Introduction

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We bring this first issue in 2026 with a profound sense of loss on the passing away of Professors André Béteille (*d.* February 3, 2026); T.K. Oommen (*d.* February 26, 2026); Hermann Kulke (*d.* March 10, 2026); and K.N. Panikkar (*d.* March 9, 2026). These stalwarts shaped generations of scholars and public thinking on a wide range of subjects related to Indian society, polity and history. They have left behind an astounding corpus of scholarship, which will continue to guide and educate South Asianists across the world for a long time to come.

In this issue, we bring a spotlight on violence directed at India's Muslims, the nation's largest religious minority, in a Hindu nationalist majoritarian polity. This is *IP&P's* third special issue, following the one on Indian Parliamentary elections of 2024 (Summer 2025), and another on Indian foreign policy (Winter 2025). This volume also engages with Devesh Kapur and Arvind Subramanian's blockbuster volume on India's post-Independence development trajectory—*A Sixth of Humanity* (2025). We present a review essay dedicated to critically assessing this considerable intellectual feat. The book reviews section features two other significant books: Rohan Mukherjee's contribution to understanding rising powers, *Ascending Order* (2022), and Mukul Sharma's contribution to Indian environmental politics, *Green and Saffron* (2024).

Mohsin Alam Bhatt, in his introduction, argues that India is experiencing a phenomenon that goes beyond what political scientists typically describe as autocratization and institutional decay spurred by ethnic majoritarianism. Papers included in this issue demonstrate that law is manipulated and administered in ways that make it difficult to conceive of an Indian Weberian state. The state no longer holds the legitimate monopoly over the use of violence. It deploys vigilante groups and other resources outside the state to execute its designs. State-society relations exacerbate and perpetuate the "othering" of Muslims. Articles in the research section highlight this central message.

Soma Basu assesses the stereotypes that were created by the social infrastructure of riots. She explores the Northeast Delhi riots of 2020 and its aftermath, and finds how social media came to define the lived environment of those affected by the riots. The digital infrastructure manifested in WhatsApp groups perpetuated stereotypes that may have had little to do with what occurred at the time of

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riots. Such environs shape the sentiment of Hindus and Muslims and perpetuate the othering of the minority community.

A leading scholar on Hindu nationalism, Christophe Jaffrelot, presents an account of the "deep state," where vigilante organizations such as the Bajrang Dal, also among the affiliates of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), perpetrate violence on the pretext of cow slaughter or forced conversion via marriage. Vigilante groups become active whenever they learn that a cow has been slaughtered or a conversion executed. Hindu nationalism thrives on the sacred cow. The state and its machinery support such socially orchestrated violence against Muslims, even when the law unambiguously rules against such vigilantism. The RSS is the world's largest cadre-based organization. It is the social arm of the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Its political lineage is much older than the BJP. RSS affiliates are spontaneously mobilized towards this end of perpetrating violence.

Nidah Kaiser introduces the term "securitisation" to connote the dangerous Muslim man as a national security threat. Muslim men are being projected as a threat to Hindu society. She demonstrates how legal changes, for example in laws pertaining to inter-faith marriages, are deployed to target Muslim men projected as forcibly converting Hindu women to Islam through inter-faith marriages. The article details laws and their implementation by the state. It also details the violence perpetrated by their partners in society who are the vigilante groups associated with the RSS.

Shaikh Mujibur Rehman finds that the nature of riots has been considerably transformed in India. A deep ethnography of the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 suggests that post-riot situations, especially those concerning Hindus and Muslims, look very different today compared with the past. The Muzaffarnagar riots (2013) occurred on the eve of the 2014 Parliamentary elections that brought the current ruling party, the right-wing Hindu nationalist BJP, to power. Riot victims in this case could not be rehabilitated like in the past. It did not help that the BJP also won the state-level election in Uttar Pradesh (2017).

In a related vein, the perspective section carries a piece by Niraja Jayal, an authority on the politics of citizenship in India. Majoritarianism presents a challenge for the conventional understanding of who should be considered an Indian. Her perspective on the evolution of citizenship in India is most timely when the Indian state has introduced a new exclusionary vehicle—the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls. Many experts and public intellectuals agree that the SIR is the most significant threat to India's reputation regarding electoral integrity. The paper details both the earlier inclusionary trajectory and the recent exclusionary turn. Instruments such as the National Population Register, the National Register of Citizens and SIR have shifted the burden of proving who is a not a citizen. Earlier, it was the state that had to establish who is not an Indian citizen. Today the

burden of proof has shifted to the person who is considered an illegal voter. Indian citizens, especially Muslims, must constantly prove their Indian citizenship. The SIR implementation is suggestive of administrative irregularities that are clearly bound to the advantage of the incumbent.

Taken together, the four papers in the research section and the perspective, all point in one direction. The state in India is "othering" its substantial Muslim population so that they should be satisfied with their second-class status. This goes against the secular tenet—that all religions must be viewed similarly before the law. Jaffrelot, Kaiser, Basu, and Rehman all describe how the state is working with social actors in this exclusionary project. Jayal's perspective reveals the trajectory of citizenship within the state but pointing in the same direction.

Alasdair Roberts does a critical read of Kapur and Subramanian's *A Sixth of Humanity* in a substantial review essay. He opines that the conventional wisdom holds that the centre or the federal state located in New Delhi has failed India. Kapur and Subramanian buy into this worldview and argue for a stronger centre. Roberts opines that the logic of federalism was weak from the very inception since the country's independence in 1947 and the formation of the republic in 1950. The founding fathers gave the country a strong centre to keep it together. Colonial rule may have contributed to the strong centre paradigm. Many of India's major developmental deficits lie in the fact that authority was not delegated to the subnational level. Such delegation worked wonders for China, but India missed that bus for delegating authority to the local level in the service of economic growth and human well-being.

We hope you will find this issue enjoyable!