



Stories of Anger and Hate: Constructing the Enemy in the Contemporary Indian Context

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It is widely recognised that narratives do not merely reflect reality, but rather they construct it because they depict how the world is and “should” be, thus revealing authors’ intentions, hopes and beliefs. From such perspective, narratives are the building blocks of values and messages, and operate as a means for their circulation, endorsement and naturalisation, also spanning negative emotions like anger and hate, two paradigms that today in India emerge as dividing mechanisms across religious, social and cultural communities. Manifestations of hate, intolerance and communalism against minorities and diversity appear in the Indian scenario almost daily, and thanks to digital communication they are now pervasive and influential, in spite of legislative attempts to regulate the effects of their dynamics. Often, these stories provide an ideological and damaging prismatic hypervisibility of those subjects/communities that do not conform to mainstream standards since they discursively portray and expose them as figments of an “impossible” alterity.

Drawing on and combining notions and intuitions from critical stylistics, postcolonial criticism and media, this article aims to identify and discuss some of the strategies that underpin the affective language of anger and hate discourses, utilised to textually “demonise” the Other, and “invent the enemy”. This preliminary investigation draws materials from news coverage, in particular three stories involving a political leader, a Dalit worker and an urban activist, to show the pragmatic structures at work in the language of persuasion and exclusion. Specifically, I discuss how a strategic use of rhetorical aspects and figurative expressions can convey emotional force and vividness to spread and reinforce fanaticism, and ultimately create an enemy.

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1. Introduction

It is almost a truism to affirm that the contemporary dimension of resentment, anger, and fear is a global phenomenon since it affects very diverse contexts and territories, and takes up a plethora of shapes, from unplanned attacks to institutional buildings and symbolic places to viral insulting campaigns in the virtual world. Whereas in the past human responses to anger were varied and composite, including religious and philosophical tendencies to reject it, e.g. in the case of Buddhism and Stoicism (Rosenwein, 2020), today's arena is shaken by more forces and actors. What commonly drives such manifestation is a mix of frustration, intolerance and dissatisfaction by which individuals experience "a new faith in the redeeming power of violence while forms of solidarities, prevalently grown on the negative base of common hate and shared 'resentment', tend to become dominant forms of social aggregation" (Ciocca and Manian 2021, 3). In this respect, in fact, the contemporary world has reduced its promise of democratisation and progress to favour neoliberal policies and practices, which in turn have generated a sort of detachment of certain classes or groups from their social contexts.

Both Arendt's insightful notion of "negative solidarity" and Mishra's provocative suggesting of an "age of anger" (Ciocca and Maniam 2021; Mishra 2017) are particularly relevant in such discussion as they trace and illustrate the emergence and development of this attitude, over the last decades, warning against the subtle but constant fragmentation of communities, in which selfish or partisan sentiments prevail over a collective idea of belonging. The Indian context, to which this article is dedicated, is not different, as it unfolds a range of cases and situations palpably marked by divisive ideologies, of religious, political or ethnic nature, based upon the strategic use of language, which endorses processes of "othering", either through tactics of hypervisibility (i.e. publicly and repeatedly exposing and ostensibly condemning the characteristics or weakness of certain subjects), or invisibility (i.e. marginalising and devoicing those individuals who do not conform to mainstream society) (Chaudhuri, 2020). It is worth recalling that the theme of hate speech in the Indian scenario is significantly important for delineating a present-day sociocultural map of the country, given the influential weight of forces such as communalism and casteism (Nair and deSouza 2020; Narrain 2018), which envision and endorse a strict separation between ethnic and religious groups. As a result they propel sentiments of anxiety, discrimination and violence and challenge the democratic principles supporting the spirit of a multilingual, multicultural and multifaith India, as prescribed by its Constitution and its postcolonial values. Writers, artists and intellectuals, however, try to resist and contest such forms of power across various domains, from fiction to media (Adami and Roy 2023). Some of Arundhati Roy's speeches and lectures (2020), for example, expose the many possible threats deriving from such a political and social climate, in which the very idea of freedom (and freedom of speech in particular) is questioned, manipulated and limited.

In this article I aim to apply stylistic and pragmatic frameworks to a specific case study, i.e. three distinct narratives of exclusion, specifically in terms of caste or religious belonging, connected with some recent episodes, which I extract from an online source and contextualise later on. Here I am particularly concerned with the linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms (Chapman 2011; Culpeper 2021) for the expression of negative

emotions (such as anger and hate), and how these operate within and across texts, and how they publicly resonate for general audiences, thus circulating and emphasising images of hatred and divisions in the multi-layered arena of India. Given the complexity of such context, the methodology I intend to utilise is inevitably interdisciplinary as it draws on and combines notions and intuitions from disciplines such as critical stylistics, postcolonial criticism and media studies (Dwivedi 2012; Jeffries 2010). As Eco (2013) argues, the very idea of hate has a twofold disposition since, on the one hand, it concerns “inventing” and fighting against some kind of enemy and, on the other, it cements a certain dominant group, typically represented by fanatical, political or religious formations. It thus takes the guise of an imaginative force that galvanises individuals and spreads ideologies, deeply affecting societies and communities.

2. Constructing hate and anger in/through narratives

The focus on the linguistic substance of hate discourse and ideology is justified by the fact that stories are not simply used to describe an event, but rather they can be employed to build a worldview, which in itself is a vehicle to transmit beliefs and meanings. According to Gregoriou, “narratives code experience and can be said to be constructions of reality” (Gregoriou 2009, 65), and of course words are the various building blocks that make up a story. But to understand stories, it is vital to pay attention not only to words, but to all the linguistic resources at work across texts and discourses. These can be either explicit (via overtly negative words), or more often, and more strategically, covertly negative forms, that not only circulate but also perniciously naturalise resentment, discrimination and fear. Among the various components of language that can be taken into account to analyse such a pervasive power, modality offers important indicators as it refers to the language system for the expression of attitude, namely it provides the perspective and point of view of the writer/speaker (Simpson 1993), which of course can endorse intolerance and rage. As Jeffries argues, “many texts in fact reflect the speaker’s or writer’s view of how the world is or might be, how it ought to be or how they wish it was” (Jeffries 2010, 114); this type of language essentially is moved by boulomaic modality, which indexes a sense of desire, or volition. Thus, in this view, speakers or writers linguistically imagine and construct a world in which their ideas and principles become the norm, the standard from which marginalised subjects depart and consequently have to be annihilated. Hate, here, stands out as a guiding keyword for such subjects, also considering its semantic perimeter, and, incidentally, the *Oxford English Dictionary* online (2024) lists 27 entries and 22 definitions for this lexeme (OED 2024). From a mere linguistic angle, and trivialising things a little, it is worth noticing that the term “hate” in English collocates in a range of set phrases and metaphors, for example with the pattern “adjective + noun” in which qualifying adjectives can premodify the word (e.g. “absolute”, “naked”, “pure”), or in verb phrases (e.g. “be filled with”, “be full of”, “burn with”, “hate someone’s guts”), but it also appears in compound expressions (noun + noun), for instance with postmodifiers such as “campaign”, “figure”, “mail”, as well as with the copula form “hate is” (followed by elements such as “a poison”, “a fire”, “a cancer”, “a disease”, “a blackhole”, “a prison”, “a chain”, “a storm”, “weapon”).

Today there is a growing body of scholarship dedicated to the investigation of hate speech and discourse, which benefits from the implementation of different theories, methods and approaches. Some important contributions to this field are volumes such

as *On Anger. Race, Cognition, Narrative* (Kim 2013), *Hate Narratives. Language as a Tool of Intolerance* (Jakubowska-Branicka 2016), *The Language of Hate. A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of White Supremacist Language* (Brindle 2016), *The Grammar of Hate: Morphosyntactic Features of Hateful, Aggressive, and Dehumanizing Discourse* (Knoblock 2022), and *Hate Speech. Linguistic Perspectives* (Guillén-Nieto 2023), whose titles and subtitles testify to the interest in, and the many possible critical approaches to, the complexities and manifestations of the theme. Since language constitutes a way to enact and enhance sociality, its role as a means for cooperative actions is evident: individuals build relations, and the sphere of hate can be viewed along with the concepts borrowed from the discipline of pragmatics, such as “face”, which “involves prestige, people’s positive social value and public image” (Gregoriou 2009, 153) as well as “politeness”, which represents the idea of self and the value of etiquette. In a peaceful situation, we all want to be respected, and implicitly are required to respect others, but such situation is reversed in the case of haters, who naturally do not recognise nor respect the face of those they hate. Pragmatics thus also pays attention to the forms of impoliteness and offers a range of interpretive models.

Although pragmatic theories of impoliteness do not typically use the concept of incitement, this appears interesting in the discussion of hate speeches since it functions as a sort of umbrella category for aspects such as norm violation, social harm and provocation, particularly in situations where three actors (A, B, C) interact implicitly and explicitly (Culpeper 2021). The inciter (A) employs a directive speech act (namely a linguistic strategy to persuade the hearer to do something) towards B (the incitee), whose effect will be on C (the target). In this way, technically speaking, B is the actual perpetrator of the violent act, although the original plan stems from A, who clearly has a reason to strike C though the help of someone (B) and yet remains unpunished and unnoticed. Culpeper insists on this type of triangular schematisation and terminology as he affirms that “we need to change the term ‘addressee’ [...] that may suggest a simple trajectory of communication as in face to face communication, from the speaker/writer as addressor to the addressee. ‘Target’ would be a possibility” (Culpeper 2021, 6). In this light, hate speeches are akin to forms of incitement that provoke and enflame readers/hearers to adopt violent and intolerant behaviour against minority groups, and in the Indian context examples abound, in particular when prejudiced and unfair discourses emerge in both traditional and digital formats to accuse, and condemn, subjects as diverse as lower caste exponents, Muslim people, and transgender subjects. Very often, in India such manifestations of hate and intolerance are intertwined with Hindu nationalism, known as the philosophy of Hindutva (Nair and deSouza 2020), according to which everything about India has to do solely with Hindu culture and religion, although in reality the country is a multilingual and multicultural tapestry, with many macro and micro communities belonging to other traditions, such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and many more.

3. A very short history of anger/hate speech in India

Before introducing the case study selected for this project, it is important to provide some contextual background in relation to the expression and notion of hate speech, and in this section I briefly present some descriptive generalisations about the themes of anger and hate speech in India, taken from published sources, in particular Narrain

(2018). Interestingly, the very expression “hate speech” is not frequently found in official documents and judgements in the Indian context, where instead the phrases “promoting enmity between groups” and protecting “wounded community sentiment” are preferred. A notable exception, however, dates back to 2014, when the Supreme Court issued a judgement with regard to a complaint by an organisation supporting migrant labour.¹

In India, there are no specific laws against hate narratives or hate manifestations, although two provisions of colonial origin (section 153A and section 295A of Indian Penal Code) are applied by the judges. Given the multilingual, multicultural and multireligious nature of the country, it is clear that this is a particularly sensitive arena, in which tensions are continuously at stake. In the post-independent time, the basis of rules and interpretations of hate speech lie in the work of the Fundamental Rights Subcommittee of Constituent Assembly, which in 1946 guaranteed freedom of speech. However, the dramatic years of Partition (between the end of the 1940s and the beginning of 1950s) increased an atmosphere of hate and anger, immediately followed by the introduction of restrictions and censorship through the Nehru government in order to safeguard national security and social stability.

Today, the situation appears to be more articulated, with less defined aspects, which of course easily lend themselves to biased reading. For example, there is a general distinction between hate speech and acceptable speech, the latter referring to cases in which language must be restrained and follow rational argument. In this respect, certain sensitive topics (e.g. religious customs) may be criticised but only within a logical argumentation, in which the writer/speaker puts forward and organises a discursive reflection, refraining from clear, explicit attacks. However, the current, markedly ideological political tendency of the country makes the borders of these categories fuzzy, and obliquely manipulates the wording of rules and conventions. For Narrain, “the law, becoming more than a space of contestation, is now a means by which discourse around hate and hurt can be constituted to further the strategic aims of political and religious groups” (Narrain 2018, 199). Consequently, it is not a surprise to observe how the Indian public sphere today is incessantly traversed by tensions, representations and processes of (un)seeing (invisibilisation, or conversely hypervisibility) for various social and ethnic categories, spanning Muslim, Dalit, Adivasi, hijra, ethnic and religious minorities (Chaudhuri, 2020). The present-day dominant Hindu ideology, in fact, exploits rising feelings of nationalism to construct a hegemonic view. Even a cursory look at the headlines of newspapers and websites such as *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express* and *BBC India* will often display ferocious episodes of lynching, riots and raping that frequently take place in the country, in particular in rural areas and villages, and that sometimes echo other similar discriminatory situations in the world, for example with the discourse of Islamophobia (Bakali and Hafez, 2022). It is not a surprise, thus, that such complex and dense themes surface and are often recycled in creative domains, as shown among others by the Netflix drama series *Delhi Crimes* (2019-2023), whose two seasons deal with the problem of urban violence, exhibiting how the uncontrolled response from people easily lends itself to the promulgation of hate messages and slogans against entire social or religious groups, rather than the individuals that are the real offenders.

¹ This case regards a Public Interest Litigation filed by Pravasi Bhalia Sangathan, an organisation supporting the rights of migrant labourers, which asked for the Supreme Court to specifically consider the effects of hate speech against migrant workers (see also Narrain 2018).

4. Case studies, domains and data

The case study I intend to scrutinise here belongs to the broad category of news discourse, i.e. news and comments reported through online platforms and other media, but a word of warning is necessary to frame the material under investigation in this article. Essentially, my case study is represented by three stories that appear in a piece entitled “The Silence and Symbolism of Hate” authored by S.F. (signed for safety purposes only with these initials) and posted on *The Indian Forum*, on 5 August 2022. The justification for working on these stories is the fact that not only do they represent different social tensions and political dynamics, but they also demonstrate how textual manipulation is responsible for the consequences that follow their circulation, especially in digital environments and considering the rising influential power of Hindutva. I have already mentioned the cultural importance of narratives in the construction of social relations and in the expression of sentiments, but I would like to underline this aspect once more since narratives can even be regarded as cognitive structures by which human beings make sense of the world they live in. Not only are narratives a way to organise human experience, as a felt experience in time, by virtue of their sequential nature, but they also demonstrate that they can encapsulate, rather than merely report, reality and experience, thus becoming fundamental tools of acculturation and socialisation. The perspectives discussed here are akin to the sociological paradigm of “stories as data” (Dawson Varughese 2012), given the capacity of narratives to mirror complex aspects of reality and operate as modes of meaning-construction.

The three stories I inspect here resonate with questions about hate for certain subjects/classes, and thus their processes of packaging negative sentiments bear witness to the deterioration of cultural and social stability. The way in which S.F. unfolds these narratives offers the opportunity to discuss some complex and sensitive questions about freedom of speech, polarisation of positions and human rights. However, two more points need clarification. Firstly, the source from which I collect my data openly deals with situations of discrimination, exploitation, and marginalisation, which do have a real-world impact, namely that they may generate repercussions and revenge for the author of the article, whose name is not revealed and is being replaced by an abbreviation (S.F.). In my contribution, thus, I will employ such abbreviation. Secondly, we know that the author of the piece is a legal anthropologist, that is an interdisciplinary figure that fruitfully combines the expertise and awareness of two distinct disciplinary fields that are particularly useful in detecting hate manifestations in the Indian context, keeping in mind the multifarious composition of its society.

4.1 Story 1: Kapil Mishra

The case of Kapil Mishra is tied to the riots that devastated the north-east districts of Delhi following the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Passed by the Parliament in December 2019, essentially, it is an act that modifies the 1955 Citizenship Act to favour the application for Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. However, the law refers to people of various religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity, who reached India before December 2014, but it does not contemplate Islam, hence becoming

a tool of discrimination. In several parts of the country, and specifically in the Delhi region, the reaction materialised through rallies and protests. A leader of the nationalist and far-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Kapil Mishra, threatened the police force to disperse the protesters within three days, adding during a public meeting that otherwise he would have reacted personally. Speaking in front of his supporters, Mishra used the Hindi phrase “desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaron saalon ko”, which in English may be rendered as “shoot the damn traitors of the nation”, a clear reference to the still looming memory of the Partition carnage (S.F. 2022, n.p.).

Mishra further exacerbated the situation by posting videos on Twitter (now called X) in which he intimidated the police to charge the demonstrators. The power of such social platform is tied to its two possible modes of interaction, i.e. “mention” and “retweet”, which cumulatively multiply communication threads, amplify visibility and often produce a form of polarisation, with users for or against a particular topic (Borah and Singh 2022). However, the virtual openness and freedom of new media does not totally coincide with a democratic forum in which all users are given the possibility to voice their opinion because “participation is neither neutral, nor is it distributed evenly. Instead, it is constrained by market forces and hierarchies of power that interweave offline and online contexts” (Page 2012, 182). In this way, social platforms can give the illusion of communication among peers, but in reality they favour certain actors who appoint themselves as spokespersons for the community to spread biased ideas.

Not only did an escalation of violence erupt in February 2020, especially in Muslim areas, but there was also a lack of an “official” response from politicians and Delhi police. The slogan created by Kapil Mishra is rather transparent and should represent a discourse “promoting enmity between groups” and yet the BJP leader, galvanised by the general silence of the institutions and the police, defended himself by affirming that he had not spoken against Muslims and that the way in which his words were decoded did not depend on him. In this light, silence becomes a form of hypocrite protection to nurture sentiments of antagonism and hate that run across the entire apparatus of the state, including police and courts, with the result of camouflaging crimes and violence. As S.F. maintains, “the unfolding judicial responses to the riots during the CAA agitation highlighted something beyond the brute manner that criminal prosecution can bow down to state power: the power of strategic silences and coded language in hiding hate” (S.F. 2022, n.p.).

The subtle stylistic rendition of Mishra’s hate message brings to light the capacity of language to mobilise people and magnify violent reaction, and unfolds the triangulation of incitement, with the three roles of inciter, incitee and targets (A + B + C, in the model put forward by Culpeper (2021)). Mishra’s words strategically address an audience to obliquely attack a certain target. Emblematically, the slogan weaves in references to Partition traumas to justify not only anger and hatred messages but also violence and destruction, with the killing of people and the demolitions of their homes. According to S.F., “the ambiguity of hate speech stems from the symbolism and the quietude through which people communicate prejudice and hostility. Perpetrators of hate tap into collective memories of oppression [...] to communicate hostility publicly” (S.F. 2022, n.p.), hence the challenges of fighting hate speech in India.

Structurally, what Mishra utters is a sort of compressed narrative that capitalises emotional and evaluative language by opposing explicitly negatively connoted terms such as “traitors” and positively connoted words like “nation”. The premodifier “damn” adds further layers of negative and dramatic characterisation, being an instantiation of

an emphatic and affective style, whilst the use of the imperative form fulfils a sense of volition, functioning as a directive, namely a speech act that the speaker utilises to persuade someone to do something (Gregoriou 2009, 145). From the standpoint of pragmatics, “getting someone else to do something is a socially tricky act to perform” (Chapman 2011, 66), as it may be based on a face threatening act (in other words, a sort of imposition or a lack of respect for others) by virtue of an imperative used as a command, but here of course the speaker does not feel the need to add some form of hedging, i.e. a structure utilised to mitigate the force of his utterance. Instead, the dramatic effect of his wording is deliberate, also thanks to the lexical selection of such a verb, and consequently meant to fire up the audience.

4.2 Story 2: Surya Chand (Meghwal)

The second story concerns casteism, namely discrimination based on the idea of caste hierarchy, for which India actually has a juridical tool of deterrence: the SC/ST (Schedule Caste, Schedule Tribe) Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989). The two groups (SC and ST) are officially recognised by the Constitution to indicate disenfranchised individuals and communities, often marginalised due to their caste belonging (in the case of Dalit) or their ethnic origin (in the case of Adivasi) (Nair and deSouza 2020, 248-9; Nayar 2015, 43-4). The episode here under consideration took place in 2017, in north-east Rajasthan, when Surya Chand, a man of the Meghwal community (an artisan caste initially found in Sindh, but now also present in various parts of the country) who worked as a driver for a man called Datta Ram (incidentally, as S.F. points out, it should be noticed that here too names have been changed to guarantee the informants’ safety (S.F. 2022)), got muddy and wet in trying to dig out the car that had bogged down because of the torrential monsoon rains. His employer’s comments were “I should have known not to employ a dirty (*ganda*) person like you”, reinforced by some more remarks phrased in this way: “Dirty dogs don’t know how to do anything (*gande kutton ko kuch bhi nahi ata hai*)”, hence the intention of Surya Chand to start the procedure of filing a complaint under the Atrocities Act, although he was aware that it was a costly and time-consuming operation. In their capacity as legal anthropologist, S.F. was summoned as the driver wanted to demonstrate that the insult he had received was not about the car accident, but rather had to be read as a derogatory identity marker in the light of this caste provenance. The police officer with whom he talked, however, refused to register his case, adding that the word “dirty” was to be taken literally, in its denotational meaning, and had no particular denigrating connotations. Naturally, the episode ties up with the question of casteism, discrimination and hate speech in the form of caste-based insult, and nonetheless it was not followed by legal consequences.

For S.F., “metaphors and silences create extensive spaces for interpretation and discretion within legal institutions” (S.F. 2022, n.p.), and these two stylistic and linguistic tactics merit attention because they show how “sad passions” in terms of discrimination, liminality and prejudice are constantly perpetuated in the Indian context as far as castes are concerned. S.F. (2022) brings to the fore and problematises the notion of “strategic silence”, that is to say the absence of an evidently derogatory term for lower castes. Even the term Dalit, actually, triggers a kind of inference, whereby the descriptive power of the term “dirty” emerges in tandem with an extra meaning, or allusion, but it does not function as a clear insult. Therefore, it limits the risk of legal consequences. As Chapman argues, “the fact that what we literally say and what we

clearly mean often differ is intuitively obvious but difficult to describe or explain systematically” (Chapman 2011, 69), and according to a pragmatic view, here we have a case of implicature as the speaker means something different from what they plainly utter. The second aspect that S.F. attempts to analyse signals the role of metaphor and its imagery, which in cognitive linguistics terms (Gregoriou 2009, 39-42) could be structured as a cognitive metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), that is a mental structure that humans utilise to categorise and conceptualise the world around them. The cognitive metaphor at work here seems to be shaped as (INFERIOR) HUMANS ARE ANIMALS², from which in turn then stem expressions such as “Dalits are dogs”, “dogs cannot do anything”, and “dogs are useless”. Such a very negative type of framing somehow betrays the Hindu roots of the hierarchical caste system, which attributes (and justifies) a sense of superiority/inferiority to subjects according to their specific castal belonging (Nair and deSouza 2020). The image furthermore engages with the idea of dirtiness and even contagiousness, figuratively opposing animals and human beings, and is also echoic of problems of untouchability according to the strict principles and codes of behaviour of some forms of Hinduism, by which certain minorities are *symbolically* imagined and discursively constructed as polluting elements.

4.3 Story 3: Umar Khalid

The last story is related to Umar Khalid, an activist and former research scholar educated at Delhi’s Jawaharlal Nehru University and accused under the UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act). This case too deals with how speakers can manipulate discourse so as to figuratively construct an enemy, someone to vilify and consequently fight. However, it starkly differs from the previous ones since it pivots around exposure, which makes a particular figure, in the definition of S.F., “hypervisible” (S.F. 2022, n.p.). From a stylistic perspective, this technique is defined as foregrounding and aims to render a specific element, in this case a person, particularly attention-grabbing (Gregoriou 2009, 26-8). In this way, the person is then turned into the target of attacks of various nature. After giving a speech against the Delhi riots in Amravati, Rajasthan, in 2020, Khalid was accused by Delhi police of instigating violence and disorder since he utilised the word “revolution (*inqalaab*)”. Thus, the 2022 trial also considered whether such a message could be defined as an instance of hate/anger speech. As the judges recognised that the man’s speech was not an actual act of terrorism, they also had a complex debate, focusing on different interpretations of the pieces of language actually used, and the potential of their denotational and connotational interstices.

The questions of visibility and exposure have massively expanded in recent times, thanks to pervasive technological innovation, and recent fictional narratives like *A Burning* by Megha Majumdar (2020) and *Teen Couples Have Fun Outdoors* by Aravind Jayan (2022) have dramatised them. But here the implications are even more subtle. Turning a critical lens on the Umar Khalid story, S.F. draws attention to the fact that this case functions in an asymmetrical way with reference to the story of Mishra, whose incendiary words were easily discarded and ignored. Here, instead, Khalid’s message is

² In linguistics and stylistics, cognitive metaphors are conventionally signalled by the use of small capital letters, which denote the structure X IS Y, respectively indicating the target domain (the aim that the metaphor tries to convey) and the source domain (the lexical field from which the linguistic material is taken). The logical connection between the two is known as mapping. See Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

carefully scrutinised, and turned into a hyperbolic narrative in order to index a sense of threat to the state. In reality, such an ideological discursive process had already been applied to Khalid during the 2020 visit of American President Donald Trump to India, when authorities described him as engaged with delivering what they considered “provocative speeches” under the principles of UAPA. The name of Khalid had started circulating for quite some time: in 2018, for example he was attacked whilst attending an event called “Khauff Se Azaadi” (“Freedom from Fear”), at the Constitution Club of Jawaharlal Nehru University, where he was completing his PhD programme. The story was reported by journalists, but what is particularly striking is that, after some weeks, the culprits spread a video of the event on WhatsApp, being certain of remaining unpunished. Such an act initiated a chain of messages and threads, probably troll-generated, suggesting “try lynching him next time” since “this kind of anti-national elements must be eliminated as soon as possible” (Teltumbde 2018, 10). Eventually the assaulters were arrested, but the real instigators of the crime were unknown, although it was manifest that they were somehow connected with political schemes.

As far as the 2020 Delhi riots case is concerned, the court, after many lengthy hearings, finally conceded that Khalid’s words did not constitute a “terrorist act”. However, there is a sort of sad irony in the entire incident, since the majority of the victims of the Delhi riots were from Muslim backgrounds. As S.F. argues, the entwined questions of symbolic silencing and symbolic hypervisibility are crucial and can also be understood as a blueprint for the manifestations of anger and hate, considering that the “hateful symbols are predominately deciphered when legal actors expect and want to see them” (S.F. 2022, n.p.). This is a crucial point in present-day Indian society, where cases of hate speech are often ideologically handled, and employed either to inspire discrimination and violence, or instead to devoice and condemn to marginalisation certain subjects. What is worse is that similar situations rarely lead to legal consequences, even when journalists and media denounce the insurgence of “‘VIP hate speech’ - offensive statements made by major Indian politicians including ministers and lawmakers” (Hrishikesh, 2022, n.p.), given the traditional rigidity and reluctance of the legal apparatus to deal with such figures and the establishment at large.

5. Discussion and Concluding remarks

The three narratives teased out by S.F. convey different linguistic dimensions and exemplify different social readings/legal interpretations of the speaker’s stylistic and pragmatic choices. The ideological construction of resentment and anger may take many guises, which cumulatively emerge as important sociocultural and political indicators of how a nation deals with its tensions, contradictions and aspirations. Understanding the manifestations of hate speech, and their perilous consequences, implies a close scrutiny of the actors, circumstances and events that characterise the social canvass of India, and Teltumbde puts forward the powerful metaphor of a “venom that benumbed masses into enduring personal hardships unleashed by demonetisation, blinded them to the destruction of the nation with jingoistic nationalism and made them celebrate lies as truth on to the path of self-destruction” (Teltumbde 2018, 11). Such a metaphor explains the rise of acrimony as an element circulating across and destroying the body of society and democracy, against the backdrop of the complicated conditions of life for a large section of the nation’s population.

To some extent, the communicative forms of hate speech are grounded upon the system of rhetoric, which in the Aristotelian tradition envisages three levels, namely *ethos* (referring to stance and personality, or the personal character of the speaker), *pathos* (whose meaning is about arousing the emotions of the audience) and *logos* (modelling and judging argument, or patterns of reasoning provided by the words of the speech itself). Specifically, it is important here to reflect on the concept of *pathos*, which covers the devices utilised “to orient emotional appeals precisely towards audience and topic” (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005, 17). The words and phrases uttered by Kapil Mishra and Datta Ram are characterised by a rhetorical force that strengthens, endorses and naturalises certain worldviews, viz. those of social hierarchy and inequality. Noticeably, the two men elaborate and foreground some linguistic forms not only to affirm their position, but also to disseminate negative feelings. Mishra’s verbal attack operates a form of parallelism, juxtaposing Muslims and traitors, and implicitly suggesting their malicious equivalence. The stylistic makeup of Datta Ram’s imprecation, instead, is constructed by modelling a type of lexical deviation (Gregoriou 2009, 28-36) by which human entities (the Adivasi population) are compared with non-human entities (dogs), so that by virtue of a syllogism the two categories are blended into one and given overtones of inferiority and abhorrence. With these two orators, tellability, a notion originally coined by William Labov (1972) to indicate the worthiness of a story, as well as its discursive arrangement (Wales 2011, 416-7), is constructed and enhanced with a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it deliberately spreads a provocative, or rather prejudiced and partisan, rendering of news, and on the other it incites addressees to act against the subjects depicted as targets. Conversely, in the case of Umar Khalid, the partisan colouring of tellability tries to generate an evaluation in the audience by strengthening the credibility, and worthiness, of the story, thus depicting the activist as a perilous instigator that has to be neutralised.

As S.F. has explored in their contribution, it is clear that the rhetorical system underpinning hate and anger narratives can provide visibility as well as invisibility, especially when it renders marginal subjects voiceless, and therefore even weaker. But this is not the only problematic side of the question since hypervisibility too can become a tool of propaganda and populism, especially when its discursive production, distribution and consumption takes place through media of different nature (including fiction), ultimately leading to the naturalisation of beliefs and values. The question of exposure becomes even more relevant in an age like ours, in which digital means have hyperbolised communication, so that online messages can not only be accessed by everyone in theory, but they can also be manipulated for specific purposes. The internet, and by extension other types of communication, are often perceived as a sort of mirror refracting the world in which human beings live, but actually it is a much more stratified system affected by various kinds of agency and powers. In their examination of the digital world, Friedrich and De Figueiredo for example distinguish between construction of reality and fabrication of reality, respectively indicating “the mediation of reality by our cultural and social beliefs” and “the making up of information by taking advantage of the open flow of it in virtual reality” (Friedrich and De Figueiredo 2016, 128). When news and stories circulate via social platforms and other digital means, almost inevitably they are reassembled so as to convey a particular point of view, as the case of Kapil Mishra and his use of a resource such as Twitter demonstrate. It is worth underlining that “social media might enable information flow by facilitating direct communication and exchange of ideas between the political entities, but might also

induce polarization” (Borah and Singh 2022, 1) and such binary opposition represents the ideal arena for conflicts and tensions.

As a matter of fact, what emerges from such subtle dynamics is a creed that mobilises masses of people, and more importantly constructs scapegoats by leveraging on certain markers of identity such as ethnicity, class or religion. As Eco maintains,

having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our systems of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one.” (Eco 2013, 10)

This explains the demonization (and condemnation) of those subjects that do not conform to the values of mainstream Indian society, currently dominated by the nationalist version of the Hindu thought, and that consequently are metaphorically constructed as examples of unacceptable difference or alterity. In this respect, Dwivedi warns about “the Hindu majoritarianism that continues to manoeuvre the ideologies of postcolonial India – by always positioning the Other as dangerous to its community and the nation” (Dwivedi 2012, 6). Evidence of such a tendency can be found in a wide range of domains, from politics and advertising to literature and even food, given the strict dietary prescriptions imposed by the Hindu religion in the Indian context, so that those who consume certain types of (taboo) foods (such as beef) are considered blasphemous, and consequently can become the target of fanatic violence. The short story “They Eat Meat!” authored by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar and collected in *The Adivasi Will not Dance* (2017) is exemplary in this respect.

This article has tried to tackle some of the complexities, paradoxes and effects of hate/anger stories and their spread and naturalization of ideologies in the contemporary Indian context, but it is clear that given the intricacy of such type of discourse I have only scratched the surface of a loaded question that will continue to affect the South Asian country. As Rosenstein points out, “the angers of the past are still with us today [...], also in the many emotional communities that surround us, whether in books, our neighborhoods, the cacophony of the internet, or elsewhere in the world” (Rosenstein 2020, 199). In concluding, I would like to suggest how the broad question of sad passions, which seems to embrace the entire contemporary world, needs to be urgently and efficiently treated, not only bearing in mind the consequences that both words and deeds have, but also considering the discrepancy between the monolithic idea of power, fixed via institutions, and the quotidian practices and behavioural styles, subjected to changes and transformations:

As debates around hate speech become global, it is crucial to remember that the language of hate speech laws reflects specific histories, and has to be read in relation to a complex set of historical and cultural factors that determine how such laws are used. Mobilization by community groups, as we see in the Indian case, can be used by dominant groups and powerful majorities to restrict internal criticism, and at other times to reinforce hate in ways that are completely at odds with the purported aims of the laws in question. (Narain 2018, 201)

It is no surprise that at the time of writing this article (spring 2024), the sociopolitical situation in India is particularly tense, given the current plans to enforce the Citizenship Amendment Act, a decision that will certainly affect the social scenario

and generate new responses and demonstrations, thus perpetuating the dynamics that underpin India's frictions. However, the results of the 2024 general elections, which have brought to a reduction of the presence of the BJP in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Indian Parliament), might redesign at least some of the current trends, in this way weakening the forms of hate speech that haunt a complex, multicultural and multilingual country like India.

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