Article

The Burden of Security

Moral Frictions and Everyday Policing in a Contested Religious Compound

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Abstract

After the Babri mosque in the northern Indian city of Ayodhya was destroyed in 1992 by mobs of ‘volunteers’ mobilised by Hindu nationalist forces, a deed of license between the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board and the Uttar Pradesh state government was signed. Through this license a portion of land in the Gyan Vapi mosque premises in Banaras (Varanasi) was handed over to the state for security purposes. The Gyan Vapi mosque is less than fifty meters from the Kashi Vishvanath temple, a notable Hindu pilgrimage destination. Although at the centre of security issues for centuries, the mosque has been a target of the Hindu nationalist movement that since the 1980s has aimed at the ‘liberation’ of allegedly originally Hindu places of worship. By analysing the evolution of security discourses in local Hindi newspapers and drawing on ethnography of everyday policing at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound, this article discusses moral frictions involved in securing a contested place of worship and argues that scopes and objects of securitisation can shift. In the case I discuss, the predominately Hindu police are shown to play an ambiguous role, caught as they are between their duty to secure the disputed mosque and their likely adherence to the increasingly dominant Hindu nationalist discourse. In overcoming these moral frictions, police through their everyday activity contribute to the shift of the object of securitisation from the mosque to the more ‘acceptable’ temple.

Keywords

security, morality, everyday policing, securitisation, religion, Hindu *dharm*, police *dharm*, Hindu nationalism, Gyan Vapi mosque, Varanasi (Banaras)

Introduction: A Shift in Securitisation

In March 2018, the government of the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh (led since March 2017 by Chief Minister and Hindu nationalist monk Yogi Adityanath), ‘bent the rules again and made the policemen deployed [...]’ at the

Kashi Vishvanath temple in Varanasi (Banaras) '[...] junk their uniforms in favour of the traditional Dhoti-Kurta in order to avoid leather belts and boots that are part of the regular police uniform but are not permissible inside the GarbhGriha',¹ or *sanctum sanctorum*. At first, the *Times of India* article says, this change sparked surprise among pilgrims but it was soon welcomed, because it demonstrates the respect of the police for (Hindu) religious rules and sensitivities, and ultimately for Hindu *dharm*—a fundamental concept of Hinduism closely connected with, and encompassing, ideas of morality and ethics and that can be defined as law, right, norm, duty, prescribed conduct, ethics and even religion itself (Flood 1996, 51-74).

Less than 50 meters from the temple lies the Gyan Vapi mosque. The whole compound has a history of controversy because, as I detail below, the mosque was constructed during Mughal times on the site of a previous structure, most likely a Hindu temple. During the Ramjanmabhumi movement that led to the dismantlement of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 by mobs of *karsevaks* (Hindu nationalist 'volunteers'), the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound in Banaras was specified as one of the next places to be 'liberated' from the Muslim presence.² A major consequence of this threat was that a security plan was implemented to protect the mosque. Security forces initially occupied several portions of land around it³ but subsequently expanded into the surrounding neighbourhood, with local police, regional and national forces regulating access to the compound and surveilling both mosque and temple, including the temple's *sanctum sanctorum*.

¹ 'Cops in Dhoti-Kurta surprise pilgrims at iconic Kashi temple', *The Times of India*, 27 March 2018, [<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/cops-in-dhoti-kurta-surprise-pilgrims-at-iconic-kashi-temple/articleshow/63485835.cms>, last accessed 14 November 2019]. In Sanskritic Hinduism leather is considered highly impure because of its animal (often bovine) origins.

² Ayodhya is a small town in eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP) less than 200 km from Banaras. The Ramjanmabhumi (Ram's birthplace) movement is a Hindu nationalist campaign for the construction of a temple at the supposed birthplace of the god Ram, on the site of the 16th century Babri mosque. The movement was orchestrated by Hindu nationalist militant organisations and leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and mobilised novel technologies that reached a vast audience. It inaugurated an urban, 'bumper sticker' Hindu nationalist ideology (Rajagopal 2001) that led to the demolition of Babri mosque in December 1992, after which communal riots broke out across the subcontinent. Some of the vast scholarship about these events focuses on the pre-conditions that led to the destruction of the mosque (for example, Gopal 1993; Guha-Thakurta 2004: 268-303) while other scholarship focuses on the politics of the past enacted by Hindu nationalist forces (for example, Pandey 1994, Deshpande 1995; Hansen 1999; Udayakumar 2005). In November 2019, the Supreme Court handed down its unanimous verdict in the Ayodhya land title dispute case, giving the disputed land where the Babri mosque once stood to the Hindu parties and assigning five acres at a separate 'prominent' location in Ayodhya to the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board. The judgment came while the criminal case about the mosque's demolition was still pending and, although spelling out clearly that the Hindu nationalist organisations involved in the demolition and other events at Ayodhya committed illegal actions, it also seems to reward those actions. For this reason, it has been seen by many critics as 'a big step towards the end of liberal democracy and the creation of a post-democratic political system in India' as declared by Appadurai in the article 'Ayodhya and the "Modimon Effect"', *The Wire*, 14 November 2019, [<https://thewire.in/politics/ayodhya-verdict-falsehood-reconciliation>, last access on 29 January 2020].

³ For instance, in September 1993 the UP Sunni Central Waqf Board granted a plot of land next to the mosque for security purposes to the state of UP, acting through the Collector of Banaras. The Deed of License is an annex of the lawsuit *Jitendra Nath Vyas and Another versus Union of India and Others*, CWP No. 1365 of 2018, Annex no. 3, p. 31-33.

Even in Banaras—a city long projected as a stronghold of Hinduism and since 2014 the constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and showcase of the government's Hindu nationalist development agenda—police wearing *dhotis* and *kurtas* (cotton garments commonly worn in South Asia) while they direct crowds of pilgrims at a Hindu temple is an unforeseen outcome of a security plan that originally protected a mosque.

This and other unforeseen outcomes are indicators of a major shift in the scope of the security plan around the compound. This article engages with and complicates theories of securitisation, arguing that objects of securitisation are not fixed but can shift and that actors implementing security measures play active, albeit ambiguous, roles in these shifts, and at times they do so in response to moral frictions. In the case I discuss, for instance, there has been a paradoxical shift in the 'referent object'—a referent object being one of the elements of securitisation according to the original formulation by scholars of the Copenhagen School (CS) of Security Studies (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Securitisation, in fact, was defined as a process involving: a) a securitising move, seen as a speech act or a discourse that presents something as an existential threat to a referent object; b) a referent object, namely the space or community under threat; c) a securitising actor, who carries out the discourse and is usually identified with the state or state actors; and d) an audience who, for the issue being securitised, has to accept and agree on the threat. In the case under discussion, the referent object was at first the mosque, then the whole temple-mosque compound before becoming nowadays almost exclusively the temple.

By looking at the evolution of security discourses and practices at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound, this article unpacks the moral frictions that underpin the shift in the scope and object of securitisation. After contextualising relationships between policing and religion in South Asia, I analyse popular local Hindi newspapers to highlight inflexion points in the shift and its moral underpinnings. I then frame the ambiguous role played by low ranking (predominantly Hindu) police, who oscillate between being securitising agents and audience, and argue that they have overcome moral frictions by favouring Hindu *dharm* over 'police *dharm*' (Jauregui 2016), thus actively contributing to the shift of the object of securitisation from the mosque to the more 'acceptable' temple.

Policing and Religion

The juxtaposition of religion and policing in South Asia, particularly in India, brings immediately to mind traumatic instances of communal riots—ethno-religious violence between religious communities that recurs in the country's history and clouds the rosy picture of India as a peaceful, multi-religious and multi-ethnic society.

Although police often appear as actors in communal riots, critical scrutiny of the perceptions and experiences of police during these episodes is still to be undertaken.

en. This gap is perhaps linked to the fact that approaches focusing on the ‘perpetrators’ of violence—towards which some police actions converge—are largely absent from scholarship on communalism (Frøystad 2009). Government commissions, scholars and even a few former officers of the Indian Police Service have, however, extensively documented the often partisan behaviours of police during riots—behaviours ranging from selectively refraining from intervention to open collusion with the majority Hindu community and participation in killing and looting members of minority religious communities, and Muslims in particular.⁴ These studies demonstrate that, despite the fact that police might be expected to be neutral, and their behaviour informed by a *super partes*, constitutionally informed civic morality, their actions are often influenced by religious affiliation.

Additionally, data about the under-representation of Muslims and other disadvantaged sections of society in the Indian police (and the over-representation of the same groups in prisons)⁵ shed light on entrenched caste, class and religious discrimination both within police forces and in law enforcement. While this might serve as an easy explanation for the attitude of police during communal riots, it is important to note that under-representation of Muslims in the police force of specific states does not necessarily match the scale or intensity of communal violence in those states (Swami 2006). Even the more vocal critics of police actions during communal riots point to the fact that ‘political will is as necessary to control communal violence as the administrative efficiency and the police determination’ (Engineer 1994, 835). For instance, as shown by official reports about the destruction of the Babri mosque, police actions depend on the general political atmosphere, the type of backing they get from government and ultimately on the orders they do or *do not* receive.⁶

As documented by scholarship and reports discussed above, prejudices about Muslims are widespread among police and they draw on images that have been elabo-

⁴ See, for example, Chopra and Singh 1972; Engineer 1994; Hansen 2001, 134-143; Brass 2006, 65-66; Subramanian 2007, 173-190; Rai 2008; and Pai and Kumar 2018. The Reddy Commission Report on the Ahmedabad riots in 1969 (quoted extensively in Engineer 1994, 837-838), the Srikrishna Commission on the Mumbai riots of December 1992 and January 1993 and the Liberhan Commission on the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 are vocal in pointing out the inadequate, at times partisan, role of security forces.

⁵ The 2019 *Status of Policing in India Report* (SPIR) shows that although the Indian Constitution makes provision for reserved seats in the public service (including in police forces) for various disadvantaged groups, these groups continue to be under-represented. In several states more than 50% of reserved seats are vacant. The report also notes that collection of data on the representation of Muslims in police forces was discontinued by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in 2013 (SPIR 2019, 33-35). At that time, Muslims made up about 6% of the total police strength (NCRB 2013, 600), although that community was 13.4% of the population of India according to the 2001 Census. SPIR also sheds light on other structural inequalities, noting that about 53% of undertrials are from disadvantaged communities although they make up 39% of the population of India.’ (SPIR 2019, 118, n. 4).

⁶ The Liberhan Commission found that that the administration did not give specific instructions to police at the time of the demolition of the mosque and that there was no planning in case force was needed at the site. It also noted that police then failed to intervene, and paramilitary forces sent by the central government were sent back to their barracks under the orders of the District Magistrate (p. 530-531).

rated since colonial times of Indian Muslims as backward (Raman 2010: 82-85). In addition, perceptions of Hindus as always potentially threatened in their motherland by outsiders are embedded in discourses of anxiety and the politics of fear at the core of Hindu nationalists' readings of history and society (Anand 2011). These underpin the violent reactions of ordinary people, and police, against the Muslim other. In the current political scenario of muscular Hindu nationalism, these images and entrenched fears have become more mainstream and under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, now in his second term, the lynching of Muslims in the name of cow protection and aggressive campaigns for *ghar vapsi* ('return home', or conversion of Muslims to Hinduism) and against 'love *jihad*', (the alleged abduction of Hindu girls by Muslim men) have been portrayed as the natural reactions of subjugated Hindus wanting to protect their *dharm* (see also Ahmed 2019).

This, however, does not mean that all police are biased and act in the same way, but it does mean that, in the words of former Director General of Police in Uttar Pradesh, 'in the mind of minorities, the image of the Policeman is that of an enemy' (Rai 2008, 7). In December 2019, this image of police as enemy was reinforced once again and indelibly imprinted on the minds of Muslim youths during nation-wide protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)—a law that expedites Indian citizenship for non-Muslims from neighbouring countries and explicitly excludes Muslim migrants.⁷ During the protests, cases of police brutality against Muslim protesters have been observed in several states, but UP had the highest death toll of eighteen people, fourteen of whom died after being shot.⁸ Following the current normalisation of violence, episodes of brutality by ordinary people and police during anti-CAA protests have been depicted as normal and even spurred as necessary measures to protect the nation from 'traitors' or 'anti-nationalists', terms increasingly used by members of the government to label Muslims and whoever else speak against Hindu nationalist policies.⁹

⁷ Protesters fear that this law could be used in the future in combination with a proposed National Register of Citizens to harass and disenfranchise Indian Muslims and other disadvantaged people, who are less likely to be able to produce the 'right papers', or afford lawyers to file petitions in case of bureaucratic mistakes or rejections of documents.

⁸ 'India: Deadly Force Used Against Protesters', 23 December 2019, Human Rights Watch, [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/23/india-deadly-force-used-against-protesters>, last accessed 30 January 2020]; and 'In Uttar Pradesh, mapping reports of violence and police brutality from 15 districts', Scroll.in, 27 December 2019, [<https://scroll.in/article/947980/in-uttar-pradesh-reports-of-violence-and-police-brutality-from-15-districts>, last accessed 28 January 2020].

⁹ For example, as reported by Human Rights Watch 'On December 20, a BJP leader, Kapil Mishra, led a large demonstration in Delhi, chanting that the police should "shoot the traitors," referring to citizenship law protesters'; see: 'India: Deadly Force Used Against Protesters', 23 December 2019, Human Rights Watch [<https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/23/india-deadly-force-used-against-protesters>, last accessed 30 January 2020]. See also, 'Kapil Mishra leads pro-Citizenship Amendment Act protests in Delhi, crowd chants "shoot the traitors"' [<https://www.firstpost.com/india/kapil-mishra-leads-pro-citizenship-amendment-act-protests-in-delhi-crowd-chants-shoot-the-traitors-7811131.html>, last accessed 30 January 2020].

Studies of policing in India have generally focused on conflicts, while ways in which a polarised atmosphere and political pressure translate into partisan actions by police *beyond* times of spectacular violence have not attracted the same attention. Ethnographic research is thus necessary to bring to light the ordinary, mundane and even boring activities of police and the ways they impact on spaces and people—all aspects that go unnoticed in surveys or quantitative studies (Fassin 2017, 8-9). One important and still unique ethnographic study of Indian police (Jauregui 2016) shows that moral frictions are commonplace in everyday policing. The work, based on research carried out in 2006-2007 at a *thana* (police station) on the outskirts of Lucknow in UP, discusses police authority and its everyday performance, pointing to the continuous negotiation of police authority and showing how this is deeply embedded in, and dependent on, social, political, religious, caste and ideological networks. Although the work is based on field data collected during the rule of a previous state government, Jauregui introduces ideas of ‘police *dharma*’ and ‘orderly ethics’ to pin down the often unpalatable, unethical or extra-legal actions of police that are useful to understand police work at any time. Police *dharma* and orderly ethics sanction the continuous compromise with legality that police have to perform on a daily basis. This *dharma*, she explains, arises out of the limited and provisional authority they have and because of being ‘integrated with systemic corruption, cronyism and coercive violence as shaped by broader forces and relations of sociocultural order’ (Ibid, 63). This means that police work is often necessarily simultaneously outside and inside the law—a law with which police have to come to terms and sometimes fix (*jugaad*) or violate in order to reach what they consider ‘substantive justice’ (Cf. Das and Poole 2014, 14-15).

While informed by the emerging field of police ethnography, the research material I draw on in this article does not arise strictly speaking from an ethnography of ordinary police. I became interested in security as part of my research on the spatialization of power and the politics of heritage at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound, for which I combine space-centred ethnographic research and deep engagement with various interlocutors (including police) with historical, archival, legal and media analysis. As I discuss in the next section, security (*suraksha*) has emerged as one of the main driving forces behind not only spatial and social changes in the area, but also changes to religious practices. Although the securitisation of places of worship is increasing globally, crucial questions about the impact of security measures and discourses on religious sites and practices, and vice versa, are yet to be asked. Investigations of policing at securitised places of worship do not figure in the growing ethnographic literature on police and security, and even Jauregui’s sophisticated ethnographic gaze at UP police hardly mentions moral frictions related to questions of religion.

But what happens when police *dharma* is faced with questions of religion, particularly at a time of increasing polarisation of society along religious lines?

Places of worship are complex affective environments and the very presence of police there brings with it issues of morality: even the adoption of ‘traditional’

garments rather than uniforms by police in the Kashi Vishvanath temple hints at frictions between competing duties and norms. In addition, police at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound are predominantly Hindu and perhaps cannot help being attuned to Hindu nationalist versions of Hindu *dharm* and morality, particularly when government decisions such as that about clothing seem to privilege them, and the national political climate normalises violence for their ‘protection’. Indeed, the increasing pervasiveness of religion in Indian politics, makes an enquiry about the weight of the religious-cum-moral component in security practices more urgent and this article wishes to stimulate reflections and research in this field.

Security at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi Compound

The sensitivity of the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound is to some extent inherent to a site in which a major pan-Indian Hindu temple stands side by side with a historic mosque. Over time, however, levels of sensitivity rise and fall, and ideas of the site as in need of security come and go.

The present Vishvanath temple was built in its current location and next to the already standing Gyan Vapi mosque at the end of the 18th century, at a time of architectural ‘resurrection’ of the city’s Hindu landscape (Dalmia 1997; Desai 2017). A previous Vishvanath temple, supposedly located on the site currently occupied by the Gyan Vapi mosque, was demolished on the orders of emperor Aurangzeb in 1669.¹⁰ The Gyan Vapi mosque was apparently built on the same site and with some of the material of the old Vishvanath temple, most likely shortly after its demolition. But in this case documentary evidence is lacking and we do not have records about the patron of the mosque or its date of construction (Asher 1992, 254), nor do we know whether the structure underneath the present mosque, and clearly visible at the back of it, was the previous Vishvanath temple.

Specific minor deities around the mosque continued to attract Hindus, however, and the whole area retained memories of the temporarily lost Vishvanath deity (Lazzaretti 2020). Indeed, even before the construction of the current Kashi Vishvanath temple, the mosque had been targeted by Hindu regional patrons who wanted to rebuild the temple in its supposedly original location (Desai 2017, 58 and 81). One of these was Ahilyabai Holkar, who was granted permission to build a new Vishvanath temple close to the mosque around 1777 (Desai 2017). The juxtaposition of temple and mosque allowed by the colonial administration certainly served to reify contestations and reinforce ideas of sensitivity and insecurity attached to the area: in 1809, for example, an incident on the outskirts of Banaras led to Hindu-Muslim riots, and as the violence moved towards the centre of the city the Gyan Vapi mosque became a major target of Hindu mobs (Freitag 1989,

¹⁰ Among the many temple desecrations popularly ascribed to Aurangzeb, this is one of the very few for which there is some documentary evidence: a sentence in the chronicles of Aurangzeb’s rule reports his order to destroy the Vishvanath temple (Khan 1947, 55).

212; Cf. Pinch 2012). Documents from colonial and post-colonial times show that the whole area was treated with care by authorities to avoid any possible disruption to public order: already during colonial times, for instance, local police in very low numbers were stationed next to the mosque, but even this was a reason for friction in the area.¹¹

Fig. 1 Gyan Vapi mosque with watchtower and iron fence, image by author.

In post-colonial times, security forces were deployed at the Vishvanath temple to control crowds of devotees during Hindu major festivals, and at times the spectre of terrorism was evoked to justify increased security there and elsewhere.¹² From the 1980s, however, the mosque increasingly became the referent object of securitisation in the area, as the Ramjanmabhumi campaign transformed local disputes

¹¹ In the 1930s, a group of Muslims achieved partial success in a lawsuit objecting to portions of land around the mosque that had been used for prayers being obstructed by police and the city administration. A group of Hindus then appealed the decision. (Din Mohammad and others versus the Secretary of State for India Council through the District Magistrate and Collector Benares, CWP No. 62 of 1936 in the Court of Additional Civil Judge of Benares, and appeal no. 466 of 1937 in the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad).

¹² For example, 'Atankavadiyonke badte jalko dekhte hue vishvanath mandir mem suraksha ki kadi vyavastha' ('Looking at the growing network of terrorists security arrangements at the Vishvanath temple increase'), Aj, 29 August 1986, p. 4; 'Vishvanath mandir mem close circuit TV se bhir ka niyantana' ('Crowd control through CCTV cameras at the Vishvanath temple'), Aj, 14 February 1988, p. 4.

concerning rights of worship and land possession into a national political debate and the Gyan Vapi mosque was targeted for ‘liberation’ from the Muslim presence. Actions in Ayodhya had repercussions in Banaras; for instance, when in February 1986 the door of the Babri mosque was unlocked by order of the district court to allow Hindu worshippers to enter, Banaras was placed under curfew.¹³ The city also experienced severe communal riots in 1990 and 1991 when marches organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)—a militant Hindu nationalist organisation—were held in Ayodhya (Malik 1996; Raman 2010).

The year 1990 is a crucial turning point in the securitisation of the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound. Local newspaper articles at the time reveal that new security measures, such as cordons and barricades, were being put in place and, after an initial period in the first months of 1990 in which articles refer to the security (*suraksha*) of temple or mosque or the whole compound, the mosque emerges as the main object of security during the last few months of the year. Gyan Vapi and its protection are mentioned in almost every article dealing with security measures in the area at that time.¹⁴

In 1991, the issue of security entered more consistently into national legal and moral debates about the protection of places of worship.¹⁵ As a means to prevent unilateral actions by the Ramjnambhumi movement, the Indian parliament passed the Places of Worship (Special Provision) Act in September 1991: it prohibits the conversion of any place of worship of any religion into a place of worship of a different religion and seeks to maintain the *status quo* at the time of Independence in 1947. The Act was vigorously contested by Hindu nationalists and specifically excluded the Babri mosque site, most likely partly to accommodate their opposition.¹⁶ Despite the moral underpinning of this Act and the subsequent security measures implemented to enforce it, Hindu nationalist claims became more strident and, in Banaras for instance, the Kashi Vishvanath Mandir Mukti

¹³ ‘Nagar me karphyu me dilke dauran gyanvapi masjid me musalmanone jume ki namaz ada ki’ (‘During a break in the curfew of the city, Muslims perform Friday prayers at Gyan Vapi mosque’), Aj, 22 February 1986, p. 5.

¹⁴ This shift from security of the compound to security of the mosque becomes clear when looking chronologically at such titles as: ‘Ehatiyati taorpar vishvanath mandir ki suraksha kara, vyapak bandobast’ (‘Precautionary measures for the security of the Vishvanath temple, increased security arrangements’), Aj, 5 March 1990, p. 3; ‘Gyanvapi kup ki gherebandi’ (‘Siege of the Gyan Vapi well’), Aj, 28 October 1990, p. 5; ‘Gyanvapi parisar ki kari suraksha se saragrami’ (‘Complex security of the Gyan Vapi premises’), Aj, 29 October 1990, p. 3; ‘Gyanvapi masjid ki suraksha aor kadi, sena ka muaayanaa’ (‘Stricter security at Gyan Vapi mosque, Inspection of the army’), Aj 31 October 1990, p. 5; ‘Gyanvapi masjid parisar sil’ (‘Closure of the surroundings of the Gyan Vapi mosque’), Aj, 4 November 1990, p. 3.

¹⁵ There were for instance direct requests to the central government from local stakeholders and politicians opposed to the UP government (then led by the BJP) to increase the security of the mosque, in order to prevent an escalation of violence: ‘Gyanvapi masjid ki suraksha kadi karne ki mang’ (‘Request to increase security at the Gyan Vapi mosque’), Aj, 17 July 1991, p. 3.

¹⁶ The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act (11 July 1991) [<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/603724/>, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].

Samiti (Committee for the Liberation of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple) was established,¹⁷ while there were regular attempts by the VHP and its associates to access the Gyan Vapi mosque area at Hindu festival times to perform rituals. Police, however, did not allow such access in this phase.¹⁸

Media discourse on the security of the Gyan Vapi mosque increases markedly after the dismantlement of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992, and until February 1993 local newspapers report daily about agreed security plans, increased security measures and inspections by police and administration authorities. The object of security in this phase is the mosque,¹⁹ and its securitisation is presented by the central government and reported in media as a civic and moral burden, deriving from the lessons learned from the events at Ayodhya.²⁰

In the following years, the securitised area progressively expanded from the mosque into its immediate surroundings, and later a substantial part of the neighbourhood. This expansion of security measures goes hand in hand with a shift in the discourse around security: the terminology changes and media reports refer more often to the area (Gyanvapi parisar) rather than to the mosque specifically. Also, security practices increasingly began to overlap with crowd control of pil-

¹⁷ 'Kashi Vishvanath mandir mukti samiti ka gatan' ('Kashi Vishvanath temple liberation committee formed'), Aj, 30 September 1991, p. 1.

¹⁸ 'Gyanvapi parisar me jalabhishek karne ja rahe VHP karyakartaon par lathicharij' ('VHP workers going to the Gyan Vapi premises to perform jalabhishek have been charged by police using long bamboo batons, or lathi'), Aj, 3 March 1992, p. 1; 'VHP ka karyakartaon par lathicarij' ('Workers of the VHP lathi charged'), Aj, 3 March 1992, p. 12.

¹⁹ For example, just from the first few weeks of December: 'Gyanvapi masjid par bhari pulis bal' ('Increased police force at the Gyan Vapi mosque'), Aj, 7 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ka suraksha prabandh aor kadi kiya gaya' ('The security management of the Gyan Vapi mosque became stricter'), Aj, 11 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi hetu vyavadhan rahit alok vyavastha' ('No interruption of light for the mosque'), Aj, 15 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ki suraksha ka jayaja lene ala aphasar aye' ('Top officer came to check the security of the mosque'), Aj, 18 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ke charon aor baluki beriyon ka ghera' ('Around the mosque a barrier of sandbags'), Aj, 19 December 1992, p. 3; 'Akarshan ka kendra bani Gyanvapi masjid ki chak chauband suraksha vyavastha' ('The management of the security of the four corners of the mosque has become the centre of attention'), Aj, 20 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ki suraksha ki yojna par kaam shuru' ('The work for the implementation of the security plan started'), Aj, 21 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ki suraksha ki kadi vyavstha' ('Strict arrangements for the security of the mosque'), Dainik Jagran, 7 December 1992, p. 2; 'Gyanvapi masjid ki sakht gherabandi' ('Strict siege of the mosque'), Dainik Jagran, 8 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ke liye 11 hazar K.V.A. ki nayi lain kinchi gayi' ('New electricity system for the mosque will be drawn'), Dainik Jagran, 17 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid kshetr ko nishiddh kshetr ghoshit karne ki yojna' ('Plan to declare Gyan Vapi a restricted area'), Dainik Jagran, 18 December 1992, p. 3; 'Gyanvapi masjid ki morchebandi lohe ki paip se beriketing hogi' ('For the fortification of the mosque there will be a barricade of iron pipes'), Dainik Jagran, 19 December 1992, p. 2.

²⁰ 'Kashi, Mathura mem kendra purva anubhav ki dhyan me rakhega' ('Concerning Kashi and Mathura the central government will pay attention to the previous experience'), Aj, 19 December 1992, p. 3.

grims during major Hindu festivals,²¹ in part because at such times Hindu nationalist forces made further attempts to access the secluded area and worship deities located adjacent to the mosque.²² During the Hindu month of Shravan (July-August) in 1995 one such major attempt by the VHP and its allies took place and was only partially halted by police, who were subsequently accused by Muslims of being complicit with Hindu nationalists because they allowed some access and thus appeared to endorse worship in the secluded area.²³ This episode is a clear example of moral frictions faced by police at this site when dealing with the burden of having to protect a mosque they most likely see as occupying an originally Hindu abode: as Hindus should they allow worship of secluded deities or should they enforce court orders? At this time in history, these frictions were apparently yet to be resolved, inasmuch as successful halting of Hindu nationalists by police in order to protect of the mosque continued to occur along with ambiguous events in which police seemed to be complicit with Hindu nationalists.

Later we find only intermittent news reports about security at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound, and then only at times of Hindu festivals, reinforcing the idea that the referent object is the temple, or the whole compound, rather than the mosque.²⁴ In the 2000s the new spectre of international Islamic terrorism filtered through to India, informing new politics of fear and reconfiguring security discourses. In Banaras, bombs exploded in March 2006 at several locations, including the railway station and a major Hindu temple on the southern periphery of the city, leaving about 20 people dead and many injured.²⁵ In December 2010 there was another bomb blast not far from Dashashwamedh ghat, an important Hindu ritual arena on the banks of the Ganges river, that killed two and injured

²¹ 'Mahashivaratri par Gyanvapi ki suraksha kadi bandobast' ('Strict security arrangements for Mahashivaratri [a major Hindu festival] at Gyan Vapi'), Aj, 7 March 1994, p. 3; 'Shivaratri par vishvanath mandir me darshan ki vyavastha' ('Arrangements for the visit to the Vishvanath temple on Shivaratri'), Aj, 9 March 1994, p. 10

²² 'Gyanvapi mudde par sakshya juthane, jan jagran hetu, jirnoddhar samiti gathit' ('Setting up a revitalisation committee for gathering evidence to awake people on the Gyan Vapi issue'), Aj, 28 March 1995, p. 2; 'Kashi vishvanath mukti ke liye sankalp aath jun ka' ('Oath for the liberation of Kashi Vishvanath on 8 June'), Aj, 21 April 1995, p. 3; 'Shravan ke charon somvar ko VHP ki GV parikrama' ('On the four Mondays of Shravan circumambulation of Gyan Vapi by VHP'), Aj, 15 June 1995, p. 3; 'Shravan ke pratham somvar par aj Gyanvapi ki kadi suraksha vyavastha' ('Strict security arrangements at Gyan Vapi for the first Monday of Shravan today'), Aj, 17 July 1995, p. 2; 'Gyanvapi suraksha vyavastha par ucchastariye dalne santosh jataya' ('The high level parties satisfied with the security arrangements at Gyan Vapi'), Aj, 19 July 1995, p. 2.

²³ 'Suraksha ghereko chakma dekar VHP samarthak shringar gauri pahunche' ('VHP reached Shringar Gauri by dodging security circles'), Aj, 25 July 1995, p. 2; 'Masjid dhvast karne ki yojna ke tahat nayi pramparayem' ('New traditions in subjection to the plan to demolish the mosque'), Aj, 27 July 1995, p. 2.

²⁴ For example, 'Kashi Vishvanath mandir va Gyanvapi parisar mem suraksha ke vyapak intizam' ('Comprehensive security arrangements at the Kashi Vishvanath temple and Gyan Vapi premises'), *Dainik Jagran*, 7 March 1997, p. 2.

²⁵ 'Bomb blasts rock Varanasi, 21 killed', *The Hindu*, 8 March 2006 [<https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/paper/bomb-blasts-rock-varanasi-21-killed/article3161347.ece>, last accessed 11 December 2019].

several others.²⁶ These episodes reinforced the idea of Hindu temples as targets of terrorism, and security measures around the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound have since intensified, focusing more specifically on the new referent object, the Vishvanath temple.²⁷

In 2017, the UP government began implementing a controversial development project in the whole neighbourhood. The project, often referred to as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'dream project' or 'pet project', aims to expand the temple domain, connect the temple to the river Ganges with broad pedestrian thoroughfares and construct facilities for Hindu pilgrims. While I describe initial phases of the project and local protest movements against it elsewhere (Lazzaretti under peer review), it is sufficient here to mention that the marginalisation of the mosque, already happening in security discourse and through security measures, is currently being sanctioned through the idioms of development and heritage. Processes and discourses of development and heritage function in this context similarly to the 'culturalization' of religious celebrations among the scientific communities described by Thomas and Geraci (2018). The ambitious development of a 'new heritage zone' centred on the Vishvanath temple partially obfuscates the solely religious nature of the temple while enhancing its meaning as heritage and an attraction that needs to be redeveloped, but at the same time normalises Hindu religious practices and spaces as the only acceptable culture and heritage of India. This process, as shown below, is facilitated also through everyday policing.

At the time of writing (December 2019), the disputed Gyan Vapi mosque stands in the middle of what is to be called the Vishvanath Dham (where *dham* indicates a divine location and a Hindu pilgrim destination). Despite the fact that some commentators and local stakeholders have begun to express doubts about possible disruption to inter-communal relationships and pointed out the insecurity of the mosque,²⁸ this has hardly figured in statements and promotion campaigns by politicians or officials to date. In March 2019, Narendra Modi inaugurated the Vishvanath Dham and posted a video on social media showing how the area

²⁶ 'India on alert as bomb hits Hindu holy city', The New York Times, 7 December 2010 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/08/world/asia/08bomb.html>, last accessed 11 December 2019].

²⁷ For example, 'Terror alert: Heavy security cover at Kashi Vishwanath temple', The Hindustan Times, 7 March 2016 [<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/terror-alert-heavy-security-cover-at-kashi-vishwanath-temple/story-50GISdwmnFXIDQXN5EsCBM.html>, last accessed 15 December 2019]; 'Shri Kashi Vishvanath mandir ko udane ki dhamki, alert ghoshit, badi suraksha' ('Threat to blow up the Kashi Vishvanath temple, alert declared and increased security'), Patrika, 6 June 2018 [<https://www.patrika.com/varanasi-news/alert-declared-after-blast-threat-of-shri-kashi-vishwanath-temple-2913191/>, last accessed 11 December 2019].

²⁸ For example, see: Is BJP planning an Ayodhya 2.0 in Varanasi?, National Herald (24 Mar. 2018), [<https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/news/is-the-bjp-planning-an-ayodha-2-in-varanasi-gyanvapi-masjid-stands-in-way-of-connecting-kashi-vishwanath-with-ganga-ghats>, accessed 15 Aug. 2019]; and, How Modi's Kashi Vishwanath corridor is laying the ground for another Babri incident, The Caravan, 27 Apr. 2019, [<https://caravanmagazine.in/religion/how-modi-kashi-vishwanath-corridor-is-laying-the-ground-for-another-babri-incident>, accessed 15 Aug. 2019].

would look after it was completed.²⁹ The video takes a sweeping, bird's eye view of the whole area between river and temple, and informative signs appear naming or describing the various buildings and facilities in the area, including a 'security office'. Stylised pilgrims are shown all over, and a few policemen also appear. At the end of the video the mosque can be seen, without its security barricade. It is clearly the largest structure in the area, and almost all the smaller buildings in this 'cultural showcase' are named, but the mosque is given no label and seems to be absorbed into the area as an unperceived structure.

Everyday Policing and the Shift in the Referent Object

I now turn to look at the roles of low-ranking police in this changing security landscape and explore ways in which everyday policing absorbs, materialises and contributes to the shift of the referent object of securitisation as a means to overcome moral frictions.

At one of the entry points to the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound a UP police booth carries a sign that welcomes you to 'Kashi, the holy city of Kashi Vishvanath temple' and a UP Tourism Department sign introduces visitors to the history of the temple. These signs are just a few meters from the historic Gyan Vapi mosque and adjacent to the gate used by Muslims, who have to queue for a body search, as do Hindu pilgrims. On a typical day a group of UP police will be sitting on benches and a few will be busy searching pilgrims, while others stare at the crowd, issue instructions about the correct line in which to stand, chat with each other or read newspapers. The majority of police officers, here and elsewhere around the compound, are easily identifiable as Hindu by the red threads tied ritually on their wrists. Others, coming from inside the compound have bare feet and fresh signs on their foreheads, showing that they have had the deity's *darshan* ('vision') at the temple. These police are immediately recognisable as somewhat ambiguous presences, whose roles oscillate between representatives of the state and devotees of the Vishvanath temple.

During fieldwork prior to the winter of 2018, when the geography of this access point changed drastically due to the wholesale demolition of buildings as part of the development project, I was sometimes invited by UP police officers to sit on those benches and drink *chay* (milky tea) with them. I also spent time with police at other posts around the compound and found them easily accessible, extremely curious about me and chatty. I draw on these interactions with low ranking UP police officers rather than the other security forces at the site. Apart from the fact that I had relatively easy access to those officers, the focus on UP police is crucial in understanding the changing security scenario at this site, because they are the ones who are the public face of securitisation and control almost all the publicly

²⁹ The video is available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/watch-pm-modis-dream-project-kashi-vishwanath-corridor-plan/videoshow/68381158.cms>, last accessed 12 December 2019.

accessible area. Only the most secluded parts of the compound, particularly the mosque, its immediate surroundings and a few inner passages, are controlled by the more highly trained Central Reserve Police Force or Provincial Armed Constabulary.

So the constables and sub-inspectors found around the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound are, as one of Jauregui's interlocutors put it, 'the edge where state and society meet' (Jauregui 2016, 22): they are the ones who meet and interact every day with pilgrims, residents and local Muslims, and they have become part of the neighbourhood. When my other interlocutors, such as residents and shopkeepers, talk about *pulis* (police) in the area, it is them they have in mind. In this section, however, I am not concerned with people's perceptions of police and their security practices, which I discuss in more detail elsewhere (Lazzaretti forthcoming), but rather with what UP police think about security and understand as their duty.

Many police officers expressed positivity about their duty at the compound, feeling privileged, as they put it, to be 'called' there by Lord Vishvanath himself (*baba Vishvanath ne hamko bulaya*) and enjoying working next to his abode: *baba ke pas hain to koi shikayat nahin hai* (We are near the Lord so we have no complaints). Only once a young constable mentioned that, although he was satisfied with his duty near the temple, finding it in many ways more relaxed than ordinary work in the *thana*, he also found it had a negative aspect: there was no chance to earn black money (*kala dan*), which he would otherwise collect as 'tips' or extra charges for doing his job (Cf. Jauregui 2016, 48 and 122). Collecting *kala dan* that then would be redistributed within the police force is part of the ambiguous police *dharm* described by Jauregui; however, as my constable interlocutor suggested, this ordinary police 'rule' is interrupted when policing happens in a religious site. Although I have been told by other interlocutors that police find alternative ways to collect *kala dan* while on duty at the compound, for instance by closing an eye and prioritising access of specific devotees guided by known *pandas* (pilgrims' priests), who will then share their earnings (the devotees' offerings) with those police, the remark of the constable sheds light on the frictions between police *dharm* and Hindu *dharm* that arise when working at a religious site.

When asked about the reason for their presence at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound, however, police appear to be imbued with mainstream narratives about the compound and speak of the site as almost any other Hindu devotee would. In listening to stories told to Hindu pilgrims directed towards one of the gates of the compound, I realised that the versions recounted by police are not at all dissimilar to those recounted by *pandas*. These narratives insist on the repeated temple desecrations committed by Aurangzeb and the Mughals and reinforce the widely held local understanding of the Gyan Vapi mosque as being the original Vishvanath temple (Lazzaretti forthcoming). Addressing pilgrims coming from far away villages and confused about the complicated geography of this part of the city, they point towards the mosque and tell them that *that* structure *is* the original

(*adi*), real (*asli*), or ancient (*prachin*) temple. No mention is made of the fact that Gyan Vapi is a functioning mosque—reflecting the silence of the signboards mentioned above on the police booth close to the entrance to the mosque.

Many of my police interlocutors cite as a reason for security the juxtaposition of temple and mosque. Most of them, however, do not identify the Ramjanmabhumi campaign and the targeting of the mosque by Hindu nationalists as a major turning point in the securitisation of the area. Some of them do mention the events at Ayodhya, but none told me that the object of protection is the mosque. Most of them say that the destruction of the previous Vishvanath temple by Aurangzeb in 1669 is the origin of securitisation. Since the emperor destroyed the temple and built the mosque, they say, there have been troubles here between Hindus and Muslims and police are here to prevent conflicts. This explanation is a telling example of Hindu nationalists' readings of history, in which a rather opaque event of four centuries ago means more than the far more recent agitations and riots associated with the destruction of the Babri mosque. Police providing such explanation are in fact endorsing moralising discourses of Hindu nationalists about the need and duty of Hindus to awake and reclaim supposedly originally Hindu sites.

When asked about the *object* of security, many of my police interlocutors referred to the Vishvanath temple: they feel compelled to offer protection to the temple, they say, because of the crowd of pilgrims and because of its proximity of the mosque. Some consider the temple to be under threat because of its pan-Indian or even universal importance, of which they have no doubt, and a few even said that they are there to protect the temple from Islamic terrorism (*islami atankvad*).

The Burden of Security

My discussion of security discourses and practices and their moral underpinning at the Kashi Vishvanath-Gyan Vapi compound speaks of the complex and transformative roles of certain actors in securitisation and the ways in which a referent object can shift.

Among many criticisms of the CS securitisation theory—apart from its highly problematic and narrow focus on discourse (Williams 2003: 511-531; Hansen and Nissembaum 2009: 1155-1175; Barthwal-Datta 2012; Maguire, Frois and Zurawski 2014)—those about actors are particularly relevant for my work with low ranking police. First, there is an ambiguity about the role of the securitising agents who actually implement security measures, and their relationships with the securitising actor (usually the state) who has the power to, and does, carry out the speech act with which, according to the CS formulation, the process of securitisation begins. The CS formulation is not clear about the relationship between what could be seen as two distinct actors (Barthwal-Datta 2012: 8-10), and in fact does not account for 'those without discourse-making power' (Booth as quoted in Barthwal-Datta 2012: 9). Indeed, networks of actors involved in the security apparatus and the 'multiple ways in which security is configured and deployed—not only by

states and authorised speakers but by communities, groups, and individuals' (Goldstein 2010: 492-493) are hardly captured by this formulation. Second, the role of the audience of securitisation is also problematic: according to the CS formulation, for an issue to be successfully securitised the audience has to accept the existence of a threat, seemingly placing that audience in a passive position. As argued by Balzaq (2005: 179), however, the audience is part of the game and securitisation is a 'situated interactive activity' rather than the unidirectional imposition of a speech of act by an abstract state.

Low ranking police, in my case, oscillate between being securitising agents and audience (to use the terms from the CS securitisation theory), but they actively take part in shaping trajectories of securitisation, its scope and shifting the referent object and they deal with the burden of security in the first person. As securitising agents, they implement and materialise, not mechanically but creatively, state discourses on security and it is likely that, if confronted by an attack by Hindu nationalists, they would attempt to protect the mosque, provided that they receive such orders from above. At the same time, though, low ranking police play a role as audience and as such they have been overwhelmed by mainstream narratives about temple desecration and the need for security at Hindu temples, and feel deeply that their duty is ultimately to protect Hindu *dharm*. They are, however, an active audience, taking part in the refocusing of the Vishvanath temple as the referent object through everyday communication with pilgrims and material measures, such as their own bodies being marked as those of Hindu devotees. In believing and communicating to other audiences (pilgrims, residents and the researcher) that they are there to secure the main attraction in the area and ultimately Hindu *dharm*, police productively overcome the moral frictions experienced by security forces during the Ramjanmabhumi campaign and, particularly after the destruction of Babri mosque, at times of attempts by the VHP to access the protected mosque.

This article has argued that the referent object of securitisation may shift over time because of the need to face and resolve moral frictions while dealing with the burden of security. Religion—through affiliation and morality—can play a pivotal role in bending security discourse and practices. Coming to terms with a civic, Constitutionally-informed morality that requires police to enforce law and order impartially, irrespective of religion, caste or class, constitutes the police *dharm* described by Jauregui; however, as my material shows police *dharm* is further complicated by questions of religious affiliation and consciousness, and superseded at times by police alignment with Hindu nationalist versions of Hindu *dharm*.

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