

Call for Papers

Science, Technology and Nationalism in India

Workshop - 12 and 13 June 2023 - Université Paris Cité (campus Grands Moulins)

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Scientific rationale :

The rise of nationalism is a remarkable phenomenon of the early 21st century. Admittedly, mobilizing certain religious, cultural, linguistic, and historical features to promote a monolithic national identity is far from being novel and has already been interrogated by scholars. What is perhaps new is the way science is being bullied by certain local ideologies when it does not fit the national narrative or how governments use technology to control and discriminate against local populations. We can see such technoscientific evolutions of nationalism in India. The past decade has seen a Hindu-nationalist ideology making great strides in public opinion and rising to the highest position of power. Recent physical and verbal assaults on academic events, institutions, and researchers by groups of Hindu nationalist supporters, in the country and abroad, have sent worrying signals that the production and circulation of scientific knowledge are under threat. Ancient bastions of knowledge, such as social science departments, are being sacrificed because they let

students and researchers express critical political opinions. Meanwhile, the nationalist government has increasingly been drawing on new technologies to measure and filter its population, promote specific ideas, shut discordant voices, and assert the country's geopolitical importance and soft power.

Whereas science and technology have also historically played a role in nation-building (Inkster, 2001; Edgerton, 2007), they are being remobilized in original ways to shape the citizens' relations with their nations. In India, national identities have long been shaped by their opposition to the colonial powers, as they simultaneously crystallized across religious, ethnic, and communal lines. Although the local nationalist ideologies widely continue to dig into similar tensions, the use of scientific and technological tools, objects, and themes has changed in recent years to shape and encourage domestic identities, reframe, or even rewrite national histories and geographies (Banerjee and Coperman 2020). Oppositions with others (nations, communities) are themselves elaborated with the help of scientific concepts, for instance, the idea that there would be a Hindu DNA that runs across the diaspora, thus using genomics to redefine a political-cultural community. In India, science is mobilized with religion as a complementary source of truth and knowledge to develop a political Hindu nationalist vision that welcomes the liberalization and globalization of its markets (Subramanian, 2019). Meanwhile, other non-Hindu ideologies and cultures are framed as backward and standing in the way of national development.

New technologies are seen as tools to leapfrog specific steps of development, as has been the case with the quest for nuclear power in India right after its independence (Abraham, 2010; Hecht, 2014). This belief justifies the digitalization of state services (e.g., Digital Pakistan, Digital Bangladesh) and tech-intensive urban mapping and planning (e.g., smart cities and monitoring air pollution). This technoscientific belief has also allowed nations to implement controversial programs, such as the Aadhaar project in India, the most extensive biometric ID system in the world (Ranjit Singh, 2019). Private and state-led infrastructural changes, tech-driven delivery of welfare benefits and public services, and emerging information technologies have changed the way national identities are discussed and embraced, enabling competing voices to emerge while reinforcing radical opinions along the same lines. Technology is redefining the relationships between the citizen and their state as the primary administrative intermediary, one that is probably more univocal and systematic than the archetypical "babus" (civil servants). While we see the potential for less social and communitarian discrimination in accessing state services and citizenship rights, we can legitimately fear the institutionalization of certain political ideologies. Rather than just connecting people, technology can also be used by the national state to unplug or control other groups (Cohn 2017).

Also, the nature of science and technology is being redefined by the promotion of local cultural traditions, challenging knowledge produced in universities and research laboratories, for example, ayurvedic medicine in India, which is also penetrating Global North markets (Pordié et Gaudillière, 2012). While political actors dig into ancient sources of knowledge to redefine national identities, state policies simultaneously facilitate the

development of emerging industries (e.g., biotechnologies) to create national champions on the international stage. India's government have the tools to decide whether to retain or transfer certain technologies and to whom, far from the one-sided perspective of a passive country where knowledge circulates from the centre to the periphery (Headrick 1988). Exporting technologies is a tool of scientific diplomacy used by nations to redefine positions in global or regional political-economic systems such as the global South or Asia-African networks (Duclos 2012). In this sense, nationalism can change priorities between technological development imperatives and access to health, as exemplified in India's balancing act in the global regulation of pharmaceuticals (Quet 2018). As seen in managing the Covid-19 pandemic in India, the national industrial and health efforts can combine with nationalistic political and market interests (Chatterjee, Mahmood and Marcussen, 2021). Contributing to the nation's prestige has also pervaded entrepreneurial narratives, even in the case of modest industrial actors such as small-scale pharmaceutical enterprises (Rault-Chodankar 2022).

Although the question of nationalism in India has been of interest to many social science scholars, the relationship between science and nationalism has seldom been discussed in a more in-depth manner. STS perspectives and debates allow a framework that investigates the pivotal role and position of science and technology in the realization of state policies in India through several technoscientific projects and illustrates how deeply it is enmeshed within the larger political and social goals of national growth and development. Therefore, we would like to investigate the role science and technology play in these imbrications, the challenges they pose, and how these new assemblages reconfigure power relations between the Global North and the Global South within India, between States and markets.

To help illuminate and further understand these issues, this call invites propositions of papers related to science, technology, and nationalism in India, for instance around the following topics (the list is not exhaustive):

- Pharmaceutical and Healthcare industries
- Genomics and biotechnologies
- Traditional knowledge
- Digital governance and data protection
- Surveillance technologies
- Environment and climate change
- Green, fossil and nuclear energy
- Agriculture and food security
- Urban mapping and planning
- Academic research and universities
- Artificial Intelligence
- Platform economy
- Digital finance, banking and insurance

Submission conditions, scholarship, and practical information:

We extend an invitation to PhD candidates and postdoctoral researchers to submit their proposals, written in English, to the scientific committee by **March 17th, 2023**. The proposals should include the author's name, institutional affiliation, and an abstract of no more than 500 words.

The results of the selection process will be communicated by **April 3rd, 2023**.

The selected participants are required to submit their final paper, with a maximum length of 8,000 words, by **May 12th, 2023**. The selected papers will be discussed by one or several senior scholars.

The presentations selected through this call will be part of the two-day event "**Science, Technology and Nationalism in India**," held at the Université Paris Cité and Inalco, on June 12th and 13th.

The event will also feature a public conference on June 12th at 6 pm, organized at INALCO, featuring **Banu Subramaniam**'s recent book "Holy Science: the biopolitics of Hindu nationalism" (University of Washington Press, 2019) and a discussion led by **Rohan D'Souza** (University of Kyoto).

A limited number of scholarships are available, and applicants should request one when submitting their abstract. Preference will be given to scholars based outside of France for financial support, which will cover transportation and accommodation expenses.

The abstract and paper should be sent to the following e-mails:

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