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**Memories of Babri**

Competing Discourses and contrasting constructions of a  
media event

**Sanaya Chandar**

MSc in Media, Communication and Development

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# Memories of Babri

Competing Discourses and contrasting constructions of a media event

Sanaya Chandar

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is a curious thing that Dayan and Katz's seminal book, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992) was published in the same year that an event that was said to rock the foundations of Indian democracy transpired in the north Indian town of Ayodhya. On December 6, 1992, the Babri *masjid*, a 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque that had stood erect for more than four centuries, was demolished in the name of Lord Ram, a Hindu deity professed to be the ideal embodiment of 'Indian' consciousness. It was said that the Mughal emperor, Babur, erected the mosque on the exact location of the deity's birthplace after destroying a temple that once stood there. A campaign was launched to reclaim that land for the Hindus and build a grand temple on it, an issue that became a strong mobilising force for rising Hindu nationalism in the 80s and the 90s (Rajagopal, 2001). The ultimate demolition of the mosque in 1992 was therefore, a retributive act, meant to correct perceived wrongs from 400 years ago.

To study an event that has taken place in the recent past is to delve into the flux between history and journalism, between news and memory. Only 25 years have passed since that day and the event continues to make its mark in political debates, election manifestos, and broad claims about the future of Indian democracy. At the time of writing, a Hindu nationalist party (the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Indian People's Party) holds an absolute majority in the central government and has enjoyed a recent election victory in Uttar Pradesh, the state where Ayodhya is located. Criminal proceedings against those who were responsible for the mosque's destruction have been revived in March 2017. The event of the Babri demolition is, and has been, a touchstone for measuring differing ideas of India as a polity and a nation. However, only 25 years on, its professed significance for the Indian nation is still hotly contested and provides an outline for investigating communal fault-lines within Indian society.

So, what is the ongoing relevance of the event of the demolition to contemporary Indian politics and society? Every year, newspapers and magazines remember the event within their editorial columns, attempting to place the event within the status quo and using it as a contextual premise to offer explanations for present circumstances. It has been used to understand contemporary Indian politics by contextualising "the present-moment with explicit reference to the past and implicit reference to the future" (Leavy, 2007, p. 7). But even though the event provided fodder for gloomy prognoses about India's future in the 90s, has this significance aged well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Ascertaining an answer to this question is the primary motive of this research. It does so by examining the event as a special case of a *media event*, offering a critique of Dayan and Katz's original formulation in the process. The study investigates the *enduring* memory of the event that exists *through* discourse, specifically, journalistic discourse. In doing so, I hope to bring together two concepts, *media events* and *collective memory*, and use them to unearth and expound upon competing discourses that surround the event of the Babri demolition. These contrasting discourses and the interaction between them not only provide clues about the ongoing significance of the event, but also explicate persistent contradictions within Indian society and the consequent implications for ideas of Indian nationhood. Through this dissertation, I provide a problematisation of media events by placing the theory within a fragmented, developing society and also hope to reinforce the importance of media theory in studying an event like the demolition of the Babri *masjid*.

## 2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Before embarking on a systematic literature review of the chosen concepts, an elaboration of the contextual background of the study is in order. The north Indian town of Ayodhya, which was home to the Babri *masjid*, became the hotbed of communal politics in India in the 1980s and 90s. It was alleged by Hindu nationalist and fundamentalist groups such as the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad<sup>1</sup>), the BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party) and the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh<sup>2</sup>) that the mosque was situated on the exact location of the birthplace of the Hindu deity, Lord Ram. They claimed that a temple had stood on that very spot until the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Mughal ruler, Babur destroyed it and erected a mosque in its place. Thus, was launched the *Ramjanmabhumi* (birthplace of Ram) movement, a systematic campaign that demanded the retributive destruction of the mosque and a reclamation of the land underneath it for the construction of a grand temple dedicated to the deity. The campaign came to fruition on December 6, 1992 when a mob of frenzied Hindu activists succeeded in demolishing the mosque.

The roots of the 'mandir-masjid' (temple-mosque) issue, as it was referred to in the years leading up to the demolition, can be traced back to 1949 when an idol of Lord Ram allegedly 'appeared' within the mosque. Even though clashes over the land on which the mosque stood went as far back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this miraculous 'appearance' of the deity was taken to be an auspicious sign by Hindu nationalists at the time. There were renewed demands for the construction of a temple for the first time in post-Independence India, a tenuous situation that was dealt with by placing locks on the

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<sup>1</sup> World Hindu Council, a Hindu nationalist organisation that subscribes to the ideology of Hindutva

<sup>2</sup> National Volunteer Organisation

mosque and foreclosing any Hindu worship in it. This continued until 1986 when Rajiv Gandhi, the erstwhile prime minister of India, ordered the locks to be opened in order to placate alienated Hindu groups, bristling at what they perceived to be appeasement and preferential treatment towards the Muslim minority. Demands for the demolition of the mosque found new fervour thereafter, as the VHP, the RSS and their political counterpart, the BJP launched the *Ramjanmabhumi* movement, mobilising mass support across vast stretches of northern India in a bid to enter into political prominence within the polity. The demolition triggered some of the most devastating riots between ethnic communities that extended out from Ayodhya to different parts of the country; more than 2000 deaths resulted from violent clashes in January 1993.

Taken as a whole, the event of the *Ramjanmabhumi* campaign and the subsequent demolition of the mosque marked three important shifts in modern Indian political history. Firstly, religion, which had always been central to social life in India, but remained at the fringes of the electoral process, entered the mainstream of Indian politics with the BJP making use of explicitly religious symbols and messages to mobilise support for the campaign (Rajagopal, 2001). It is widely held that it was the Ram temple campaign that brought the party into political prominence; popular support for the campaign was translated into substantial electoral gains during the elections of 1989 and the BJP began to be considered as a viable opposition party (Nandy, Trivedy, Mayaram, & Yagnik, 1995; Rajagopal, 2001). Secondly, this event, which culminated in the destruction of the mosque in 1992, occurred in the context of a sizeable expansion of the media and communications landscape of the country (Gupta & Sharma, 1996; Rajagopal, 2001). Rajagopal (2001) argues that the event wedded media, politics and religion together for the first time. Not only was the campaign characterised by substantial coverage in the English and Hindi language press, but the expansion of electronic media allowed for the articulation of new cultural and religious symbols, particularly that of Lord Ram in the hugely popular 'mythological soap operas' that were broadcast on national television (Guha, 2007; Rajagopal, 2001). The expanding media landscape, especially the televisual medium, 're-shape(d) the context in which politics (was) conceived, enacted and understood' (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 1). The rise of the BJP was thus, intimately related to a newly liberalised economy and the political exploitation of new communication systems.

Lastly, the event threw into sharp relief communal divisions within the Indian public sphere between communities that were targeted by the movement and those that remained at a distance from it (Rajagopal, 2001). Even while the movement aimed to create support for a homogeneous Hindu identity, the press coverage of the campaign highlighted what Rajagopal (2001) calls a 'split-public' (p. 151). While the English press held fast to ideals of objectivity and neutrality when it reported on the event as an issue that harmed democracy and secularism and thus, required appropriate security measures, the Hindi press recognised the cultural significance of the campaign to sizeable proportion

of the populace; coverage of the event in the English press was characterised by a distance and an 'aloofness', while the Hindi press reflected greater social and cultural proximity to the movement (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 16). Correspondingly, Nandy et al. (1995) identify a 'forgetfulness' or denial that plagued the modernised, English-speaking classes of the subcontinent and belied an awareness of the rise of fundamentalist forces; these forces represented what they called 'the disowned other self of South Asia's modernising middle classes' (p. viii).

The event of the demolition of the Babri *masjid* was hailed as an historic inflexion point in the trajectory of modern Indian politics. Khilnani (1997) referred to it as 'the most piercing assault ever faced by the Indian state, one that shook its basic political identity' (p. 151). It was an event that has claimed historical significance and triggered sombre prognoses for the future of the Indian democracy (Guha, 2007). Moreover, the movement and the demolition entailed a broader shift in politics by welding religious fundamentalism with a keener understanding of communication power by a political party (Rajagopal, 2001). However, only 25 years have passed since the day the mosque was demolished and the event remains within the country's very recent past. The complete significance of the event and its implications for the Indian polity are still unfurling; we still operate within 'the din and clamour' of the present in trying to ascertain the implications of this event (Guha, 2007, p. 607). In this study, I aim to analyse the discourses that constitute the memory of this event in contemporary print journalism and thereby trace ongoing themes and evolutions that characterise them. I treat the demolition as a *media event* and its memory in contemporary journalistic discourse as an active site of construction and contestation to 'trace the specific paths taken in the circulation of (its) messages' to understand its enduring significance for politics in twenty-first century India (Rajagopal, 2001, p. 11).

### **3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the following section, I elucidate the existing literature that underpins the two primary concepts that make up the theoretical framework of this study: *media events* and *memory* in journalistic discourse. I first explore the concepts individually within the context of the Babri demolition and then move on to establish the link between them.

#### **3.1 Media Events**

The theory of *media events* was originally formulated by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz in their hugely influential book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992). Media events, in their original formulation, were events that embodied a 'sense of occasion' and were an expression of society's values in their most ideal form (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. viii). They were pre-planned 'high holidays of mass communication' which were organised by established authorities, broadcast live and

constituted an interruption in the routines of broadcasters and audiences alike (ibid, 1992, p. 1). These were events that were characterised by a historicity and in a neo-Durkheimian spirit, reflected the realisation of television's full potential: to achieve societal integration around an established 'centre', as audiences in a nation collectively devoted their attention to their television screens (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Thus, media events were seen as explicitly positive in their effect, performing the function of integrating society around some shared values and renewing loyalty towards some legitimate source of authority (Couldry, 2003). Dayan and Katz (1992) envisioned media events as a new narrative genre that deployed the capabilities of the televisual medium; live broadcasts of events were said to follow specific scripts of *contest*, *conquest* and *coronation*, each of which served the ceremonial function of gathering an audience around society's perceived centre. *Contests* included a face-off between two rivals taking place under a strict set of rules, as is seen in the case of presidential debates. *Conquests* were heroic and seemingly impossible acts of historic achievement by a charismatic leader and *coronations* referred to commemorative events organised by the state such as state funerals or royal weddings that were broadcast by the media with an explicit tone of reverence (Dayan & Katz, 1992).

This set of conditions and parameters for what defines a media event has since come under criticism from various corners of media scholarship. Studying the case of the demolition of the Babri *masjid* under the rubric of a *media event* necessitates the elucidation of the various critiques that have been levelled against Dayan and Katz's theory. The original formulation of the theory has been criticised for lacking a historicity even as it purported to be a 'live broadcast of history'; it lacks a 'a sense of before and after *Media Events*', a sense of what differentiates the mediated broadcast of a public event from what it would have been before the advent of broadcast media (Scannell, 1995, p. 154). Others have criticised it for adopting a benign view towards societies of sharing a common set of values that are reinforced and expressed through exceptional communicative events; events that are often conflictual in nature can arguably meet the requirements of a media event without reinstating some central, commonly held value (Couldry, 2003; Couldry & Hepp, 2010). Scholars have therefore, questioned the integrative function of pre-planned, ceremonial media events by emphasising events of a more conflictual, unplanned nature (Couldry, 2003) or disaster coverage that dominates broadcast schedules in much the same way that media events are prescribed to do so (Liebes, 1998).

Additionally, the changed context of the twenty-first century has witnessed several developments in the global media landscape; the diminishing presence of the nation-state as a unit of analysis, increasing fragmentation of the community into individualised units, as well as the omnipresence of a multiplicity of media forms has necessitated a concerted effort to revisit the theory to better apply it to life and events in the new millennium. Couldry et al. (2010) undertake this task of re-theorising *media events* in the age of globalisation, updating a framework which was formulated very much within the context of a nation-state to a more de-territorialised, diffuse definition that is more suited

to the global media landscape. Dayan (2010) revisits his theory by arguing that the changed context is characterised by increasing conflictualisation, banalisation and disenchantment; no longer are media events exceptional moments that are attended to with awe, but an explosion of news coverage has led to a host of 'almost' media events that blur the lines between news and traditional events (p. 27). Essentially, critiques of *media events* have centred around the very '*particular* constitution of authority, power, intention, loyalty, and performance (emphasis mine)' that they demand; on the contrary, it is argued that their 'normative status is not found in their form, genre, or content, but in a complex and layered set of conditions and interactions' (Hoover, 2010, p. 294).

Couldry (2003) offers an alternative conceptualisation of *media events* by viewing them through the lens of the ritualised actions of the media that vest in them the authority to represent reality. By studying the actions that have been ritualised by the media, Couldry (2003) offers a critique of Dayan and Katz's insistence on the exceptional nature of these events. Indeed, Silverstone (1999) argues that an overemphasis on the exceptional may be misleading, an underestimation of the routine nature of media processes that fit into the organisation of social life as a whole. Applying a media rituals approach to *media events* then views them as 'large-scale media-focused social processes whose overall organising frame is precisely the values, or at least the *assumed* values, that underlie a Durkheimian reading of media rituals: the affirmation of the social bond through the media process (emphasis original)' (Couldry, 2003, p. 60). An emphasis on "assumed" implies that the values embodied by these events are no mere expressions of some 'centre', but are ideological constructions that play a role in constituting social collectivities; this view embodies a *critical approach* that studies media events as contesting constructions and not implicitly integrative in nature.

While Dayan and Katz's (1992) original formulation presumed a stable society with a shared set of values, this assumption does not hold in many multi-cultural, developing societies like India. The *Ramjanmabhumi* movement, particularly, was a concerted effort to unite a disparate, diffuse and highly diversified Hindu community around a single issue: that of building a temple in the name of Lord Ram (Bhattacharya, 1992; Guha, 2007; Nandy et al., 1995; Rajagopal, 2001). Hinduism and *Hindutva* (political belief that India is a Hindu state) in its present form is very much a modern conception that took shape only within the context of colonial rule and the import of European Enlightenment ideals (Nandy et al., 1995). The religion lacked a holy book, a principal deity and was additionally afflicted by divisions of class and caste (Bhattacharya, 1992; Nandy et al., 1995; Rajagopal, 2001). The intention of the movement and the consequent demolition, therefore, was to integrate Hindu society. However, even while it attempted the integration of a section of society (a section that it believed was exemplary of Indian society as a whole) this was an event that created deep fissures in Indian society and in the Indian public sphere (Rajagopal, 2001, 2016). The contentious nature of an event that was motivated by an intent to unite by instigating conflict against



an othered community offers rich opportunities for revisiting Dayan and Katz's theory. These contentions live on, more than two decades later, in the memories of the event as constituted by media discourses, which brings us to the next section: *media* and *collective memory*.

### 3.2 Media and Collective Memory

Journalism, says Zelizer (2008), provides 'one of the most public drafts of the past' (p. 79). Media institutions, including journalism, offer a 'warehouse' for the storage of public memory, to be drawn upon in the future (Steiner & Zelizer, 1995, p. 233). The media then become the conduit through which memory is articulated, even as they serve the function of storing recollections of the past (Silverstone, 1999). *Media memories* are the 'collective pasts that are narrated *by* the media, *through* the use of the media, and about the media' and are the outcome of a process of mediation that collective memory is subjected to (Neiger, Mayers & Zandberg, 2011, p. 1). Significantly, the memory so articulated by the media is *collective* and public in nature, not individual or private. It is this emphasis on the collective nature of memory that traverses journalistic and media channels that creates opportunities of reaffirming a group identity within the act of recall. This type of memory 'refers to recollections that are instantiated beyond the individual by and for the collective'; these are instances of recall that are '*determined and shaped by the group* (emphasis mine)' (Steiner & Zelizer, p. 214). The collective nature of these memories plays a key role in the affirmation and *construction* of groups, identities, and ideologies with their focus on ideas of a *shared* past (Neiger et al, 2011; Silverstone, 1999; Steiner & Zelizer, 1995; Zelizer, 2008). Memory, then, is no longer a simple cognitive process confined to the individual, but is a crucial social and political act of mediation and construction (Silverstone, 1999; Steiner & Zelizer, 1995).

Media and collective memory share a relationship that surfaces in questions of authority. Especially in the case of events that have transpired in the recent past, media assume the role of recounting history, of representing the past, when official and standardised sources have not created a consensus about a particular event (Silverstone, 1999; Steiner & Zelizer, 1995). The process of remembering is processual in nature, constantly changing and undergoing transformations, a feature that explains our 'inability to fasten memory work long enough to generate consensual notions about it' (Steiner & Zelizer, 1995, p. 220). This lack of consensus about the past is especially stark in the case of events that are covered by the media; these events offer 'memory a platter on which to serve historical accounting' and in doing so, invite contrasting constructions that 'shatter or reinforce a moral, cultural or political consensus' around the event (Steiner & Zelizer, 1995, p. 231). An emphasis on media memories as *socio-political constructions* that are as indicative of the present that produces them

as they are of the past event that they refer to, make collective memory in the media a ground for contestation, a platform for the negotiation of common values and identities (Neiger et al., 2011; Steiner & Zelizer, 1995). Leavy (2007) asserts that it is in the manner that 'iconic events' in collective memory are narrated 'which evoke currents of patriotism, ideas about democracy, or other values of nationhood' (p. 9). The memory of the demolition of the Babri *masjid*, an event that called 'the idea of India' into question (Khilnani, 1997), thus serves as an ideal vantage point for studying contrasting discourses and values of nationhood.

Journalism, particularly, serves as an 'institution of mnemonic record' (Zelizer, 2008, p. 79). It is an institution that provides the 'first draft of history' in chronicling an event and therefore, claims the authority to not only retellings of the event, but also to report on what *really* happened (Edy, 1999, p. 71). Routine practices of remembering and making sense of the present context within journalistic discourse construct a sense of 'history-in-motion' by ritualising these acts of recollection (Steiner & Zelizer, 1995, p. 216). These 'rituals of collective memory' that are encapsulated by regularly recalling events within journalistic discourse 'are part of a daily interpretive process whereby we attempt to gain a sense of our environment.' (Leavy, 2007, p. 7). Schudson (2014) in stressing the importance of routine journalistic practices, argues that it is 'in the quest for coherent understanding...that journalists may make their most valuable contribution to social memory' (p. 88). Therefore, journalism's recall of the event of the Babri demolition, whether it be to explain the present circumstances or to acknowledge an event that changed the course of Indian political history, is fertile ground for investigating competing discourses and memories of the event. Remembering the event in newspaper and magazine columns, especially on the date of its occurrence, makes it a kind of *anniversary journalism*, albeit the matter of whether the act of remembering is commemorative or not is what makes this memory an active field of contestation (Kitch, 2002). Unearthing contrasting constructions of memories of the Babri demolition in contemporary journalistic discourse thus, becomes a useful exercise of extracting contrasting ideas of Indian nationhood that form the fault lines within the Indian public.

In this section, I have presented the relevant literature on the two concepts that I have chosen to use as the lens to study the case of the demolition of the Babri *masjid*. While literature on *media events* and their theoretical evolution have focused on large scale, integrative events broadcast in developed societies, such as royal weddings, coronations, or the Olympics (Couldry, 2003; Couldry & Hepp, 2010; Dayan, 2010; Dayan & Katz, 1992), studying the concept in less stable, multicultural developing societies is an area of research that is still underdeveloped. The contested nature of the Babri demolition and its violent aftermath are indicative of splits that run along Indian society, a mark of how values are *not* commonly shared by all (Rajagopal, 2001). Studying the endurance of this event into the 21<sup>st</sup> century through memories articulated in regularised journalistic discourse then functions

as a special case of the media events theory. It is an application of a critical approach to media events wedded to an analysis of retrospective discourses, with a special attention to how competing discourse and constructions interact with one another. In the following section, I state lucidly the conceptual framework that I have chosen to conduct an analysis of competing discourses of the Babri demolition.

#### 4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework that I adopt for conducting this research therefore draws on Dayan and Katz's (1992) formulation of *media events* as historic occasions that mark a turning point in the development of a nation, Couldry's (2003) critical approach towards media events, and *collective memories* constituted through journalistic discourse. This research functions as a critique of the original formulation of *media events* by studying the case of the demolition of the Babri *masjid* within its proposed theoretical framework. This exercise is achieved by studying contrasting *collective memories* of the event as they are articulated in journalistic discourse. The link between the chosen concepts, collective memory and media events, lies in viewing them as *constructions* that are motivated by conflicting ideological interests (Couldry, 2003; Neiger et al., 2011; Steiner & Zelizer, 1995). A critical approach towards media events by viewing them as *media rituals* or as repeated articulations of the media's power to represent reality (Couldry, 2003) moves this research away from an analysis of the exceptional to the routine, a shift that is effected by studying the ritualised recollection of the Babri demolition within journalistic discourse. While the event itself may be exceptional, its regularised invocation to provide explanations for the present brings it within the category of mundane journalistic endeavours, into the domain of the *media ritual*. 'Reminiscent journalism' says Kitch (2002) 'is a dialogic creation of journalists and audiences, who together *construct* collective memory and a shared national identity based on the passage of time (emphasis mine)' (p. 47). Contrasting constructions of memories of the demolition therefore, correspond with contrasting conceptions of Indian nationhood; memories of the event and the event itself function as the stage for negotiating and contesting meaning ideas of what it means to be Indian.

Viewing both media events and collective memories as constructions rather than expressions of some presumed central authority allows an investigation into contested meanings and the significance attached to a dominant event. This makes relevant an analysis of the competing discourses that surround a disruptive, conflictual event such as the demolition of the Babri *masjid*. This research then places itself at the intersection of *media events*, *collective memory*, and their ideological articulation

through discourse, an intersection that knits together these concepts by an emphasis on their *constructed* nature.

## 5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Through this study, I aim to achieve three research objectives: a critique of the *media events* theory by applying it to the case of a conflictual event within a developing society, contributing to the burgeoning literature on the links between journalism and memory by studying competing memories within journalistic discourse, and conducting a fresh analysis of the Babri demolition within the rubric of media theory. The research question thus addressed by this project is as follows:

How are competing discourses of the Babri demolition articulated through memories of the event in contemporary print media?

Implicit in this question are the sub-questions of **how the demolition is constructed as an event** by differing sources and consequently, **what significance is attached to it**.

The research makes a contribution to existing *media events* literature by offering a rich and unique case to test its limitations and possibilities within developing societies. It makes a contribution to existing literature on media and *collective memory* by conducting an analysis of the memories of an event that survives *through* journalistic discourse, thereby investigating the contested nature of collective memory. Finally, while the demolition of the Babri *masjid* has been thoroughly analysed within the disciplines of sociology, history and political science, its implications for media theory and media theory's implications for it are ripe for exploration. Rajagopal (2001) provided an incisive study into the role played by television in the fruition of the *Ramjanmabhumi* campaign and the features of the press coverage thereof. Through this study, I attempt to update the literature that focuses on the Babri demolition within the rubric of media theory by studying the event through contrasting retrospective accounts. The changed context within India that has seen both the rise of communalism as well as an expansion of the media landscape, thus make this case study an opportunity to better understand the splits and fragmentations within Indian society.

## 6 METHODOLOGY

To investigate the research question at hand, I have undertaken a discourse analysis of the chosen textual material. My chosen research methodology and design have met the ethical standards of the institution and have been approved by my dissertation supervisor.

Discourse analytic methods involve careful considerations of both theory *and* method (Gee, 2014; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002) and the present research has been guided as much by discourse theory and its own theoretical framework as the research question itself. The conceptual framework underpinning this investigation of viewing media events and memories *as constructions*, expressing the interests of various social actors is closely entwined with the **Foucauldian theory of discourse** as productive and *constitutive* of the social world (Chouliaraki, 2008; Foucault, 1978). Specifically, within the discourse analytic tradition, I use Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional approach of **critical discourse analysis (CDA)**, which draws on this Foucauldian theory of discourse, to study the contrasting discourses surrounding the event of the Babri demolition within the larger context of social practices in India (Fairclough, 1995; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002; Rose, 2001). CDA is particularly appropriate for this study because of its emphasis on a two-way relationship between discourses and the socio-cultural contexts that they are both born of and give meaning to; discourse within CDA, Phillips and Jørgensen (2002) maintain, 'is in a *dialectical* relationship with other social dimensions. It does not just contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures but also reflects them (emphasis original)' (p. 61). Theories underpinning the discourse analysis are thus, augmented by an interdisciplinary approach that considers theories related to media events, memory, and nationalism to explore and locate the event within broader social practice and explicate contrasting ideas of Indian nationhood.

Discourse analysis was chosen over other methods because of the study's focus on *contrasting constructions* of an event in *public* memory and correspondingly, on *competing* discourses that constitute that memory. Foucault (1978) stresses that social subjectivities are born of the process of discourse. It therefore follows that competing discourses entail the constitution of different and often contrasting subjectivities. Discourses also '*position* people as social subjects (emphasis original)' and the present research seeks to study the nature of this "positioning" of different ideological perspectives and ideas of nationalism through the use of discourse analytical tools (Talbot, 2007, p. 11). Additionally, the research concerns itself with notions of the public memory of an event as it is articulated *through* journalistic discourse. This theoretical decision necessitates the analysis of textual journalistic material, a decision that logically orients the research towards discourse analysis. Using a research methodology like interviews would analyse journalism's role in constituting public memory by studying discourses as they have been consumed and received by the audience, but would lack the tools to delve into the nuances of the public discourses that form an important source of that memory (Zelizer, 2008). This research is a study into the process of the production of discourse and the constructions that it entails; the study seeks to understand *mediated* memories (Silverstone, 1999) of a *mediated* event (Couldry, 2003) and therefore, necessitates an analysis of the materials that do the mediating. Besides, to capture the depth and complexity of different discourses and ideological positions on the Babri demolition, the sample of interviewees would require a diversity that was not

feasible for a study being conducted in the United Kingdom. A critical discourse analysis of memories articulated through major news publications that adopt differing ideological positions therefore, achieves not only an analysis of journalism's role in constituting public memory, but also an elucidation of contrasting constructions of the demolition *as an event* in journalistic discourse.

## 6.1 Sample Selection

In this study, I critically analyse discourses pertaining to the event of the Babri demolition in 10 news articles that have been published by national publications taking up different positions along the ideological divide that persists in the Indian public (Rajagopal, 2016). Contrary to worldwide trends, print media in India has been growing rather than declining since the 90s and forms a substantial part of the Indian public sphere (Gupta & Sharma, 1996; Rajagopal 2001, 2016). The publications selected include two of India's leading English dailies, the *Times of India* and the *Indian Express* (forming a part of the purported 'secular', non-partisan press), and the *Organiser*, a weekly magazine published by the RSS, the social wing of the BJP. *Organiser* straddles the loose divide between media and political discourse, but is an important addition to sample to provide for the ideological diversity that the study demands. It is self-described as 'one of the oldest and most widely circulated weeklies from the capital'<sup>3</sup> and formed an important conduit for the articulation of the ideology in support of the Ramjanmabhumi movement in the years leading up to the demolition (Gopal, 1992; Rajagopal, 2001). Therefore, the sample includes a melange of media and mediated political discourse (Fairclough, 1995), both of which have a bearing on the construction of the public memory of the event.

This study restricts itself to English publications to fully utilise the tools of CDA, a socio-*linguistic* methodology that does not lend itself well to other languages. Discourses in the English press also resort to rationalist discourses of democracy and secularism (Rajagopal, 2001) that make up 'the modern idiom of politics' that the intended English-speaking Indian public has been exposed to (Nandy et al., p. 77). These rationalist discourses are also what underpin the project of Hindu nationalism, the main thrust of the Ramjanmabhumi movement. Therefore, the political significance of the event in a country that at least on the surface claims to be committed to rationalist discourses of democracy and secularism (Guha, 2007) requires an analysis of the relevant discourses that have been appealed to in the past, manifest in the 'idiom of politics' of the English-language press.

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<sup>3</sup> (About Us: Organiser, 2017)

The selected articles (six from *Times of India* and *Indian Express*, four from *Organiser*) have been published between 2010<sup>4</sup> and 2017. All the articles invoke the memory of the demolition and bulk of them have been published on or around December 6, the anniversary of the demolition. As far as possible, articles that simply recall the demolition as an event and not as a response to reports of new developments have been selected to reconstruct contrasting memories of the event. Sampling restrictions enforced by questions of access and language, however, may make the discourses take on a dichotomous appearance of secular versus fundamentalist. A conscious effort has been made to emphasise the internal nuances of the discourses to correct for this by exploring common themes between the two positions as well as the contradictions. While studying the English-language press is an important angle to explore the memory of the Babri demolition, an ideal sampling strategy for a project not restricted by time and access would involve an exploration of the multiplicity of positions in relation to the event. This would involve both a consideration of press coverage in different languages as well as an analysis of regional news.

## 6.2 Research Design

Fairclough's (1995) CDA provides a three-dimensional approach that forms the research design of this study. The approach analyses the **textual, discursive and sociocultural dimensions** of any communicative event to study the relationship between socio-linguistic structures and the broader context of which they are a part (Fairclough, 1995; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). This design was first piloted on a sample of three texts published by only non-partisan sources. It was found that for this larger project, the analysis would be augmented by a diversity of ideological positions to allow for a deeper intertextual analysis. CDA focuses on *intertextuality* or 'how an individual text draws on elements and discourses of other texts' (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 7). Intertextual analysis, Fairclough (1995) stresses, is 'the traces of discourse practice' in the texts being analysed and is the link between the text and the different discourse types and genres it draws on (p. 61). A focus on intertextuality allows me to explore how competing discourses respond to one another by identifying common themes as well as contradictions between two ideological discourses that have conventionally been pitted against each other. I carried out the research by first analysing texts that constitute each position separately (*Times of India* and *Indian Express* on the one hand and *Organiser* on the other) and then comparing and contrasting the major themes extrapolated from the individual analyses.

The research tools that I utilise in each of the three dimensions are summarised in the table below:

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<sup>4</sup> 2010 marked the year when the Allahabad High Court released its landmark verdict on the question of the ownership of the land on which the mosque previously stood, dividing the land between Hindu and Muslim groups.

**Table 1: Critical Discourse Analysis: Fairclough's three-dimensional approach**

Dimension	Tools Utilised
Textual	<p>This dimension refers to the meanings and forms of the linguistic structures utilised by a text (Fairclough, 1995). The tools include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="479 567 1299 787">1. <b>Presuppositions</b> – This tool refers to that information that text <i>assumes</i> the readers to already possess and is contained in what the text relegates to the background in its presentation of information. Presuppositions, thus, <i>orient</i> the readers in specific ways and pay a crucial ideological role in the construction of different subjectivities (Fairclough, 1995)</li><li data-bbox="479 829 1299 934">2. <b>Recontextualisation of social practices</b>– This tool refers to the transformation of larger social practices within the text to better suit its own purposes (Fairclough, 1995).</li></ol>
Discursive	<p>Intertextuality is nestled within this dimension. It encapsulates the different discourse types and genres that the text draws on in the process of its production. The tools within the discursive dimension include: the <b>genre</b> of the text, use of <b>narrative, voices</b> that are drawn on and the overall <b>discourse representation</b>, the different <b>discourse types</b> that are articulated in the text as well as the use of <b>metaphors</b> by the text (Fairclough, 1995). This dimension is used to identify common as well as contrasting themes occurring across ideological discourses.</p>
Socio-cultural	<p>This dimension refers to the broader socio-cultural practices that the communicative event both constitutes and is constituted by. These are the economic and socio-political goings-on at the time the text was produced which have a bearing on its discursive meaning (Fairclough, 1995; Phillips &amp; Jørgensen, 2002). For this study, both the socio-cultural context that the texts evoke by calling on the memories of the demolition, as well as the contexts and events that gave rise to these retrospective accounts between 2010 and 2017 have been considered in the discourse analysis.</p>



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At the heart of CDA, therefore, is the study of ideological discourses ‘that contribute to the maintenance and transformation of power relations’ (Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002, p. 75). An analysis of different ideological positions relating to the Babri demolition thus finds itself aptly in this methodological domain. Moreover, the approach allows me to adopt a critical stance with respect to my research question; it is my aim to not only describe the two discursive strands, but also to unearth the contradictions inherent in them and place my findings with India’s contemporary political context.

## 7 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

In this section, I present the core themes that were extracted from the critical discourse analysis of the 10 articles using the three-dimensional approach. I divide this section into three parts: first, I present the analysis of those publications that claim to represent a ‘secular’ or non-partisan position in the Indian public sphere (*Times of India* and *Indian Express*). I then move on to present the analysis of the opposing discourses contained in the *Organiser* articles. Finally, in the last section, I discuss the interactions between the two competing strands of discourse, focusing on both common and contrasting themes. I also use this final analysis to place the CDA within the theoretical framework of *media events* and *public memory* as constituted by journalistic discourse; I tie back the analysis to the proposed research question ‘*How are competing discourses of the Babri demolition articulated through memories of the event in contemporary print media?*’ and in doing so, put forward a critique of Dayan and Katz’s (1992) theoretical formulation of *media events*.

### 7.1 *Times of India and Indian Express on Babri: An analysis*

Using Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional approach, the CDA was aimed at unearthing *how the event is remembered* through discourse and what kind of *significance* is attached to the event by invoking memories of it. Both of these questions help draw conclusions about the construction of the demolition *as an event* and thus allow for an investigation of *media events* in relation to this case.

Three broad themes were extrapolated from the analysis: the nature of **authority** that the texts draw on to claim authenticity and objectivity, a set of **secularist and rationalist discourses**, and an evidence of **orienting readers** in specific ways, thereby constituting a specific subjectivity through discourse. The first two themes draw on the discursive dimension of Fairclough’s approach, while the third

theme is based on the interaction between the textual and socio-cultural dimensions. It is found that through the operation of all three dimensions, the 'secular' press attempts a desacralisation of the discourses pertaining to the event of the demolition.

## 7.2 Use of Authoritative Voices

Authoritative claims of authenticity of the *real* significance of the event emanate from two broad sources as per the analysis: the **voice of ordinary citizens** residing in Ayodhya on the one hand, and the **voice of experts and academics** on the other. Drawing on different voices to make claims of authenticity is functionally determined in the case of this sample, functions that influence the genre of the texts as well (Fairclough, 1995). Texts that draw on the voice of ordinary citizens tend to adopt a **narrative** format in treating the memory of the demolition, while texts that draw on the voices of experts and academics tend to stick with editorial tradition by seeking to be **informative** sources of memories of the event. The use of narrative, as opposed to an editorial format is visible in the following two extracts that directly invoke the memory of the demolition:

*On the morning of December 6, 1992, I was to travel to Ayodhya for the sixth straight day. In Lucknow, the roads were empty, silent. A cold morning. It now feels like the calm before a storm. We knew there was trouble brewing in Ayodhya, big trouble, but what we didn't know was that over 3 lakh karsevaks (religious workers) has gathered there, biding their time (The Times of India, 2012)*

*After assuming power in UP under Kalyan Singh, saffron forces gave the call to start 'symbolic' construction of the Temple on December 6, 1992, which led to the demolition of the mosque (Tripathi, 2012)*

The narrative structure of the first extract not only allows for a more descriptive and evocative writing style, but more significantly, constitutes what is a noticeable *individualisation* of discourse. The narratives draw on the voices of individuals who have been physically present at the site of the demolition, whether they be Ayodhya's ordinary citizens or journalists reporting on a story. Giving a voice to children, students, local authorities in Ayodhya, and devout individuals makes a claim to authenticity by representing 'a *real* city of *real* people with aspirations and needs like that of any other (emphasis mine)' (Apurva, 2012). This individualisation seeks to vest ordinary citizens with the authority to make claims about the "ground reality" of living conditions in Ayodhya and the significance of the event to their lives. This individualisation is most starkly visible in an *Indian Express* article that marks the anniversary of the demolition by outlining the daily routine of the head-priest at the makeshift temple installed at the site of the demolition:

*Das wakes up at 4 am and recites bhajans (chants) for two hours. At 6 am, he turns on the radio to listen to bhajans and Ramcharitramanas. An hour and a half later, he listens to news on radio, followed by reading the news-paper and then watches news on television. After the morning aarti (prayer), he gets into his Mahindra Scorpio and drives 3 km to his place of work – the makeshift temple of Ram Lalla (Singh, 2014)*

The voice of a single individual therefore, encapsulates the authority to represent significance of the demolition *to the region* through this discursive representation. Therefore, individualised discourses emanating from the voices of ordinary citizens also constitute a *localisation* of discourse. By calling on the lives of Ayodhya's citizens, these narratives are a response to the national significance that has been accorded to the event (Guha, 2007; Khilnani, 1997; Rajagopal, 2001). Localisation serves to draw a contrast between an event that gets 'bandied about in political debates and discourses' at the national level and the 'real' conditions of people and in doing so, highlights the *political* nature of an event that claims to find its cause in religion; it denies that the event has any cultural or religious significance for the people residing in the town, a discursive strategy that contributes to a desacralisation of discourse pertaining to Babri.

Contrastingly, editorial texts that seek to inform draw on authoritative voices such as those of political analysts and academics to make claims about the significance of the event. These voices stand for an almost universal truth that applies to the entirety of the nation:

*Inflection points leave their mark and, therefore, need to be acknowledged. In his magnificent book, The Age of Revolution, Eric Hobsbawm speaks of the way the French Revolution lived on in slogans, and even in the choice of a tricolour, in nations that were fighting for liberation more than a century later (Chishti, 2012).*

Appealing to academia allows the text make assertions about the *national* significance of the event, calling it an "inflection point" and claiming that it changed the "Indian polity forever" (Tripathi, 2012). Absent from these discourses are individual voices of the locals, a discursive strategy that has the opposite effect of localisation. While texts that localise the issue make an explicit attempt to bely the actual significance of the event to the lives of ordinary people, discourses that construct the demolition as a landmark event emphasise its importance in public memory. However, it is significant that the latter discourses construct the demolition as a *political* event that serves as an inflection point in Indian political history. Similar to the narrative texts, these texts also distance the event away from any cultural and religious significance, thereby contributing to the desacralisation of discourse, manifest in the memory of the demolition.

### 7.3 Discourse Deployed

A major theme uncovered by the analysis is the presence of secular and rationalist discourses in the texts. These discourses have a twofold effect: a quality of inclusivity which in turn, contributes to a further desacralisation of the discourses pertaining to an event said to be religiously motivated.

Within this ideological position, secular and rationalist discourses pertaining to the economic growth and development of the region, as well as legal discourse and constitutionality feature most prominently. Discourses related to economic growth and development once again localise the significance of the demolition by expounding upon present conditions in the region of Ayodhya:

*The town gets about 3,000 visitors a day on average, but has nothing to keep them back – no hotels, no dhabas (roadside eateries) and restaurants and no markets. A large part of the town, about 69 acres of it, is part of the disputed site and is cordoned off. The only economy here is the one that is centred around the disputed structure, a sad reminder of a town that never moved on (Apurva, 2012)*

Foregrounding the stagnated economic development of the town as the lasting memory of Babri demolition in discourses of growth and development further divests the event of the religious significance attached to it. The significance of the event therefore lies, not in its political ramifications or theological implications, but in the developmental decline that set in following the events of December 6, 1992. Additionally, a melange of voices is drawn upon to reinforce this discourse of growth and development, a carefully chosen mixture that includes individuals from both religious faiths. It's asserted that "the incident doesn't deserve further interest in the best interest of Ayodhya" and that it "robbed the city and its people of their right to development" (Sharda, 2014). Issues of development then acquire a secular character in the face of a communal dispute; questions of a declining economy and stalled development affect the lives of all of Ayodhya's citizens, Hindu and Muslim alike. These discursive strategies not only aspire to achieve an inclusive character, but also contribute further to the localisation and desacralisation of discourse.

Corresponding to economic discourses of growth and development that localise discourse are discourses that pertain to legality and constitutionality that exalt the event's national importance. Rajagopal (2001) remarks that the English-language press of the 80s emphasised the 'truth-value' of news by adopting stances of transparency and neutrality while covering the *Ramjanmabhumi* campaign at the close of the decade (p. 152). This meant that the campaign was viewed as an issue that pertained to law and order, rather than a movement that had close cultural links with a major section of the populace (Rajagopal, 2001). Similarly, the texts analysed describe in detail the security measures put in place in Ayodhya as a constant reminder of the threat of violence. Chishti (2012)

stresses that the event is important “because of what happened to the rule of law that day”. The *Express* article moves on to call for a constitutional discourse by emphasising that “an important promise of January 26, 1950<sup>5</sup> was run to the ground. Majoritarianism was wilfully confused with democracy”. Using the language of democracy and constitutionality reinforces the political significance of the event in Indian history. However, once again, it is noticeable that these discourses also distance the event away from its professed religious importance.

#### 7.4 Orienting Readers, Constituting a Subjectivity

An important exercise in critical discourse analysis is the explication of particular subjectivities that are constituted through the process of discourse. To this end, it is found that a combination of presuppositions and recontextualisations made by the texts as well as the socio-cultural context that the texts exist in conjunction with helps build the ‘modern idiom of politics’ (Nandy et al., 1995, p. 77). The texts presuppose knowledge on the part of the readers of a communal dispute that has been heavily politicised as well as a ubiquity of the Babri demolition in public discourse. Phrases like “as another anniversary of that day comes and goes” (Singh, 2014) reveal a degree of reflexivity within journalistic discourse about what has become an evergreen topic of remembrance. Referring to the demolition as an event that “worked wonders for several political fortunes” places it firmly within a background of political exploitation. Use of these presuppositions when juxtaposed with discourses of development, legality, constitutionality and democracy constitutes a subjectivity that is nestled in this ‘modern idiom of politics’ and is critical of the event’s politicisation.

The texts are written between 2012 and 2017, a period that witnessed greater drives towards economic globalisation and the maturation of aspirations towards modernity that were born after economic liberalisation in 1991. Recontextualising the event within economic and developmental discourses creates a link between the economic decline of the region with the memory of the demolition. Development and modernity are therefore presented as the desirable antithesis of a communal politics: for India to “genuinely transform into a modern republic”, moving on from the politics of *Ramjanmabhumi* is imperative (Chishti, 2012).

In summary, within discourses offered by the ‘secular’, non-partisan press, a contrast is drawn between the political significance of the event on the one hand, and the developmental neglect of the region on the other. Both trends remember the Babri demolition as a traumatic event that set into motion trends that are perceived to be largely negative. The event is either an “inflection point” that

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<sup>5</sup> January 26, 1950 is the date that marks the day when the constitution of India was put into force in the newly independent country

communalised Indian politics, or is the turning point that is largely responsible for the developmental decline of Ayodhya. While the former trend raises the demolition to a level of national importance, the latter attempts to localise the aftermath to the region. Either way, discourses in English-language non-partisan newspapers accord a very specific significance to the event of the Babri demolition as per the present analysis.

### 7.5 Memories of Babri in *Organiser*: An analysis

A critical discourse analysis of the memory of the Babri demolition in the four *Organiser* articles revealed three broad themes: an overt attempt to **depoliticise discourse**, a construction of **protagonists and antagonists** through discourse representations that lead to an orientation that positions readers as those who are concerned with issues of a *specific* kind of **national pride**.

The depoliticisation of discourse presupposes and is a response to aforementioned discourses that have constructed memories of the demolition as a political instrument. In order to achieve this, discursive strategies undertake the project of the *recontextualization of history* to place the event within a larger historical narrative and accord it a national *historical* significance by drawing on nationalist discourses. It asserts that '*contrary to general perception, the Ayodhya movement is not the creation of the BJP or the VHP, but was always there in the Indian consciousness (emphasis mine)*' (Organiser, 2014). Nationalist discourses appealing to an 'Indian consciousness' are resorted to in order to reinforce this distance from political intentions by referring to the event as 'the most important socio-cultural movement of post-Independent India'; it was 'restoring national pride' and not any political machinations that motivated the event (Organiser, 2014). Additionally, parallels are drawn between the event and historical landmarks such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and Indian independence (Dubashi, 2013) to attach a *national* and *historical* significance to the event. Through these discursive strategies, a call is made for the event to be cut out of religious discourse and made a part of broader national discourse (Organiser, 2017).

Another significant trend visible in the analysis is the construction of antagonists and protagonists through discourse. The *Ramjanmabhumi* movement and the Babri demolition are presented as necessary acts against what is described as 'Moghul aggression' which was perceived as an invasion into ancient 'Indian' culture (Organiser, 2014). Antagonists in this discourse operate on two levels. On the first level are the 'barbaric' invaders who 'plundered, destroyed and looted' India's temples, that is, the Mughal rulers (Rajan, 2010). On the second level are the 'eminent intellectuals and historians who always distorted the debated in their own interests' (Organiser, 2017). The event of the demolition is then considered a victory over these antagonistic constructions, a 'beginning of a new era in India and the beginning of the end of Islamic hegemony in India' (Dubashi, 2013). The

memory of the demolition is thus constructed as a spectacle to behold, one that was met with jubilant crowds, overwhelmed by the emotion of the event (Dubashi, 2013).

Implicit in the construction of antagonists is the presumption of the protagonists, a feature that plays a significant role in constituting the subjectivity produced through these texts. This brings us to the third major theme extrapolated from the critical discourse analysis: an orientation that positions readers as those who embody a *specific* sense of national pride. Emphasis on 'specific' refers to the brand of nationalism that equates a sense of Indianness with the Hindu religion and culture (Bhattacharya, 1992; Gopal, 1992; Khilnani, 1997; Nandy et al., 1995; Rajagopal, 2001). This is visible when texts assert that the 'Hindu society (was)...not fighting for places, temples or a piece of land, but its prime motive (was) to restore *India's cultural ethos* (emphasis mine)' (Organiser, 2014). The discourses of nationalism then construct the event as having a 'bearing on (the) socio-cultural identity of *India* (emphasis mine)'. There is slippage between claims of speaking on behalf of all Hindus (Dubashi, 2013) and speaking on behalf of all Indians, specifically those Indians who are committed to restoring 'national pride' in the face of perceived wrongs committed in the past. This discursive strategy then calls for a sense of inclusiveness to integrate all citizens into Indian, that is, Hindu society; 'the real legacy of Ayodhya', it is said, 'is not only to unite Hindus but to restore the cultural bond of different faiths existing in India' (Organiser, 2014). This cultural bond is thus, exemplified by an allegiance to the majority religion as the marker of what it means to be Indian; these discourses therefore, constitute a subjectivity that equates its "idea of India" with Hindu society.

It is important to mention here that this sort of Hindu nationalism constitutes an *imagined community* in Benedict Anderson's (1983) sense of the term and an *invented tradition* (Hobsbawm, 1983). Hindu nationalism, thus defined, is a relatively novel concept that uses 18<sup>th</sup> century European nationalism as its template (Nandy et al., 1995). A colonial import, it 'has always been an illegitimate child of modern India' (ibid, p. 78). Thus, the Babri demolition and *Ramjanmabhumi* movement were projects aimed to homogenise and unite a highly stratified community, divided along multitudinous lines of caste and class (Gopal, 1992; Guha, 2007; Nandy et al., 1995, Khilnani, 1997, Rajagopal, 2001). Television in the late 80s and early 90s, says Rajagopal (2001), played a crucial role in building 'imagined communities of sentiment' around the project of Hindu nationalism that the *Ramjanmabhumi* movement stood for (p. 6). The discourses in the *Organiser* articles, by drawing parallels between 'Hindu civilisation' and ancient Greek and Roman civilisations (Rajan, 2010) and making a call for all faiths to subscribe to a common Indian consciousness represented by Hindutva, perpetuate this project into 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through a newfound historical consciousness (Nandy et al., 1995), these discourses place the event of the Babri demolition within a much longer historical narrative that stretches well into the past and far into the future; it was an event that is central to India's self-identity, 'rooted in an illustrious past' (Rajan, 2010) and will determine the future of a

new India that has witnessed a 'cultural resurgence' (Organiser, 2014). This idea of nationalism thus, 'loom(s) out of an immemorial past' and 'glide(s) into a limitless future' (Anderson, 1983, p. 11-12). Historical recontextualization creates 'an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity' which attempts to achieve a cohesiveness within the Hindu community (Hobsbawn, 1983, p. 7). This idea of community and nation is at odds with that espoused by the non-partisan press, a fact that has important implications when the event is placed within the framework of *media events*.

## 7.6 Discussion: Babri and Media Events

In this section, I expound the common themes and contradictions between the two ideological positions before exploring the implications of placing the results of the analysis within the framework of *media events*.

### 7.6.1 Common Themes and Contradictions

The most striking instance of intertextuality between the two positions is in the characterisation of the Babri demolition as an event. The 'secular', non-partisan press distances the event from matters of faith and theological importance, constructing the event as a political instrument. In short, it desacralizes discourse in response to the religious significance of the event professed by party leaders. Texts espousing Hindu nationalism, on the other hand, undertake a similar project in reverse. They construct the event as one of *historical* and *national* significance that embodies the 'cultural ethos' of the country, far from the machinations of any political party. Interaction between the two strands of discourse creates a tension between constructing the event as a *political* event on the one hand, and constructing it as of *national* cultural importance on the other. Whatever be the level of significance accorded to the event, it is regarded as a turning point in all the strands of discourse, whether it be responsible for setting in a period of economic decline in Ayodhya, communalising Indian politics, or marking the beginning of a new chapter, signalling the resurgence of a Hindu nation.

Both ideological positions have their origins in rationalist discourses and ideas of the nation-state that draw on themes of inclusivity, but articulate contrasting expressions of Indian nationhood. The choice of textual materials may give the appearance of binary and overly simplified discourses, but it has been the aim of this research to address a dichotomy that has been constructed *through* discourse in the Indian public and investigate the nuances within and between them. While the *Times of India* and *Indian Express* articles drew on discourses of development, legality and constitutionality to create the idea of a nation committed to secularism in the face of a communal dispute, texts from the *Organiser* drew on historical and nationalist discourses to construct an idea of India that is equated with Hindu society and culture. The demolition of the Babri *masjid* is then viewed as an assault to secular traditions within the first position, and a landmark event along a longer historical trajectory that signals the beginning of a new era within the second. Essential to these contrasting visions of Indian



society, are the subjectivities that competing strands of discourse constitute. Each discursive domain constructs an antagonist and an implicit protagonist in the process. The *construction* and reinforcement of this subjectivity consequently has implications when the event is viewed within the framework of *media events* and *collective public memory*.

### 7.6.2 The Babri Demolition: A media event?

'Media coverage', says Rajagopal (2001) 'was a constitutive part of the (Ramjanmabhumi) movement in both its eulogistic and critical aspects...Media criticism confirmed the importance of the campaign's goals and preserved the appearance of what had to be achieved.' (p. 174). On December 6, 1992, live television coverage of the demolition ensured that the news reached the rest of the country (Guha, 2007). The question that this section addresses then, is whether the Babri demolition may be regarded as a *media event*. I put forward a critique of Dayan and Katz's (1992) original formulation by focusing on the contrasting *memories* of the event that persist through contemporary journalism, drawing on Couldry's (2003) critical approach towards media events.

The demolition was an unplanned event that created deep fissures within Indian society. However, Dayan and Katz's theory of *media events* and its 'implicit understanding of societies as stable and marked by a shared set of values' does not accommodate an event like the demolition within its theoretical framework (Couldry & Hepp, 2010, p. 5). The event did not integrate societies through a ceremonial broadcast; indeed, it elicited deeply contrasting responses outlined by differing conceptions of Indian nationhood. The CDA in the previous sections establishes the enduring memory of these divisions within contemporary journalistic discourses. It is then useful to adopt a critical approach and view this media event as '*constructions, not expressions, of the "social order" (emphasis original)*' by viewing the memories of the event as a form of *media ritual* (Couldry, 2003, p. 56). It is this stress on 'construction' that provides the link between *collective memories* as a process through which a group defines itself (Neiger et al., 2011; Steiner & Zelizer, 1995) and media events as 'large-scale media-focused social processes' through which '*a social collectivity is affirmed, reinforced or maintained (emphasis mine)*' (Couldry, 2003, p. 60). Memories of the event are *mediated* through the ritual of recounting it in newspaper and magazine columns long after the event itself has transpired. Competing constructions ritually persist through public memory and give shape to the demolition *as an event* in contemporary media.

'In the absence of other sources,' says Silverstone (1999) 'the media have the power to define the past: to present and represent it.' (p. 127). This is especially true of an event that has taken place in the recent past, not yet canonised within 'official' history and classroom lessons (Guha, 2007). Journalism, in the case of the Babri demolition, acts as 'an institution of mnemonic record' (Zelizer, 2008, p. 79) and assumes an authority to present retellings of past events (Couldry, 2003). *Anniversary journalism*

(Kitch, 2002) in the case of the Babri demolition ritualises the act of remembering the event and invests in journalism the authority to recount what *really* happened. By recalling the event every year on and around December 6, 1992, journalistic discourses develop a sense of event through memories of the demolition. Couldry's (2003) view of media events as a media ritual, a construction and not expression of some 'centre' that is expressed through the media, stresses the *power* vested in media institutions to present reality. Competing discourses give shape to the Babri demolition *as an event* in public memory, albeit through contrasting constructions and contrasting memories. Strikingly different memories are reflective of political ideologies of the present (Steiner & Zelizer, 1995) and contrasting memories of the Babri demolition as presented in this study exemplify this phenomenon. Constructing the demolition *as an event* through collective recollections then makes of this iconic event a stage where 'national identity is formed and contested' (Leavy, 2007, p. 28). Competing discourses articulated through memories of Babri then express competing notions of Indian nationhood: one that is characterised by a commitment to secularism and one that sees in Hindu society the paragon of Indian culture. Therefore, through this study, it is my argument that the regularised and ritualised invocation of the memory of the demolition of the Babri *masjid* constructs a sense of event. This event exists and persists *through* competing discourses, embodying differing senses of community and nation, thereby constituting a special case of a *media event*.

## 8 CONCLUSION

Through this research, I have highlighted the main themes within two ideological positions in relation to the case of the Babri demolition: a 'secular' perspective as well as one that endorses the Hindu nationalist project. The analysis conducted has unearthed not only recurring themes within the individual strands of research, but has also examined how competing discourses interact with each other. An analysis of retrospective accounts in journalistic discourse that recount the *memory* of the event reveals that the demolition has variously been constructed as an important political inflection point, an event akin to gaining independence from colonial rule, signalling the start of a new era for a Hindu nation, and an event that marks the beginning of the developmental decline of a region in India. These contrasting constructions appeal to different discourses in order to constitute different ideas of India's nationhood, a negotiation that plays out within the microcosm of the communal dispute. I have argued that the Babri demolition and its contrasting constructions constitute a special case of *media events* in a developing society by adopting a critical approach towards the ritualised recall of the event within contemporary journalistic discourse. Finally, the research demonstrates the usefulness of placing the case within media theory by highlighting how divisions and contestations that were sparked off in the 80s continue to find resonance in the public memory, especially at a time when Hindu nationalism in the country is at its strongest.

Future research can further address this case by analysing regional news as well as news that is published in other languages. India's news and media landscape is vast and varied. Capturing this diversity within the sample can provide further insights about the Babri demolition's enduring significance within Indian society. Moreover, while this study has restricted itself to studying textual journalistic material, a study into broadcast and documentary material will highlight the inherent contrasts between different genres and formats in a discourse analysis. The demolition of the Babri *masjid* is a unique case that involves the contestation of identities and ideas of nationhood; it is as yet under-theorised within media and communications, but will prove to be a rich case for future analyses.

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# APPENDICES

Attached here are annotated examples of the critical discourse analysis conducted:

- Narrative
- Presupposition
- Recontextualisation
- Voice
- Metaphor
- Representation

**Three Dimensions**

1) Textual → presuppositions, recontextualisation, <sup>recontextualising</sup> <sup>one wants to explain presuppositions</sup> <sup>discourse</sup>

2) Discursive → genre, narrative, discourse, representation, metaphors

3) Socio-cultural → socio-political goings-on → Lots of **DOX JONES** <sup>descriptive</sup> <sup>the press</sup> <sup>already</sup> <sup>decisions</sup> <sup>to be</sup> <sup>an</sup>

**VOICE FORMS A PART OF DISCOURSE REPRESENTATION**

→ uses the discourse of historicity → "for all times to come", emerging as a national force, changing the Indian political use of dates, name places → aim to inform and claim authenticity

→ use of a metaphor of a war → "saffron front" "intercept" "counter the saffron heat" "defeat hardliners" (feeds into the historic discourse)

→ use of phrases "frenzy" "saged"

→ use of voice → political analyst, conspicuous lack of leaders, ordinary citizens, by emphasised that Babri was a HIS and POLITICAL event

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**THE TIMES OF INDIA**

India  
20th anniversary of Babri mosque demolition: **The damage has not been undone as yet**  
Ashish Tripathi  
1,586 words  
6 December 2012  
The Times of India  
TOI  
English  
(c) 2012 The Times of India Group

Conclusion → Babri is an important political event → lived on in the political scenario and had had wider implications for the political field in the country at large. → Purpose that the event had longer NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

VOICES: only to political analysts, numerous other politicians and parties

Eventualising

ORIENTATION → to see the effects of the communalisation of politics → a war that must be fought "damage that must be undone"

LUCKNOW: Twenty years after demolition of Babri mosque, the Ayodhya debate is still on. The frenzy mob which razed the masjid to ground on December 6, 1992, perhaps had little or no inkling that the fanatic act would change the Indian politics for all times to come. Though the Ram Temple issue seems to have lost its electoral appeal, the damage has not been undone as yet and the efforts to polarise votes on religious lines continues, at least in UP, where eight major communal clashes have taken place after Samajwadi Party (SP) came to power in March this year and the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) is trying to cobble up the team of Hindutava hardliners who played a crucial role in the Temple movement, leading to the demolition of the masjid.

EXAMPLE → The communal rift created by the 1990 Ram temple movement which resulted in demolition of the mosque "saw the BJP emerging as a national force," particularly in the north and west India, thereby changing the Indian polity forever. "Till then the politics mainly revolved around the Congress and anti-Congressism, but post 1992, it became 'triangular' with the addition of the anti-Congress-BJP Third front. The demographic vote equations also changed with the Muslims, who also held inaction of the then Congress government headed by PV Narasimha Rao at the Centre equally responsible for the demolition of the mosque, shifting loyalty to regional parties which they felt could counter the saffron threat. It led to the rise of regional satraps like Mulayam Singh Yadav and Lalu Prasad Yadav among others. what disoriented are drawn on? → discourse of history → grand claims

The upheaval also pushed India into an era of instability which saw four prime ministers heading various coalition governments and two mid-term lok sabha polls between 1990-99. As no single party could win majority since then, the regional parties have been playing crucial role in formation of the governments. The coalition politics still continues but now its more mature and stable than 90s. But in UP, the instability continued from 1989 to 2007, during which period, the state saw ten governments of different permutations and combinations, three mid term assembly elections, four chief ministers, defections in parties and two stints of president rule. Interestingly, while the BJP was able to sustain in other states after Babri mosque demolition, in UP its tally declined steadily with every election. ← PAST political events

Many political analysts believe that the 'Mandir' issue should be seen along with the 'Mandal'. After revolting against Rajiv Gandhi over Bofors scam, VP Singh formed Janta Dal in 1989 by bringing all the anti-Congress forces together. In the subsequent elections, the Congress was defeated but Janta Dal could not get the majority either. Singh became prime minister with support of the Left and the BJP. On August 7, 1990, Singh implemented the Mandal commission report providing 27% reservation for other backward classes (OBCs) to mobilise backward vote bank. On September 25, BJP's LK Advani began his rath yatra from Somnath in Gujrat demanding construction of Ram Temple at the disputed site housing Babri masjid in Ayodhya, which the saffron forces claimed was the birth place of Lord Ram. \* dispute regarding the 6th, not the 12th century

The yatra, which was to end at Ayodhya, left behind a trail of communal clashes. On Singh's direction, the then Bihar chief minister Lalu Yadav's ordered police to intercept yatra at Samastipur and arrest Advani on October 23. On October 30, the then UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav ordered firing on people, who had assembled in Ayodhya on BJP's call, when they tried to storm into the mosque. The firing in Ayodhya and ensuing communal clashes in all over the country left over 500 dead. The immediate impact was that the mandir (communal) politics overshadowed the mandal (caste) politics. As a result, the BJP's number in Lok Sabha rose to 120 in 1991 from 85 in 1989. The BJP also won state assembly elections in five states in 1991 - UP, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh. ← LOTS OF DETAILS, PRESENTATION OF FACTS.

history being created  
"change Indian politics for all times to come"

Article aimed to be informative, providing a historical context for a present day a topic created by the article firmly one of politics

Metaphor of army was feeding into a historic discourse

DATES  
creating an emphasis on historicity in the event  
Significance of the event → changing Indian political forever → ensuing period of instability  
Dates, name places, date statistics  
Region of myth, area of objective truthfulness, formal recording history.

functionally determined.  
↓ NARRATIVE AS OPPOSED TO INFORMATIVE

political instruments

Voice given to "political analysts" → addressing the political significance of the event.

memory of the movement

echoes what was there in Manoj Chhabra's article

conspiracy, intrigue, political manoeuvres

MBB

The communal plank polarised votes across all castes. After assuming power in UP under Kalyan Singh, **saffron forces gave call to start** 'symbolic' construction of Temple on December 6, 1992, which led to demolition of the mosque. Kalyan was jailed for a day for 'contempt of court'. He had assured the Supreme Court that the government will protect mosque but failed to discharge the constitutional duty. **The turn of events** led to more communal riots across the country but by **razing** the mosque down, **the saffron brigade** killed the goose that laid the golden egg. At least, it was true for UP where caste politics took over communalism after tempers cooled down following fall of the 15th century mosque, **allegedly built by a Mughal ruler over ruins of a temple at Lord Ram's birth place after destroying it.**

↑ one reference to larger history

"Temple politics created 'upper caste dominated middle class' vote bank for the BJP. A few dominant OBCs also supported it. The party sustained in the states where it is in direct fight with the Congress. But in UP, dalits by Mayawati and OBCs by Mulayam realised that supporting temple politics means accepting the brahminical order responsible for their repression since ages", said political analysts. In due course, said political observer JP Singh, the BJP also realised that the factor which increased its tally from 2 in 1984 to 182 in 1999 is also the major hurdle in exceeding further. The party had to put the **temple issue on the back seat to form a coalition with other parties to assume power at the Centre.** This, however, left supporters disappointed, leading to drop in its tally in subsequent elections.

"temple issue" → shorthand for the politicised dispute

↑ moderation thesis

In UP, the disillusionment of upper casts from BJP was so strong that a section brahmins voted for BSP in 2007 assembly elections and for SP in 2012. But, says political analyst Sudhir Panwar, the divisive politics based on cast and faith has divided farmers, artisans and industrial workers, as a result the issues related to agriculture and labour have become secondary in the priority list of the political parties. "One should also not forget that maximum cases of terror attacks in India have happened after demolition of Babri mosque, which communalized the social-political environment of country further. We need to **defeat hardliners**, in all the communities, and **their political masters, for the sake of the nation and people**", he added.

→ an event of national significance

However, political parties seems to be in no mood to leave caste and communal politics. In fact, the BJP leaders said **that today party needs the kind of tailwind that was necessary for the party in 1984 when it was reduced to just two seats in Parliament. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad had then came to the rescue.** It formed a committee to "liberate" the 'birthplace' of Lord Ram in Ayodhya and build a temple. Advani was given leadership of the campaign. **The BJP gained from the issue till 1999 but decline started thereafter.** The decline was mainly because of loss in UP where BJP's seatshare **dropped to 10 in 2009 from 51 in 1991.**

↑ socio-political going-on

Today, the BJP has reached a saturation point in most of the states except UP where its prospects may improve. But the situation in UP has gone from bad to worse for the BJP to the extent that it **lost the Ayodhya seat for the first time since 1989** in the assembly elections held earlier this year. The 'embarrassment' has made saffron forces to sit up and revive the Hindutva agenda, as in 1984, by bringing back the Hindutva mascots like Uma Bharti and Kalyan Singh. Simultaneously, the work at the workshop set up in Ayodhya during temple movement to carve pillars for the 'grand Ram Temple' has started, **indicating that something is cooking in the saffron camp.** The riots under the SP rule have **come as a booster.**

← presume that readers know the importance of the Ayodhya seat.

→ trouble brewing → bringing up the "issue" again

While the **BJP is desperate for a revival** in UP, the Congress and SP are also looking forward to **cash in on the 'fear psychosis'** among Muslims after demolition of the Babri Masjid. The two parties are trying to appease the **minority committee** by announcing a number of sops. Mulayam has prime **ministerial ambitions** and that can be fulfilled only if his party is able to win maximum seats in UP. And, it will be possible only if Muslims stick to him, so Mulayam is doing all he can to **keep them in good humour.** Besides welfare schemes for the Muslims, he has promised to release all Muslims 'falsely' implicated in terror acts. He is even taking support of hardliner Muslims and has inducted some of them in the party.

← Socio-cultural context

The **Bahujan Samaj Party** is also trying to **win the confidence of** the Muslims by **publicising** that the community was safe during the Mayawati rule, during which period no riots took place. Mayawati, too, has **prime ministerial ambitions.** Both SP and BSP are banking on the fact that the Ram Temple movement and the Babri Masjid demolition pushed India into an era of instability. **As no single party could win majority after the incident, the regional parties have been playing a crucial role in the formation of central governments.** Also, ever since the Muslims have been voting tactically for the party which can stop the BJP. Under these circumstances, Mayawati and Mulayam know that **Muslim votes would be crucial for them to become king or kingmakers in 2014.**

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