Kajri Jain

GODS IN THE TIME OF DEMOCRACY

GODS IN THE TIME OF DEMOCRACY

This page intentionally left blank

GODS *in the* TIME *of* DEMOCRACY

Kajri Jain

Duke University Press
Durham and London
2021

© 2021 Duke University Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Drew Sisk
Typeset in Portrait Text and ITC Century by
Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Jain, Kajri, author.
Title: Gods in the time of democracy / Kajri Jain.
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2020020342 (print) | LCCN 2020020343 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478010340 (hardcover)
ISBN 9781478011392 (paperback)
ISBN 9781478012887 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Art and religion—India—History—21st century. | Gods in art. | Idols and images in art. | Art and popular culture—India. | Religion and culture—India. | Commercial art—India. | Aesthetics—Religious aspects.
Classification: LCCN 72.R4 J356 2021 (print) | LCCN 72.R4 (ebook) | DDC 201/.67—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020020342
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020020343

Illustrations by Prasad Khanolkar

Cover art: Kashinath, 65-ft. seated Shiva at Kids Kemp department store, also known as Kemp Fort, Old Airport Road, Bengaluru, inaugurated in 1995. Photograph by Kajri Jain, 2007.

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges the Department of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto Mississauga, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

Contents

Acknowledgments vii
Introduction EMERGENCE 1

1 STATUES AND SCULPTORS 29
2 DEMOCRACY 81
3 ICONOPRAXIS 120
4 CARS AND LAND 181
5 SCALE 220

Notes 259
Bibliography 307
Index 323

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This is ultimately a book about time. Fittingly, it also embodies a great deal of time—not just mine but also that of many other people in many different places. Much as I wish to, I cannot name everyone here, and some people prefer not to be named, but I am deeply grateful to them all.

First and foremost, I thank the marvelous sculptors and architects who shared their work, ideas, process, images, and more, with unfailing generosity, grace, and good humor. Naresh Kumar and Matu Ram Varma in Gurgaon and Pilani, Sridhar and Kashinath in Bangalore, Sanjay and Bijoy Sakya in Sikkim, and Anil and Ram Sutar in Delhi went out of their way to help me understand what they do and how, patiently answering many questions over many years. Similar thanks to Shamaraya Acharya, Rekha Bhoite and Subhash Bhoite, S. K. Chopra, Dharmendra Kumar, Rajesh Nayak, Amar Pal, Navin Pradhan, Shravan Prajapati, Babu Kazi Sakya, and Thangam Subramanian. I was also fortunate to interview several people responsible for commissioning or supervising monumental statues and associated projects. Many thanks to Anil Bachoo, B. K. Birla, J. R. "Raj" Dayal, Sat Maharaj, Ravi Melwani, Sonam Paljor, Prasadji, Manju Safaya, B. K. Saini, R. N. Shetty, and Thobchen Takapa.

This project ranges over multiple locations and areas of specialized expertise, so I have relied on information, insights, and other assistance from others with deep understanding and experience of specific contexts, for which I am hugely thankful (though any lapses remain my responsibility): in Bangalore, Annapurna Garimella; in Delhi, Y. S. Alone and Vivek Kumar; in Lucknow, Ram Kumar; in Kanyakumari, A. K. Perumal and "Mamaji" Angiras Hazrat; in Mauritius, Amenah Jahangeer-Chojoo and Vinesh Hookoomsingh; in Sikkim, Tashi Densapa, Chetan Shreshtha, and Pema Wangchuk; in Murudeshwar, Jairam Madigal; in Trinidad, Christopher Cozier, Steve Ouditt, Raymond Ramcharitar, Glen Ramjag, Indrani Rampersad, Rhoda Reddock, Deokinanan Sharma, and Pandit Satnarine Sharma. Thanks also to my wonderful research assistants, on-site and long distance: Rohit Dhanuk, Sushumna Kanan, Jaby Mathew, Akshaya Tankha, Sarah Richardson, and Sumanlata Singh.

I was lucky to have delightful and erudite companions on some of my field trips: Dean Arlen, Shalmali Guttal, Sameera Jain, Yamuna Mukherjee, Sarah

Richardson, Aveek Sen, and Dayanita Singh. I can only hope that something of their superb sensibilities and spirits permeate this book. I was also immensely fortunate to enjoy the warm hospitality, assistance, and enthusiasm of friends and family on my travels. My gratitude to Champak and Vimoha Bagla, Kuhu and Arijit Banerjee, Shalmali Guttal and Randall Arnst, Sameera Jain, Sheena Jain, Yamuna and Sandeep Mukherjee, Vanita Pai, Rhoda Reddock and Dean Arlen, Vivek and Shamim Saraswat, Dayanita Singh, Aveek Sen, Aradhana Seth, and Nilita Vachani.

I am grateful every day to live and work in a society that believes in the public funding of the humanities. This research was funded by Canadian taxpayers, by way of a Social Sciences and Humanities Standard Research Grant and my position at the University of Toronto, with the time and funding it provided: a Connaught Start-Up Award, a Dean's Special Grant, and a University of Toronto Research Completion Award. I am also indebted to the organizers of the many excellent academic forums who invited me to engage in stimulating conversations and share my work in various parts of the world. Here I particularly want to mention the multiyear Transcultural Visuality Learning Group at the University of Heidelberg led by Christiane Brosius, Barbara Mittler, and Sumathi Ramaswamy; the Wenner-Gren Symposium on "New Media, New Publics?" organized by Maria José de Abreu, Carlo Caduff, and Charles Hirschkind; the "Ecologies of Urbanism in Asia" workshops organized by Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan; and the "Markets and Modernities" project at the University of Toronto's Asian Institute, led by Ritu Birla and Tania Li, which convinced me that the University of Toronto was the place to be.

I have been working on this project as long as I have been in Toronto. Over that time, I have come to depend on the advice, support, and inspirational brilliance of an extraordinary community of colleagues and graduate students within and beyond my own university, most of whom have also become deep and dear friends. Those who commented on drafts of chapters or helped me sort through specific issues include Mark Cheetham, Francis Cody, Naisargi Dave, Shubhra Gururani, Elizabeth Harney, Tong Lam, Jaby Mathew, Radhika Mongia, Brian Price, Bhavani Raman, Aparna Sundar, and Meghan Sutherland. Beyond Toronto, too, I am indebted to those who commented on chapters or related papers in formal or informal settings: Nikhil Anand, Adam Bobbette, Anne Hartig, Shobhita Jain, Monica Juneja, Dipti Khera, William Mazzarella, Rosalind Morris, Constantine Nakassis, Ying Qian, Anna Seastrand, Aveek Sen, and participants at conferences, workshops, and seminars too numerous to list here.

In addition to the two insightful, encouraging, and enormously helpful readers for Duke University Press who worked so generously *with* the manuscript, beautifully in tune with its spirit, three people read the whole first draft. One is Ravindra Jain, my father; my parents' approval and enthusiasm mean the world to me. Simryn Gill is in my mind the paradigmatic reader of this book: a serious intellectual who is not an academic but, as an artist and writer, is far, far more than that. Many thanks to her for suggesting the illustrations and to Prasad Khanolkar for conceiving and executing them with such intelligence, imagination, skill, and keenness, which also entailed reading the entire manuscript. Other colleagues and friends whose imprint appears here in various ways—through conversations, observations, references, images, connections, excitements—include Susan Bean, Catherine Becker, Ritu Birla, Joseph Clarke, Rory Crath, Ramu Dhara, Christoph Emmrich, Richard Fung, Tejaswini Ganti, Roos Gerritsen, Bishnupriya Ghosh, Yi Gu, Tapati Guha Thakurta, Jack Hawley, Stephen Inglis, Malavika Kasturi, Ravinder Kaur, Sonal Khullar, Tania Li, Victor Li, Philip Lutgendorf, Saloni Mathur, Ranjani Mazumdar, Arvind Rajagopal, Srilata Raman, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Katharine Rankin, Anupama Rao, Srirupa Roy, Tamara Sears, Bhaskar Sarkar, Orijit Sen, Kavita Singh, Ajay Sinha, Patricia Spyer, S. V. Srinivas, Alison Syme, Akshaya Tankha, Ravi Vasudevan, and Karin Zitzewitz.

Portions of this book have appeared in the following earlier versions. Chapter 2 is derived in part from "Partition as Partage," *Third Text* 31, nos. 2–3 (March–May 2017): 187–203 (© Third Text, a Taylor and Francis publication); from "Tales from the Concrete Cave: Delhi's Birla Temple and the Genealogies of Urban Nature in India," in *Places of Nature in Ecologies of Urbanism*, edited by Anne Rademacher and K. Sivaramakrishnan (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2017); and from "Gods in the Time of Automobility," *Current Anthropology* 58, no. S15 (February 2017): S13–S26 (© 2016 by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. All rights reserved). Chapter 4 is derived in part from "Post-Reform India's Automotive-Iconic-Cement Assemblages: Uneven Globality, Spectacle, and Iconic Exhibition Value," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 23, no. 3 (2016): 327–44 (© Identities, a Taylor and Francis publication).

One of the most difficult and the most joyful things about what academics do is the inextricability of work and pleasure, the professional and the personal. If so far my scales have consistently tipped on the joyful side, surely it is because for me this has been a family business from the start: my anthropologist parents, Shobhita and Ravindra Jain, showed me how it was done. They have been constant interlocutors, exemplars, and supports. They encouraged

me to make the visit in my opening anecdote, with which this project began, and came along, too. In this and many other ways, my work is theirs. Another deep well of well-being, similarly both intellectual and otherwise, has been the fictive extended family in Toronto into which my daughter and I have been so happily enfolded. Alok, Aparna, Radhika, Shubhra, and Terry, I cannot thank you enough for your unhesitating, unconditional, abundant care for both of us over all these years. Amitav, Ilan, Rishabh, Rosa, and Sumana, it is such a delight to watch you lovely beings grow.

And then, of course, there is the dear bright sun around which my life has revolved throughout the writing of this book, keeping me warm, laughing, and vital, steadying my orbit, making it all worthwhile. This book is for Ira.

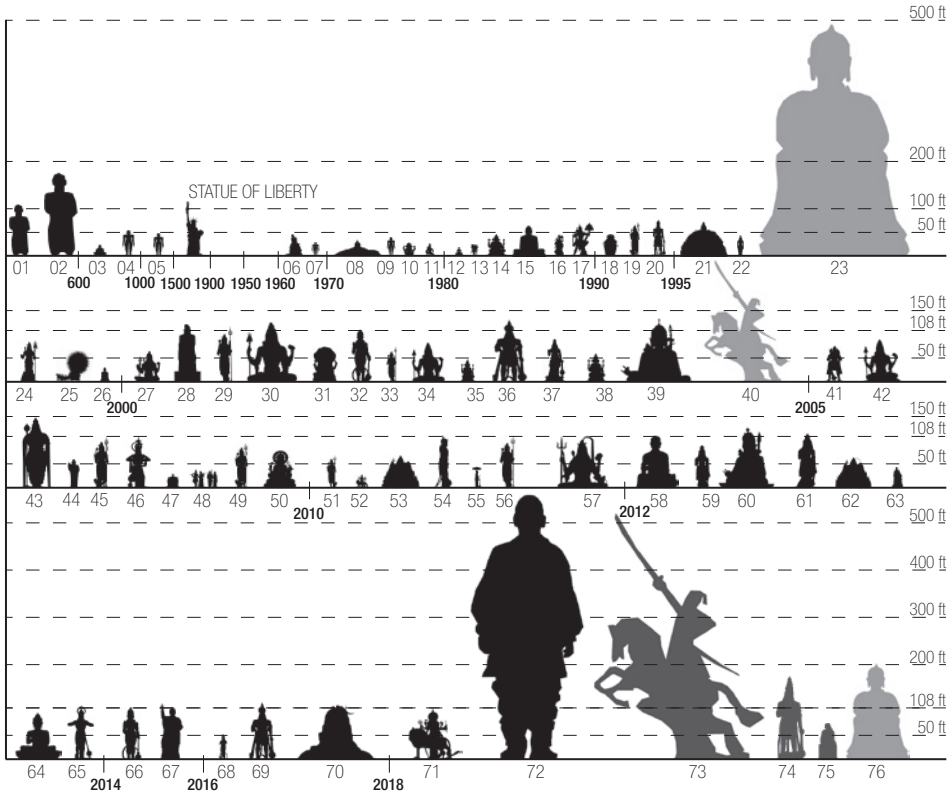

FIGURE FM.1 Time line of statues mentioned in the book (not exhaustive; scales are approximate). As of 2018, statues in lightest gray were proposed; those in medium gray were in progress. See Table FM.1 for key to time line and map of statues.

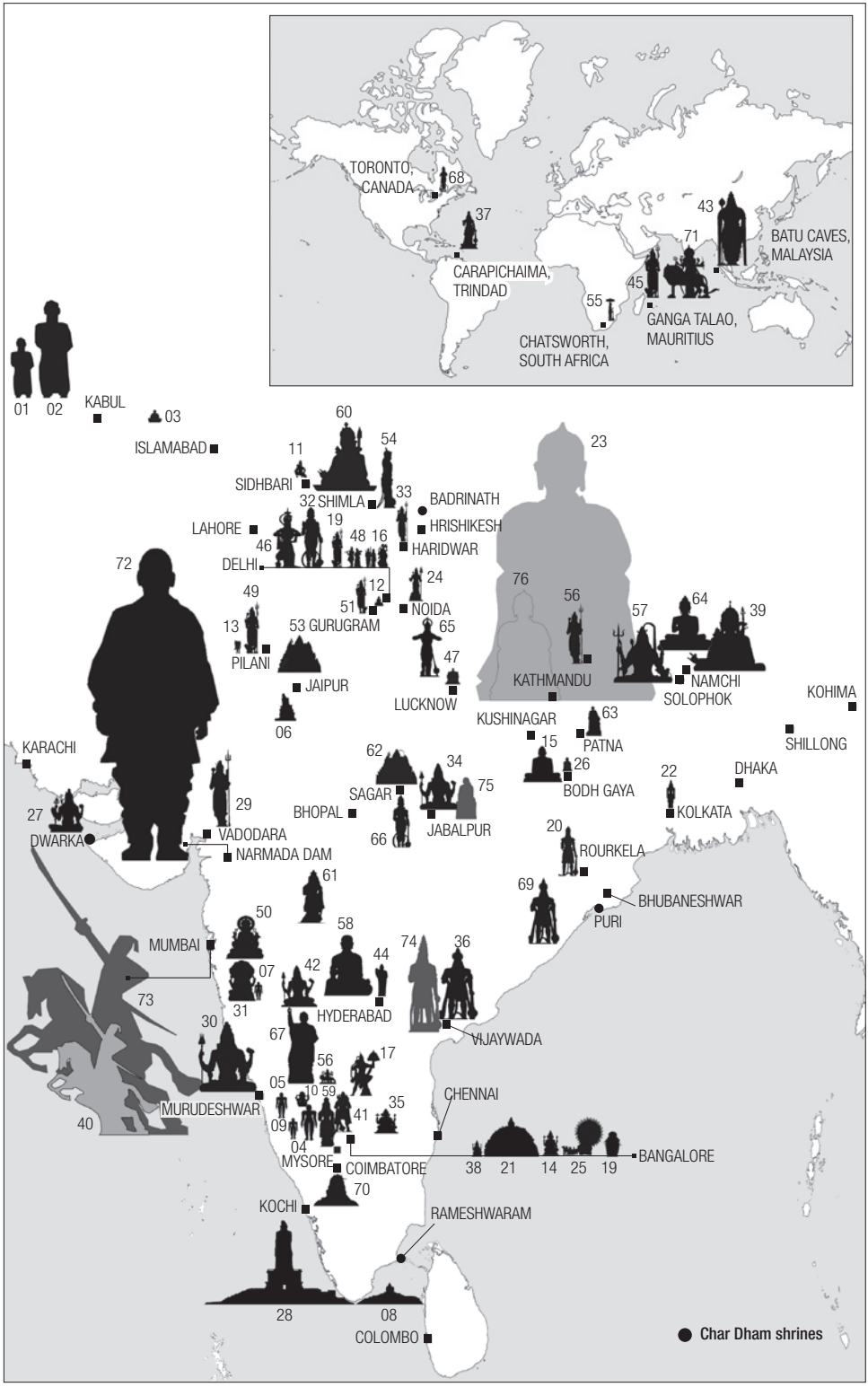
TORONTO, CANADA
68
37
CARAPICHAIMA, TRINDAD
43
71
BATU CAVES, MALAYSIA
45
GANGA TALAO, MAURITIUS
55
CHATSWORTH, SOUTH AFRICA
01
02
KABUL
03
ISLAMABAD
60
11
54
SIDHBARI
32
SHIMLA
33
BADRINATH
HRISHIKESH
HARIDWAR
LAHORE
19
48
16
46
DELHI
72
12
24
51
NOIDA
49
13
PILANI
53
GURUGRAM
65
47
JAIPUR
06
LUCKNOW
23
76
56
57
64
39
KATHMANDU
NAMCHI
SOLOPHOK
KOHIMA
KUSHINAGAR
63
PATNA
15
SHILLONG
KARACHI
62
34
75
SAGAR
BHOPAL
66
JABALPUR
26
BODH GAYA
22
DHAKA
KOLKATA
27
29
DWARKA
VADODARA
NARMADA DAM
20
ROURKELA
61
69
BHUBANESHWAR
PURI
50
58
74
36
MUMBAI
07
42
44
31
HYDERABAD
VIJAYWADA
73
30
67
56
17
05
10
59
35
CHENNAI
MURUDESHWAR
40
09
41
04
MYSORE
COIMBATORE
38
21
14
25
19
BANGALORE
70
KOCHI
RAMESHWARAM
28
08
COLOMBO
Char Dham shrines

FIGURE FM.2 Map of statues as of 2018 (not exhaustive; scales and locations are approximate). See Table FM.1 fo key to timne line and map of statues.

TABLE FM.1 Key to timeline and map of statues (FM.1, FM.2).

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
1	ca. 507	Buddha (standing)	Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan		115	Sedimentary rock	
2	ca. 554	Buddha (standing)	Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan		174	Sedimentary rock	
3	ca. 700	Buddha (seated)	Swat Valley, Pakistan		22	Granite	
4	ca. 938/981	Bahubali/ Gommateshwara (standing monolith)	Shravanabelagola, Karnataka		57	Granite	Chavundaraya
5	1432	Bahubali/ Gommateshwara	Karkala, Karnataka		42	Granite	Veera Pandya
6	1962	Chambal Devi	Gandhi Sagar Dam, Madhya Pradesh	Ram Sutar	45		Government of India
7	1963	Bahubali	Kumbhoj, Maharashtra		28	Marble	
8	1970	Vivekananda (standing)	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	Narayanrao Sonawadekar	12	Bronze	Vivekananda Rock Memorial Trust
9	1975	Bahubali/ Gommateshwara (standing monolith)	Dharmasthala, Karnataka	Renjala Gopalakrishna Shenoy	39	Granite	Veerendra Heggade (temple trustee)

TABLE FM.1 (*continued*)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
10	1979	Ganesha (for festival)	Shimoga, Karnataka	Kashinath	29	Clay	
11	1980	Hanuman (kneeling)	Sidhbhari, Himachal Pradesh	Kashinath	25	Concrete	Chinmaya Mission
12	1985	Mahavir (seated)	Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road, Delhi	Shamaraya Acharya	13.5	Granite	P. C. Jain (watches)
13	1987	Hanuman (standing)	Panchavati Park, Pilani, Rajasthan	Matu Ram Varma	21	Concrete	L. N. Birla (businessman)
14	1989	Ganesha (seated)	Kolar, Karnataka	Kashinath	45	Concrete	Chinmaya Mission
15	1989	Buddha (seated)	Bodhgaya, Bihar	V. Ganapati Sthapati	64	Chunar sandstone	Daijokyo, Japan
16	1990	Hanuman	Basant Gaon, New Delhi		45	Granite	Prabhudutt Brahmachari
17	1990	Hanuman	Puttaparthi		70	Concrete	Sathya Sai Baba
18	1992	Krishna	Vishwa Shanti Ashram, Bangalore-Tumkur Rd, Karnataka	Kashinath	45	Concrete	Sadguru Sant Keshavadas, Temple of Cosmic Religion
19	1994	Shiva (standing) "Mangal Mahadev"	Birla Kanan, New Delhi	Matu Ram Varma	85	Concrete	B. K. Birla (businessman)
20	1994	Hanuman (standing)	Rourkela, Orissa	Laxman Swamy	75	Concrete	Jai Hanuman Trust
21	1995	Shiva (seated)	Kemp Fort, Bangalore	Kashinath	65	Concrete	Ravi Melwani (department stores)
22	1995	Krishna (standing) "Mangal Madhav"	Calcutta	M. Muthia Sthapati	45	Granite	B. K. Birla

TABLE FM.1 (*continued*)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
23	(1997)	Maitreya (proposed)	Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh		(500)	Concrete	Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition
24	1998	Shiva (standing)	Film City, Noida, Uttar Pradesh	Matu Ram Varma		Concrete	Gulshan Kumar, T-Series
25	1999	Surya (standing)	Eagleton Golf Resort, near Bangalore	Sridhar	65	Concrete	M. Ashok Kumar, Sri Chamundeshwari Developers
26	1999	Maitreya	Bodhgaya, Bihar		24		Lama Zopa Rinpoche
27	2000	Shiva (sitting)	Nageshwar temple, Dwarka, Gujarat	Kashinath	65	Concrete	Gulshan Kumar
28	2000	Thiruvalluvar (standing)	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	V. Ganapati Sthapati	133	Granite	Govt. of Tamil Nadu (M. Karunanidhi, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)
29	2002	Shiva (standing) "Sarveswhar Mahadev"	Sursagar Lake, Vadodara, Gujarat	Matu Ram Varma	111	Concrete	Yogesh Patel (Bharatiya Janata Party)
30	2002	Shiva (seated)	Murudeshwar, Karnataka	Kashinath	123	Concrete	R. N. Shetty (builder, businessman)
31	2002	Ganesha (seated)	Kolhapur, Maharashtra	Kashinath	75	Concrete	Chinmaya Mission
32	2002	Hanuman (standing)	Chattarpur, New Delhi	Matu Ram Varma	101	Concrete	Anonymous (for Baba Sant Nagpal)
33	2003	Shiva (standing)	Haridwar, Uttarakhand	Kashinath and Sridhar	75	Concrete	Gulshan Kumar
34	2003	Shiva (seated)	Kachnar City, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh	Sridhar	81	Concrete	Arun Tiwari (builder, Kachnar City)

TABLE FM.1 (*continued*)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
35	2003	Ganesha (seated)	Kanakapura Road, Bangalore	Sridhar	45	Concrete	Vishranthi Dhama Health Club and Spa
36	2003	Hanuman (standing)	Paritala, near Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh		135	Concrete	Paritala Anjaneya Temple
37	2003	Hanuman (standing)	Carapichaima, Trindad	Thangam Subramanian	85	Concrete	Avadhoota Datta Peetham
38	2003	Ganesha (seated)	Bangalore	Sridhar	32		
39	2004	Guru Rimpoche/ Padmasambhava (seated)	Namchi, Sikkim	Naresh Kumar Varma (initial design)	135	Concrete	Government of Sikkim (Pawan Chamling, Sikkim Democratic Front)
40	(2004)	Shivaji (proposed)	Mumbai, Maharashtra	Ram Sutar	(309)		Government of Maharashtra (Congress Party)
41	2005	Hanuman (standing)	Tumkur, Karnataka	Kashinath and Sridhar	75	Concrete	Kote Anjaneya Swamy temple
42	2006	Shiva (seated)	Bijapur, Karnataka	Sridhar (initial design)	70	Concrete	Basant Kumar Patil (Kannada film producer)
43	2006	Murugan (standing)	Batu Caves, Malaysia		140		Sri Subramaniar temple
44	1992–2006	Buddha (standing)	Hussain Sagar Lake, Hyderabad	S. M. Ganapathi Sthapati	58	Granite	Government of Andhra Pradesh (N. T. Rama Rao, Telugu Desam)
45	2007	Shiva (standing)	Ganga Talao, Mauritius	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	Government of Mauritius (Anil Bachoo)
46	1994–2007	Hanuman (standing)	Karol Bagh, New Delhi		108	Concrete	Brahmaleen Nagababa Shri Sevagiri Ji Maharaj

TABLE FM.1 (*continued*)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
47	2008	Ambedkar (seated)	Ambedkar Memorial, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	Ram Sutar	27	Bronze	Government of Uttar Pradesh (Kumari Mayawati, Bahujan Samaj Party)
48	2009	Ram, Sita, Radha, Krishna	Birla Kanan, New Delhi	Naresh Kumar Varma	31	Concrete	B. K. Birla
49	2009	Shiva (standing)	Pilani, Rajasthan	Matu Ram Art Centre	80	Concrete	S. K. Birla (businessman)
50	2009	Ganesha (seated) "Mangal Murti Morya"	Talegaon, Maharashtra	Naresh Kumar Varma	72	Concrete	B. K. Birla
51	2010	Shiva (standing)	Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana	Naresh Kumar Varma	65	Concrete	Balkrishna Saini (real estate, automobile service station)
52	2010	Durga (standing)	Ballari, Karnataka	Sridhar	26	Concrete	B. Sriramulu (Bharatiya Janata Party)
53	2010	Shiva (seated)	Bishangarh, Jalore, Rajasthan	Sridhar	65	Concrete	Bhawarlal Khivesra, Maharaja Build Tech Ltd. (construction)
54	2010	Hanuman (standing)	Shimla, Himachal Pradesh	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	H. C. Nanda Trust (Nikhil Nanda, Escorts Ltd., engineering and manufacturing)
55	2010	Hanuman (standing)	Chatsworth, Durban, South Africa		40	Concrete	Shri Vishnu Temple Society
56	2011	Shiva (standing)	Sanga, near Kathmandu, Nepal	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	Kamal Jain, Hilltake (water tanks)
57	2011	Shiva (seated)	Solophok, Namchi, Sikkim	Sridhar (initial design)	108	Concrete	Government of Sikkim (Pawan Chamling, Sikkim Democratic Front)

TABLE FM.1 (*continued*)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
58	2012	Basaveshwara (seated)	Basavakalyan, Bidar, Karnataka	Sridhar	108	Concrete	Mate Mahadevi, Basava Dharma Peetha
59	2012	Hanuman (standing)	Mysore, Karnataka		70	Granite	Avadhoota Datta Peetham
60	2012	Guru Rimpoche/ Padmasambhava (seated)	Tso Pema, Rewalsar, Himachal Pradesh	Drupa Kunzang (Bhutan)	123	Concrete	Lama Wangdor Rinpoche
61	2012	Hanuman (standing)	Nandura, Maharashtra		105	Concrete	
62	2013	Shiva (seated)	Sagar, Madhya Pradesh	Sridhar	61	Concrete	Shivmandir Development Trust, Sindhunagar Colony, Sagar (developers)
63	2013	Gandhi (standing)	Patna	Ram Sutar	40	Bronze	Government of Bihar (Nitish Kumar, Janata Dal)
64	2013	Sakyamuni (seated)	Ravangla, Sikkim	Sakya Brothers	95	Concrete	Government of Sikkim (D. D. Bhutia, Sikkim Democratic Front)
65	2013	Hanuman (standing)	Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh	Veerendra Shekhawat	104	Concrete	
66	2014	Hanuman (standing)	Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh	Naresh Kumar Varma	101	Concrete	Anonymous (constituency of Kamal Nath, Congress Party)
67	2015	Basaveshwara (standing)	Gadag, Karnataka	Sridhar	111	Concrete	Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation, Government of Karnataka
68	2016	Hanuman (standing)	Toronto, Canada	Naresh Kumar Varma	50	Concrete	Richmond Hill Vishnu Mandir

TABLE FM.1 (*continued*)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
69	2017	Hanuman (standing)	Damanjodi, near Koraput, Odisha		108	Concrete	National Aluminium Company, Abhaya Anjaneya Parichalana Samiti
70	2017	Shiva (bust) "Adiyogi"	Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu		112	Steel	Jaggi Vasudev, Isha Foundation
71	2018	Durga (standing)	Ganga Talao, Mauritius	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	Government of Mauritius (Anil Bachoo)
72	2018	Vallabhai Patel (standing) "Statue of Unity"	Kevadiya, Gujarat	Ram Sutar	597	Concrete	Government of Gujarat, Government of India (Narendra Modi, Bharatiya Janata Party)
73	(Stayed by court, 2019)	Shivaji (equestrian)	Mumbai	Ram Sutar	(690)	Concrete	Government of Maharashtra
74	(In progress, 2019)	Hanuman (standing)	Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh	Shankar (structural engineer)	(176)	Concrete	Sri Ram Bhaktha Hanuman Seva Samithi Trust
75	(In progress, 2019)	Saibaba (seated)	Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh	Sridhar	72	Concrete	Virat Sai Dham Seva Samiti
76	(Proposed)	Maitreya (seated)	Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh		200		Lama Zopa Rinpoche

This page intentionally left blank

PLATE 1 Kashinath, 65-ft. seated Shiva at Kids Kemp department store, also known as Kemp Fort, Old Airport Road, Bangalore, inaugurated in 1995. Photographed in 2007.

PLATE 2 Kashinath, 123-ft. seated Shiva, Murudeshwar, Karnataka, completed in 2002. View from Shri Murudeshwara temple gopuram, March 2012.

PLATE 3 135-ft. seated Guru Rinpoche, or Padmasambhava, at Samdruptse Hill, Namchi, Sikkim, inaugurated in 2004. Initial design by Naresh Kumar Varma; completed by Lobdon Lhundrup, Bhutan. Photographed in March 2013.

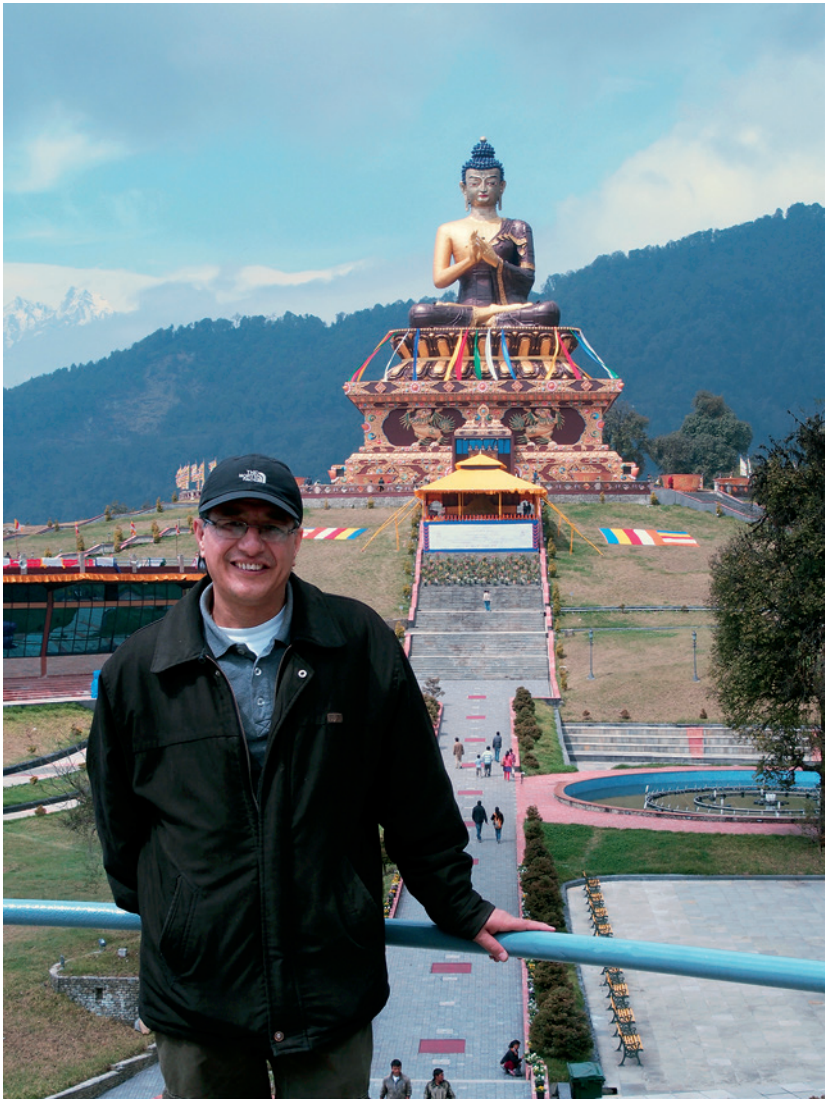

PLATE 4 Sanjay Sakya with Sakya brothers' 95-ft. seated Sakyamuni at Ravangla, Sikkim, before the statue's inauguration in March 2013.

PLATE 5 Thangam Subramanian, 85-ft. standing Hanuman, inaugurated in 2003, and plywood cutout featuring Sri Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swami, leader of the Avadhoota Datta Peetham. Sri Dattatreya Yoga Center, Carapichaima, Trinidad, December 2009.

PLATE 6 Vivekananda Rock Memorial (left) and Thiruvalluvar statue (right). Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, April 2018.

PLATE 7 (*above*)
Kanwariya pilgrims returning from Haridwar arriving at Birla Kanan for a rest stop and to pay obeisance to Mangal Mahadev, July 2009.

PLATE 8 (*left*)
Mangal Mahadev illuminated at night, Birla Kanan, May 2009.

PLATE 9 (*right*)
Shri Sundhara Rameshwara lingam, under Shiva statue, Murudeshwar, including lingam cover in the form of Shiva's head and painted diorama-like backdrop. March 2012.

PLATE 10 (*below*)
View of Murudeshwar beach from steps ascending to Shiva statue, with rajagopuram under construction on right. December 2007.

PLATE 11 (*above*)
Mural in Gita Ashram prayer hall, Carapichaima, Trinidad, December 2009.

PLATE 12 (*left*)
Gita Ashram mural, detail showing Shiva lingam in gazebo with *jhandis* (flags) next to it. Trinidad, December 2009.

PLATE 13 (*above*)
View of temple complex at Ganga Talao, Mauritius, New Year's Day, 2014. On the far side of the lake is the Hindu Maha Sabha's Kashi Vishwanath Mandir.

PLATE 14 (*right*)
Shiva statue outside Mauritiuseshwarnath Shiv Jyotir Lingum temple (Shiv Parivar Mandir) with monumental Shiva in the background. Ganga Talao, Mauritius, January 2014.

EMERGENCE

Here is a list of top 10 tallest Hindu God Murtis (Statue or idols) in the World. . . . As per Hindu tradition, the Supreme Truth (Brahman) is beyond imagination. But human beings need a form to worship and we modern day people are obsessed with size and height. So we are constantly increasing the size of Hindu Murtis. Therefore this list will be constantly updated.

—ABHILASH RAJENDRAN

The history of images is a history of objects that are temporally impure, complex, overdetermined. It is therefore a history of polychronistic, heterochronistic, or anachronistic objects. . . . Is it not to say . . . that the history of art is itself an anachronistic discipline, for better or for worse?

—GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

The transition from the first kind of artistic reception [cult value] to the second [exhibition value] characterizes the history of artistic reception in general. Apart from that, a certain oscillation between these two polar modes of reception can be demonstrated for each work of art.

—WALTER BENJAMIN

MONUMENTAL STATUES

On January 9, 2003, the front page of the *New York Times* carried a picture of a 108-ft. concrete statue of the god Krishna that fell as it neared completion at the peri-urban village of Narsinghpur near Gurgaon, on the outskirts of New Delhi, killing at least one person and injuring several others. The Associated Press report on the incident claimed that "the village and people from the surrounding district had raised $417,000 to build the statue," shoring up

the stereotype of Indian villagers as gullible and god-fearing, with dubious priorities. The local priest was quoted as calling the incident a "bad omen" (despite the statue's numerologically auspicious height of 108 ft.). A more in-depth piece in an engineering journal put the cost of the statue at $200,000.[1] It provided the scientific explanation, interviewing an architect who blamed the absence of soil testing (the statue was situated in a dried-up pond) and the imbalance created by a pose with the worst possible center of gravity, in which Krishna's massive concrete arms held his flute off to one side of his head. It also noted that the sculptor of the statue was a traditional *murtikar* (icon maker), with no formal training in architecture or engineering, who had earlier successfully built an 80-ft. Shiva and a 60-ft. Hanuman.

And, indeed, although this statue fell, dozens of other giant icons have been springing up, and staying up, all over India and amid the Indian diaspora since the late 1980s—that is, in tandem with the rollout of economic reforms and the resurgence of Hindu nationalist politics. (For a map, timeline, and list, see figures FM.1, FM.2, TABLE FM.1.) Initially emerging in stone and concrete, with heights of around 20–30 ft., they had reached 140 ft. by 2006 and continued to grow, breaking the world record for the tallest statue in 2018 with a 597-ft. figure of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first home minister and deputy prime minister.[2] While this is a secular figure, most of these colossi are Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain icons. They are usually freestanding, unlike the colossal rock-cut images of earlier South Asian traditions, such as the second-century Swat Valley and sixth-century Bamiyan Buddhas and the medieval Jain statues of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. Many of them are situated in theme parks (another mushrooming feature of India's post-liberalization landscape), featuring religion, culture, leisure/entertainment, political memorials, commerce, environmentalism, or some combination of these. Most notably, they have been increasingly deployed in "statue wars" in which politicians seek to outdo one another in building spectacular statues for their electoral constituencies (known in India as vote banks), despite inevitable public criticism for squandering limited state resources on such symbolic projects. These controversies predate, and differ from, the intensified protests from 2015 onward against Confederate memorials in the United States and statues of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa and elsewhere, which are struggles over historical memory and the ongoing legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racism. The Indian statues are a form of monument that is not necessarily subsumed within the secular frame of memory. However, as this book will argue, as embodiments of public presence they ultimately have very similar political stakes.

In December 2006, I went to Narsinghpur to find out more about the fallen Krishna statue, driven by curiosity—tinged with suspicion—about the story I had read. There I gleaned that the story about the villagers' funding the statue had likely been fed to the media to deflect attention from the statue's effective patron, whose nearby factory manufactured seats for cars and multiplex cinemas, again both key features of the postreform landscape. The company's website described itself as a "365 million dollar conglomerate." I was told that a charitable trust in the name of this entrepreneur's mother had acquired land next to the village temple, perhaps including the pond. It is not clear whether this was wasteland, the village commons, or both; in any event, the pond had dried up and turned into a waste dump as Gurgaon's industrial and housing development pushed down the water table. The trust had built an orphanage with a dispensary and ran occasional "women's empowerment" programs.

The role of the seat baron came as no surprise to me, given that my earlier work on printed bazaar icons emphasized the role of vernacular capitalists in the twentieth-century production and distribution of religious images (more on vernacular capitalism later).[3] But I did not anticipate how quickly the big statue genre would lead me beyond this anonymous domestic capitalist—and others featured more explicitly in this book—to a host of powerful political players: members of state legislative assemblies, cabinet ministers, a panoply of chief ministers, the vice prime minister of Mauritius, the prime minister of India. As I followed the big statue trail over the decade following that 2006 visit to Narsinghpur, I learned that the same industrialist had earlier funded another statue for a large temple complex on the (then) outskirts of Delhi. He was also associated with a later 101-ft. Hanuman in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, the constituency of Kamal Nath, who had served in the United Progressive Alliance government as cabinet minister for commerce and industry, for road transport and highways, and for urban development. So much for the cliché of the god-fearing "common man" as the primary locus and driver of religiosity.

The Chhindwara statue was inaugurated in the run-up to the national elections in 2014, as other politicians scrambled to initiate similar projects for their vote banks. Akhilesh Yadav, then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, laid the foundation stone for a 200-ft. statue of Maitreya in Kushinagar, reviving a plan for a 500-ft. Maitreya that had earlier been abandoned by his predecessor Kumari Mayawati in the face of resistance from farmers (backed by the Congress Party), whose land was being appropriated for the project. Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa of Tamil Nadu announced plans for a "mega

statue" of Thamizh Thaai (Mother Tamil) in a theme park on Tamil ideas of landscape. The Maharashtra government revived plans for a 300-ft. monument to the Maratha king Shivaji on an island off Mumbai in response to the Statue of Unity, a 597-ft. statue of Sardar Patel (twice the size of the Statue of Liberty) that was to become the world's tallest statue, being erected by Narendra Modi, then the chief minister of Gujarat. On October 31, 2018, after his election as prime minister, Modi inaugurated the Statue of Unity; by that time, the proposal for the Shivaji statue had been scaled up to surpass it at 695 ft. That inauguration also unleashed a further spate of proposals for politically motivated colossi all over India, as did the 2019 elections, when Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's proposed 823-ft. (251-meter) statue of the god Ram at the controversial site of Ayodhya joined the fray, vying to surpass the world record.

There is a continuum here between secular and religious figures, which can be seen as part of the same genre. As I describe in chapter 1, not only do they use the same technology and often the same sculptors, but they also, importantly, are incorporated into a similar structure of political patronage, albeit one in which the patronage of religious figures tends to be more at arm's length. Religious icons feed into secular power, while secular figures partake of iconic efficacy and animation. I use the term *icon* to address this spectrum without adjudicating between the contested categories of the religious and the secular, while also taking into account their discursive force.[4] The icon here simply becomes a figurative image that is treated as somehow efficacious. I adopt the term *iconopraxis* (elaborated later) to describe practices of engagement with images within a frame that treats the devotional and the aesthetic as both overlapping and distinct.

This book traces the emergence of the monumental statue genre on the Indian religious and political landscape during the economic reforms of the 1990s and describes the complexly layered forms of aesthetic, political, social, commercial, and religious efficacy in which it participates and that it helps bring into being.[5] It is not enough to simply ascribe this phenomenon to Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva—as though that was a monolithic entity with stable characteristics—or to large scale as a universal expression of power and dominance, for neither "explanation" illuminates the significance of this form in its novelty: as an index of emergence. What distributions and redistributions of the sensible unfold in the appearance of this new form?[6] What is it that becomes otherwise?

This pursuit of emergence—the very newness of the new and its relations with the systems from which it arises—is in the spirit of Walter Benjamin's

legendary artwork essay, which, like this book, is centrally concerned with the politics of new image technologies at a moment of increasingly authoritarian right-wing populism.[7] Emergence takes on a twofold aspect in my account: it refers both to the (re)appearance of the monumental statue form in time and to the literal coming out of religious icons from temples into public space. Outdoor location has been a condition of possibility for the growing size of deities, their publicness giving the colossus form a political charge that was subsequently harnessed by secular icons. This spatial emergence is central to the political stakes here, for the sequestration of icons in the *sancta sanctorum* of temples has been a key element of the priestly power of Brahmins as mediators between mortals and gods, in a sensorium of caste in which the community now self-identifying as Dalit (oppressed)—known during the colonial period as Untouchable—was once forbidden to enter caste Hindu temples. What made it possible to supplement priestly mediation of the gods with this new form, extending beyond caste Hindus to a heterogeneous democratic public that must reckon with the palpable presence of Dalits and non-Hindus? How might this relate to the intensification of caste-based politics that was also a crucial force of transformation in the 1990s, alongside economic liberalization and a resurgent Hindu nationalism?

Examining what monumental icons add to existing devotional practices and how, this book asks what this tells us about the pressure politics exerts on religion. It also asks the reverse: how did these colossi come to be added to a material vocabulary of political and social power that could have contented itself with spectacular infrastructure projects such as dams or with the related and similarly viral mushrooming of temple complexes (of which the global Akshardhams are only the best-known instance)?[8] After all, canonical features of temples such as *gopurams* (entrance towers) and *shikharas* (towers over the central shrine) can—and, as we will see, do—achieve similar heights. In short, these new incarnations of the gods in the time of democracy are a material entry point into tracking the co-constitution of religion and politics. The description of how these intimacies articulate with technological, social, and governmental processes, including economic liberalization, is also necessarily a reflection on time that confronts secular narratives of development and periodization in art history with the uneven, temporally layered modernity and contemporaneity of religion. In the process, it revisits core concepts of the image such as cult value and exhibition value, scale, spectacle, and *darshan* (a key term for describing the devotional engagement with icons in South Asia), as well as their relation to the political valences of publicness and, hence, to the aesthetics of democracy.

In this introduction, I identify the book's presuppositions, stakes, methods, and interventions; its scope; and its limits. In doing so, I briefly gloss some of its informing concepts: sensible infrastructures, iconopraxis, emergence, assemblages, circuits, layered temporalities, and vernacular capitalism.

SENSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURES OF CASTE

A central theoretical presupposition of this account is that the aesthetic is not an epiphenomenon or secondary effect of politics or economy but the very ground on which politics unfolds: that images, what they do with people, and what people do with them, are elements of what I call, as a polemical shorthand, "the sensible infrastructures" of politics. Like other recent work on political images, the book draws on Jacques Rancière's compelling insistence on the centrality of aesthetics to politics, where politics itself is formulated as a redistribution of the sensible arising via dissensus.[9] While Rancière's elaboration remains firmly within the European tradition, I selectively hijack his ideas to the service of nonmetropolitan sites and contemporary public icons—that is, to images that bear a tenuous and contested relation to the domain of "art" and to secular, anthropocentric formulations of the sensible or the aesthetic.[10]

Those familiar with South Asia will recognize the relevance of Rancière's thought to the aesthetics of caste and the sensible regime of untouchability, which I posit as key to the emergence—in both senses—of monumental statues. Central to the relationship between aesthetics and politics for Rancière is the idea of *partage*, an allocation of proper places that entails both separation and sharing within the signifying logic of a given regime. This constitution and classification of roles and status within the polity—as with the occupational hierarchy of caste (as well as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, and so on)—is at the same time also a distribution of the sensible, where "sense" is both knowing and embodied sensing. "Distribution," therefore, also pertains to the relationship between these two forms of sense: how we understand sense experience and how the senses inform knowledge (e.g., the privileged link between knowledge and vision is a particular historical formation). A regime's prevailing aesthetico-political consensus or common sense unfolds via what presents itself to the senses and what is made sense of: who or what can be heard, seen, or—key to caste and untouchability—touched; what is intelligible; what is understood as speech or silenced as noise; who is admitted and who is cast out or outcaste, rendered abject.[11]

This excluded element of the polity is what Rancière calls the "part without a part"; its exclusion plays a defining part in the polity, although this is not

recognized (think here of gendered domestic labor). The caste schema consigns Dalit labor to realms of social activity that are essential but nonetheless considered polluted, such as working with dead bodies (animal and human) or waste. The "part without a part" is not present to the dominant regime of the sensible; its absence is actively enforced through the distributions that inform governance or social practices (such as exclusion from temples, schools, housing, or wells). For Rancière, this is not a preconstituted political subject, a "people" with given characteristics. It *emerges* as a political subject in the process of staking claims, as Dalits did through the Temple Entry Movement in the 1920s–30s, among others. Politics here is the necessarily violent (both symbolic and physical) dissensus through which the claims of the "part without a part" break through a given distribution of the sensible to be heard and seen, to occupy space, to become intelligible, enabling the cognition that is a precondition for recognition.

What Rancière neglects in his emphasis on the radicality of dissensus, but is central to my account, is the ongoing and mutating nature of these struggles and the messy, often violent reterritorializing responses to them as the prevailing order undergoes upheavals and reconfigurations. In the case of caste, one flashpoint for such violence was the announcement in 1990 of plans to implement public service job reservations for "Other Backward Classes" (OBCs) recommended by the report of the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Commission, known as the Mandal Commission. This was met with widespread protests—notably, a spate of self-immolations by upper-caste students—and followed by the rise of OBC and Dalit parties in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, in which public statues played a key role. But there is also a far longer history of attacks (termed "caste atrocities") on Dalit homes and bodies, both human and iconic, as well as of counterassertions in the aesthetic domain such as monumental statues. Such counterassertions by the prevailing regime are comparable to the spikes in the building of Confederate statues in the United States at times of heightened civil rights tensions (1900s and 1950s).[12]

Crucially, the aesthetic here is not restricted to images or to art. Rather, it extends to a far more broadly construed domain of sensation, perception, and intelligibility and the relations between them that Rancière calls a "primary aesthetics."[13] As he puts it, "Aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience."[14] Aesthetics

describes historical (yet functionally a priori) regimes of sense experience; politics hinges on *aesthetic* experiences of matter, form, space, and time. Emergent material forms that constitute an upheaval in an entrenched order, such as public supplements to temple worship (monumental deities, printed icons, outdoor processions, and shrines), are therefore a key element of politics, for this emergence indicates a reconfigured distribution of the sensible.

Given this insistence on the a priori nature of the sensible, the aesthetic or the symbolic cannot be understood merely as the superstructure on a primarily economic base.[15] As I describe in chapter 2, the ubiquitous journalistic critiques of Indian monumental statues that decry the misdirection of public funds to the "merely" symbolic politics of recognition fail to reckon with the value and force of recognition in the prevailing distribution of the sensible. It is against this tendency to think of the aesthetic as *super*structure that I posit "primary aesthetics" as *infra*structure: as the sensible and material infrastructure that enables a given aesthetico-political regime to function.[16] The embodied practices that constitute the infrastructure of caste enact a primary aesthetics in which sense experience and concepts commingle: as spatial exclusion, untouchability, invisibility, illiteracy, silencing, manual labor, and polluting substances for Dalits. Conversely, for Brahmins this regime entails privileged access to and control over icons, sacred texts, writing, scholarship in general, and purifying substances. This is the sensible infrastructure informing my genealogy of public icons (in assemblage with other infrastructures, as the next section elaborates). In keeping with this infrastructural quality, however, caste does not constitute the primary thematic focus here, except in chapter 2. Instead, it runs through the entirety of this account as an omnipresent but relatively subterranean thread, surfacing periodically to show how the ruling order of the sensible has been pervaded by the primary aesthetics of caste.

If the sensible underpins political exclusions that are fundamentally embodied, experiential, and aesthetic, this has implications for its theoretical analysis. The sensible infrastructure of the political first makes itself evident through the claims of the "part without a part"; it does not emerge from prognostic or activist analyses by others. Rather than proceeding, like Plato's philosopher kings, from an avant-garde position of theoretical knowledge to awaken oppressed political subjects or predict the workings of a system, critical analysis by others is, precisely the other way around, a *response* to dissensus. Its challenge is not to lead the struggle but to *sense* it, to be *affected* by it, in order to declare, enact, and strengthen solidarity. So the description of the present here is also necessarily a revisionary and speculative genealogy that attempts in hindsight to retool the sense of sense to see and hear what was