




GOVERNING BY PROXIMITY: State Performance and Migrant Citizenship on the India-Pakistan Border

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On a hot summer morning in the western Indian city of Jodhpur in July 2016, the humming of air coolers and standing fans nearly drowned out a muffled microphone announcement. Office clerks draping tables with white cloth paused to listen as a district official commenced the special two-day program, welcoming attendees to the The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs' Special Camp for Long-term Visas and Citizenship for Pakistani Citizens.

Some Pakistani Hindus migrate to India, where they aspire to offer their families improved socioeconomic opportunities in a place where they have long-standing cultural, linguistic, and kinship ties and can participate in religious-national modes of belonging as “Hindus in Hindustan.”¹ While this camp took place a few years before the 2019 passage of the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which formally sutured religion and citizenship in India, the immigration bureaucracy had long privileged Pakistani Hindu migrants in practice.² Pakistani Hindus may imagine their migration as an enactment of their “right of return,” but they in fact experience an ambivalent welcome on arrival.

Among the Pakistani citizens in attendance that day, there was some confusion, and hope, as to whether officials would be awarding Indian citizenship certificates at the camp. Local newspapers had enthusiastically reported that the

government was holding camps to give citizenship to Pakistani Hindus, featuring stories of people who had been waiting for naturalization for more than a decade. In 2005, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had granted citizenship en masse to 13,000 Pakistani Hindus in Rajasthan, and folks at the 2016 camp hoped for a similar outcome.

As we waited for something special to happen, I noted the sprawling white canopy offering shelter from the harsh sun. In the center of the tent, rows of off-white plastic chairs sat on a thin green carpet and faced a special section marked “Chief Guests.” The Pakistani Hindu families I was seated with chatted excitedly about the elaborate arrangements. They were energized by the opportunity to meet *rubaru* (face to face) with *bade neta log* (big leader people). It was rumored that the home secretary would be in attendance from Delhi, the nation’s capital. The fleet of white cars and decorative lines of pink chalk on the street suggested this was not mere hype.

Meera, a middle-aged Bhil woman who had moved from Hala, Sindh, to Jodhpur, Rajasthan, in 2014 on a pilgrimage visa with her parents, husband, and ten children, told me she did not know why the Indian consulate in Islamabad had recently rejected her sister-in-law’s visa application.^{3,4} In Jodhpur, as in Hala, Meera and her family worked as agricultural laborers. As per India’s Foreigners’ Acts for Pakistani nationals, her family had to regularly report to the police to register their movements for work and to extend their visas. When I asked about her family’s decision to live in Jodhpur, she stated that “Modiji,” Narendra Modi, India’s prime minister, had invited them, referencing a video saved on her husband’s smartphone. We hunched over the phone to see a close-up shot of the then candidate giving a campaign speech in 2014 in Rajasthan. In the two-minute clip, he felicitated Hindu brothers and sisters from Pakistan in a booming voice followed by loud cheers from an unseen crowd. Meera looked up from the phone and said, “Dekha, Modiji ne hame bulaaya hai aur aaj, aaj ham sarkar se milenge. [See, Modiji has invited us and today, today we will meet with the government.]”

For Meera, meeting with high-ranking officers and seeing digital clips of welcoming political speeches in the palm of her hand made Indian citizenship feel like a close possibility. At the same time, she had relatives and acquaintances whose visa and citizenship applications had been delayed or rejected. Applicants like Meera would typically submit their visa and citizenship files in the quietude of a local immigration office to low-ranking clerks who only occasionally looked up, and sometimes asked migrants to stand outside, citing their alleged sweaty smell. In contrast, this *vishesh shivir* (special camp) made for an exceptional opportunity

to meet with high-ranking government officers and politicians. These moments led me to wonder: How does proximity to politicians perpetuate a form of aspirational citizenship? How does proximity produce hope in the face of deferral?

Similar to other staged government events that I observed, face-to-face visits with ministers and members of parliament (MPs) from Delhi fostered hope among Pakistani Hindus who sought Indian citizenship. Yet in close encounters before this legal formalization, government officials welcomed these migrants as entitled Indian citizens on the basis of their Hindu religious identification and related experiences of persecution in Pakistan. As evinced below, high-ranking, national-level politicians' occasional visits to Jodhpur, along with their digital addresses, incorporated Pakistani Hindus into a Hindu-India imaginary.

This article argues that *proximity* constitutes a mode of governance that enchants aspirational citizen-subjects while exposing ambivalent state workings and discretionary power. High-ranking state actors *govern by proximity* when their presence raises hopes for intervention and generates attachments with constituents within a wider body politic. The possibility and felt nearness of sovereign intervention comprise a marked form of hope and recognition for surveilled migrant populations who otherwise predominantly experience government as bureaucratic stasis. The narratives of governing by proximity below convey how sovereignty, and the expectations it generates, remain inseparable from its mediation. In the context of populism in India, and more broadly, governing by proximity helps us think anew about nationalist attachments among people in liminal states of belonging at the borders of nation-states. My focus on proximity as a modality of governance joins a growing literature on the political economy of hope as a technology of government around the world (Kleist and Jansen 2016; Hage 2016), enriching our understanding of the affective, sensory dimensions of popular sovereignty movements claiming to speak for “the people” (Chatterjee 2019; Chowdhury 2019; Patch 2019; Seo 2019).

The accounts of proximal governance in this article draw on ongoing digital ethnography and twenty-two months of in-person field research conducted between 2014 and 2022 in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, a city with a high concentration of Pakistani Hindu refugee-migrants.⁵ This research forms part of a broader inquiry on the cross-border flexibility of the religious minority form in South Asia in the context of colonial legacies of state enumeration and religious majoritarianism. During field research, I embedded myself in a moving migrant landscape: observing the routine processing of visa and citizenship-related paperwork at immigration bureaucracies; attending political rallies and NGO events; and spending time

with migrant families during daily life and at special occasions. I conducted extensive unstructured and structured interviews with immigration officers, politicians, migration brokers, migrants, and NGO advocates.

Drawing from these sources, I present three different sites and modes of governing by proximity to discuss the shifting effects of nearness in a digital era. The range of examples shows how the concept can travel and how multiple spatialities comprise proximal governance. The first example, the citizenship camp, requires people to leave their homes to be in proximity to politicians. The second, a parliamentary tour, makes for a mode of proximity that places government officers in migrants' homes. In the final example of digital media, location seems irrelevant when proximity occurs in the palm of one's hand. All three share a sense of possibility produced through physical immediacy and feelings of being personally hailed. Drawing attention to these effects, governing by proximity sheds insight onto how a space for possibility and recognition becomes etched out amid deferral, where *not yet* is linked with *but soon* (Miyazaki 2004).

When high-ranking politicians and officers govern by proximity, their status is magnified. Traveling from the center, the nation's capital of Delhi, to a so-called periphery, the border city of Jodhpur, politicians' physical traversal "comes to signify the ubiquity and translocality of the state" (Gupta 1995, 377; Geertz 1980). But such proximity also shapes mixed affects of hope and cynicism, as I observed among Pakistani Hindus waiting for Indian citizenship. The possibility of personal connection and direct address with high-ranking state officials energized migrants stuck in liminal states of prolonged waiting: the Delhi *sarkar's* (central government's) visits conveyed the Indian state's commitment to persecuted religious minorities from Pakistan. But while physical proximity to national-level politicians offered assurance, it also provided an opportunity to scrutinize the government's deferred and undelivered promises. Moments of improvisation revealed inconsistencies between officers working at local, state, and national levels, but it also featured hopeful exceptions when high-ranking politicians enacted discretionary authority and extended recognition to select individuals, yielding excitement and a sense of possibility. These moments of proximity to government officers made unfulfilled political promises visible and opened space for doubt.



Figure 1. Sign for “Pending Pakistani Displaced People’s Citizenship Applications” hanging from tent top. Photo by Natasha Raheja.



Figure 2. Standing fan at citizenship camp. Photo by Natasha Raheja.

FROM MINORITY TO MAJORITY

The highest concentration of recent Pakistani Hindu arrivals to India occurs in the city of Jodhpur, where they number about 15,000, across at least seventeen refugee settlements, according to local police reports. While some refugee-migrants disperse after their train journey from Sindh to Rajasthan, many stay in and around the city, the point of disembarkation and a resettlement hub. During the naturalization waiting period, their Pakistani nationality largely prevents them from receiving an official caste certificate, opening bank accounts, enrolling in schools, legally acquiring cooking gas cylinders, purchasing property, or moving outside of permitted locales, among other restrictions.

Circular migration between India and Pakistan and bilateral treatment of religious minorities as “proxy citizens” convey the contrivance and ongoing colonial legacy of the 1947 Partition (Zamindar 2007; Roy 2013; van Schendel 2002). Today, Pakistani Hindu migrants claim Indian citizenship based on their status in Pakistan, where they experience targeted anti-Hindu, casteist exclusion as a religious minority (Jaffrelot 2020; Schaflechner 2020; Mahmood 2014; Asif 2021). The Hindu nationalist BJP, in turn, hails Hindus in Pakistan as a persecuted religious minority; the party’s 2014 campaign manifesto declared India a home to the world’s persecuted Hindus. In 2015, the MHA issued an executive order exempting Pakistani Hindus from the 1946 Foreigners Act, which requires valid passports and visas for non-citizens. In 2019, the parliament passed the CAA, which expedites Indian citizenship for this population, reducing their naturalization waiting period from twelve to six years. Though socioeconomically marginalized, Pakistani Hindu refugee-migrants prove central to the configuration of a Hindu-India imaginary.

The Hindutva state’s project of welcoming Pakistani Hindus incompletely consolidates diffuse religious identity in a frontier desert region, one crossed by an international border.⁶ Refugee-migrants continue to face exclusion in India because of their caste status and affiliation with Pakistan, a purported enemy state. As a community with cross-border attachments that is “foreign,” Sindhi- and Urdu-speaking, and primarily “lower caste,” Pakistani Hindus fail to conform to normative images of Indian citizenship.⁷ They undergo mandatory police reporting as they wait indefinitely for citizenship, experiencing deferred access to basic welfare. Some describe their frustrations on both sides of the border as “death by religion in Pakistan, and death by paperwork in India.” If lacking family support and unable to secure employment in India, some refugee-migrants eventually return to live with relatives in Pakistan.

In this context of deferred recognition, high-ranking Indian officials manage refugee-migrants' expectations and showcase their commitment to this population through proximity. Politicians' and state officials' governmental strategies of presence manufacture hope and manage official narratives about cross-border Hindu migration, sometimes personally discouraging refugee-migrants from returning to Pakistan. Yet BJP politicians' governance by proximity also exposes the distinction between nationalist narrative and substantive recognition for Pakistani Hindu migrants, even while ostensibly seeking to close this gap. Despite the promise of democratic enfranchisement, the selective welcome of such migrants in practice exposes the normalized exclusion, casteism, and "incivility" of citizenship for marginalized groups (Sethi 2021; Sinharay 2019; Waghmore and Gorringer 2020), leaving them between "faith and panic" (Ghosh 2020). Pakistani Hindus may be subjects of the Hindu nation, but they are conditional subjects of the Indian state.

GOVERNING BY PROXIMITY

The notion of governing by proximity builds on anthropological literatures on the state, performance, and proximity to understand the work of closeness and mediation in producing aspirational citizenship. Through this concept, I further an understanding of proximal political performance as a historically conditioned mode of power that links people to the state through perpetual promise and deferred recognition.

Governing by proximity works much in the way a magnifying glass amplifies both stature and shortcomings (Hill and Paris 2014). The concept builds on the work of Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (2014), performance artists and scholars who reflect on how proximity shapes interactions between performers and audiences. Following the anthropologist Edward Hall's (1963) landmark study of proxemics, Hill and Paris develop work that experiments with social encounters within "close distance," where people can reach out and physically touch one another. While their work primarily explores lateral peer relations between individuals, I extend this focus to understand how institutional and state actors leverage "close distance" to enfold aspirational citizen-subjects into a religious-national imaginary and expand state power, though in ways that simultaneously expose inconsistent state workings.

Studies of proximity commonly describe this paradox. Performance, film, and digital communications scholars offer rich analyses of how liveness, closeness, and co-presence shape social solidarity in mixed ways, cultivating a dialectics of hope and hopelessness (Duggan and Muñoz 2009). On the one hand, nearness

and co-presence appear pleasurable (Mazzarella 2010) and promote an ethical order (Levinas and Nemo 1985), but on the other, closeness seems risky and overwhelming (Obadia 2020; Crosson 2020). In particular, the face (including close-up shots of faces in film) offers a key medium through which people are brought into responsibility for and relationality with each other (Turkle 2011; Goffman 1967; Doane 2003). Proximity through digital technologies can seemingly re-order time (Nair 2019), fostering both an ambient co-presence and a sense of alienation, especially among displaced migrant communities (Madianou and Miller 2012). I draw on these works to make sense of the fraught exhilaration of face-to-face proximity in the context of state-subject relations, suggesting that the uncontainable excess of nearness makes governing by proximity both exhilarating and exasperating for citizens in waiting.

I also build on anthropological theorizations that underscore how drama-turgy, presence, and theater prove integral to, not extrinsic from, democratic politics (Finlayson 2015) and state power more broadly (Geertz 1980). State performance and mediatized representations foster national attachments and bind people into publics (Bryant 2021; Bobick 2017; Wedeen 2008), collapsing boundaries between reason and affect, governed and governing (Chowdhury 2019). This approach emphasizes the affective and symbolic dimensions of state-making, in contrast to a Weberian emphasis on rationality and proceduralism (Aggarwal 2004; Strauss and O'Brien 2007) or accounts of routinized and exceptional violence as modes of state legitimation (Auyero 2011; Gupta 2012; Khanikar 2018). Scholarship on state performance remains largely informed by studies of grand political theater and ceremony that are ritualized through repetition, such as nation-wide parades (Adams 2010; Roy 2007), mass religious festivals (Kaur 2005), cosmological political systems (Geertz 1980), and national elections (Banerjee 2017). James C. Scott (1990) describes such official ceremonies as sites of both state domination and popular resistance, suggesting two disparate sets of actors: the superordinate state and subordinate subjects. But my analysis shows how state actors themselves expose the negotiated contingencies of state-making. That is, challenges to totalizing state power are embedded in public acts of domination, not only in offstage, subordinate acts of resistance.

Rather than rely on tightly curated and rehearsed large-scale state performances, then, this article builds on anthropological work that focuses on local-level, improvisational, and intermittent encounters to highlight the dynamism and inconsistencies of state practices within smaller events (Larkin 2008; Li 2007; Harvey and Knox 2015). Specifically, my work extends conversations about the

processual, fragmented “migration control field,” where inconsistency and intimacy with state actors enhance and eclipse possibility at peripheries in ways central to state formation (Andersson 2014; Das and Poole 2004; Kalir, Achermann, and Rosset 2019). The performances discussed in this article were singular events, planned with no regular frequency and involving no more than a few hundred people, but they required pomp, advance orchestration, staging, the appearance of select personalities, the negotiation of scripts, and an audience—all dramatic elements of “secular ceremony” (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Approaching proximity as a mode of governance helps us understand the promise and risk of these small-scale state performances beyond a performer-spectator, dominant-weak binary. As Hill and Paris (2014) note, proximity to a spectator both enhances and compromises the status of the performer. As back and front stage collapses at these state events, narratives of migration are awkwardly negotiated rather than imposed through prescribed, top-down spectacular ceremony. Zeroing in on modes of proximal governance thus reveals how the maintenance of state legitimacy and public transcripts make for tedious, uncertain achievements.

The nexus of performance, politics, and proximity is generative especially in the case of South Asia. Scholars of the region have theorized forms of traveling theater as sites for the negotiation of authority and social critique (Hansen 1991), recognized the centrality of intimate audiovisual modes of political speeches in cultivating national publics (Gopinath 2020; Kunreuther 2010; Mitchell 2014), analyzed the sense of possibility embedded in the proximity of crowds (Chatterjee 2016; Chowdhury 2019), argued for “politics as permanent performance” (Hansen 2004), and noted the border as a site of mundane and spectacular ritual (Aggarwal 2004; Menon 2013). Anthropologists of the state working in this region have similarly been attuned to the efficacy of face-to-face interactions, individual charisma, and personal connections in the routine workings of bureaucracy (Hull 2012), brokerage of state-citizen relations (Raheja n.d.), electoral politics (Ahmed 2019), court trials (Kaviraj 2007), and international diplomacy (Lutfi 2021). Ubiquitous practices of seeing across the subcontinent such as *nazar*, an evil-eye, and *darshan*, a momentary mutual glance between devotee and deity, also inform my reading of the power, pleasure, and excesses of face-to-face encounters (Amin 1988; Dinkar 2021) and the face in circulated images as sites of “proximal empowerment” (Pinney 1997).

The idea that proximity plays a role in political relations in India in particular is not new. Anthropologists have conceptualized how hierarchical, patronal intercaste relations (Piliavsky 2020) and everyday mediation of bureaucracy and

electoral politics (Berenschot 2010; Björkman 2014) appear intimate, personal, and caring even as they are implicated in mechanisms of shrinking, unequal access to state services. In India, the question of what proximity offers seems particularly salient given the governing regime's move toward an electronic governance that seeks to eliminate intermediary figures (Mazzarella 2006) and promote direct interfaces with government officials. Praseeda Gopinath's (2020, 152) analysis of Narendra Modi's speeches is instructive for apprehending how felt proximity to high-ranking politicians works to both "invoke the vastness of the Indian nation while including the nation-family in the intimate domestic." The possibility of face-to-face visits and personalized digital media encounters with politicians and state officials dampens the mediational qualities of distal, broadcast modes of national-level governance from afar, ultimately blurring the distal/proximal state dichotomy.

This article expands these accounts by focusing on qualitatively exceptional moments of a liminal population's nearness with high-ranking government officers, helping us understand what the possibility of a personal connection means for recognition. In these fleeting interactions, state actors work to guide the narrative of Pakistani Hindu migration to India, exposing how such public transcripts are coproduced and selectively edited, drawing attention to deferred promise. My use of *exposure* here reflects the risky duality of proximity, which heightens stature as well as scrutiny: proximal encounters both incorporate aspirational citizen-subjects into a religious national imaginary and lay bare governmental inconsistencies. In these encounters, refugee-migrants prove central because they are required to bolster and hold state narratives. But the mutuality of proximate state performance is not wholly bidirectional; high-ranking officers' relative ability to enter and exit interactions with "the public" maintains the allure and risk of close distance in ways that both affirm and expose manufactured state power.

Governing by proximity thus captures the specificity of how the felt nearness of politicians and their promises are implicated in the ways that select migrant populations experience both privilege and precarity as they seek citizenship and recognition (Chen 2020; Parla 2019). But the concept also carries broader significance for understanding affective governance in the context of growing global populism and religious nationalism. As an analytic, governing by proximity thus bridges ethnographic work on nationalist populism and the political affect of hope, which come together to generate attachments between "the people" and political leaders.



Figure 3. Migrant Passports and Immigration Stamps. Photo by Natasha Raheja.

IM/POSSIBILITY

As the morning at the citizenship camp progressed, families and friends in attendance turned the neat rows of plastic chairs into circles so they could face each other and chat while waiting. A dozen or so police officers in uniform followed suit, until, after idling most of the morning, they suddenly shifted to straighten their berets and stand guard.

The Ministry of Home Affairs home secretary, Rajiv Mehrishi, had arrived with his retinue comprising the joint secretary, the district collector, the divisional commissioner, and other noted officials. A rush of refugee-migrants and news reporters moved forward to greet them. Sarita Madam, a district magistrate, signaled the police to control the crowd with her right hand while her left hand motioned seated NGO leaders to come greet the “chief guests.” Sitting back in a plush loveseat draped with a white sheet, the home secretary asked the NGO leaders to invite a few refugee-migrants to get a bit closer and present their cases directly to him. The presence of the high-ranking official generated a frenzied excitement among the crowd of refugee-migrants, who were separated from the visitors by a khaki row of security personnel. As people shifted the weight of their bodies around to get closer to Mehrishi, staff from local Pakistani Hindu NGOs tried to direct the traffic.

The possibility for fleeting conversation with members of the Delhi *sarkar* was rumored to change fates. A connection with a politician could expedite one's own citizenship application or the visa process for a relative back in Pakistan. At

the district authority in Jodhpur, refugee-migrants can wait hours before finding out that the officer they need to see is not available; rather than leaving an application at their desk, they would return to deliver it personally when the officer was present. At this two-day camp, officers who under usual circumstances seemed perpetually at lunch or out of town sat behind desks in the open air, where refugee-migrants could stand in line to capture their attention. With proximity to both high-level politicians and local bureaucrats at the camp, citizenship seemed within grasp.

The desks for 5-1a and 5-1c had the longest lines. Section 5-1a of the Indian Citizenship Act deals with applicants who have a parent born in “undivided India” before the 1947 Partition; 5-1c concerns foreigners married to Indian citizens. Pankajlal waited in the 5-1a line for an hour. When it was almost his turn to submit his application, he called out to his elderly mother to join him. At the desk, the concerned officer, whose regular post was in the Revenue Division, flipped through his file to ensure all the requisite documents were in order. Moving his pen down the document checklist, he stopped to inquire about the “Proof of Father or Mother Birth in Undivided India.” Pankajlal moved his mother in front of himself, in clear view of the seated officer, before explaining that he had submitted an affidavit attesting that his mother was born in Umerkot, Sindh, before the Partition.

“The birth certificate is missing.”

“But I have an affidavit. And can’t you see that my old mother could only have been born then [1947]?”

“The instruction is for a certificate.”

In the absence of a birth certificate, the officer dismissed Pankajlal: “These people have no proper guidance; their applications will go in the trash.”

Later, in line at the water coolers, Pankajlal commented, “The burden always falls on the common people, the way weight always falls on the wheel of a cycle. There [in Pakistan], they call us infidel Hindus, here [in India] bloody Pakistanis.”

Another refugee-migrant, Biharilal, tried to comfort Pankajlal: “Well, today’s arrangements are good and big *netas* are here, let’s see the results.” Together they approached a desk with MHA representatives to complain about the criteria for birth certificates. Their exchange conveys how this site, centered on a performative avowal of their special status as desirable Indian citizens, also enabled refugee-migrants’ critiques of the Indian government.

At another desk, officers from the Foreigners Registration Office (FRO) expressed confusion about why the district collector had summoned them to par-

ticipate in the camp: the FRO oversees residence permits and visa extensions, not citizenship applications. Few refugee-migrants visited the satellite FRO desk at the camp. In the absence of activity, I chatted with Aruna Madam, one of the higher-ranking FRO officers present, about the likelihood of the government awarding citizenship to Pakistani Hindus en masse, as they had done in 2005.

“Asambhav, asambhav [Impossible, impossible],” she said. The visiting Delhi officials wouldn’t award bundles of citizenship certificates, given all the paperwork involved. “And besides, if the government could or actually wanted to provide that, wouldn’t they have already?” Aruna Madam’s words resounded in my head, “impossible, impossible.” Certainly, the elaborate arrangements of the camp and chief guests seemed to indicate some special announcement? Special—and expensive—events like this camp made the impossible seem possible.

A few hours later, the home secretary indeed came on the loudspeaker to make a special announcement: he had decided that, in lieu of birth certificates, the officers at the camp would accept applications with affidavits attesting to a parent’s birth in undivided India. As Pankajlal headed back to the 5-1a desk, others rushed to the stamp paper vendors and notaries at the back of the camp to secure affidavits attesting to the date of their parents’ births.

Unlike the entry-level officer at the 5-1a desk who had defaulted to procedures, the home secretary had exercised his discretionary power to offer some momentary relief. While discretionary authority is a feature across Indian bureaucracy, it cuts multiple ways: low-status petitioners do not often experience bureaucratic discretion in their favor. Exceptional moments of sovereign intervention at a special camp feel different than the stasis associated with routine visits to an immigration office, as high-ranking officers might offer relief to current and future constituents. At the same time, Aruna Madam’s comment about the impossibility of sovereign intervention speaks to bureaucrats’ cynicism about higher-ranking politicians’ governance by proximity.

This mixed affect was reflected in the listless spirit with which refugee-migrants continued to wait for something to happen. I sensed both an energetic hope and an exhausted cynicism among the scattered groups of people moving about the garden. The collective anticipation was reminiscent of the long takes in [Bani Abidi’s 2006](#) video installation *Reserved*, featuring a fidgeting city awaiting the arrival of state dignitaries. It had become increasingly clear that this was a citizenship *application* camp, similar to one held the year before at a different location in Jodhpur. Contrary to high expectations, this was not the much-awaited camp at which Delhi officials would distribute citizenship certificates.

As much as the camp's showy display seemed to offer assurance to refugee-migrants, the elaborate performances also indexed uncertainty about the promised award of Indian citizenship. After all, why affirm what is certain? For local officers and refugee-migrants, the attention that the government drew to itself highlighted the gaps between *dikhaava*, *vachan*, and *natije* (show, promise, and results), signaling something yet to be achieved.

APPROXIMATE NARRATIVES

If refugee-migrants had to travel from their homes to the city center for face-to-face encounters with the Delhi *sarkar* at the citizenship camp, they found themselves greeted by MPs directly at their doorstep a few months later. In December 2016, eleven of thirty members of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) visited three Pakistani Hindu refugee-migrant settlements in Jodhpur. The JPC, comprising twenty BJP MPs and ten MPs from opposition parties, had been convened to compile a report on the BJP's controversial Citizenship Amendment Bill. The committee traveled to Assam, Gujarat, and Rajasthan on "study tours" to obtain firsthand information about religious minorities from Pakistan and Bangladesh living in India.

During the three-day tour, state officials and refugee-migrants found themselves on mutual display. The MPs (none with constituencies in Rajasthan) were accompanied by parliamentary staff and Jodhpur district officials as they visited Pakistani Hindu refugee colonies in the mornings and heard testimonials from refugees and advocates at their hotel in the afternoons. As one MP explained to me, "the study tour was a way to hear authentic voices and see refugee conditions firsthand."

On the first morning of the tour, a fleet of white cars stood parked outside a palatial, five-star hotel. Inside the lobby, a few burly men in blue-and-green camouflage stood stoically with rifles slung across their torsos. After completing their scheduled breakfast, the visiting group of MPs, all men, congregated in the lobby, while four women, including three visiting parliamentary staff and one local district official, paced about the marble floors ensuring logistics were in order.

My own physical presence in the lobby, including my novelty as a woman and status as a researcher from an elite university, allowed for a discretionary spontaneity that garnered me fieldwork access. While I had breezed past the hotel security with my American accent and sunglasses, tagging along with the study tour proved more difficult. Without personal connections, I would have to formally request permission. But when I inquired, Sarita Madam, the district magistrate

accompanying the tour, directed me to Madhavi Madam, the parliamentary committee's secretary, who directed me back to Sarita Madam. Both claimed the other was in charge. Finally, Madhavi Madam suggested I write a letter to the committee chairman, or just look at the committee website in a few months to read the parliamentary report for my research. Confused as to what to do, I sat down and began to write out my request, looking up to say hello to a man in a tweed blazer sitting opposite me. I introduced myself as an anthropologist and shared my interest in the study tour. An MP himself, he invited me to come along. I closed my notebook and joined the tour's fleet as it set out onto dusty desert roads.

Decorative pink and white chalk lined the roundabouts and roads, welcoming the visiting dignitaries. The committee chairman told me they did not pre-circulate their itinerary, to prevent refugee-migrants from staging difficult living conditions. "Why else come all the way from Delhi to Jodhpur if not to see authentic refugee life," stated Madhavi Madam. Nonetheless, the parliamentary committee from Delhi and the district officials in Jodhpur relied on NGO leaders to identify locales to visit. Community leaders had called one another to tidy and prepare their settlements in anticipation of official government visitors. And of course, the stories that people share are often already rehearsed and ready to be narrated; the idea that the parliamentary committee was searching for authentic suffering shaped how local NGOs advised refugee-migrants to give testimonials to the visitors in the following days.⁸

Though the district had carefully arranged the tour logistics, the field visits themselves appeared a bit haphazard. The fleet of cars came to a halt outside a small Dalibai temple on the outskirts of Jodhpur, where the chairman and his assistants rolled down a window to ask where they could find Pakistanis. A few turns later, we reached a locale where about one hundred Meghwal families from southern Punjab, Pakistan, resided in small concrete-and-brick dwellings. Around forty people quickly gathered in front of the cars as MPs stepped out to see the crowd. The chairman, Mr. Singh, a BJP MP and former Bombay police commissioner, led the encounter, while an assistant took notes.

The refugee-migrants looked at their guests in silence, as if in quiet awe. Mr. Singh stepped forward and introduced himself and the committee, not by name, but by purpose: "We're here to help you get citizenship." Followed by silence, he repeated himself. This time, the parliamentary secretary initiated applause.

Mr. Singh posed a series of questions to the refugee-migrants: "Why did you all come here from there? What problems did you have over there?"

There was an energetic murmur in the crowd.

"Freely speak your minds, be open, and don't worry about anything!"

Ajeet, a middle-aged man, shouted out: "We just want a place to live here, we have no other issues!"

"What's your age?" inquired Mr. Singh. "Did you have any difficulty there? Did anybody tell you to become Muslim?"

The murmur intensified into a loud hubbub. Voices spoke over each other, and Mr. Singh tried to talk to Ajeet above the din. When Mr. Singh asked why some of his sons still lived in Pakistan, Ajeet said they would be coming to India soon.

The committee began inquiring about the conditions and motivations of migration: "Did you come on a visa or escape on the run?"

"Could you go to temples?"

"Yes," replied an elder man with a curvy white mustache, standing tall to be heard.

"We're not talking about India, we're talking about Pakistan," Mr. Singh clarified.

Subtle moments of direction like this recalled line feeders who remind actors of the script on movie sets. The JPC offered nudges instead of commands. Unlike the regulation and expression of national identity through tightly-controlled mass ceremony, these improvisational encounters expose the coproduction of narratives of Hindu persecution compatible with India's migration policy. Governing by proximity includes this editorial work that sustains public transcripts.

As the crowd split up into smaller groups, women chatting with women and men with men, Sanjay complained that the MPs had asked whether they had come illegally. "Don't they know we all have visas?" The lack of the politicians' familiarity with the specifics of Pakistani migration to India felt frustrating. NGO advocates told officials that as compared to the India-Bangladesh border, where people can cross without visas, the India-Pakistan border is more militarized and refugee-migrants can only enter Jodhpur with a valid visa. The MPs' questions were uninformed, exposing that their authority didn't come from knowledge of the situation. Moments of proximity like the tour thus reveal the gaps underlying governmental power, even as they reinforce that power.

On the third and final day of the study tour, the committee had dwindled from eleven to five members. The morning visit was to a colony of Bhil families who had mostly moved from southern Punjab, Pakistan. On arrival, a group of MPs and district officials walked past the table and chairs set up for their visit, instead marching around the settlement knocking on doors and calling out over

thatched fences so they could talk to Pakistani refugee-migrants directly and see their housing conditions. Stirring up dust behind them, the marching group expanded as refugee-migrants from the colony and other passersby joined. The five MPs signaled their first stop, but after realizing the hut they had stopped at belonged to an Indian family, they quickly moved on. “Oh, you all are Indian also,” said one of the MPs at their second stop before marching on.

After finding Pakistanis at the next three homes they visited, the MPs and their retinue then returned to take a seat at the front table and addressed the colony. District officials sat in the front three rows, while refugee-migrants, mostly middle-aged men, sat in the back. Young men and a few women stood around the edges of the tent. From where I sat in the fourth row, the MPs’ remarks were barely audible. Though the event planners had brought a microphone, Sarita Madam, the district officer in charge, said there was no need to use it. For the next half hour, the crowd intently looked on; the presence of MPs seemed to hold its attention. Governing by proximity is an affective performance that sometimes exceeds comprehension.

A line of men, all vocal community leaders, formed near the table at the front of the tent. As they began to speak, one of the MPs interrupted with a joke: “Just to make sure, you’re not Indians, right? We’re not here for Indians, we’re here for Pakistanis.” He and the crowd laughed, but the men continued: “We don’t have a teacher at the school! . . . We don’t have a cremation ground! . . . We don’t have toilets! . . . There’s a highway being built through our colony!” Sarita Madam summoned the relevant district-level officer to provide brief progress reports on these items. Though the committee’s mandate to review the Citizenship Bill was clear, the MPs and local officials ended up being audience to refugee-migrants’ complaints about social services.

Governing by proximity engages presence and nearness to manage expectations and generate attachments with aspirational citizen-subjects within a wider body-politic, but in doing so also opens unexpected risks, gaps, and possibilities.

As politicians and NGO leaders edited out the excesses in Pakistani Hindus’ non-linear migration stories, their proximity exposed the vulnerable co-production of those public scripts. Proximity also reveals the gaps between knowledge and power, as in the politicians’ ignorance of border rules. And, as in calls for social services, it opens possibilities for unexpected claims to be made on the state as part of that citizenship.



Figure 4. Tent Setup for Members of Parliament on Citizenship Amendment Bill Study Tour in Jodhpur, 2016. Photo by Natasha Raheja.



Figure 5. Chairs for the Study Tour in Jodhpur, 2016. Photo by Natasha Raheja.

Shortly after hearing the migrants' complaints, the politicians took off in their cars, and the crowd started to disperse. I listened to few men talk about how the government ought to compensate them for the day's missed wages, as they had stayed home to see and be seen by the Delhi *sarkar*.

DIGITAL REACH

Governing by proximity also takes up digitally mediated forms. The possibility of digital encounters with high-ranking politicians via apps and social media platforms builds hopes for recognition. Like the experiential close distance of the citizenship camp and parliamentary tour, digital platforms and apps pronounce gaps while seeming to collapse the distance between the government and citizenry. One man, Ashok, brought these forms of proximity into direct comparison for me. After the JPC visited his neighborhood as part of the study tour, Ashok called me. He had been at the school where he teaches martial arts when the MPs visited his home, but was excited to hear that his daughter Rani got to meet a parliamentary secretary and share her struggles as a Pakistani citizen.

I had met Rani and Ashok several months before at the local immigration office. It was rare to see young women enter the office; they had come to inquire about how to enroll Rani in tenth grade without a transfer certificate. They had been trying to enroll since migrating three years ago, but Rani's school in Rahimyarkhan had not sent a transfer certificate and no government school principal in Jodhpur was willing to admit a Pakistani student. On the day of the study tour, I saw Rani maneuver her way to stand in front of the secretary and her note-taking assistant. Tall and smiling, she attracted Ms. Sharma's attention. Rani expressed her desire to study and shared the difficulties she was facing. The notetaker told her they would write down her name and get back to her, leaving Rani beaming with excitement.

Rani and Ashok were hopeful that, with Ms. Sharma's help, she would be able to go to school "like Mashal." A few months earlier, a twenty-two-year-old Pakistani Hindu woman in Jaipur named Mashal had wanted to apply to medical school, but as a Pakistani national, she was not eligible to take the entrance exams. Mashal and her parents (both medical doctors) reached out to local news outlets to publicize the issue. In a tweet, then external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj assured Mashal that she would personally assist her with getting into medical school. Eventually, with the minister's intervention, Mashal enrolled in a medical college in Jaipur. With excited buzz, Rani's family hoped that perhaps she, too, would finally be able to continue the studies she had left three years ago in Pakistan.

Sushma Swaraj was known for her Twitter governance, and she regularly tweeted announcements of her resolution of individual visa and migration-related cases. Such announcements represent a mode of neoliberal governance that emphasizes individual initiative in securing access to services. This mode of governance may generate individual excitement like Rani's, but it does not change the larger structural obstacles that refugee-migrants face. The promise and excitement of personal connections and special permissions obscure the structures of power that shape who gets individual attention and who doesn't. Mashal came from a dominant-caste Maheshwari family, and both her parents formed part of the salaried class. Class and caste structurally positioned Mashal to get attention from a high-ranking official more so than Rani, who hailed from a Meghwal family. Rani never did get a call or Twitter mention from the secretary, a reminder of the ways young people's aspirations are structured along caste and class lines in an era of digital empowerment in "Millennial India" (Desai 2020; Udupa, Venkatraman, and Khan 2020).

Still, digital social media platforms have the allure of closeness, and they seem to offer some ability to cross these structured gulfs. Returning to the scene of Meera's husband holding Modi's moving image in the palm of his hand, the ability to listen to and view a close-up of the speaker's face on one's own device enhanced Meera's sense that the Indian prime minister had personally invited her and other Pakistani Hindus to India. Refugee-migrants share these kinds of videos with each other on WhatsApp, emboldening their claims to citizenship. The digital reproduction and circulation of Modi's face evokes Achille Mbembe's (2001) theorization of the ways that the omnipresence of images of autocrats generates a subaltern accessibility to power in the postcolony, while also producing an excess that opens up avenues for manipulation and play (Strassler 2020). Played on personal smartphones, these videos additionally scale public and private socialities, moving between addressing the national body politic and small groups of individuals (Borgeson and Miller 2016; Gopinath 2020; Nair 2021; Udupa 2019).

These videos also speak to each other, shaping modes of narration and self-identification. On several occasions, refugee-migrants and I watched mobile video clips of the Indian home minister at a campaign rally vowing to expel (Muslim) infiltrators from Bangladesh while welcoming (Hindu) refugees from Pakistan. In December 2019, I heard refugee-migrants on the outskirts of Jodhpur echo, "We are refugees, not infiltrators," to a news crew collecting video responses to parliamentary debates about the Indian Citizenship Act. Proximity provides language to lasso together a political community on the basis of religion, but the

tenacity of this community comes into question in the face of deferred recognition of some of its alleged members.

In India, Pakistani Hindus are somewhat privileged by their religion, but they remain excluded from the body politic on the basis of caste, class, and nationality. Rani's cousin, Prakash, had migrated from southern Pakistan to Jodhpur in 2015 at the age of sixteen. The registrar at a local government college had said they could not admit a Pakistani national, and his family could not afford the tuition for private college. In 2016, the prime minister launched the PMO India app for citizens to be directly in touch with his office, and Prakash submitted a lengthy grievance. He waited several months for a response, but by the time he got a message summoning him to deliver his complaint to the local district administration, he had taken up a job as assistant to a wedding videographer. It was winter, wedding season, and he couldn't let the gig go now. Plus, there was no assurance that a local complaint would yield a positive outcome. He told me, "Modi ke yojnaae acche hai, lekin ham tak pahunchti nahin hain [Modi's schemes are good, but they don't reach us]." Prakash's use of the word *pahunchna* (to reach) underscores the distal qualities of governing by proximity in "Digital India," connoting simultaneous closeness and distance.

The above moments—officials' confusion about their audience, lack of knowledge about border requirements, the failure to follow up with a promise, ignoring a tweet—signal the vertical differences between officials and migrants. Even as these interactions reveal inconsistencies through proximity, the reinforcement of a vertical distance reinforces relations of power. As part of their interpellation as state subjects, migrants learn that relationships of power can be dismissive as well as generous in both everyday bureaucratic and fleeting official encounters.

Shifting proximity between officials, politicians, and constituents thus ambivalently coheres state-subject relations. Despite the accessibility of e-governance apps and politicians on physical visits, refugee-migrants' sense of deferred promise and reachability further conveys the mixed affects of hope and cynicism embedded in proximal governance. When state actors govern by proximity, they offer a hope that is co-cultivated with aspirational citizen-subjects. At the same time, they expose contradictory state workings in ways that render the Hindutva state project, in spite of itself, incomplete.

YAH SAB TAMASHA HAI (THIS IS ALL A SPECTACLE)

I was struck by this phrase, which I heard from refugee-migrants, FRO officers, and NGO leaders as the 2016 citizenship application camp entered its second

day. The Hindi-Urdu word *tamasha* translates to “show” or “spectacle,” and its colloquial use connotes an extravagant display.⁹ Shailaja Paik’s (2017) social history of *tamasha*, a form of traveling theater, reveals the form’s contradictions—wherein Dalit women artists experience both economic empowerment and social stigma. In this context, the above phrase is a popular critique, a shorthand for the fanfare of a state that dazzles but does not deliver—akin to Sianne Ngai’s (2020) theorization of the dually attractive and repulsive gimmick that strikes us as working too hard and too little. By no means limited to India, such personal modes of politics are common among populist governments worldwide, appealing as they do to claims of solidarity while being fueled by capitalist and class hegemony (Gusterson 2017; Berlant 2011; Chatterjee 2019). Rather than identifying a particular problem of Global South states, popular critique instead points to how proximity opens risks not only for the state but also for the people (here Pakistani Hindu migrants) seeking recognition. Corresponding to Waharu Sonavane’s (see Patankar 2012) incisive poetic censure of the politician’s stage, forms of popular critique recognize that it is somehow both in spite of and because of its *tamashas* that the state’s exclusive forms of recognition endure, while also inviting a dismantling.¹⁰

The ambivalent incorporation of Pakistani Hindu migrants into the Indian national body politic casts doubt on the Hindu nationalist project, for me as a researcher and for migrants themselves. Manish Bhil, a Pakistani Hindu community leader and volunteer with the right-wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), shared that he cannot wait to become an Indian citizen so he won’t have to interact any more with *sanghis* (right-wing Hindu extremists who take up the cause of Pakistani Hindu recognition). He told me how, at a rally with Pakistani Hindu migrants, a senior VHP member had opened their car trunk to reveal dozens of swords. “This is no different than the *mullahs* I left in Pakistan,” he lamented. A few months later, Manish had to delete a WhatsApp group he had made for his Bhil acquaintances and friends to practice English. When one member introduced himself as living in District Sangad in Pakistan, Manish’s local Indian friends objected.

When Manish told me of his hurt feelings, he trailed off, saying, “But don’t they know that I am a Pakistani?” In moments like these, religious nationalism’s binary taxonomies exclude those it purportedly seeks to include, revealing the limits of state recognition and the need for those in waiting to enact alternative political futures (Ramberg 2016). Scholars have demonstrated how the migration control field keeps people waiting at such thresholds to maintain their liminality, extract value, and bind subalterns to the state (De Genova 2002; Andersson 2014; Auyero 2011). Indeed, migrants also experience prolonged waiting in ways that generate

alternative imaginaries and robust solidarities (Sari 2021). If proximal encounters offer refugee-migrants a glimpse into a potential future that includes Indian citizenship, it also reminds them—like Manish—that there remains an uncrossed threshold for recognition. In gesturing to what is possible, governing by proximity signals what is lacking.

The risk of proximal governance for surveilled migrant populations is thus that, in generating hope, it may reveal artifices and inconsistencies, possibly destabilizing national projects. Victor Turner (1975) offered a way to approach riskiness in political performance, whereby the subjunctive mood exposes what is currently not in one's grasp but could be. Indeterminacy offers the condition for continued hope, maintaining attachment in spite of repeated deferral (Miyazaki 2004; Chatterjee 2020), a site of simultaneous privilege and precarity (Parla 2019). In her research with Hindus from Sindh living in the Indian state of Gujarat, for example, Farhana Ibrahim (2020) illuminates the wistful ways migrants in borderlands experience overlapping regional and national belonging, where incorporation into a single citizenry leaves much to be desired.

In this vein, while I have focused on proximity's affective and symbolic work, it is important to briefly note how migrants in Rajasthan also ambivalently linked proximal encounters to material and legal results. In January 2022, after the MHA applied to parliament for its third extension to notify rules for the CAA, without which the act cannot be implemented, a message in a migrant WhatsApp group read: "Stalemate continues on citizenship . . . it certainly leads to utter hopelessness across migrant community." In February 2022, the group shared an op-ed about CAA "rhetoric versus realities" and in May, news reports of Pakistani Hindus leaving India after failing to get citizenship.¹¹ Migrants recognized the power of the government and discretionary authority when seeking recognition and benefits, but, after prolonged waiting, they did not always keep up hope or afford the same power to state actors on fulfillment of their needs. In 2021, Rani is in her second year of medical school, having finally acquired one of a handful of spots reserved for foreigners. But when we sat together teary-eyed at the news of her admission in 2019, her father insisted that they did this without connections: it was by the grace of God and their own hard work. In March 2020, another migrant-refugee, Karan Bhil, sent me a photo of his Indian citizenship certificate, with a caption that said Modi had finally delivered on his promise. Having moved from Pakistan in 2005, Karan had attended application camps in 2015, 2016, and 2019, appealing to BJP and Congress leaders over the years. I read his caption as a deserved assertion, appreciative but also fatigued. When I asked what Indian citizenship meant

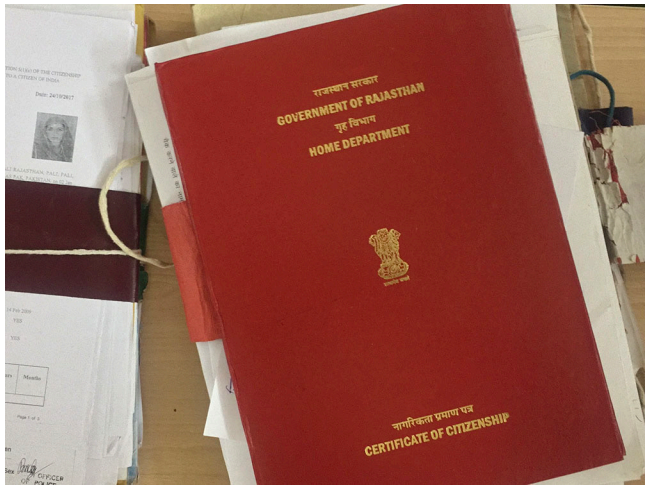


Figure 6. Rajasthan State Certificate of Citizenship, 2019. Photo by Natasha Raheja.



Figure 7. Citizenship Camp, Bikaner, 2019. Photo by Natasha Raheja.

to him, he thought for a moment and shared, “Not much has changed. After so many years, we figured out how to make do. Maybe our children will benefit and get government jobs.” In 2019, I noticed that the government had built modular toilets at migrant settlements on the outskirts of Jodhpur, as part of a nation-

wide sanitation campaign. Without running water, the rectangular concrete stalls stamped with Gandhiji's (Mahatma Gandhi's) signature spectacles functioned more as a landmark than as a site for relief—another marker of the state working too hard, and yet somehow too little.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed intermittent, proximate political performance as a key site of governance that works in tandem with everyday bureaucracy. While the special events discussed above may appear as a respite from the everyday work of policymaking or bureaucracy, politicians' visits and tours across the nation constitute forms of "the state at work" (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014). Governing by proximity is hardly unique to India but describes a key modality of populist governance that creates "intimate publics" (Berlant 2011) by mobilizing mixed affects of hope and disaffection.

The BJP brings together Hindutva political rhetoric and governance to lasso a Hindu body politic through legislation such as the CAA. At this conjuncture, the legislation of exclusionary citizenship criteria and the proliferation of documentary requirements converge with mass public rallies and events decrying the infiltration of state borders. The visual spectacles, hype, and fervor associated with the Hindutva vision for Indian citizenship cannot be extricated from the burdensome banalities of bureaucratic recognition and documentary proof. The wide circulation of video clips of right-wing Indian cabinet ministers defending the logics of the CAA on social media underscores this point. The modality of governing by proximity at such events amplifies the status of state actors as it enfolds aspirational citizen-subjects into exclusive national imaginaries.

Edward L. Schieffelin's (1998, 198) notion of performance as "achievement in the world" is instructive for thinking about whether a given proximal performance "is properly carried out, whether it works." Schieffelin locates the contingency of success or failure on the relationships between performers and spectators. In some ways, the citizenship camp, parliamentary study tour, and digital encounters were co-productions between officials and refugee-migrants in proximity. In these interactions, refugee-migrants participated in and evaluated the state's "showing." What was achieved in these state performances, and what was at risk of failing? How do the camps and tours expose the artifices of state sovereignty and recognition more broadly (Bryant 2021; Bobick 2017)?

The events described in this article cultivated hope among refugee-migrants and bolstered the possibility of their inclusion within a Hindu-India imaginary. But

if the relationship between performers and spectators is an interactional one, it is also an evaluative one that exposed inconsistencies between the national Hindutva project and state forms of recognition in practice. In particular, the state's failure to recognize Hindu Pakistanis as Indian citizens sits at odds with their conditional recognition as national subjects. Proximal state performances invite scrutiny to these contradictions, especially during improvisational moments that stray from the script, showing how small-scale state performances are "fundamentally risky" (Schieffelin 1998, 198). Recall state officials' leading questions about refugee-migrants' reasons for leaving Pakistan; when refugee-migrants did not provide answers that matched the narrative of religious persecution, these momentary schisms exposed taken-for-granted state narratives as effortful contrivances.

In November and December 2019, in the lead-up to the Indian parliament's passing of the controversial CAA, the Rajasthan government hosted another series of citizenship camps at eleven districts across the state. Like Meera, who felt affirmed when she replayed Modi's digitally recorded welcome, many refugee-migrants continued to hope that the Indian government could, and would, award them the Indian citizenship to which they were entitled. At the 2019 camps, I watched as refugee-migrants pulled out worn files of carefully organized documents to show the visiting officers, clearly not for the first time.

There is a fatigue that comes with deferred promises. Manish and other refugee-migrant leaders in Jodhpur advised people against attending the new camps, to not waste their time. They reminded others of the citizenship camps in 2014 and 2015 that had yielded few citizenship certificates. Furthermore, no high-ranking officials from Delhi were expected to attend. This refusal emphasizes how governing by proximity exposes the space between rhetorical and substantive recognition, even as it seeks to close the gap.

Shortly after India's religion-based citizenship bill passed in parliament in January 2020, Manish and other community leaders posted social media photos of glossy, vinyl posters of their faces placed next to the face of the Indian home minister Amit Shah, welcoming him to Jodhpur for a pro-CAA rally.¹² The persistent fatigue I observed in person and felt in these digital images laid bare the ambivalence of aspirational citizenship produced in proximity.

ABSTRACT

This article argues that proximity is a mode of governance that both enchants aspirational citizen-subjects and exposes ambivalent state workings. I track face-to-face and digitally mediated interactions—over eight years, from 2014 to 2022—be-

tween Indian politicians and Pakistani Hindu migrants in the Thar Desert region. Officials and politicians govern by proximity when their felt presence raises hopes and generates attachments with constituents within a wider body politic. When state actors govern by proximity, they evoke what is lacking by gesturing toward the possible. If proximal encounters with high-ranking politicians offered Pakistani Hindu migrants a glimpse into potential futures that included Indian citizenship, it also reminded them that there remained an uncrossed threshold for recognition. Understanding what governing by proximity is, and the work it does, helps us think anew about questions of populist governance and popular sovereignty at the borders of nation-states. [proximity; governance; populism; migration; citizenship; borders; Pakistan; India]

सारांश

इस लेख में तर्कपूर्ण कहा गया है कि सामीप्य से शासन करना एक ऐसी प्रणाली है जो नागरिकता लेने के इच्छुक लोगों को आकर्षित भी करती है और राज्य की उभयभावी कार्य प्रकृति को भी दर्शाती है। थार रेगिस्तान के छेत्र में २०१४ से २०२२ के आठ वर्षों के शोधकार्य के दौरान, मैंने भारतीय राजनेताओं और पाकिस्तानी हिंदू प्रवासियों की व्यक्तिगत तथा डिजिटल रूप में होने वाली बातचीत का अध्ययन किया है। अपनी उपस्थिति को दर्ज कराते हुए अधिकारी और राजनेता लोगों में उम्मीद जगा कर और निकटता की भावना पैदा कर के अपने राजनीतिक छेत्र में आत्मीयता द्वारा शासन करते हैं। सामीप्य द्वारा शासन की प्रणाली में उन बातों के संभव होने की उम्मीद दिलाई जाती है जिन का लोगों के जीवन में सख्त अभाव है। पाकिस्तानी हिन्दू प्रवासियों को सुनहरे भविष्य - जिसमें भारतीय नागरिकता भी शामिल होती है, की झलकियां दिखाने वाले उच्च श्रेणी के राजनेताओं के साथ जब कभी उन का आमना सामना होता है तो उन को इस तथ्य का भी आभास हो जाता है कि मान्यता पाने का उन का सपना एक सपना ही रहेगा। सामीप्य द्वारा शासन क्या है, और यह कार्य क्या करता है, इस को समझने की प्रक्रिया हम को राष्ट्र-राज्यों की सीमाओं पर लोकलुभावी शासन और संप्रभुता के लुभाव के प्रश्नों पर एक नए सिरे से विचार करने में मदद देती है।

[सामीप्य, आत्मीयता; शासन; लोकलभावनवाद; प्रवास; नागरिकता; सीमाएं; पाकिस्तान; भारत]

تلخیص

اس مضمون میں بحث اٹھائی گئی ہے کہ قربت کے ذریعے حکمرانی ایک ایسا طریقہ ہے جو شہریت لینے کے خواہشمند لوگوں کو مسکور بھی کرتا ہے اور ریاست کے متضاد طریقہ کار کو بے نقاب بھی کرتا ہے۔ تھار ریاست کے علاقے میں ۲۰۱۳ سے ۲۰۲۲ کی اپنی آٹھ سالہ تحقیق کے دوران، میں نے ہندوستانی سیاستدانوں اور پاکستانی ہندو تارکین وطن کی روبرو اور ڈیجیٹل طریقے سے ہونے والی گفتگو کا مطالعہ کیا ہے۔ اپنی موجودگی کو درج کراتے ہوئے افسران اور سیاستدان لوگوں میں امید جگا کر اور اپنائیت کا احساس پیدا کر کے اپنے سیاسی علاقے میں قربت کے ذریعے حکومت کرتے ہیں۔ قربت کے ذریعے حکمرانی کے عمل میں اُن باتوں کے پورا ہونے کی امید دلائی جاتی ہے جن کی لوگوں کی زندگی میں سخت کمی ہے۔ پاکستانی ہندو تارکین وطن کو سہرے مستقبل - جس میں ہندوستان کی شہریت بھی شامل ہوتی ہے، کی جھلکیاں دکھانے والے اعلیٰ درجے کے سیاستدانوں کے ساتھ جب کبھی اُن کا آئنا سامنا ہوتا ہے تو اُن کو اس حقیقت کا بھی احساس ہو جاتا ہے کہ شناخت پانے کا اُن کا خواب ایک خواب ہی رہے گا۔ قربت کے ذریعے حکمرانی کیا ہے، اور یہ کام کیا کرتی ہے، اس کو سمجھنے کا عمل ہم کو ریاستوں کی سرحدوں پر پاپلسٹ حکمرانی اور پاپلر خود مختاری کے سوالات پر نئے سرے سے سوچنے میں مدد کرتا ہے۔

[قربت؛ حکمرانی، بالولزم، ہجرت، شہریت، سرحد؛ پاکستان؛ ہندوستان]

NOTES

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1. This phrase is commonly uttered by refugee-migrants, across castes, in reference to their migration to India. This communal use of Hindustan is emblematic of [Manan A. Asif's \(2020\)](#) thesis on the colonial loss of Hindustan as a religiously plural space. Some Pakistani Hindus also avowedly reject migration to India as a solution to their minoritization as "non-Muslims" in Pakistan. The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reported about 10,000 pending citizenship applications from Pakistani nationals in 202; as of November 2019, the Pakistani High Commissioner in Delhi maintains migration of Pakistani Hindus to India is due to marriage reasons.
2. Apart from the non-interference in internal affairs negotiated in the 1972 Shimla Agreement, India's secular nationalist Congress Party has also supported the naturalization of Hindus from Pakistan, on the avowed basis of their generic minoritization. See, for example, a 2010 Ministry of Home Affairs' notice under Congress qualifying Pakistani Hindus and Sikhs for long-term visas: <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=62479>. In Rajasthan, at the state government level, though migrant rehabilitation has taken different forms under each ruling party, it has had bipartisan support, shaped by the regional history of refugee displacement after the 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars. See [Sherman 2015](#) and [Zamindar 2007](#) on the Indian immigration bureaucracy's suspicion toward Muslims post-Independence, and [Roy 2020](#) on how citizenship policy has defined the outsider. More specifically, see [Kapur 2021](#) on India's special accommodation of Hindus from Pakistan as the ghost of Partition, with the CAA as one of its culminations.
3. At the request of participants, all names except for those of high-ranking public officers and politicians have been changed.
4. Pakistani Hindus migrate to India on short-term pilgrimage or visit visas, applying for long-term visas after arrival.
5. The refugee-migrant binary is predicated on ideas of "migrants" having choice and pursuing economic aspirations, while "refugees" supposedly do not have choice and are persecuted on the basis of group identity. In Rajasthan, both terms are used for this population (along with the Hindi word *visthapit* (displaced [people])). By referring to Pakistani Hindus in India as refugee-migrants, I am trying to trouble the distinction between these categories.
6. Frontiers have long constituted a zone of nationalist experimentation in South Asia. See [Longkumer 2020](#) on the Hindutva experiment and Indigenous resistance in northeast India. On the specific histories of mobility in this desert region, see [Kothiyal 2016](#).
7. Migration of Hindus from Pakistan to India occurs cross-caste, but the majority of migrants in Jodhpur hail from Meghwal, Bhil, and Kolhi caste backgrounds, which comprise Dalit, Adivasi, and Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe designations in India that correspond to robust political formations ([Xaxa 2005](#); [Pantawane 1986](#); [Rao 2009](#)). Both the Congress Party and the BJP have cited the naturalization of these migrants as a Dalit issue, with the latter also framing it as a Hindu matter (see [Ansari 2018](#); [Lee 2021](#); and [Natrajan 2021](#) on interreligious, dominant-caste hegemony and state enumeration in India). Caste is an axis of inequity in Pakistan ([Gazdar 2007](#)), but the politics of state

recognition are constructed through the language of religious majorities and minorities without a distinctive political counterculture around caste and indigeneity (Asif 2020; Mahmood 2022). Refugee-migrants in Jodhpur discussed experiences of caste discrimination, and sometimes identified as Adivasi, but typically they did not self-identify as Dalit. When they did, they simultaneously avowed Hindu identity. Dominant-caste Pakistani Hindu migrants (Rajput, Mali) often have resources and rely less on state forms of recognition to access social welfare and meet their basic needs, but they also experience stigma, disappointment, and modes of selective welcome. Echoing Ghassan Hage (2016) on the “unequal distribution of hope,” aspiration and disaffection are inequitably distributed along class and caste lines.

8. Sometimes this involved filtering out participants whose individual situations didn't correspond to governmental scripts. In one case, a migrant family wanting to meet the secretary to request an exit permit to leave India and return to Pakistan was asked to stand back and meet with a district officer another time. Migrants seeking exit permits, especially in the case of expired visas, did not easily garner NGO support and faced bureaucratic challenges, including immigration officer questions such as, “If it is so bad in Pakistan, why do you want to go back?”
9. *Tamasha*, however, differs from the classist European media theory reading of spectacle as mass entertainment (Inden 2014).
10. See also Waghmore 2016 on Dalit political humor as a form of anti-caste critique that generates hopes of egalitarian norms of democratic engagement.
11. See Hindu Singh Sodha, “CAA & Pak Hindu Migrants: Rhetoric versus Realities,” *South Asian Times*, February 9, 2022 (<https://thesouthasiatimes.info/caa-pak-hindu-migrants-rhetoric-versus-realities/>) and Vijaita Singh, “800 Pakistani Hindus left India after failing to get citizenship, says advocacy group,” *Hindu*, May 08, 2022 (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/800-pakistani-hindus-left-india-after-failing-to-get-citizenship-says-advocacy-group/article65394201.ece>).
12. Later these posters would be used as tarps for protection from rain and dirt. See photographer Ritesh Uttamchandani's 2022 show *A Lease of Life* to ponder the improvisational afterlives of political posters in South Asia, whereby politicians' faces go up and come down.

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