



Disrupting rituals of parliamentary debate: the Indian parliament

Dr Carole Spary
Post-doctoral Fellow, Leverhulme Trust
Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament
Department of Politics and International Studies
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
Tel: 024 765 72511
E-mail: c.spary@warwick.ac.uk

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Dignified conduct of the members of our Legislatures, both inside and outside the Chambers, is a pre-requisite for the success of parliamentary democracy...On many occasions, interruptions lead to pandemonium, with members coming to the well of the House, shouting slogans, even indulging in physical attacks, interrupting others from speaking and totally disregarding, if not even deliberately insulting, the Chair, causing forced adjournment of the scheduled business resulting in loss of the precious time of the House, which subverts the very process of the functioning of our Legislatures, thereby undermining people's faith in them.

Current Speaker of the Lok Sabha (lower house), Somnath Chatterjee MP
(Chatterjee, 2008)

Norms of orderliness sometimes exclude disruptive or emotional forms of expression that can be very effective in getting people's attention and making important points.
(Young, 2002: 56)

Introduction

Let me begin by describing a recent incident in the upper house of the Indian parliament, the Rajya Sabha.¹ On May 6th 2008, the Law Minister, Shri H.R. Bhadrachari, rose to his feet to introduce the women's reservation bill, a bill which seeks to reserve 33 per cent of seats in national and state (sub-national) legislatures for women.² The bill, in its various forms over the last decade, has so far met with a lack of consensus due to disagreement over demands for quotas for 'backward caste' groups within the women's quota, and previous governments have been unsuccessful in introducing and passing the Bill (Rai and Sharma, 2000; Randall, 2006). On May 6th, when the Law Minister rose to introduce the Bill, a noisy confrontation occurred between MPs, followed by a forced adjournment. Members of a party opposing the bill on caste grounds, the Samajwadi Party, approached the Law Minister (who, according to media reports, was sitting in the third row instead of his usual first row seat), upon which a number of women MPs, including Kumari Selja, Ambika Soni and Jayanti Natarajan (all from the ruling Indian National Congress, or INC), sitting either side and in front of the Law Minister rose to form a protective shield around the Minister. Their intervention prevented the Samajwadi MPs who were attempting to snatch the bill from the Minister's hands before he could introduce it. When the Samajwadi Party MPs were unsuccessful, one of them instead took the few sheets of paper he was holding in his hands, held them above his head and in a symbolic gesture seemingly as if he were holding the Bill, he tore the paper into pieces and threw the pieces up into the air. What

¹ I am grateful to Ted Svensson for bringing this incident to my attention.

² The official title of the bill in its current form is 'The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2008.

followed was a quick voice vote in favour of introducing the bill and then a forced adjournment of the house by the Speaker.

This recent incident is an illustrative example of the increasing disruptions witnessed in parliamentary debate in India. Much of this incident was characterised by scenes of disorderly behaviour in the house, full of symbolic gestures and emotional displays. The forced adjournment demonstrated the inability of the Speaker, and by extension the rules and procedures of ritualised parliamentary debate, to discipline and control the conduct of members in the House. Yet, these rhetorical forms of parliamentary interaction and political communication were clearly symbolically significant.

This paper explores the significance of increasing disruptions to parliamentary debate and forced adjournments witnessed in the last two decades in the Indian Parliament. In doing so, it understands parliamentary debate as one of many rituals which embody the symbolic norm of democratic representation in the institution of the Parliament in India. Ritual has not been a common focus of analysis in the study of legislatures apart from a few recent studies (see for example Crewe and Muller, 2006; Crewe, 2005). The research on which this paper is based contributes to a larger research programme, *Gendered Ceremony and Ritual in Parliament*, which is a comparative project analysing ceremony and ritual in the parliaments of the United Kingdom, South Africa and India. Through this research programme we aim to explore further the relationships between political institutions and democratic representation.

This paper asks three key questions, namely i) what norms are embedded within the ritual of parliamentary debate within the chambers of the Indian Parliament?; ii) to what extent do these norms privilege some groups and marginalise and exclude other groups?; and iii) to what extent are parliamentary rituals able to discipline members of parliament to enact parliamentary debate according to these norms? In the first half of the paper I begin by setting out how parliamentary debate within the chambers of parliament may be understood as a performative ritual of democratic representation including how rituals of parliamentary debate are imbued with norms which have the potential to exclude and marginalise non-elite groups. I analyse parliamentary documentation from the Indian parliament on the rituals of chamber deliberation and communication including formal and informal rules, procedures and conventions, in order to understand the norms of 'proper' deliberation in the two chambers of the Indian Parliament. In particular I refer to an educational training film produced by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies

and Training of the Indian parliament: *How to be an effective parliamentarian* (BPST, n.d.-a). I also draw on parliamentary documentation on formal rules of procedure, parliamentary debates, and committee reports.³ In the second half of the paper, I then juxtapose this analysis with a discussion of increasing disruptions to parliamentary debate in the house.

In the course of the paper I make two main arguments. Firstly, an analysis of the formal rules and norms of the Indian parliament challenges to some extent some more general theoretical assumptions pertaining to norms of deliberative interaction, and highlights the specificity of the institutional context in determining norms embedded within parliamentary ritual. Secondly, given the increasing frequency and severity of disruptions, I question the extent to which the ritual enactment of norms in parliamentary debate, particularly a norm of orderliness, is able to substantially shape and discipline the actions of participants.

Rituals of parliamentary debate in the Indian Parliament

As in other parliamentary systems, parliamentary debate in the chambers of the Indian parliament constitutes a ritual which enacts principles of representative and deliberative democracy through its performance within rule-governed sites and modes. A working definition posits ritual as a ‘rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they [the participants] hold to be of special significance’ (Lukes, 1975: 291). More specifically, rituals draw the attention of their participants and their audience to the special significance or social value of the ritual’s symbolic referents, the latter of which might include objects, relationships, ideas and so on (Lukes, 1975: 290). In that ritual is rule-governed, its performance exerts normative pressure on its participants (ibid) to act in certain ways according to a regulatory system of norms or ‘scripts’ which pertain to a historically and culturally specific institutional context (Butler, 2006; Puwar, 2004). In doing so, power operates productively through each performance of ritual in that it ‘helps to define as authoritative certain ways of seeing society: it serves to specify what in society is of special significance...and at the same time, therefore it deflects their attention from other forms...’ (Lukes, 1975: 302). As such, it is the constitutive and disciplinary power of ritual through the

³ The intention is to supplement the analysis here with interviews with members of parliament and observation of parliamentary proceedings at a later date.

reiterated enactment of, and subscription to, the symbolic value of the ritual's referents rather than merely a reflection of a pre-existing consensus on these values. In other words, notwithstanding the limits on how it can be used instrumentally by some to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of others, ritual acts more as a tool of cultural management to bring about value integration (Lane, 1981: 12) than as a benign reflection of a pre-existing value consensus.

The ritualized performance of parliamentary debate is imbued with both spatial and temporal significance (Kürti, 2006: 42). Theorists of the performance of ritual emphasise its corporeal aspect, its embodied element, and at the same time suggest the importance of the spatial ordering of both participants of ritual and ritual events, processes and activities. For instance, referring to the UK parliament, Puwar speaks of the *somatic norm*: that public institutional spaces invite particular bodies (in this case, white males) to inhabit them unquestioningly but that other bodies (female and non-white) are dissonant, alien bodies within these sites, they are 'space invaders', and they create 'ontological anxiety' among those bodies who embody the somatic norm (Puwar, 2004).

At the macro level, the Indian parliament is often metaphorically referred to by parliamentarians and political commentators alike as a 'temple of democracy'. The spatial mapping of activity takes place on many levels: the Indian parliament is bicameral, consisting of two Houses, the Lok Sabha (lower house, or 'House of the People') and the Rajya Sabha (upper house, or 'Council of States'). Formal parliamentary debate takes place in the two chambers of the House as well as in committees, but debate on an informal level may continue in a number of other spaces within the Parliament building such as the library, the parliament canteen, designated rooms for political parties, and other social spaces. The spatial positioning of participants within the horseshoe-shaped chambers represents their position as elected representatives, as members of government or of the opposition, as members of differentiated political parties, and as leading members of their political party and as ministers of government. Spatial embodiment and positioning within the chamber also signifies appropriate and inappropriate areas for members to inhabit, from the elevated and solitary speaker's chair to designated members seats, from the well of the house to the visitors' galleries.

Parliamentary debate is also ritualized through the temporal division of parliamentary membership and activity. Membership of parliament is temporally structured around the election of a new parliament every four to five years in the case of the Lok Sabha, and a rolling

retirement of a third of the (nominated) members of the Rajya Sabha every two years. Further temporal divisions in parliamentary activity are the opening and the closing of parliament during this election cycle, yearly cycles of parliament which consist of three sessions (Budget, Monsoon and Winter sessions)⁴, the opening and closing of each parliament session, and the temporal divisions within each parliamentary session, including the schedule of business, the segregation of government business and private member business on a weekly basis, and on a daily basis by the commencement of question hour, followed by 'Zero Hour'⁵, and afternoon sessions which may include further temporal segmentations of half-hour discussions and so on.

Daily business begins by recognizing the authority of the Speaker by standing upon his or her entry into the Chamber. Parliamentary debate is regulated by a series of formal rules of procedure and informal conventions which symbolize principles of deliberative exchange such as respect for others through turn-taking and detailed procedures (and reprimands) for intervening illegally without the permission of the Speaker or the member speaking. These smaller temporal divisions of parliamentary activity all form part of the larger ritual of parliamentary debate which shapes what can be discussed and when and in what form the debate may take. Each of these particular rituals determine the extent to which debate is regulated, with question hour often highly confrontational between the opposition and the government, but still regulated by the prior admission of questions by the speaker, and with zero hour often being largely unregulated and therefore characterized by more uncertainty, spontaneity, and irregularity.

The 'good' parliamentarian: norms of political communication in the Indian Parliament

How might an examination of the rituals of parliamentary debate – the rules and norms which structure deliberation within the chamber – shed light on which kind of performances are privileged and which are excluded? Looking at the performative aspect of parliamentary rituals highlights those aspects of parliamentary activity that are not necessarily intentioned to be

⁴ These normally take place, respectively, in the months of February to May (with a break during March and April), from mid-July to end August, and from November to December.

⁵ 'Zero Hour' is a uniquely Indian convention which is only informally codified in the rules and procedures of the Indian parliament and consists of a variable period of time following Question Hour where members may raise issues deemed to be of significant public importance. As a result of its informal status, different speakers have varied in their recognition of its sanctity in parliamentary activity, although most recognize it is an important means for holding government accountable and for raising urgent matters not always possible under the strict scheduling of parliamentary business.

primarily functional, instrumental, or efficient, and points to the more symbolic and interpretive ways in which deliberative democracy and democratic representation operates and produces symbolic meaning for its participants and audience. A performative lens also compliments an understanding of ritual as a *stylised and reiterated enactment of norms*.⁶ Furthermore, drawing attention to these norms makes possible a problematisation of what is firmly established as routine parliamentary practice as well as how it is reproduced (or disrupted) through parliamentary ritual and sedimented into institutional culture.

Parliamentary documentation and training material provides significant support and resources for new parliamentarians on entering the institution as a newly elected member, and help to shape the way in which new members become acquainted with parliamentary ceremony and ritual (Rosenblatt, 2007). In this way, such documentation and training material becomes an important source for identifying the particular norms and values which parliament as an institution seeks to inculcate in new members with a view to reproducing the institutional culture. Parliamentary actors occupying privileged positions of authority, such as parliament staff as experts in parliamentary procedure as well as speakers of both chambers and to some extent eminent parliamentarians (particularly those rewarded with the distinction of the Outstanding Parliamentarian award), play a central role in this institutional reproduction. It is for this reason that they might be referred to as '*ritual specialists*' (Lane, 1981: 14), or as those who are in a position to define what the dominant norms embedded in rituals of parliamentary debate should be. I draw on one such example here: *How to be an Effective Parliamentarian* is a training video produced by the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training during the previous government (1999-2004) (BPST, n.d.-a). The Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training was established in 1976 as part of the parliament secretariat primarily to provide training and orientation to parliamentarians and parliamentary officials, but also to hold training programs, study visits and tours for foreign parliamentarians and foreign officials, and to host lectures and seminars on issues of interest to parliamentarians. Through interviews with senior MPs such as the former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and current and former speakers including Somnath Chatterjee and Shivraj Patil and selected footage of MPs speaking and debating within

⁶ Blom Hansen (2004) has applied Butler's notion of the performative to analyse political performances of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and can be considered the foremost proponent of this approach in the Indian context.

parliament chambers, the training video provides guidance on how to make most effective use of parliamentary rules and procedures as well as appropriate ways of speaking in the chamber.⁷

I also refer to formal rules of procedure that govern parliamentary practice and procedures in the two chambers of parliament as well as texts of previous debates.⁸ By means of an analytical framework, I draw upon Young's discussion of deliberative democracy and her critique of the norms which often underpin potentially exclusionary but accepted forms of political communication within deliberative fora (Young, 2002).⁹ Young identifies three such norms: a norm of articulateness, a norm of orderliness, and a norm of dispassionateness, which together, she argues, can constitute a form of 'internal exclusion' in democratic debate. Internal exclusion means that while debate appears to be inclusive of diverse and unequal groups in the political arena, the norms of political communication serve to privilege particular groups within this arena while excluding and devaluing other groups (Young, 2002: 38).

Young defines a *norm of articulateness* as a culturally-specific form of expression which privileges 'speech that is formal and general', 'framed as straightforward assertion' rather than 'circuitous, hesitant, or questioning expression', which 'proceeds from premise to conclusion in an orderly fashion', rather than 'halting or circuitous speech', and which is defined by 'clarity' and 'subtlety' (Young, 2002: 38-9). Confining deliberative democracy to rational speech means privileging 'universalistic, dispassionate, culturally and stylistically neutral arguments that focus the mind on their evidence and logical connections, rather than move the heart or engage the imagination' (Young, 2002: 63). Privileging rational speech also means privileging forms of expression more common to highly educated or socially privileged people (ibid).

⁷ The video lasts approximately 40 minutes, and is narrated in English with English language subtitles where necessary.

⁸ While the election of members to each of the two chambers differs, as does various aspects of their purpose, I will not be making a significant distinction here between the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the norms of debate. More research is needed to ascertain whether and how one might make a distinction, but it is not clear cut as the example in the UK between the House of Commons and the House of Lords might suggest.

⁹ As will be seen later, the application of Young's theoretical critique of norms of deliberation to the parliamentary context suggests that parliamentary institutions, as public fora, have particular traits which are only partially comparable to other public institutional contexts, of which Young refers to more generally. However, as many others have discussed more thoroughly than I will here, in choosing to apply this framework to the Indian case, we have to exercise caution when transposing concepts that derive from a largely Eurocentric framework (Drexler, 2007). This is particularly important in the context of institutional sedimentation - despite the institutional design of the Indian parliament being of Western, and non-Indian origin, more than fifty years of parliamentary democracy in India has enabled a degree of institutional evolution in terms of the normative standards of parliamentarians.

In the context of the Indian parliament, training material suggests that articulateness is particularly valued by both formal and informal rules of parliamentary debate in the house as one MP explains:

Being an orator is definitely an advantage, it's essential to be a good debator. All do not possess the talent of speaking well but if a person speaks clearly and succinctly, he can make the same impact.

Nitish Kumar, MP, Lok Sabha (BPST, n.d.-a)

Rational, reasoned and logically progressive arguments are also valued. As the narrator suggests, 'while preparing for a speech, a member should know the essential difference between a parliamentary and a public speech. In a parliamentary speech, force of logic is preferred to theatrics' (BPST, n.d.-a). Rule 356 states that a member may be directed to discontinue his speech if 'he [sic] persists in irrelevance or in tedious repetition either of his [sic] own arguments or of the arguments used by other members in debate' (Lok Sabha, 2004).

The presence or absence of a norm of dispassionateness in the Indian parliament is a lot more ambiguous and has a more complex relationship than suggested by Young's link with articulateness. For Young, *a norm of dispassionateness* 'dismisses and devalues embodied forms of expression, emotion, and figurative expressions'. Central to this norm is a dichotomous distinction between reason and emotion, associating the former with objectivity and calmness and the latter with irrationality and a lack of objectivity. Under conditions where a norm of dispassionateness is dominant, emotional and passionate displays may 'taint' or weaken assertions and arguments because they are understood as signs of weakness and a lack of control (Young, 2002: 39-40).¹⁰ Young suggests that, despite all its intentions to abstract from particularity, specificity, and differentiation, this privileging of dispassionateness in fact reflects other aspects of social privilege, in particular what she calls the 'speech culture of white middle-class men' (Young, 2002: 39-40). In contrast, she suggests that 'the speech culture of women, racialized or ethnicized minorities, and working-class people, on the other hand, often is, or is perceived to be, more excited and embodied, values more the expression of emotion, uses figurative language, modulates tones of voice, and gestures widely' (Young, 2002: 39-40). In

¹⁰ Young's earlier work on the 'ideal of impartiality' discusses the origins of this norm of dispassionateness, presenting the by-now well rehearsed feminist debates on the public/private divide between public masculine normative reason and private feminine desire and affectivity (Young, 1987).

this sense, norms of deliberation will marginalize and exclude groups whose form of expression does not reflect this dominant norm of dispassionateness.

Yet this process is not so clear cut in the context of the Indian parliament. On one occasion in 2007, prior to the initiation of a short duration discussion on an inter-state issue, the current speaker of the Lok Sabha, Somnath Chatterjee, pleaded with members to discuss the ‘emotive issue’ in a ‘constructive and *dispassionate* manner...without hurting the sentiments of one another and in a manner that enhances the dignity of the House and its Members’ (Lok Sabha, 2007d, my emphasis).¹¹ Yet, guidance on how to be an effective speaker in parliament suggests that one must be passionate and have conviction (BPST, n.d.-a). To be effective, oratorical forms of communication must also include emotive appeals, as another member explains:

if he [sic] has a good proficiency in language, and if he [sic] has developed the art of communication, and his [sic] way of delivery and way of communication is lucid, direct and *coming from the heart and reaching the heart*, he [sic] can become a successful parliamentarian.

Shivraj Patil MP, former speaker of the Lok Sabha (BPST, n.d.-a)

Similarly, the narrator of *How To Be An Effective Parliamentarian* also emphasizes the role of more rhetorical modes of argument: that ‘a member need not resort to lung power to attract the attention of the House. Instead, speeches work like a charm, when wit, humour and even satire are artfully woven in’ (BPST, n.d.-a). Articulateness is not guaranteed by a dispassionate and rational, reasoned appeal to statistically supported arguments as the same member points out:

Some people collect information and statistics and if you want to make the speech on the basis of statistics and information, well, to some extent they will be able to influence, but ultimately, they do not carry conviction.

(Shivraj Patil MP, in BPST, n.d.-a)

Conviction in the sense described here implies a degree of emotional investment on behalf of the member speaking, which stands contrary to a norm of dispassionateness. *How To Be An Effective Parliamentarian* also states that to be a good parliamentarian, members have to *empathise* with the grassroots concerns of their constituents. Patil’s comment further suggests that if political

¹¹ This short duration discussion referred to the Final Award Decision of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, which is a long-standing controversial inter-state dispute between the states of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Pondicherry, over the distribution and use of water from the Cauvery River. Despite the Speaker’s pleas, the discussion later resulted in a forced adjournment.

communication is designed to influence and persuade others to one's perspective, then speeches are best delivered as passionate as opposed to dispassionate statements.

Perhaps the strongest presence of Young's three norms of deliberation within formal rules and norms of parliamentary debate is the *norm of orderliness*. For Young, frequently, norms of articulateness and dispassionateness will combine to constitute an understanding of 'civilised' conduct, and to exclude other forms of expression as disorderly, disruptive, and sometimes 'extreme' (Young, 2002: 47). This norm of orderliness serves not only to prohibit such forms of expression but also to discredit the views, values and ideas of those adopting more disruptive forms of expression. Yet, as Young argues, public demonstration, often characterised by disruptive activities, 'is a most important and often effective mode of expressing opposition and criticism, and of calling powerful actors to account' (Young, 2002: 48). In this sense, *disorderliness* may sometimes serve as 'an important tool of critical communication aimed at calling attention to the unreasonableness of others' in that disruption and disorderliness may interrupt processes of exclusion of the marginalized by the privileged (Young, 2002: 49).

In the Indian parliament, concern for order underpins a large majority of the formal rules of procedure and thus it might be overly laborious to re-present them here, but a few examples will suffice. Rules of procedure for the Lok Sabha explicitly address the issue of disorderly behaviour: rule 349 states *inter alia* that 'whilst the House is sitting, a member...shall not interrupt any member while speaking by disorderly expression or noises or in any other disorderly manner;... shall maintain silence when not speaking in the House;... shall not obstruct proceedings, hiss or interrupt and shall avoid making running commentaries when another member is speaking;... [and] *shall not shout slogans in the House*' (Lok Sabha, 2004, my emphasis). Articulateness is also governed by rules which exclude 'unparliamentary expressions' and by regulations on speaking from designated seats.

Notions of dignity and decorum occupy a central place in the concern over (dis)orderly behaviour in parliament. The prestige of parliament as an institution of democracy, it is argued, is intimately linked to the behaviour of its members, and thus to the ability of key persons including the speakers, the whips and so on, to control and discipline the behaviour of members. The narrator of *How To Be An Effective Parliamentarian* states

it is the duty of a member to zealously guard the dignity of the sovereign institution through his or her immaculate behaviour. A member can earn the respect of others by how he or she relates with them. Respect begets respect. Every member should strive to

uphold the traditions. He or she must remember that while becoming an effective parliamentarian requires ability and devotion, it also demands a large measure of co-operation, self-discipline, and restraint.

(BPST, n.d.-a)

Rules relating to reprimanding members on the basis of disorderly conduct during parliamentary debate are numerous and allow for suspension and expulsion. Yet, nowhere is this norm of orderliness more strictly emphasised than in reference to the President's Address, as part of perhaps the foremost symbolic ceremony of the Indian parliament, the periodic (re)opening of parliament. Documentation on parliamentary procedures states:

President's Address to both the Houses of Parliament assembled together is the most solemn and formal act under the Constitution. Utmost dignity and decorum befitting that occasion is maintained. Any action on the part of a member which mars the occasion of the President's Address or creates disturbance is punishable by the House to which he belongs.

(Lok Sabha, n.d., para 5)

Finally, order and adherence to the formal rules of procedure is presented as both necessary and beneficial for members. Adherence to the rules is necessary for their ability to function in parliament:

...mere understanding of issues is not enough. A member needs the ability to use the available parliamentary opportunities to create the maximum impact. To make this possible, a thorough grounding in the rules, procedures, conventions and customs of parliament is required.

(BPST, n.d.-a)

But perhaps more significantly, observation of formal rules will ensure that they become effective parliamentarians and fulfill their representative duties (BPST, n.d.-a). As such, the narrator of the training video suggests that, 'armed with the rules, a member can secure his or her rights in Parliament. Well wielded, they can become potent weapons... Those who master the rules, rule the game' (BPST, n.d.-a). Given this strict emphasis on orderliness and adherence to the rules in the Indian parliament, it is curious that disruptions to parliamentary debates, in the form of disorderly conduct during debates and forced adjournments, have increased in frequency in the last two decades.

However, before discussing these incidences of disruption in detail, it is important to place issues of parliamentary norms, rituals, and representation in their wider institutional context. Central to the significance of the Indian case is the issue of ongoing institutional change. In the

next section I briefly discuss simultaneous changes in Indian electoral politics and democratic representation more generally.

Changing contours of Indian politics

It is often suggested that in recent years India's Parliament has grown increasingly more inclusive and representative of India's diverse social groups. At Independence, India adopted the British Westminster model of parliamentary democracy with some modifications for the federal arrangement of government. Parliament was initially dominated by the Indian nationalist elite, many of whom were forward castes, upper middle class Hindu men. As Jayal argues, 'the character of Parliament has certainly changed, as many non-elite groups that were not formerly a part of the political process now are' (Jayal, 2006: 183).

In part, this is due to significant changes in India's party system. The decline of the single dominant party system of the Congress Party, the rise of parties appealing to the lower castes as well as regionally based parties, all point to the fragmentation of party politics, from which has emerged in the last two decades a kind of coalition politics both at the centre and in the States. Simultaneously (and perhaps not unrelatedly), debates about the decline of Indian politics, including the weakening of parliament as an institution under Indira Gandhi's governments in the 1960s and 1970s, the perceived increasing criminalization of Indian politics and politicians, and the diminishing amount of time taken in debating important legislation have raised concerns about the quality and legitimacy of representative democracy in India and the accountability of parliamentary institutions, parliamentarians, politicians, and political parties (Rubinoff, 1998; Agarwal, 2005; Hardgrave and Kochanek, 2000)

This changed context of electoral politics suggests that political representation has grown increasingly complex. The sheer level of diversity in India - through intersections between group identities along lines of caste, class, sex, religion, region, language, age, and so on - makes any identification of elite groups highly complex. In terms of religion, Hindus dominate in number in the Indian parliament slightly more disproportionately than they do as a proportion of the population, and Muslims are an underrepresented minority. A strong regional bias exists within the lower house of parliament due to the distribution of seats - nearly half of the seats in the Lok

Sabha (239 out of 543, or 44%) are occupied by northern Hindi-speaking states.¹² Yet this regional bias intersects with politics along other axes in terms of coalition politics, the rise of regional or caste-based parties, and political competition within parliament. Agarwal (2005; 83) suggests that ‘as regional parties come to control state governments more pervasively, party affiliations of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha members are likely to grow more heterogeneous.’ If Agarwal is correct, this may complicate the ways in which political parties communicate with each other through parliamentary debate, potentially making the latter more volatile due to heightened competition.¹³

In terms of the participation of women in parliament, as in many parliaments around the world, male MPs dominate parliament where female MPs make up just over 9 per cent in the lower house (the Upper house fares only slightly better at just under 10 per cent). One justification that resurfaces time and again for increasing women’s participation (although somewhat now discredited by more high profile cases) has been that women are less likely to be corrupt and that increasing their participation in politics will to some extent redress the rising criminalization of politics in India. However, while this justification is theoretically problematic because it is based on an essentialised comparison of male and female behavioural traits, it is not always possible to sustain this argument in the Indian empirical case, and thus employing it has the potential to jeopardise women’s claims to participation in politics. Yet it is still possible that female MPs may draw on this moral capital in a process of self-stylisation to suggest how they *perform* politics differently to male MPs (Spary, 2007).

¹² This regional grouping by Jayal (2006: 117) consists of the Indian States of Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Chandigarh (Union Territory) and Delhi (National Capital Territory). This figure is based on the distribution of seats prior to the recent delimitation exercise undertaken by the Delimitation Commission.

¹³ This phenomenon is also not confined to the national parliament. In a comparative study of subnational (State) legislatures in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and West Bengal, Pai and Sharma (2005: 56-59) suggest that in the case of UP, there is a clear link between the limited time available to discuss non-government business and incidences of disorderly conduct. They argue that, ‘frustrated at not being able to speak and raise issues they consider important, members sometimes tend to adopt strong-arm tactics and create disturbances in the Assembly’ (2005: 54). Pai and Sharma (2005) also note that a significant difference can be observed between the two states under study in the occurrence of disruptive and disorderly behaviour, with UP experiencing such behaviour much more frequently compared to the West Bengal state legislature. They suggest that this is a more acute problem in the states than in the Lok Sabha.

Forward castes¹⁴ have traditionally dominated the Indian parliament in number although the so-called backward castes (or ‘classes’ in the official terminology) have increased their presence in parliament from 32 per cent in the Tenth Lok Sabha (1991-1996) to 40 per cent in the current 14th Lok Sabha (2004-) (Jayal, 2006: 183). But Scheduled Castes only ever marginally exceed their constitutionally-mandated reservation of nearly 15 per cent, unlike Scheduled Tribes who, due to their geographical and demographic concentration in some areas are often successful at contesting general seats over and above their reserved quota of 7 per cent of seats (ibid).

In the context of the increasing participation of lower caste groups in electoral politics in India, Varshney (2000: 7) suggests that ‘democracy has been substantially indigenised, and the shadow of Oxbridge has left India’s political centre-stage’. But for Varshney the impact of this ‘vernacularisation’ of Indian politics is unclear. He asks

Does the rising vernacularization mean that India’s democracy is becoming more participatory and inclusive, or simply more chaotic and unruly? Or, are such developments mere cosmetic changes on the surface, a political veneer concealing an unchanging socioeconomic structure of power and privilege?

(Varshney, 2000: 7)

To some, this proposition - that the inclusion of lower caste groups within Indian politics will make it more disorderly and rowdy – is understandably problematic because it posits a higher caste/lower caste dichotomy of civilised/barbaric. But Varshney’s questions raise an important point – do these new entrants to party and parliamentary politics in India have different styles of *doing* politics? Or are they socialised into political institutions to perform politics in particular ways appropriate to the institutional context, thus retaining the status quo of ‘power and privilege’? Although we might still argue that the Indian parliament still does not represent the true diversity of the Indian polity, *it is because the composition of the Indian political elite has changed significantly enough in recent years that we should examine in more detail whether these changes have had an impact on the performance of representative politics.*¹⁵ Important

¹⁴ Jayal (2006) provides a neat summary of the composition of this group, describing it as a residual category, comprising of those remaining Indian citizens not included in the socio-economic groups entitled to government reservations as notified in the Constitution and the subsequent Mandal Commission (e.g. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes).

¹⁵ It is important to recognise that the institutional specificity of the norms that shape the acceptability of disorderly behaviour in different parliamentary contexts will vary. While adversarial, combative style exchanges of *words* are quite common in the UK parliament, particularly during Question Time, to the best of my knowledge, more overtly physical protests have not been witnessed, at least in recent years (although it is well known that the floor markings which run parallel to the members’ benches in the House of Commons represent the limit on the proximity allowed

questions include to what extent might changes in party politics in India impact upon the form of parliamentary performance? To what extent have parliamentary ceremony and ritual resisted or incorporated this increasing diversity? Might the growing trend of disruptions in parliament be a reflection of escalated political competition? In the final section of this paper, I explore this growing trend and its implications for the significance and reproduction of the ritual of parliamentary debate in the Indian parliament.

A ‘disease of democracy’ or disruptive subversions?

So far, the analysis presents only a partial picture of the norms embedded within rituals of parliamentary debate. Organisational training material and formal rules of procedure are likely to be only indicative of *formal* norms, and are less likely to tell us anything about *informal* norms which also become sedimented within institutional culture and are enacted and reiterated through ritual.¹⁶ Disruption to parliamentary debates within the Indian parliament has become more prevalent since the late 1990s. In the three parliamentary sittings of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha in 2007 alone, an astonishing 128 hours were lost due to forced adjournments by the Speaker as a result of unruly behaviour (Lok Sabha, 2007a, 2007b, 2008). While Pai and Sharma (2005) suggest that disorderly conduct, at least in the state assemblies, is not a completely new phenomenon and has been common in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh since the late 1960s, it is since the 1990s that the increasing frequency and severity of disruptions have become the subject of periodic resolutions to rid the house of unruly behaviour and abide by the rules and conventions governing the ritual of parliamentary debate. So serious is the concern with disorderly behaviour in the Indian parliament, that the current Speaker of the Lok Sabha Somnath Chatterjee recently referred to disruptions, forced adjournments, and disrespect for the Speaker’s authority as a ‘disease of democracy’ (Times of India, 2007).

between government and opposition MPs based on sword length). Yet, there have been instances further afield, however; to take only a very selective few examples, physical clashes between members have occurred recently in 2005 in the Ukrainian parliament (Guardian, 2005) and in 2007 in the Taiwanese parliament (BBC News Online, 2007).¹⁵ As such, disorderly conduct is certainly not confined to the Indian case. But it is important to explore occurrences of disruption to parliamentary ritual within its institutional and historical context.

¹⁶ Defining the term ‘norm’ is complex given that dictionary definitions provide contrasting uses of the term: ‘a norm’ is defined as ‘a required or acceptable standard’ whereas ‘the norm’ is defined as ‘the usual or standard thing’ (Compact Oxford English Dictionary). Here I loosely associate formal norms with the first definition, and informal norms with the latter, whilst being aware that there are significant overlaps and exceptions to this application.

A dictionary definition of the verb ‘to disrupt’ is to ‘prevent something, especially a system, process or event, from continuing as usual or as expected’ (Cambridge Online Advanced Learners Dictionary). Here I define disruption in the context of the parliamentary debate in two senses: firstly, very literally, as an interruption to parliamentary business and procedure, and secondly, more figuratively, as an interruption to the norms embedded within the ritual of parliamentary debate discussed in the previous section. I focus on two issues related to these two definitions of disruption, and their significance for studying parliamentary ritual. The first concerns the capacity of a ritual, as rule-governed activity, to discipline its participants. The second concerns whether disruptive styles of performance provide alternative opportunities to those internally excluded and marginalised within established practices of debate to intervene and make their voice heard. On the first, to the extent that disruption within the chamber involves an interruption of the formal ritual of parliamentary debate, it is potentially illustrative of i) the effectiveness of ritual as a rule-governed activity to govern the actions of its participants, ii) the symbolic significance (or not) of the ritual for both its participants and audience, and iii) the vulnerability of that symbolic significance and the importance placed on the reproduction of ritual in the face of such vulnerability.

On the second, disruptive performances violate norms of articulateness, dispassionateness and orderliness and embody some of the features of what Young calls ‘rhetorical’ forms of expression.¹⁷ But does this suggest that disruptive styles of performance are any more inclusive than those that follow norms of orderliness? Drexler (2007: 12) suggests that ‘disruption of process or routine follows from, and is followed by, disruption of the reasonable and accepted’. As such, oppositional, performative action moves beyond the markers of certainty (and orderliness) by creating spontaneous moments of uncertainty where the possibilities for creativity and political freedom emerge (ibid: 13). Following Drexler’s argument, disruptive protests within the chamber exceed the boundaries of orderly parliamentary ritual norms and practices and create opportunities for contestation. Both aspects, the disciplinary capacity of

¹⁷Young sees rhetoric as ‘the flesh and blood of political communication’ and defines it as ‘the various ways something can be said, which colour and condition its substantive content’ (Young, 2002: 64). This may include any or all of the following aspects: emotional tone including expressions of passion; figures of speech and associated styles of expression such as playful or humorous, or grave or provocative; non-speech forms of expression such as visual and symbolic gestures; and particularity and specificity in directing all of the above to a particular audience (Young, 2002: 64-5). Young suggests that norms of dispassionateness, articulateness and orderliness result in the neglect of rhetorical forms of political communication. As we will see here, in the context of the Indian parliament, rhetoric is not as neglected as a form of political communication as Young’s theoretical argument suggests.

parliamentary ritual and the possibilities for alternative forms of contestatory politics within parliamentary debate, are important for understanding the relationship between parliamentary ritual and the participation of marginalized groups.

In the introduction to this paper I gave an example of one such incidence of disruption to parliamentary debate occurring recently in 2008. Disruptions¹⁸, as seen in this example, typically involve interruptions to the order of business or to debate in the house followed by an attempt to restore order by the Speaker, and if unsuccessful, a forced adjournment, on some occasions for only a matter of minutes, on others, for the rest of the day. Disruptions which are followed by forced adjournment often involve slogan-shouting by members and chaotic scenes including a rush of protesting members into the well of the house. In this sense, disruptions often involve a violation of the appropriate use of space¹⁹ in the chamber (the well of the house is particularly symbolic) and parliamentary procedure regarding turn-taking, the use of ‘unparliamentary expressions’, and defiance of the authority of the speaker to decide the order of business and regulate proceedings among members. Certainly, disruptions do not occur over light-hearted issues and many incidences have occurred where members have tried unsuccessfully to raise issues of urgent public importance outside of the scheduled order of business, including at the start of Question Hour.²⁰ Yet often (but not always) disruptions do not arise from heated debates over legislation; in fact, the decline in the time discussing legislation and the number of bills passed with only a minimum of discussion has been a major concern over the declining standards of debate in the Indian Parliament.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, disruptions are usually instigated by opposition members. In this sense, understanding the substantive matter of disruptions may be only *as important as* understanding disorder as a mechanism to *disrupt the flow* of a scenario or process which is not proceeding in the desired direction or with the desired results (Drexler, 2007). Disruption may enable opposition members to subvert the extent to which government is able to determine the parliamentary agenda. Yet not all parliamentary systems conform to a strict binary logic of a

¹⁸ Disruption, as defined and discussed here, is only one possible form of subversion and of course other, perhaps more successful forms of subversion exist - for example, ignoring female members’ contributions in debates (Childs, 2004: 185).

¹⁹ Rule 361 of the Rules of Procedure in the Lok Sabha states that ‘whenever the Speaker rises he shall be heard in silence and any member who is then speaking or offering to speak shall immediately resume his seat... No member shall leave his seat while the Speaker is addressing the House’ (Lok Sabha, 2004).

²⁰ The adjournment motion exists to facilitate members raising such issues and adjourns normal parliamentary business to accommodate urgency. Adjournment motions are allowed at the discretion of the Speaker.

Westminster model of government and opposition (Kaiser, 2008). In India, pluralist coalition politics at times blurs the distinction between government and opposition, making disruption as a strategy of opposition more complex. So, while opposition MPs are often culpable for disruptions, it is not unheard of for members of a party in coalition with the government to also disrupt proceedings. For example, in 2003, the Lok Sabha leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) disrupted proceedings after demanding the resignation of a government minister, following a statement to a similar effect by his party leader and Chief Minister of the State of Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati. At the time, the party held an alliance with the leading party of government, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP President Venkiah Naidu was quoted as telling a press conference that ‘such behaviour (stalling proceedings in Parliament) by an ally is not a happy thing’ (Frontline, 2003).²¹ Similarly, deep-seated disagreements arose recently between ruling-coalition partners, the Left parties and the Congress Party, over the civil nuclear energy agreement with the United States government. These disagreements have consistently led to stallings of proceedings in parliament, have destabilised coalition alliances, and have provided considerable fodder to opposition parties.

But how has parliament sought to more forcibly discipline its own members? The issue of disruptions during house proceedings has been an enduring concern for presiding officers of Indian parliaments and legislatures. Not surprisingly given their central role in maintaining order in the Chambers, Speakers of both houses have often been at the forefront of criticising unruly behaviour and disorderly proceedings. Yet, attempts to discipline disorderly conduct have had limited success. In 1992, a presiding officers’ conference suggested convening an All India level conference to deliberate on issues of discipline and decorum in legislatures. Another conference followed in September of the same year, but had little impact: it resolved to reiterate the responsibilities of legislators and suggested political parties should draw up and enforce codes of conduct for their members. In October 1996, at the presiding officers’ conference in New Delhi it was suggested that an Ethics Committee be set up, which was established in the following year in the Rajya Sabha. The ad hoc Committee on Ethics defines its purpose as to ‘oversee the moral and ethical conduct of members’ and ‘frame rules specifying acts which constitute unethical

²¹ The parliamentary disruption also had consequences beyond the confines of parliament when the BJP threatened to withdraw support for Mayawati’s State government in Uttar Pradesh where a coalition agreement also existed between the two parties (*ibid*).

conduct' (Rajya Sabha, 2002). It acts as an 'internal self-regulatory mechanism which aims at inculcating in the members certain standard norms of behaviour' (Rajya Sabha, 2002). The Ethics Committee have also appealed to the leaders of political parties to 'co-operate effectively' with the presiding officers of the legislatures in enforcing discipline...[and] ensure their members to faithfully adhere to the norms of discipline and decorous behaviour in the House' (Rajya Sabha, 2002: para 18).

However, the Ethics Committee have acknowledged the difficulties in disciplining the behaviour on members of the House, particularly in drafting a code of conduct for members:

There can be no single remedy for it...[E]thical questions cannot be dealt with entirely by legislation. These are mainly matters of one's conscience. The Committee is also aware that merely by prescribing a Code of Conduct the problem cannot be solved. However, the Code of Conduct...could help in evolving certain standard norms of behaviour which everyone intending to enter a legislature is expected to follow.

(Rajya Sabha, 2002)

Two attempts have also been made to introduce Private Members Bills to introduce disincentives for members of parliament to discourage them from disorderly conduct, such as withdrawing members' daily allowances. Proposals such as these have been underpinned by an argument that disruptions to proceedings are economically inefficient and costly to the national economy (Rajya Sabha, 2002: para 17; Speaker Somnath Chatterjee cited in Frontline, 2008).

In contrast to the economic argument, shaming parliamentarians' over their unruly behaviour is reflected in appeals to restore standards of parliamentary behaviour and avoid risking the vulnerability of people's faith in democracy. It is also simultaneously an attempt to restore the prestige and reverence of the institution of parliament and its members (with frequent references to their dignity and decorum, as noted earlier). The current Speaker of the Lok Sabha suggested in a recent interview that the media were in part responsible for reproducing the image of parliament as a disorderly and disruptive forum. He stated,

it has become very fashionable to abuse the legislature...The majority of the media are more interested in covering disruptions, commotions and fracas...[M]ost of the media have no space for serious issues concerning the people.

(Frontline, 2008)

The significance of the relationship between the media, elected representatives, and the electorate in parliamentary democracies is well established. Television news channels and newspapers play an important role in mediating the relationship between elected representatives and the electorate in India and disruptions are certainly newsworthy material. Such media coverage of parliamentary proceedings in India has been suggested as a contributing factor to the

rising incidences of disruption. In an attempt to increase access to a wider range of parliamentary proceedings and debate, *Lok Sabha TV*, a 24 hour channel covering live sessions of the Lok Sabha as well as topical discussion programmes, began broadcasting in 2006 via Doordashan, a state-owned broadcaster. This attempt to showcase parliament in a different light signified parliament's concerns of legitimacy and representation and suggests that the ritual performance of parliamentary debate remains central to how elected representatives signify their function to their (external) audience of Indian society. Yet, in a disorderly scene in the Lok Sabha on April 27th 2008, the Speaker refused to adjourn the house and instead threatened to turn the lights and cameras off if members did not come to order. This signified a realisation that television coverage of proceedings may actually be encouraging disruptive behaviour (Rediff, 2008). The current Lok Sabha speaker outlined the wider significance of disruptions for public faith in Indian democratic politics:

All of us, as stakeholders in our parliamentary polity, should be greatly concerned about the falling standards of parliamentary behaviour. As we all well know, scenes of unruly conduct attracts adverse public comments and we cannot lose sight of the fact that the loss of people's faith can damage our democratic polity. All of us must acknowledge that disturbances and forced adjournments should never be used as tools for articulating concerns on issues, *howsoever grave they be*.

(Chatterjee, 2008: my emphasis)

Despite these concerns and given Chatterjee's strong emphasis on order and that disruption should 'never be used' no matter how serious are the issues being raised, his reluctance (and others that have gone before him) to use already established rules to discipline disorderly conduct in the house is significant. Rules 373 and 374 allow the Speaker to ask disorderly members to withdraw from the House or to suspend them for the rest of the day's sitting. Rule 374a is even more strict in its reprimand of disruptive members:

(1) Notwithstanding anything contained in rules 373 and 374, in the event of grave disorder occasioned by a member coming into the well of the House or abusing the Rules of the House persistently and wilfully obstructing its business by shouting slogans or otherwise, such member shall, on being named by the Speaker, stand automatically suspended from the service of the House for five consecutive sittings or the remainder of the session, whichever is less: Provided that the House may, at any time, on a motion being made, resolve that such suspension be terminated. (2) On the Speaker announcing the suspension under this rule, the member shall forthwith withdraw from the precincts of the House.

(Lok Sabha, 2004)

Instead, Speakers have generally chosen forced adjournments (rule 375) as the way to dispel unruly scenes in the house.²² Does this suggest that informal norms within and outside of rituals of parliamentary debate discourage presiding officers from reprimanding members who violate formal parliamentary rules of procedure and disrupt proceedings? Has disorderly conduct up until recently only been regarded as a minor misdemeanour and therefore overlooked? Or is there a more serious issue of a tension between constitutional mandates of elected representatives and the authority of parliamentary officials? To what extent does the lack of reprimand encourage such behaviour?

To turn to the second aspect of disruption: by contesting the dominant norms of parliamentary debate, to what extent do disruptive styles of performance offer alternative opportunities to groups marginalised by the dominant norms of parliamentary debate discussed earlier? The answer to this question is far more opaque for several reasons. Firstly, disruption is co-ordinated by members of parliament, who, in relative terms, are already elite members of Indian society. Furthermore, members who disrupt parliamentary proceedings are working within party organisational contexts as well as parliamentary contexts, and as such their actions may be disciplined just as much by their party organisational culture as by parliamentary rituals. And disrupters are often senior members of their parliamentary party if not the larger party organisation. This point is crucial for the conditions of who gets to disrupt and how, but also for how we interpret the value of disruption to parliamentary rituals and for its potential to include marginalized groups.

Secondly, from the analysis of normative standards earlier, we can already suggest that there is more room for emotive performances in the Indian parliament than Young's norm of dispassionate would suggest. Disruptions, in that they are often strategically calculated and orchestrated displays of heightened emotion and disorderliness within the chamber, problematise the dichotomy between reason and emotion – emotional outbursts are strategically calculated rather than irrational.

Thirdly, it is not clear to what extent orderliness or disruption provide a more inclusive environment for female MPs. Several female MPs can be associated with norms or positions of

²² This is not to suggest that MPs are not reprimanded, especially in cases of alleged corruption and unethical conduct, and one such incident occurred in 2005 when eleven MPs were expelled from parliament. Reprimands for disorderly conduct within the chamber have been far rarer, although in a recent twist, Chatterjee referred 32 MPs to the Privileges Committee for their disorderly conduct in the Lok Sabha on April 24th.

orderliness. Najma Heptallah held the post of the Deputy Speaker in the Rajya Sabha from 1985-96 and 1988-2004. Sushma Swaraj (BJP MP, Rajya Sabha) was the first female MP to be awarded the Outstanding Parliamentarian Award in 2004 (conferred in 2007). Malini Bhattacharya, former Communist Party of India (Marxist) member of the Lok Sabha 1988-1996, has stated her disappointment at the rising violence within Indian party politics which, she thinks, is not conducive to facilitating the participation of women MPs in chamber debates:

...the greater incursion of money and muscle power into politics in the past 10-15 years is something that is definitely going to go against women representatives in Parliament. If there is a rise in violence so far as the parliamentary process is concerned, it would be difficult for women to play an effective role even if they enter the fray...This increase in violence, just as it hurts democracy in other ways, makes it difficult for women to operate within the parliamentary process.

(Bhattacharya, 2008)

These examples all suggest that female MPs have been positioned in ways that benefit from or adhere to a state of orderliness. Is disruption within the context of the Indian parliament a masculinist script and therefore not an *appropriate* form of performance for women MPs? Does this mean that disruptive performances as a form of protest closed off to women? Clearly not - women MPs have not been absent from or marginal to disruptive incidences. Yet there are instances which suggest that their participation in these episodes provokes a tension between norms of appropriate behaviour for MPs and for women. The Congress member Jayanti Natarajan who was involved in the women's reservation bill confrontation in the Rajya Sabha on May 6th, subsequently that day moved a breach of privilege notice against the Samajwadi MP Abu Azmi complaining that he had man-handled her and other women members. Another example is that of a female MP when she found herself in the well of the house, shouting slogans, suddenly became cognizant of what she was doing, thinking 'what if my family see me now?'.²³ This raises the question: do women MP disrupters have to justify their behaviour in different ways to men MP disrupters? How might we understand the appropriateness of disruptive performances more generally?

Young is quick to emphasise that critiquing a norm of orderliness is not to say that 'anything goes': 'hate speech' and violence, for instance, while disruptive, transcends the limits of what is *reasonable* in deliberative processes. Thus, Young instead suggests that a norm of *reasonableness* will encompass more diverse forms of political communication than norms of

²³ I am grateful to Shirin Rai for providing me with this insight, from an interview she has conducted previously with a female MP from the Indian parliament as part of a different research project.

articulateness, dispassionateness, and orderliness in terms of inclusion, but will also entail a recognition of, and basic respect for, other participants of deliberation and a willingness to listen to them. Does a norm of orderliness constrain the principles for which parliamentary debate may be valued – namely deliberation that goes beyond mere rational, dispassionate, logical argument towards more passionate forms of embodied expression as Young suggests? Or does a lack of orderliness signify the breakdown in the principles of recognition that enable the debate to take place in the first place? Former Prime Minister and senior BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee suggests that despite the conflictual nature of debate, respect and tolerance should remain paramount: ‘I don’t consider my opponent an enemy, neither do I want to be treated as an enemy. Ideological differences are bound to occur but tolerance is the hallmark of democracy’ (BPST, n.d.-a). Similarly, Nitish Kumar, another MP, sees it as important to recognise the participation and contribution of others: ‘to leave without listening to others is shirking away from our duties’ (BPST, n.d.-b). But in another BPST training video on *Parliamentary Etiquette and Manners*²⁴, Vajpayee suggests that disrupting proceedings was not an effective form of protest and that members should instead stage a walkout:

the most noticeable/effective way to oppose someone is a walkout...[Members] have the *right* to do so. It should be considered the highest form of opposition or antagonism. There should be no need for someone to jump into the well or beat their chest and scream slogans while addressing the parliamentary officer, or collect in the well.
(BPST, n.d.-b)

In this sense, a walkout is considered a more ‘dignified’ protest than one which disrupts proceedings but is perhaps just as effective and does not transgress the boundaries of orderliness within chamber debates. But walkouts as a form of protest raise further questions regarding the disruption of parliamentary ritual. On which occasions do disrupters choose to stage a walkout rather than disrupt proceedings, and under what circumstances are the former more effective than the latter? Is it perhaps preferential that members disrupt outside parliament rather than inside? To whom are walkouts an option for protest? And which form of protest poses a more significant challenge to the reproduction of parliamentary ritual? These questions suggest a delicate tension between disruption as a form of democratic protest and the boundaries of reasonableness in the

²⁴ This training video consists of an interview of the former Prime Minister and Member of Parliament Atal Bihari Vajpayee by Rita Verma MP. The video is in entirely in Hindi and I thank Sana Ghazi for providing an English translation.

ritual of parliamentary debate, something which more extreme modes of orderliness will find hard to accommodate.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was an exploration of the significance of parliamentary debate as ritual, through an analysis of the norms embedded within, and the significance of increasing disruptions to, this ritual. It sought to explore the question: what is the significance of this changing style of political communication on the floor of both houses of the Indian Parliament, and what does it mean for the reproduction of parliamentary ritual and its participants? Instances of disruption in the Indian parliament suggest that, of all three of the norms Young critiques (articulateness, dispassionateness, and orderliness), the latter appears as the hardest to enforce in the Indian parliament. Curiously however, in many ways the Speaker has not fully utilised the capacity of formal rules of procedure to discipline MPs, despite the frustrated pleas for order that often come from this ritual authority figure. An unwillingness to discipline MPs suggests that other, competing informal norms might be at work (for instance, norms of member privileges).

Despite the expansion of performative politics that disruptions offer through rhetorical forms of political communication, I have argued that disruptions are not necessarily more inclusive or destabilising in the Indian case. More research is needed as to whether individual MPs themselves perceive norms of parliamentary debate as inclusive or exclusionary and if so, in what senses, and to what extent they see disruptions in parliament as an aberration against parliamentary ritual or as a central part of the performance of democratic representation. The preliminary findings raise the question of what then are the implications for rituals of parliamentary debate, underpinned by principles of political communication and orderliness in particular, if they cannot accommodate this more agonistic, disruptive and subversive mode of political practice?

The severity and frequency of disruptions will continue to pose challenges to ritual specialists of the Indian parliament, in whose minds the orderliness of parliamentary ritual is paramount. Disruption demonstrates an alternative style of performing representation which, creates moments of uncertainty in which alternative possibilities emerge. This requires courage 'to act beyond markers or scripts, to set something new and unanticipatable into motion, and to refuse the conformity of social behavior in order to act anew' (Drexler, 2007:14). Incidences of

disruption suggest that Parliament is, therefore, still a central place for the playing out of democratic, representative and contestatory politics. Whether this makes parliamentary debate a more inclusive ritual of democratic politics remains to be seen.

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