Architectural Hindutva: The Shri Kaashi Vishwanaath Mandir Precinct Development

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List of Abbreviations

BJP   Bharatiya Janata Party

HCP   HCP Design, Planning and Management Private Limited

INC   Indian National Congress

UP   Uttar Pradesh

Introduction

The ruling party in India, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), use architecture to symbolise their Hindu nationalist project; this has created an era of *Architectural Hindutva*. My thesis will focus on The Shri Kaashi Vishwanaath Mandir Precinct Development in Banaras, that began in 2018 and is yet to be completed. I set out to explore how this project is consolidating a Hindu identity for Banaras, but also reinventing it into a microcosm of a unified Hindu nation. This architectural refashioning for such a purpose has not been executed before. A year later, the BJP also began working on the Central Vista Project in Delhi (2019), an architectural development that aims to reshape government buildings within the capital city. The vista was originally built during the British Raj, designed by the architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker in 1912–13. In the eyes of the BJP, the need to dismantle the vista's coloniality is a decolonising necessity for independent India.[1] Due to its significance, architects, including Prem Chandavarkar, have intellectually engaged with this reconstruction as non-partisans.[2] However, there is no architectural commentary on the Banaras redevelopment, as it appears to be secondary in comparison due to its more local and regional nature. I want to argue that the Banaras reconstruction in fact laid the foundation for the vista project. The mandir redevelopment is the first example of the BJP using a city as an architectural case study for their political agenda: to develop India into a homogenous Hindu nation. The vista project builds on this, reconstructing the government buildings into *architectural Hindutva* on an international scale through a capital city. I wish to stress that this study also holds contemporary relevance, as the mandir redevelopment forms the blueprint for how a Hindu nationalist design can impact the urban planning and wider architectural landscape of a city. I will bring into dialogue scholars of planning and urban planning, such as Cliff Hague and Dorina Pojani, to help support these claims. I want to argue that it is important to undertake a close study of this project, as it enables architects, architectural historians and planners to understand how this project is an exemplar for further developments.

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[1] D. Bhasthi, "What Gets To Be Chosen as 'Heritage'?", *Art Review*, April 22, 2021.
[2] P. Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy: Central Vista and a Tale of Three Axes", *The India Forum,* Sept 4, 2020.

The BJP adopt a nationalist, majoritarian, and populist approach to their politics, and they leverage all three in this redevelopment to execute their architectural vision. The BJP's nationalism finds its source in Hindutva. Theorised by the politician Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966), it makes the claim that India is a Hindu community.[3] Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) imagines a territorial majority who share a religious, cultural, racial, and linguistic identity. For Savarkar, a Hindu's unquestionable loyalty to India rests with the fact it is both their "fatherland and holyland".[4] This informs how the BJP imagine India, they set out to uphold the interest of Hindus, and this is achieved to the detriment of minorities. The BJP disenfranchise other groups as they threaten the unity of the nation. Hindutva stresses that as Muslims and Christians have extra territorial religious and ancestral lands, their loyalties are divided.[5] This is why the BJP cannot accept them as equals in their idea of the nation. This is evident in the mandir redevelopment as the government sidelines the Gyan Vapi Mosque, which is located within the vicinity of the mandir (Figure 1). The BJP also ignore the city's diverse history, in particular the influence of Muslim dynasties, including the Mughals. While art historians, such as Madhuri Desai and scholars of religion such as Diana Eck, specialise in the history of Banaras' architectural landscape, neither comment on the how present-day projects challenge this eclectic history.

Marking a turn away from liberal democracy, the BJP champion a Hindu majoritarian politics. Built on the assumption that a Hindu numerical majority can translate into a unified political one, the BJP's majoritarianism both neglects caste differences among Hindus and "normalis[es] anti-minority rhetoric".[6] The party's origins lie in the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, formed in 1951 by Shyama Prasad Mukherjee. The party was refashioned as the BJP in 1980. It forms a part of the Hindu nationalist collective Sangh Parivar. The collective has its roots in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist volunteer organisation. Those who associate with the Sangh Parivar envisage a Hindu majoritarian polity that "combines cultural nationalism and political strategies" to form "a firm grip on the instruments of state power".[7]

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[3] V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2003 edition, first published in 1928).

[4] Ibid, Introduction 12.

[5] P. van der Veer, *Religious nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

[6] A.P. Chatterji, T.B. Hansen, and C. Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

[7] Ibid, 1-2.

The BJP merges this with populism. Populist leaders set out to present themselves as an alternative to any elite political order, representative of ordinary people. During the 2014 General Election, the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Narendra Modi, sought to depict himself as a relatable "*chaiwala*" (tea-maker) with a developmentalist vision vis-à-vis a supposedly corrupt Indian National Congress (INC) and establishment.[8] This worked to the BJP's advantage, resulting in a landslide victory. Through this political strategy, the party set out to present a politics that they believe will benefit the masses – that being their imagined Hindu community.[9] Symbolic of an authoritarian style of governance, it appears that any criticism of the BJP's architectural projects has been subverted, preventing any discussion in the public domain. The lack of freedom to information available for this project enables the party to conceal and privatise any in-depth designs. The liberal democratic prerequisite for public transparency is destroyed, marking an authoritarian turn in India's political history. Indeed "majoritarian national-populists are authoritarian by definition", as they imagine the people as a homogenous entity, ignoring any form of diversity.[10] Through this, the BJP envisage their voters as a unified Hindu community. This is the very group for whom the mandir redevelopment is designed.

My thesis has coined the term 'imagined pious Hindus', as the BJP picture those who will engage with this redevelopment in their own image. For the government, this community will form the pilgrims of the site. They set out to unite a religious community that is divided by caste, class, regional and linguistical differences. They also accommodate for diverse interpretations of theology within Hindu nationalism. In many ways, this makes the BJP's project more dangerous and powerful as it allows for some differences, as long as Hindu voters are united by a political and cultural consolidation that is rooted in majoritarianism. Therefore, the imagined community is essentially homogenous. A unified Hindu community is politically convenient for the BJP, as it forms the bedrock of their nationalist, majoritarian

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[8] The Economic Times, "Chaiwala to PM: Modi's incredible journey from poverty to power". Accessed 30.08.21. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/chaiwala-to-pm-modis-incredible-journey-from-poverty-to-power/humble-background/slideshow/60717966.cms

[9] I draw inspiration from Benedict Anderson for my use of 'imagined' when referring to the imagined Hindu community, or the 'imagined pious Hindus'. Anderson explores this in relation to nation-states, arguing that they have been imagined into existence. Likewise, the BJP have imagined their Hindu community into existence too. See, B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 4.

[10] Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, 4.

and populist approach. Even if such homogeneity does not exist in social reality, colonialism essentialised religious community as a category; this set the foundation for an interpretation of 'Hinduness' as uniform. This codified 'Hindu', making it into a fixed legal category that is still used today for censuses. Thomas B. Hansen, an anthropologist, argues that "the authorised colonial and orientalist knowledge of India as a deeply religious society" still informs Indian politics today.[11] Hindutva follows the colonial way of interpreting religious difference, as outlined by Hansen. He contextualises the emergence of modern Hindu Nationalism in India, arguing that "in the hands of Hindu nationalists, the same knowledge could promote a single reified 'Hinduism' as the natural matrix of the true Indian nation".[12] This underpins BJP's politics. It is also reflected in this architectural project too, as the plan only includes Hindu structures within its grand urban axis (Figure 2).

The BJP's majoritarian approach then places their vision of this community up against other religious groups. This is implicit in the way the government set out to fashion a fixed 'Hindu' identity for Banaras, ignoring its diverse religious communities. The BJP view Muslims as part of these 'outsiders'.[13] This minoritised group are the most affected by the plan and legal implications of this architectural project. The BJP link their interpretation of Muslim communities to Muslim dynasties who conquered India. For example, the BJP have reduced Mughal history to a set of falsehoods. It has demonised — rather than encouraged the critical evaluation of — Mughal emperors. It argues that Muslim conquerors disrupted a settled 'Hindu culture'.[14] This allows the BJP to fashion a place identity for both Banaras and India that is rooted in a set religious identity. Coupled with this architectural project, the political success of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh (UP) at state and national elections since 2014, has enabled them to use Banaras as a template. They employ the city as a case study to project their ideas of nationalism, majoritarianism, and populism from the governmental level. Consequently, BJP's interpretation of Hindu nationalism is not theological, instead, it is about political and cultural consolidation. The mandir redevelopment and the imagined pious Hindus are a spectacle for this unity. This architectural project is a performance of politics to

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[11] T.B. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 10.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Chatterji, Hansen, Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State,* 1-5.

[14] D. Gilmartin and B.B. Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (Gainesville: University Press Florida, 2000), 3.

build a consciousness for the imagined pious Hindus. As the community constitutes various differences in reality, the BJP need to keep the fabric of this fractured community together. As a result, the government need to constantly perform their politics to actualise it. The more they perform it, the stronger it becomes. This is evident in how the Banaras project has led to the Central Vista development in the capital, and so *architectural Hindutva* exists on local, national and global scales.

To support my analysis, I will consult scholars who specialise in Indian political thought and its intersections, including culture, history, class and religion. Such scholars include: Nita Kumar, Sheldon Pollock, Peter van der Veer, Suhas Palshikar and Louise Tillin. I will also consider how this redevelopment is an example of architectural monumentalism. This is typically characterised by gigantic and imposing structures. These buildings are visually overpowering, making the observer feel overawed. This makes the architectural experience for the viewer immersive, enabling the designer to overexert their architectural agenda for emphasis. Architects and architectural historians who specialise in the techniques used by the designers of this project will be brought into dialogue including, Le Corbusier, Flora Samuel, Paul Jenkins, and Emily Cole. This will enable me to ground my architectural analysis in specialist thought. Architectural monumentalism is used throughout the course of India's architectural history. Some examples during Mughal reign (1526-1750) include, the Taj Mahal and Humayun's Tomb. During the British Raj (1858-1947) such examples include Lutyens' Delhi, comprising of Central Vista. Like the BJP redevelopment, these examples were used to signal to the local, as well as national population, where the sovereign political power lies. However, this BJP project expands on architectural monumentalism, as it is also intrusive in design. This is achieved through sidelining other structures, and divisively restricting which buildings can be included within its grand urban axis (Figures 1,2). This development presents a shift in India's architectural landscape, marking a new era: *Architectural Hindutva*. During my study, I will analyse the existing plans of the redevelopment to reach these conclusions (Figures 1,2).

As this project is unfolding as I write, this study will focus on the existing plans and the destruction that occurred in early 2019 to make way for the redevelopment's promenade

(Figures 4,5).[15] The construction of the promenade began in March 2019 after Modi laid the first brick and is yet to be completed.[16] There have been no official plans released for this project. The only plans that can be accessed are through screenshots of an online presentation (Figures 1,2).[17] This poses a difficulty for architects and architectural historians, as it is hard to undertake an in-depth study of the plans from screenshots of a video. Nevertheless, this study will closely analyse these plans, in an attempt to push past the restrictions imposed upon the designs. This thesis will demonstrate that a lot can in fact be gleaned from this restricted access. I will consider how this lack of freedom to information in an architectural context mirrors the government's approach to politics. This study uses an eclectic range of sources. Textual secondary sources include commentaries from architects and architectural historians, while the primary sources comprise of contemporary newspaper articles, and observations made by the architectural designers of the project. Visual primary material includes online presentations on the redevelopment, along with the video screenshots of the plans that are briefly shown in such presentations. The lack of technical architectural planning resources in the public domain presents a challenge, and complicates this study. However, I am able to undertake a close analysis of what is available through following the methods used in architectural history, that works simultaneously with both textual and visual sources.

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[15] Newspaper articles commenting on the destruction date back to early 2019. See the following: K. Agarwal, "In Modi's Varanasi, the Vishwanath Corridor Is Trampling Kashi's Soul", *The Wire*, January 23, 2019; O. Rashid, "Kashi demolitions reveal communal faultlines", *The Hindu*, January, 20, 2019.
[16] Agarwal, "In Modi's Varanasi, the Vishwanath Corridor Is Trampling Kashi's Soul".
[17] Signify, "Vishwanath Dham Varanasi Webinar: Presented by Dr Bimal Patel". Accessed 17.08.21. https://www.signify.com/global/lighting-academy/browser/webinar/vishwanath-dham-varanasi

Chapter 1: Monumentalism, Consolidation and Refashioning

There is an obvious political alignment between the ruling BJP and the architectural firm who have been commissioned for this redevelopment, HCP Design, Planning and Management Private Limited (HCP). The BJP's architectural project, The Shri Kaashi Vishwanaath Mandir Precinct Development, sets out to place their imagined majoritarian Hindu community at the centre of Banaras, by creating a grand corridor leading up to the mandir (commonly known as Vishweshwur Mandir, Figure 3) continuing to the Manikarnika Ghat (Figure 6). The art historian Madhuri Desai notes that this *ghat* is known to be one of the most auspicious places for a Hindu to be cremated.[18] Even though Desai does not explore how the BJP are architecturally consolidating a Hindu identity for the city, her study is the only work that provides a thorough reading of the Vishweshwur Temple. As a result, my thesis is grounded by the most up-to-date and relevant piece of historiography. However, I intend to explore Banaras in its contemporary context. In particular, how the BJP have set out to refashion this diverse history through majoritarianism, presenting the site as a performance of politics to build the consciousness of the imagined pious Hindus. The mandir precinct is headed by the BJP state government in Uttar Pradesh (UP). Through this redevelopment, the BJP are able to present themselves as auspicious Hindus, who are enhancing the accessibility of the *ghat* to their imagined Hindu community. As the precinct development is a significant ritual centre, the BJP hope their community will feel a sense of gratitude for the construction, as the design strives for the appearance of modernity, comfort and convenience for middle-class Hindu pilgrims through fashioning them a walkway (Figure 2). The BJP set out to appeal to the Hindu upper-middle class who aspire for social mobility, as well as the predominantly Hindi-speaking belt of the lower-middle class. As a result, this architectural project is an example of how the government set out to unite a religious community that is divided by class differences, keeping the fabric of this fractured community together. Even if socially such a homogenous middle-class Hindu community does not exist, they are seen as a collective for the BJP's imagined pious Hindus to fulfil a majoritarian political agenda. Moreover, the BJP are able to consolidate the reputable nature of the *ghat* for practicing Hindus, while also elevating the

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[18] M. Desai, *Banaras Reconstructed: Architecture and Sacred Space in a Hindu Holy City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), 38.

sacred site to a national scale, as it symbolises the government's vision for their imagined community. HCP, founded in 1960 in Ahmedabad by Hasmukh C. Patel, specialises in statutory city planning, architectural redevelopments, and urban design.[19] Dr Bimal Patel – the son of Hasmukh C. Patel – is the current Director of HCP who is heading the redevelopment. The firm set out to collaborate their design expertise with "visionary leadership" and politics.[20] Ideologically committed to the BJP, the HCP have now become a preferred supplier for the party, constructing their architectural vision across the country.[21] HCP set out to use their urban planning, in particular the corridor, to make the site more efficient for the estimated 15,000 pilgrims who visit the temple annually.[22] They intend to use their design to make the movement of pilgrims, local citizens and tourists more fluid around the temple and the approach to the *ghat*.[23] Even though the project planning only began in 2018 and is yet to be completed, Bimal Patel received a Padma Shri Award in 2019.[24] The director has already been recognised for beginning his work on the BJP's architectural idea. This award, therefore, signals a preconceived agenda.[25] BJP have commissioned a local firm based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. There is political alignment as Gujarat is the home state for the BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is also a stronghold for the party. HCP are able to use their design expertise to redevelop a site that the BJP has commissioned mainly for their imagined pious Hindus. The sovereign Hindu political order is signalled to the population.

Architectural monumentalism is used to highlight the BJP's political control as the governing party. The urban design, outlined by HCP, supports this. Bimal Patel explains the master plan of the precinct development in an online presentation about the project.[26] The precinct of the mandir – meaning the area within the walls or perceived boundaries of the mandir building – is set on the street of Godowlia Marg (Figure 1). The only plans that can be

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[19] HCP Design, Planning and Management Private Limited (HCP), "About Us". Accessed 16.08.21. https://www.hcp.co.in/about-us#1960
[20] Ibid.
[21] HCP are working on both of BJP's national architectural redevelopments, The Shri Kaashi Vishwanaath Mandir Precinct Development in Banaras and the reconstruction of the Central Vista in Delhi, that commenced a year later in 2019. For more see: N. Sharma, "Central Vista Avenue Plan Finalised", *The Economic Times*, Jan 22, 2021; HCP, "About Us: 2018". Accessed 16.08.21. https://www.hcp.co.in/about-us#2010
[22] HCP, "About Us: 2018".
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Anustup Basu's argument that the BJP use "Hindutva as political monotheism" supports the idea that their politics is an example of religious majoritarianism in practice. For more see, A. Basu, *Hindutva as political monotheism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 2-9.
[26] Signify, "Vishwanath Dham Varanasi Webinar: Presented by Dr Bimal Patel".

accessed are through screenshots of the online presentation. However, through examining these it becomes clear that HCP are building a corridor – which can be architecturally analysed as a promenade – leading up to the temple, continuing to the Manikarnika Ghat (Figure 2). Patel's Precinct Landmarks' Plan depicts an aerial view of the dense architectural landscape within the vicinity (Figure 1). It reveals how much of the area the corridor cuts across, as Godowlia Marg is marked on one side and Manikarnika Ghat on the other. I want to argue that it is an example of monumentalism, with the magnitude and overbearing nature of the architectural landscape being symbolically used to exert a majoritarian agenda. This is achieved through the use of a promenade. Architectural monumentalism tends to use a single centre as the focal point for power, with the rest of the urban planning directed around this to create a sense of flow and unity.[27] In this planning example, it is also intrusive in style, interrupting the architectural landscape around it to mark its significance (Figure 1). The promenade frames the mandir and the *ghat*, reinforcing a sense of importance (Figure 2). It is an example of architectural intrusion as the promenade disrupts the landscape so abruptly. Monumentalism also uses force to claim power.[28] This is achieved in the architectural plan by placing other religious buildings in the vicinity as secondary to the prominence of the walkway to the mandir and the *ghat*. For example, the plan sidelines the Gyan Vapi Mosque (Figure 1). This is an example of the BJP using this project to consolidate the idea that Banaras is a 'Hindu' city.[29] The BJP intend to present these structures as significant to the city's Hindu character, as well as the nation's religious identity. They hope that their imagined, homogenous Hindu community will also support this. Through this architectural performance of politics, the BJP are building the consciousness of the imagined Hindu community. They intend to then place this community against others, symbolised through sidelining the mosque in the plan. As a result, Banaras' so-called 'Hindu' structures become a central component to the city's architectural landscape.

The plan for the promenade follows the traditional architectural aim of a walkway (Figure 2). Promenade architecture was coined by the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier

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[27] Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy: Central Vista and a Tale of Three Axes".

[28] Ibid.

[29] D. Eck, *Banaras: City of Light* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983). Throughout this work, Eck (a Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies) explores the Hindu traditions of Banaras and its so-called Hindu identity and character. Despite referring to the diversity of beliefs in Banaras, Eck argues that it is historically seen as a 'Hindu' city. She stresses that contemporary visitors also understand it in the same way.

(1887-1965) in the twentieth-century as "promenade architecturale".[30] According to Le Corbusier, "the law of 'roaming through'" architecture is a key component to its success.[31] If it is "brilliantly obeyed" then the architecture can be experienced by the observer.[32] I want to argue that Corbusier's "law of 'roaming through'" has been "brilliantly obeyed" for the plan of the promenade, with the imagined pious Hindus being able to walk in leisure, creating effortless movement from the mandir to the *ghat*.[33] The walkway strengthens the fabric of this fractured community by bringing them together. Flora Samuel, an architect and architectural historian, notes that the promenade is "the observer's pathway through the built space".[34] According to Samuel, Le Corbusier's promenade is "the creation of a hierarchy among the architectural events", forming the "the 'internal circulatory system' of architecture".[35] This leads me to suggest that the precinct's promenade creates such a hierarchy, with the walkway leading to an auspicious *ghat* located at the end of the corridor (Figure 2). The promenade development is an example of Le Corbusier's idea of "the internal circulatory system" in practice, creating an architectural circuit whose purpose is purely to be a walkway to significant Hindu sites.[36] I want to argue that the monumentalism of the entire site creates such a system for the urban planning of Banaras too. With the promenade cutting through a dense amount of the architectural landscape (Figures 1), it redirects the city's current architectural "internal circulatory system".[37] Its intrusive quality abruptly divides buildings around the street of Godowlia Marg into those that – according to the BJP – are key sacred sites that must be marked by a walkway and those that do not. The promenade is "designed to resensitise people to their surroundings", encouraging the pilgrims, local citizens and tourists who visit the site to respond to the grandeur of the built-up 'Hindu' environment.[38] Le Corbusier stresses that "you follow an itinerary" that unfolds as you walk

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[30] Le Corbusier, *Precisions: On the Present State of Architecture and City Planning* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 128-133.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] F. Samuel, *Le Corbusier and the Architectural Promenade* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2010), 9.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Le Corbusier and P. Jeanneret, *OEuvre Complète Volume 1, 1910-1929* (Zurich: Les Editions d'Architecture, 1995, originally published in 1937), 60. Translation from T. Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier 1920-1930* (London: Yale, 1987), 4.

along the promenade.[39] In my opinion, as the imagined pious Hindus watch the itinerary unfold as they reach the mandir and the *ghat*, this builds up their consciousness as the walkway is meant to create a sense of civic religious pride for the community. This marks a success for the BJP's architectural performance of politics in practice, as it strengthens the fabric of the fractured community, helping to actualise their imagined pious Hindus.

Like promenades, boulevards are also used to heighten the importance of structures. Through comparing the two, I want to argue that the HCP have adopted similar techniques used for boulevard plans for their promenade. At the same time, they intend to use these techniques for the opposite effect, to create disharmony within the architectural landscape. Even though a promenade differs from a boulevard in that it is used exclusively as a walkway, while a boulevard may or may not be used by vehicles, both offer a specific route that is often used to frame key monuments. Both use a grand urban axis, with significant buildings located at either end, or they are lined with structures. The HCP and BJP have decided "what kind of activities should be privileged within the axis" of the promenade.[40] This is achieved through sidelining other buildings, but also through the bulldozing effect of the rolling promenade that heightens the importance of the activities within the axis. The edifices – meaning the large, imposing buildings – included in this plan are the temple and *ghat* (Figure 2), and the activities "privileged within the axis" are for tourism and pilgrimages.[41] Ultimately, the plan of the promenade intends to heighten the admiration for Hinduism in the city of Banaras. It also sets out to signify the impressiveness of Hindu ritual centers in the city, with visitors being awestruck by their magnitude and abruptness. Non-religious tourists admire the pious walking down, along with the key 'Hindu' buildings. Whereas, the pious participate in this practice, bringing human engagement and purpose to the BJP's and HCP's imagining for the precinct development. This builds up the consciousness of the imagined community. Chandavarkar considers different examples of boulevards that have been used globally "to make a strong symbolic statement in the centre of a city".[42] He is one of the only architects who has publicly engaged intellectually with the BJP's architectural projects as a non-

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy".

partisan.[43] However, his work focuses solely on the role of boulevards for the BJP's Central Vista Project in Delhi, without any reference to the mandir precinct development. As the BJP have commissioned the HCP for both projects, I want to explore how Chandavarkar's architectural analysis for the boulevard can help develop an understanding of the HCP's ideas for the promenade in Banaras.[44] Chandavarkar uses Avenue des Champs Élysées in Paris as a case study for a significant boulevard to support his architectural analysis on the role of such a feature. Built in the seventeenth century, the boulevard works in harmony with the rest of the architectural fabric of the city, due to "the radiating boulevards carved through the medieval streets of Paris by Baron Hausmann in the mid-19th century [that] integrated the avenue with the rest of the city" (Figure 7).[45] However, I want to argue that this is not the case for the promenade plan for Banaras. In order to heighten its monumentalism, it stands out as a stark, overbearing feature, that is purposely not integrated into the rest of the city through "radiating boulevards" (Figures 1,2).[46] The design for the Champs Élysées balances diverse architectural structures, the Arc de Triomphe at one end, and Louvre and Tuileries Garden at the other. This leads me to suggest that this creates a sense of architectural equilibrium. It stresses different focal points on the boulevard, preventing architectural hierarchy. Whereas for the precinct development in Banaras, balance is not an important component. The aim is to have one set focal point: reclaiming the significance of 'Hindu' buildings, in particular the temple and the *ghat*. Champs Élysées incorporates surrounding structures into its design. The promenade for the precinct development divorces itself from surrounding buildings, and achieves this by cutting past structures. Champs Élysées has a different agenda to the development's promenade. It intends to work in harmony with the surrounding area (Figure 7), while the Banaras promenade aims to create disjointment in the architectural planning by imposing upon the existing architectural landscape. Through this, the BJP are able to signal to the population where power lies.

The BJP's political power is not an example of liberal democracy. It is majoritarian democracy. In liberal democracy, there is space for peaceful dissent. However, no voice has been given to any backlash about this architectural project. Along with this, the plan to cut

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[43] Ibid.
[44] HCP, "About Us: 2018".
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.

through Banaras' diverse, religious architectural landscape also supports the notion of majoritarianism in practice. Therefore, the BJP can be understood as an example of "so-called hybrid regimes—authoritarian regimes in the guise of democracy".[47] While the BJP may not remain in power across the course of India's political future, the legacy left through the permanency and gravity of architectural developments symbolises a time of majoritarian democracy. Dorina Pojani, a scholar in urban planning, focuses on these "so-called regimes" that have "emerged in Europe" in particular "in the past decade".[48] Likewise, the significance of the BJP on a national level in India has heightened over the past decade, with BJP securing 282 seats in the 2014 General Election, while its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured 336.[49] The party further increased their substantive majority in 2019 securing 303 seats with the BJP-led NDA securing 353.[50] Such hybrid regimes "are engaged in a remake of their place identity in order to legitimize their new political trajectories".[51] To reshape a place identity, the BJP and HCP have envisaged an urban character for Banaras – one that reflects a Hindu nationalist agenda. Cliff Hague, a scholar of planning, and Paul Jenkins, an architect, add that "place and territorial identity is increasingly important and contested in underpinning governance: as class has waned as the basis of political identity, spatial and ethnic identities have become more significant".[52] For this context, religion is more suited than ethnic identities. This leads me to suggest that the BJP have utilised their political leverage that is rooted in religious identity – that being Hindu majoritarianism – in order to create a fixed spatial identity for Banaras, the 'Hindu' city.[53]

The BJP are consolidating a 'Hindu' image of Banaras through this project, as Hindu religious texts have informed the planning process. Lord Shiva is revered in Banaras, an idea that is presented in Hindu mythology.[54] The term *linga* is used in relation to Shiva, meaning

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[47] D. Pojani, "Cities as story: Redevelopment projects in authoritarian and hybrid regimes". Journal of Urban Affairs, Vol 40 No 5 (2018), 705.

[48] Ibid.

[49] NDTV, "A Recap Of 2014 Election Results When BJP-Led NDA Formed Government". Accessed 18.08.21. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/2014-election-results-a-look-at-poll-outcome-of-last-general-election-2038714

[50] NDTV, "Election Results 2019". Accessed 18.08.21. https://www.ndtv.com/elections/lok-sabha-election-results-2019

[51] I. Traynor, "Eastern European Autocrats Pose New Test For Democracy", *The Guardian,* Aug 13, 2013.

[52] C. Hague and P. Jenkins, *Place Identity, Participation and Planning* (London: Routledge, 2005), 27.

[53] Eck, *Banaras: City of Light.*

[54] S.G. Kavi, *Shri Kashikhand Kathasaar* (Kolhapur: Saraswati Publishing, 2017).

"emblem" in this context.[55] This symbol has a wider connotation in Hinduism: it presents Shiva as "the wholeness of the Hindu Universe".[56] I want to argue that this creates a significant tie between Shiva and Banaras, as the city too embodies this "wholeness" in Hinduism for pilgrims.[57] Shiva's affiliation to the city is also mentioned in the religious Hindu texts, the *puranas*.[58] Desai notes that "his connection to the Ganges River is crystallized through a myth in which he tames the river by binding her in his locks before letting her flow gently on earth".[59] In my opinion, this myth resonates with the architectural planning of Banaras. The city sits on the banks of the river Ganga, with the precinct development leading up to the Manikarnika Ghat that is located on the riverfront itself (Figure 6). This, along with city's religious connection to Shiva, creates a strong resonance between the myth and the city's landscape. Additionally, Shiva's and Lord Vishweshwur's connection to Banaras is explored in the religious text, *Kashikhand*, that forms a part of the *puranas*.[60] This leads me to suggest that this directly informed the ritual geographies for pilgrimages in Banaras, as Shiva and Vishweshwur are the key deities for the Panchkroshi pilgrimage.[61] This route includes the Vishweshwur *linga*.[62] The Vishweshwur Mandir is a key component of this *linga*, meaning a ritual centre that holds religious significance and informs pilgrimage routes. Such centres create sacred zones within Banaras, as these zones architecturally spread outward from a ritual centre.[63] The promenade in the precinct development is an example of an architectural feature that spreads from the mandir, expanding the sacred zone of the Vishweshwur *linga* across the architectural landscape through the monumentalism of a walkway (Figure 1). Indeed, a 'Hindu' identity for Banaras already existed prior to BJP intervention. The existing ritual geography informs tourists' understanding of Banaras as a significant and sacred Hindu city. This is apparent during key pilgrimages and festivals, for example an estimate of ten thousand come to Lolark Kund during September.[64] Those who partake in these important Hindu events "vote with their feet".[65] Consequently, the BJP sustain a historic image of

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[55] Eck, 103.
[56] Ibid, 105.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Desai, 20.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Kavi, *Shri Kashikhand Kathasaar.*
[61] Desai, 20.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Eck, 105.
[65] Ibid.

Banaras as a sacred Hindu city through a present day 'Hindu' architectural project. But, the plan not only consolidates a Hindu identity for Banaras, it also reintensifies its Hindu character in ways that have not been architecturally envisaged before.

Simultaneously, the project is also an example of a modern refashioning of Banaras. While its Hindu character already informs part of the city's place identity, the BJP have reshaped this for the Hindu majority. Place identity influences architectural planning.[66] The BJP and HCP use this project to fashion such an identity for their imagined pious Hindus, building the consciousness of a fractured community. They use "marketability" to achieve this by improving the experience of the *ghat* and mandir.[67] The HCP's precinct plan endeavours to maintain efficiency for the pilgrim 'market' by using a promenade to create more easy movement (Figure 2). This then presents the project – and the city at large – as a significant site for the BJP's imagined community. This supports the BJP's Hindutva agenda for India at large with "totalitarian urban design" being used "to dominate over the masses".[68] This also projects a set religious identity for the country on the global stage. Perhaps this architectural performance of politics that resembles 'one religion, one culture' can then be modified globally, and used as a template for other countries to follow. The BJP projects a certain type of democracy on the global stage, one that has a majoritarian agenda. As the government hope to appeal to a high scope of the Hindu community, they adopt a populist strategy. Modi's nationalism and populism also links him to other 21st century leaders who use the same political tactics, such as Donald Trump. It is also interesting to consider how this place identity also affects the Indian diaspora too. Many of them will identify with Modi's homogenous, unified Hindu community. This is because it creates a bond that can transcend a territorial boundary, as it is presenting an idea of what an Indian *is*. This then connects the diaspora with their Indian roots, enabling them to develop a modern Indian identity, now rooted in Hindu political thought. This then extends Modi's majoritarian idea of an 'Indian' to Hindu communities globally, due to its fluidity and agenda to unify. Simultaneously, Modi is building a consciousness for the imagined Hindu pious in Banaras, as well as the imagined Hindu diaspora. In my opinion, the project also leverages a patriotic sentiment. Architecturally this is heightened through a walkway due to the flexibility of a grand urban axis. This

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[66] Hague and Jenkins, 212.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Pojani, 706.

strengthens HCP's planning intentions. Like the Arc de Triomphe, the framing of the structure at one end of the boulevard enhances its monumentalism, along with the sheer size of the structure, coupled with its symbolism. That being, honouring those who died for France in the Napoleonic Wars and French Revolution. The positioning, size, and symbolism of the precinct development enables the BJP to evoke a patriotic sentiment (Figures 1,2). But for this project, this patriotism is a religious identity, rooted in Hindu Nationalism. As a result, Banaras is politically refashioned for Hindutva.

This architectural performance of politics is also an example of a modern reshaping of Banaras' history, with the BJP giving a political majoritarian twist to the city's past. The diversity of its history speaks to a range of religious beliefs. For example, the Dhamek Stupa at Sarnath and its adjoining monastery architecturally illustrates Banaras' historic Buddhist identity. Therefore, "to project the notion of a consolidated and unified Hinduism onto the religious landscape would certainly constitute anachronism".[69] The *puranas* on Banaras are then in fact "often representations of negotiated pasts".[70] With the *puranas* including Vishweshwur Temple as a significant component of various pilgrimage routes in the city, Desai notes that it has "been cast as a source of religious authority and ritual continuity within medieval and, to some extent, modern Hinduism".[71] This leads me to argue that the BJP have solidified the authority of the temple, to consolidate the city's Hindu character, while also using it to reject Banaras' diverse history. The Vishweshwur Mandir has been influenced by the city's eclectic history. First erected in the eleventh century, it was demolished by Qutb-ud-Din Aibak (r.1206-1210), the first Sultan of Delhi and founder of the Slave Dynasty, before being refurbished by an unknown Gujarati merchant in the mid-thirteenth century. Yet it was demolished again by Firoz Shah Tughlaq, ruler of the Tughlaq dynasty (1351-1388), and rebuilt by Raja Todar Mal, the Finance Minister of the Mughal empire during Jalal-ud-din Muhammad Akbar's reign (1556-1605). The temple was demolished for the last time by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's (r.1658 to 1707), who built the Gyan Vapi Mosque on the site instead. The new Vishweshwur Mandir is located adjacent to the mosque, and was built by Ahilyabai Holkar (known as the Queen of Malwa r. 1767-1795) in the eighteenth century.[72] Therefore,

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[69] Desai, 18.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Historical points supported by Desai, 6-10.

the mandir, as well as Banaras as a city, has been influenced by various settlers and dynasties. As a result, the architectural landscape has become a *palimpsest* – meaning architectural developments have been superimposed onto earlier developments, creating this layer upon layer effect. This symbolically blends an old architectural agenda with the new, giving the sites and the city new meaning. I want to argue that the BJP set out to reconfigure the architectural palimpsest of Banaras by opposing the city's collective history. Nita Kumar, a historian, argues that Banaras is a composite of different cultures that come together to form a collective consciousness.[73] Kumar explores this idea through one specific example: local artisans. She stresses that local artisans are divorced from the city's elite Hindu identity, and she intends to bring a marginalised group to the centre of Banaras' history. Through this, she sets out to present a multidimensional reading of the city's history. I want to argue that a similar reading is required of Banaras' architectural history. I intend to use Kumar's approach to stress that her understanding of Banaras' history as multidimensional translates into architecture as architectural palimpsest. Consequently, tourists, locals and pilgrims encounter a "reconstructed Banaras".[74] This approach allows for the architectural histories which have otherwise been ignored by a Hindu majoritarian idea of Banaras, to be exposed. I want to take Kumar's reading a step further and stress that the BJP set out to rewrite the city's multidimensional history. Through reshaping the city's architectural palimpsest, Banaras' eclectic history has been subverted by the BJP so that they can solidify its Hindu identity, refashioning a new Hindu nationalist character for the city too.

The architectural design of the Vishweshwur Mandir has been heavily influenced by the Mughal dynasty, however this has been side stepped by the BJP for its own majoritarian project. The Mughal dynasty's imperial rule expanded across North India from 1526-1750. During Akbar's reign, the religious landscape, including the Vishweshwur Mandir, was supported by state sponsorship and patronage, with the mandir being rebuilt by Raja Todar Mal, Akbar's Finance Minister.[75] This shows how Mughal governance at this time accommodated for religious difference. Unlike Akbar, Aurangzeb in 1669 ordered for the Vishweshwur Temple to be demolished, and commissioned for the Gyan Vapi Mosque to be

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[73] N. Kumar, *The Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3.

[74] Desai, 3.

[75] Desai, 6.

rebuilt on the site instead. Refashioning religious architecture for a new agenda – in particular adapting Hindu sites for an Islamic purpose – first occurred in India in the thirteenth-century for the Quwwat al Islam (Might of Islam) Mosque, Delhi. Similar to Aurangzeb, Qutb-ud-Din Aibak built the first mosque in India that was located within a captured Hindu citadel.[76] The sultan's refashioning of the site influenced its architectural landscape. Similarly, Mughal intervention also impacted the design of the Vishweshwur Temple. While Mughal columns can be spotted on the temple, (Figure 3) arcades, consisting of traditional Sanskritic columns used for temple architecture, surrounded the courtyard for the Quwwat al Islam Mosque (Figure 8). Sheldon Pollock, a scholar of Sanskrit, coined the term "Sanskrit Cosmopolis", or 'Sanskritic', referring to the diffusion of an ancient Indian culture for which explicitly Hindu related themes were important.[77] A Sanskritic architectural style refers a pre-existing Indian architectural form.[78] Built on the site of Rai Piathora's Hindu temple, the mosque incorporated spoil from 27 other Hindu and Jain temples.[79] This layer upon layer effect is another example of an architectural palimpsest. Similarly, the Gyan Vapi Mosque has been built on the remaining plinth of the Vishweshwur Temple and it abuts the temple's lone standing wall (Figure 9).[80] A close reading of the wall suggests the original temple structure was made of sandstone, with the design including pointed arches and converging *iwans* (Persian-style vaults) (Figure 9).[81] In contrast, the mosque now built on the site follows the traditional triple-bay South Asian mosque design (Figure 9). Traditionally this design includes a tank in the centre of the courtyard, with domes that surmount three bays. Due to the shape of the plan, "a major portion of the plinth of the older temple could be left unbuilt to be reused as its courtyard".[82] The temple's synthesised design brought together Mughal and Sanskritic styling. This heavily contrasted with the pre-existing architectural style adopted for temples in India. Emily Cole, an architectural historian, explains that this "was based on the post-and-beam system used in building stone temples decorated with intricate wooden

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[76] British Library, "Online Gallery: Pillars and dome of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, Qutb, Delhi". Accessed 20.08.21. http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/p/019pho000001003u00886000.html
[77] S. Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis AD 300-1300: Transculturation, Vernacularisation, and the Question of Ideology" in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, ed. J.E.M. Houben (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 230.
[78] Ibid.
[79] British Library, "Online Gallery: Pillars and dome of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, Qutb, Delhi".
[80] Desai, 51.
[81] Desai, 60.
[82] Ibid.

carving".[83] I want to argue that this synthesised style became a distinctive feature of Mughal reign. This is apparent in Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi. Built in 1571 by Akbar, the tomb fuses the traditional Sanskritic red sandstone material, with the Persianate use of white marble in-lay, a style linked to the familial heritage of the Mughal dynasty (Figure 10). Mughal influence on the Vishweshwur Temple contrasts Akbar's fusion of architectural difference with Aurangzeb's demolition. The latter example demonstrates authoritarian Mughal control over the religious character of the city, symbolising an austere political and imperial message. As they were a Muslim dynasty, the BJP ignore the Mughal architectural history of the site. However, like Aurangzeb, the BJP reconstruction also sets out to make an explicit visual and political message, marking a fixed religious territory on a religiously diverse city.

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[83] E. Cole, *Architectural Details: A Visual Guide to 2000 Years of Building Styles* (London: Ivy Press, 2014), 178.

Chapter 2: Local and National Legacy

To help strengthen the fabric of the fractured Hindu community, the BJP set out to disenfranchise outsiders, as according to the government, they threaten Hindu unity. With the promenade monumentalising Hindu religious identity through "a ritual construction of self", the HCP have also created a "symbolic boundary" through forming a divide between prominent Hindu sites and other sites of diverse religious importance in the local vicinity (Figure 1).[84] The boundary was "a contested and negotiated one".[85] There was a negotiation with the landowners of the mosque to give land that belonged to the them to the corridor redevelopment project.[86] In exchange, another plot of land nearby was given to the Gyan Vapi Mosque by the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust.[87] However, there is discrepancy in size as "the land given by the mosque measures 1,700 sq ft compared to the 1,000 sq ft given to it in exchange".[88] Despite this exchange, there has been underlying tension that is yet to be resolved around the Kashi Vishwanath Temple-Gyan Vapi Mosque complex. In April 2021, the Architectural Survey of India (ASI) were ordered by a local Varanasi court to detect whether the religious structure currently standing at the site, meaning the mosque, "is a superimposition, alteration or addition or there is a structural overlapping of any kind, with or over, any religious structure".[89] The history and demolition of the site has created tensions between local Hindu and Muslim communities, with the local Muslim community challenging "the order in the Allahabad High Court, arguing that such a suit is barred under provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991" in late July 2021.[90] The majoritarian agenda of the government who are driving the monumentalism of this design not only cuts past the mosque, but also marks a symbolic sidelining of the voice of the local Muslim community who are challenging the local court. This helps the BJP to minimise the threat from 'outsiders'.

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[84] Van der Veer, 11.
[85] Ibid.
[86] A. Rehman, "Gyanvapi Mosque Gives Land Near It For Kashi Temple Corridor Project", *The Indian Express*, July 24, 2021.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

This project signifies the overbearing control of this government's majoritarian and authoritarian agenda on both a local and national scale. The criticism about the development is either very limited to left-wing news platforms, or cannot be accessed at all.[91] The "media protocol" of the project has presented the government as head commissioners, which in turn corrupts the legal local tension around the Vishwanath Temple-Gyan Vapi Mosque complex.[92] The BJP are also ignoring the influence of Islam on the wider city, evident in the city's skyline as two seventeenth-century mosques are a key feature. With the BJP solidifying the city's Hindu "ritual values", the government are intensifying the Hindu-centric history of Banaras.[93] This architectural project is a microcosm of this political and cultural consolidation, helping BJP present "Hindutva 2.0".[94] This depicts a specific global "spectacle" of Indian culture and politics, while the "perception management" enables the government to build the consciousness of the imagined Hindu community.[95] Banaras was Modi's seat for both 2014 and 2019 elections. The Prime Minister is now able to reinforce his reach in the city by commissioning an architectural development that fits with the local — as well as national — political project. This also highlights his governing strategy both locally and nationally. In Banaras, Modi is being elected to fulfil a contract between him and his voters to develop Banaras into a Hindu nationalist image. Modi then adopts this model nationally, and as a result, the BJP secure the General Elections in both 2014 and 2019 with this very strategy. It is no accident then that the Prime Minister is voted in from this constituency. By playing on the city's 'Hindu' history, it becomes convenient for the BJP to utilise Banaras as a case study for their India-wide political strategy. The BJP's politics consolidates a new Hindu nationalist ideology, and the redevelopment is a spectacle for this.

By transcending Banaras from a local to a national level, the city becomes an emblem of a national Hindu unity. The aim of this project works in tandem with the BJP's endeavours for Banaras – as well as the wider state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) – during their 2014 General Election campaign. Due to this, UP has become a laboratory for the BJP's architectural

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[91] In the public domain, there is no specific architectural specialist scrutiny about this BJP project. All that can be found is accounts from left-wing news platforms including, The Quint, "Varanasi Locals on How the Kashi-Vishwanath Temple Corridor Took Away Their Homes". Accessed 24.08.21. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeOTzjUM4jU
[92] Ibid.
[93] Basu, 8.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

performance. Back in 2014 in UP, "the BJP made efforts to bring about communal polarisation and to mobilise Hindu voters primarily on the basis of their religious identity".[96] This stresses the power of regionalism on a national level.[97] This leads me to argue that Hindutva needs to appeal to its local constituency, as it becomes more relatable and tangible for voters. Through harnessing the power of political decentralisation through Indian states, the BJP were able to win a majority, which has not occurred for 30 years in Indian parliament. Amit Shah – the President of the BJP from 2014 to 2020, and now the current Minister of Home Affairs – commented on the party's success in UP stating that "you can't have one homogeneous campaign. It is almost as if seven different states make up Uttar Pradesh. So, our strategy had essentially four layers—one at the level of the seat, at the level of clusters, at the level of zones and then at the state level".[98] This shows that the BJP understand the diversity within UP's political landscape. They were able to use this to their advantage, enabling them to secure 71 seats in UP.[99] Eck adds that as Banaras is presented as a 'Hindu' city, it is important to note that "part of the task of researching a place like Banaras is to see where the people cast their vote, month after month".[100] The BJP were able to understand the limits of Hindu unity, through localising their political strategy, resulting in a landslide victory in 2014. It is clear that the BJP safely secured local interest in UP in 2014, creating a foundation for more localised urban planning, such as the redevelopment project that is driven too by the same political philosophy. Such architectural projects enable the BJP to overcome the restraints of Hindu unity, as these redevelopments symbolise a unity that has not been fully achieved yet on a national scale. Ultimately, the BJP are able project Banaras as an exemplar of their politics in practice, and in turn utilise the city at a national level.

The BJP set out to overcome the local limitations of this redevelopment by presenting the walkway as advantageous to their diverse community of pious Hindus. This helps the government to build up the consciousness of their imagined community. While the government try to strengthen the fabric of this fractured community, the redevelopment has

[96] S. Palshikar, "The BJP and Hindu Nationalism: Centrist Politics and Majoritarian Impulses". South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, Vol 38 No 4 (2015), 726.

[97] L. Tillin, "Regional resilience and national party system change: India's 2014 general elections in context". Contemporary South Asia, Vol 23 No 2, (2015), 181.

[98] R. Singh, "Election Results 2014: How Amit Shah swept Uttar Pradesh for BJP", *The Economic Times*, May 17, 2014.

[99] NDTV, "A Recap Of 2014 Election Results When BJP-Led NDA Formed Government".

[100] Eck, 105.

socio-economic knock-on effects, revealing how the project is only advantageous to certain fringes of society. This shows how the BJP are trying to unite a community that are in fact divided by class differences in reality. This is why there is a need for the government to constantly perform their politics to create an imagined, homogenous community. Rs 600 Crore budget has been allocated to the construction, and around 250 houses were knocked down to make way for the corridor, leaving families destitute (Figures 4,5).[101] Residents tried to save their homes but failed.[102] In order to fulfil "Modi's dream project" in his constituency, houses located between the temple and the *ghat* were demolished to make way for the corridor.[103] It is unclear how much damage has been done as this information has been concealed by the BJP. Consequently, all the figures are estimates. There are no official government documents on this, but as it is a contemporary issue, it has been documented by Indian left-wing news platforms.[104] These platforms have their own agenda, to scrutinise the BJP for their majoritarian politics. That is why I am keen to note that the figures are approximates, as it is possible that they may have been exaggerated for a leftist agenda. No sign of compensation has been expressed by locals who have lost their homes, instead they were unable to save their belongings during the deconstruction.[105] *The Quint* ask "Will PM Modi become 'Ahilyabai' or 'Aurangzeb' For Viswanath Temple?" A common thread can be drawn between the demolition undertaken to fulfil the BJP's architectural agenda, with that of Aurangzeb. Both deconstructions set out to realise an authoritarian architectural vision for the site. After the demolition of the original temple by Aurangzeb in 1669, Ahilyabai Holkar rebuilt the temple adjacent to Gyan Vapi Mosque in 1780. With Ahilyabai commemorated for bringing the temple back to its former glory through a reconstruction project, the BJP too set out to further enhance the sites former significance before demolition, through a new vision of architectural monumentalism. With the BJP glorifying the redevelopment, this leads me to stress that understandably the government have refrained from sharing any details about the socio-economic knock-on effects of the project. Fundamentally, the most significant aspect is the lack of information presented to the public by the BJP to counter such claims. The BJP are anti-liberal in their approach, through limiting public knowledge, as well as their lack of

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[101] The Quint, "Varanasi Locals on How the Kashi-Vishwanath Temple Corridor Took Away Their Homes".
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.

transparency. With the BJP withholding the socio-economic effects of the project, there is also limited information in the public domain about the architectural planning undertaken for this project too.

Architectural plans for contemporary reconstructions by the BJP are concealed and privatised. The lack of freedom to information prevents architects and architectural historians from fully criticising the project. This mirrors the BJP's national approach to their politics. Through concealing information on a national level, the government hope to limit criticism around what is happening in the country. Examples of this on an architectural note include the precinct development as well as the Central Vista project in Delhi. It is important to note this was first imagined architecturally in 2018 for the Banaras project, inspiring a similar idea for the Central Vista project a year later. The HCP have been commissioned for both reconstructions, so similarities can be drawn between the approach to each redevelopment.[106] For both projects "no data on the design has been released in the public domain and whatever is known is gleaned from screenshots of online presentations to selected audiences made by HCP".[107] The presentation for the precinct redevelopment is available to access online, however this is the only official form of planning released to the public.[108] Little information can be obtained about the plans for the redevelopment, but the vista project designs should be accessible in the public domain, as according to The Central Public Works Department they have "put the avenue design in public domain and has sought views and objections till January 31".[109] Yet, it is impossible to access The Central Public Works Department's website.[110] The connection drops each time, and this has been tried in multiple locations across various devices. Through further online research, the official plans for both of these HCP reconstructions cannot be obtained. This leads me to argue that this is a conscious decision by HCP and BJP as it prevents an in-depth study of the plans being undertaken by architects and architectural historians. Instead, architects such as Chandavarkar has mocked up his own estimation of an in-depth plan for the vista project, in an attempt to visually capture the architectural agenda (Figure 11). Chandavarkar uses his

[106] Sharma, "Central Vista Avenue Plan Finalised".

[107] Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy".

[108] Signify, "Vishwanath Dham Varanasi Webinar".

[109] Sharma, "Central Vista Avenue Plan Finalised".

[110] Central Public Works Department, Government of India. https://cpwd.gov.in

mock-ups to stress that "the proposed redevelopment will reduce public space, highlight the spectacle of government and seems to reflect the authoritarian turn in our democracy".[111] While the mandir redevelopment also symbolises a "spectacle of government", reflecting an "authoritarian turn in [India's] democracy", the Central Vista sets out to project a very particular image of the capital city on a global scale. The legal submission made in February 2020 for the vista project does not align with HCP and BJP's vision for this reconstruction.[112] The BJP argued that the new parliament building is an "extension of the old one, and several parliamentary functions will remain within the existing Sansad Bhavan so that the two buildings function as a single complex".[113] This leads me to suggest that no drastic changes are being made to the use of land. However, "the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has issued legal notifications on the change of land use zoning needed to execute the project" (Figure 12).[114] In order to fulfil this significant architectural change to the current Central Vista landscape, buildings have been privatised, as the project does not support public interest. The National Archives building has changed status from "Public/Semi-Public" to "Government Office", and there is no "proposal to carve out public land from the President's Estate".[115] As a result, over 80 acres of land have been altered from public to government usage.[116] I want to argue that both projects in Delhi and Banaras reveal how architectural monumentalism is concerned with public participation. This is restricted in order to fulfil the government's authoritarian vision. The mandir redevelopment in Banaras limits this participation to those who help promote its Hindu agenda, building up the consciousness of this imagined community. It creates an architectural divide between those who supports this and those who do not, by removing any form of religious diversity within the corridors' axis. This is taken a step further for the Central Vista project as buildings have become privatised, which have historically been in the public domain, in order to manipulate DDA's legal submission to work in accordance with their architectural vision. Both developments "reduce the public to mute spectators awestruck by the pageantry of governmental architecture".[117] The BJP's new distinctive architectural agenda does not accommodate for public good. Instead it symbolises

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[111] Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy".
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

the government's own idea of democracy that is majoritarian and not liberal. This is evident in their architectural strategy for both projects. The vista project manipulates architectural legal proceedings, and the temple redevelopment conceals the socio-economic implications, while detailed plans cannot be obtained for either. The BJP's idea of a Hindu Nation demands a majoritarian, not a liberal approach. Envisaged by the government, their imagined Hindu community participate in their political strategy, with the BJP intending to project a type of politics that benefits Hindu interests. This is evident in their attempt to monumentalise a Hindu character for the country through architecture, while also creating walkways designed specifically for the use of their imagined pious Hindus.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how this project simultaneously consolidates a Hindu identity for Banaras but also refashions the city into a symbol of a modern, unified Hindu nation. By transcending Banaras to a national level, BJP reshape the mandir redevelopment to resonate with their political strategy that is rooted in majoritarianism, nationalism and populism. In order to fulfil their majoritarian agenda that strives for Hindu dominance, the government adopt an authoritarian political stance. This is implicit in the lack of freedom to information for the architectural plans, as well as subverting criticism and debate in the public sphere. In order to create a place identity for Banaras, the government leverage public participation – creating a walkway for their imagined pious Hindus. This very group represents the BJP's national vision for India: to be defined as a Hindu state. To achieve this, Banaras' eclectic history has been subverted through the government's attempt to revamp the city's architectural palimpsest. This is evident through the BJP's decision to ignore how Mughal design has impacted the Vishweshwur Mandir, as well as sidelining the Gyan Vapi Mosque by cutting straight past it (Figure 1). The BJP anachronistically superimpose a fixed Hindu history onto the city, architecturally evident through a rolling promenade that intrudes through the architectural landscape, adjusting the city's "internal circulatory system".[118] Through this intrusion, the BJP and HCP coin a new type of architectural monumentalism for India that purposely disrupts its surroundings to signal where power lies. As a result, the HCP create an architectural hierarchy in the vicinity through confining significant 'Hindu' structures within the redevelopment's grand urban axis. The architectural firm also fashion a new way of using a promenade that does not blend into its surroundings through "radiating boulevards".[119] While the Champs Élysées is integrated into the character of Paris (Figure 7), this project knowingly intends not to create an architectural equilibrium. The bulldozing effect of the walkway enables the BJP to reconfigure the site to fulfil their own political agenda. Banaras' political landscape is a perfect laboratory for this project, as Uttar Pradesh (UP) is a stronghold for the party. The BJP polarised UP voters during the 2014 General Elections across religious lines. So, undertaking a local architectural construction that is fashioned around the religious

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[118] Samuel, 9.
[119] Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy".

majority and minority worked in their favour.[120] The government are providing locals who "vote with their feet" with exactly the type of politics they support, enabling Modi to fulfil his Hindu nationalist contract with his constituents.[121] Voters are able to participate in this spectacle by using the promenade, with the government hoping they will feel a sense of belonging. Through participation, the imagined community help the BJP to consolidate a Hindu character for the city. They also engage with the BJP's refashioning of the site for a Hindu nationalist agenda by bringing human engagement to their architectural vision. Modi also adopts this model nationally, presenting his political agenda as beneficial to India's Hindu majority. As a result, the BJP have secured the General Elections in both 2014 and 2019 with this very strategy.

This study has demonstrated how 'the imagined pious Hindus' resemble the BJP's vision for India's national Hindu community, as this architectural project is a performance of politics to build a consciousness for the imagined community. In order to present a Hindu nationalism that benefits an imagined, homogenous group, the government need to regularly perform their politics. This is architecturally evident through the government's attempt to appeal to both lower and upper-middle class Hindu pilgrims. Through uniting a community that is divided by class, caste, linguistical and regional differences, the BJP then place the Hindu majority up against other minorities. This is architecturally conveyed through sideling the voice of the local Muslim community, who are challenging the local court about the religious unrest around Vishwanath Temple-Gyan Vapi Mosque complex.[122] The imagined pious Hindus are utilised by the BJP to echo the government's majoritarian political agenda, one that sets out to use Hindu dominance for cultural and political consolidation. The term I have coined, 'the imagined pious Hindus', has enabled me to show that the BJP view this religious community in accordance with their political theory, Hindutva. This idea of a unified Hindu community is a fragile and mythical one, for it denies the real divides caused by caste hierarchies and the possibility of a politics that transcends identity. As a result, the BJP must regularly perform its politics to sustain the idea of this community, that is fractured in reality.

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[120] Palshikar, 726.
[121] Eck, 105.
[122] Rehman, "Gyanvapi Mosque Gives Land Near It For Kashi Temple Corridor Project".

This architectural performance has enabled the BJP to bring an imagined community consciousness into being.[123]

The more the government perform their politics, the stronger it becomes. This is architecturally evident in the Banaras project, leading to the Central Vista development. Consequently, the mandir redevelopment forms the original blueprint for the BJP's and HCP's reshaping of a city's "internal circulatory system", disrupting urban planning and existing architectural landscapes (Figure 1).[124] While both projects in Banaras and Delhi explore the importance of participation in architectural monumentalism, the Central Vista takes this further through privatisation. Many of the buildings in the complex have changed from public to government use only, while there is also a lack of public land within the President's estate (Figure 12).[125] Likewise, in order to present a majoritarian image of Banaras, public participation was used to reflect Hindu dominance through the imagined pious Hindus. While the Banaras project transcends the city from a local to a national level, the Central Vista development presents an authoritarian architectural shift from a national to an international level through a capital city. In the BJP's eyes, they are decolonising the Central Vista from Lutyens' colonial design. Nevertheless ironically, the BJP are adopting colonial logic themselves through dividing the population into religious categories, evident in how the Banaras project is significantly fashioned around the religious majority and minority. This first piece of architectural commentary on the site demonstrates the advantage of using architecture for a Hindu nationalist political performance. By actualising this politics through a visual means, this project forms the template for other *architectural Hindutva* developments.

As India's current political establishment uses divisive architecture to separate Hindus and Muslims, the project raises questions around what will happen next for *architectural Hindutva.* With the BJP using the Banaras project to sustain a political stronghold in UP, perhaps the government will undertake similar projects in other cities to consolidate their political reach in the upcoming General Election in 2024. After projecting their political agenda globally through Central Vista, perhaps the BJP will now resort back to regional

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[123] Anderson, 4.
[124] Samuel, 9.
[125] Chandavarkar, "The Architecture of Democracy".

projects to localise Hindu nationalism and secure votes. Through the Banaras redevelopment, the government have realised the importance of decentralisation through the states. Therefore, it would not be surprising to see this architectural idea continue nationally. Will the government be able to overcome the restraints of Hindu unity by refashioning the architectural landscape of various cities across India? As the redevelopment symbolises a unity that has not been fully achieved yet on a national scale, perhaps nationwide architectural developments will bring the government closer to their Hindu nationalist vision. Will architecture be the most significant tool to repaint India's landscape into a majoritarian imagining? This leads me to ask what will happen to these redevelopments if the government changes political hands?

During the time of Manmohan Singh's governance (2004-2014), the Indian National Congress (INC) Prime Minister requested to work in partnership with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture to restore Humayun's Tomb (Figure 10). The Aga Khan and the Prime Minister used the restoration project in 2008 to revive Akbar's founding pluralistic ideas for the tomb, which worked in harmony with the values of the Indian political establishment at the time. Now, however, the structure works autonomously from the state, symbolising a cohesive culture which the current government sets out to challenge. Consequently, the tomb has been neglected, with little to no interest given to restoration. The structure has found a new meaning, functioning as a reminder of India's shared history, during the rise of Hindu nationalism. This leads me to suggest that if Congress were to govern India in the future, would BJP architectural sites also be neglected? Like Humayun's Tomb, the mandir redevelopment resembles the political opposite to Congress' politics. While Congress set out to uphold a pluralistic identity for India, the BJP hope to fashion a majoritarian one, rooted in Hindu dominance. If neglected, what would happen to the 'imagined pious Hindus'? Would the site not function as a walkway for the Hindu community envisaged in the BJP's image? Would this be detrimental to the BJP's attempt to build the consciousness of this imagined community? Would this religious nationalist identity be reclaimed by pilgrims, functioning as a Hindu site for voters from across the political spectrum? Or would the promenade be demolished to revitalise the city's diverse history? In contrast, the Central Vista project includes significant government buildings that the next political establishment would need to use. As a result, the BJP are able to leave an entrenched architectural legacy. They have

refashioned government structures that hold an important functioning purpose for both the present and beyond. If neglected, it directly impacts the functionality of the government. Would a new political establishment demolish the site and start again? Would this mark another example of authoritarian architecture? Or would the current vista become an architectural palimpsest, reinvented each time a new government holds power? The site would then resemble an eclectic architectural history shaped by different political establishments. *Architectural Hindutva* raises new questions about the future of India's architecture. It has also sparked a new era for architectural history, rewriting sites for a Hindu nationalist agenda. This has not been achieved before through redirecting the architectural landscape of a city.

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Illustrations

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Figure 1. Precinct Landmarks. Plan: HCP Design, Planning and Management (HCP).

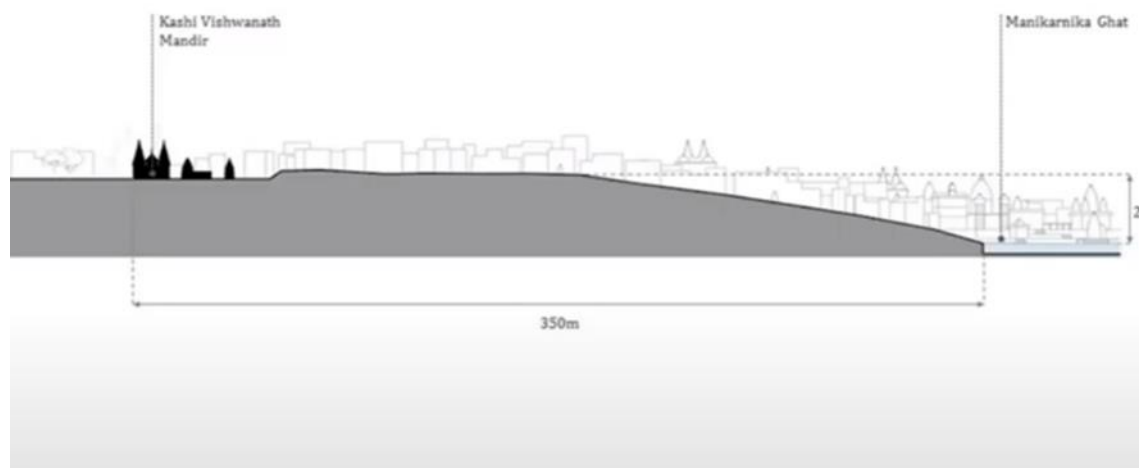## Existing section cutting through the buildings

Figure 2. Existing section cutting through the buildings. Plan: HCP.

Figure 3. Shri Kashi Vishwanath Mandir, Banaras. Photo: Rgyan.

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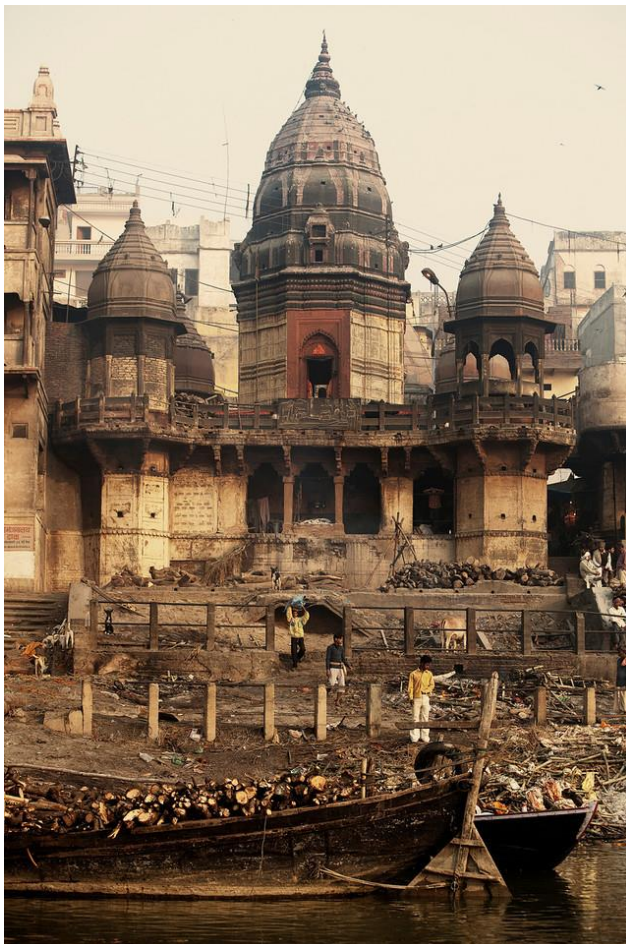
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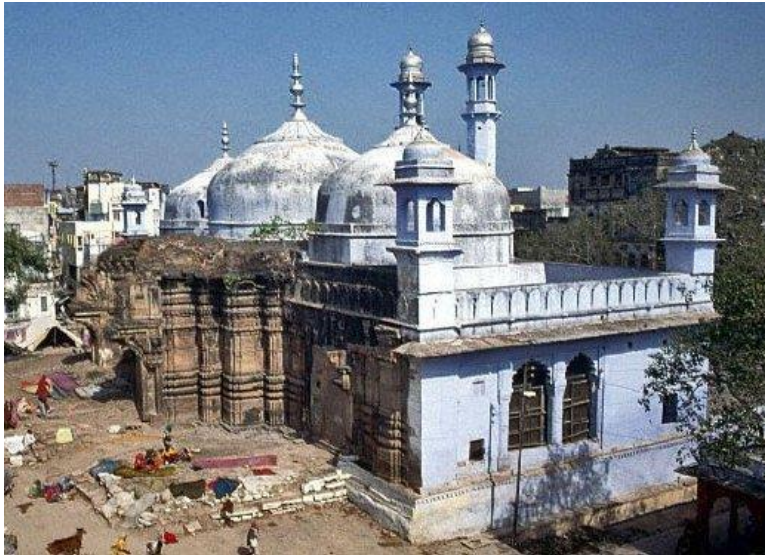Figure 8. Pillars and dome of the Quwwat-ul-Islam Mosque, Qutb, Delhi. Photo: British Library.

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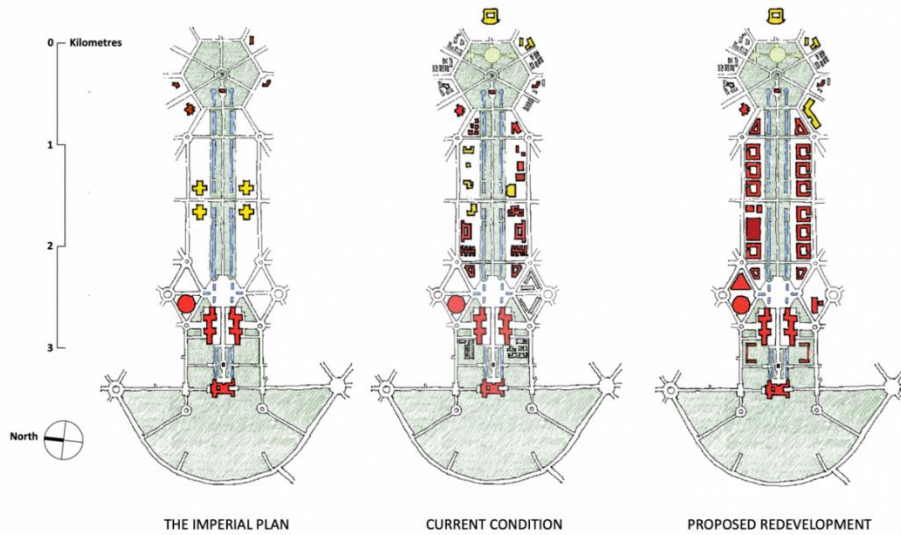Figure 10. Humayun's Tomb. Photo: author.

Figure 11. Three States of Central Vista. Plan: Prem Chandavarkar.
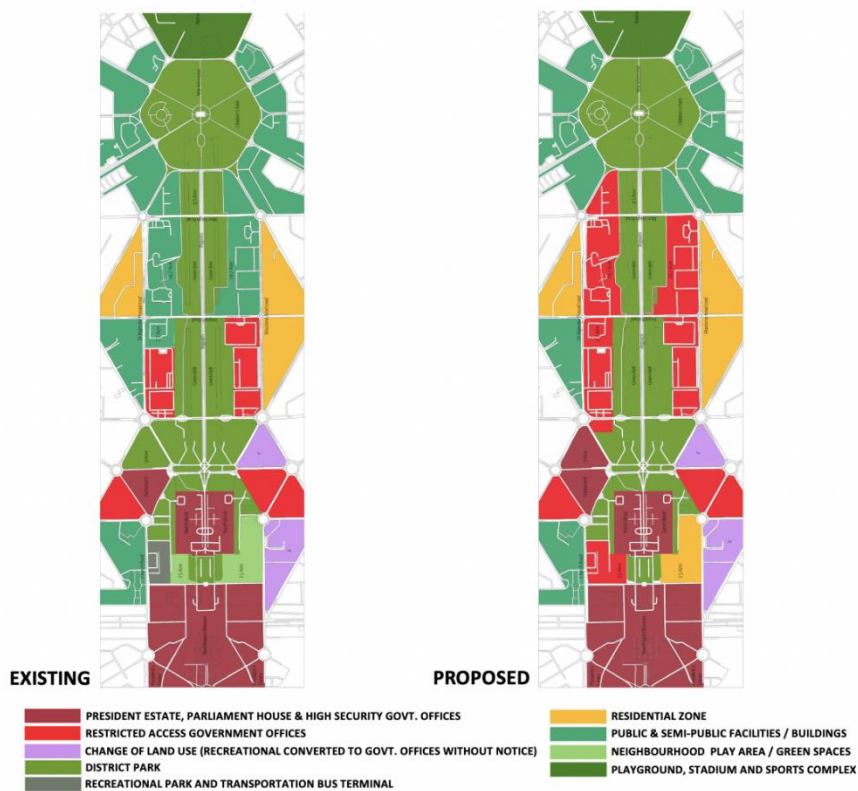

Figure 12. Central Vista, The Proposed Redevelopment, Diagram Reflecting Legal Notifications on Change of Land Use. Diagram: LokPATH India.