Accessed 10 March 2012).
11 The approaches of the European cultural institutes contrast with those of countries such as China, Japan or South Korea, whose cultural centres focus on promoting their own cultural forms and agents.
12 In the Indian polity, municipalities are not empowered to function as autonomous cultural policy making or implementing entities.
13 This section borrows from my analysis in UNESCO/UNDP, 2013.
14 Some forward movement might emerge, however, from a workshop on 'Art and cinema industries in India: Norms, workers and territories', that was organised in May 2016 by Christine Iturbide, a researcher working with the French Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities (CSH) in New Delhi, on the basis of her earlier as well as ongoing research on the cultural industries in India.
15 www.kochimuzirisbiennale.org.
16 http://teamworkproductions.in/.
17 The word *bajrang*, meaning 'strong', is associated with the monkey god, Hanuman – sometimes also referred to as *Bajrang Bali* – who is generally depicted brandishing a club.
18 Quoted in *The Hindu*, 5 February 2000.
19 The first major episode of this recent history was the Rushdie affair: before taking on a transnational dimension in the wake of Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa*, the campaign against *The Satanic Verses* was actually launched in India.
20 Cited on www.firstpost.com/politics/culture-minister-mahesh-sharmas-strikes-again-bible-quran-not-central-to-soul-of-india-2438340.html (Accessed 18 April 2016).

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