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Constructing the Threat: A Critical Discourse Analysis of India's Terrorism Discourse Across the 2001 Parliament and 2008 Mumbai Attacks

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how Indian state institutions discursively constructed the 2001 Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai attacks through official speech acts, diplomatic communications, and parliamentary interventions. Drawing on a primary corpus of 29 MEA documents produced between December 2001 and February 2009, the study applies Norman Fairclough's three-level critical discourse analysis alongside Buzan and Wæver's securitisation theory within a broader constructivist framework. The analysis reveals how Indian official discourse performed a layered securitisation of both events — constructing existential threats to democratic identity, sovereign integrity, and international order — while simultaneously constituting India's national self as a restrained, law-abiding, ascending democracy positioned against a Pakistan constructed as the structural 'epicentre' of regional terrorism. Comparing the two cases, the article traces a significant evolution in Indian counterterrorism discourse: from the militarised, coalition-seeking register of the BJP-led government in 2001 to the institutionally calibrated, internationally oriented communication of the Congress-led UPA in 2008. Both discursive formations, however, share a foundational ideological architecture that naturalises India's regional dominance, forecloses structural explanations for political violence, and systematically marginalises Pakistani civilian perspectives, Kashmiri political grievances, and Indian policy failures. The article contributes to the literature on securitisation in non-Western contexts, the discursive construction of state identity in South Asian security politics, and the role of official language in mediating the India-Pakistan conflict.



1. Introduction

The global security environment changed after September 11, and counter terrorism became the dominant security framework in international relations. This framework has governed national security policymaking for states, as well as the development of military strategy and foreign policy. India was able to take advantage of this changing international context and use the evolving global counter-terrorism landscape to frame its own strategic and diplomatic priorities in terms of global counter-terrorism efforts.

On the morning of 13 December 2001, five gunmen stormed the Indian Parliament complex in New Delhi, killing nine security personnel before being shot dead. On 26 November 2008, ten militants spent sixty hours conducting coordinated attacks across Mumbai, killing 166 people. The two events differ enormously in scale, geography, and method. Yet in the weeks and months that followed each attack, the Indian state produced a remarkably coherent body of official discourse — speeches, resolutions, press briefings, parliamentary interventions, and diplomatic communications — that performed strikingly similar interpretive work: naming a threat, identifying its origin, constructing India's identity in the face of that threat, and positioning both events within a global struggle between democracy and terrorism.

How states narrate acts of political violence is not incidental to those events but constitutive of them. The meanings attached to a terrorist attack — who is responsible, what is threatened, what must be done — are never self-evident. They are produced through discourse and shaped by institutional interests, domestic politics, strategic calculations, and the international context. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides the analytical tools to examine how these meanings are made, whose interests they serve, and what alternative understandings they suppress or foreclose.

This article analyses the official Indian state discourse surrounding these two landmark events using a combined framework of securitisation theory and CDA. Three research questions guide the inquiry. First, how did Indian official discourse securitise the 2001 and 2008 attacks — that is, how were these events framed as existential threats requiring emergency measures? Second, how were the identities of the Indian self and the Pakistani other constituted through this discourse, and how did these constructions differ across the two events? Third, what ideological work does this discourse perform — what does it naturalise, and what does it conceal?

The study draws on a primary corpus of twenty-nine official documents produced by the Ministry of External Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office, the Home Ministry, and Parliament across both crisis periods. It proceeds through Fairclough's three-level model of text, discursive practice, and social practice, situating both close textual reading and institutional analysis within the constructivist insight that identities, interests, and threats are intersubjectively produced rather than objectively given.

Beyond its empirical contribution — providing the first systematic comparative CDA of these two events — the article makes a theoretical argument: that securitisation in the India-Pakistan context is not simply a speech act in the classical Buzan/Wæver sense but a sustained, multi-venue, multi-audience discursive project through which the Indian state simultaneously manages its domestic constituencies, shapes international opinion, and reproduces its own national identity. Understanding how this project operates, and what it conceals in doing so, is essential for scholars seeking to move beyond state-centric accounts of South Asian security.

2. Situating the Study: Literature and Gaps

A substantial body of scholarly literature on the India-Pakistan conflict focuses on the strategic, military, and nuclear dimensions (Ganguly, 2001; Tellis, 2001). Discourse-focused approaches to this conflict are comparatively underdeveloped, particularly regarding how official language shapes and reproduces the conditions of conflict rather than merely responding to them.

The scholarship on terrorism in the India-Pakistan context tends to favour policy analysis and strategic studies over interpretive or constructivist approaches. Perkovich (2003) and Byman (2005) examine the strategic logic of Indian restraint following both attacks, but neglect the discursive construction of that restraint as a political and identity performance. Fair (2014) provides a comprehensive account of alleged/so-called militant organisations in Pakistan by approaching the question from a security studies perspective rather than a discourse-analytical one. Studies of the 2008 Mumbai attacks have examined tactical lessons, intelligence lapses, and bilateral diplomacy (Tankel, 2011; Jones, 2009) without systematically examining the Indian official discourse that constructed the event's meaning.

Within the constructivist tradition, Bajpai (2002) and Basrur (2006) have applied identity-focused frameworks to Indian security culture, and Rajain (2005) has examined nuclear deterrence through a social constructivist lens. However, these contributions remain at a relatively high level of abstraction and do not engage with the specific language and rhetoric of official discourse production. The application of CDA to South Asian security contexts remains genuinely underdeveloped.

Securitisation theory has received significant attention in the broader IR literature since the publication of Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde's foundational text (1998), with productive debates emerging over its applicability to non-Western and non-liberal political contexts (McDonald, 2008; Wilkinson, 2007; Vuori, 2008). Wilkinson's critique is particularly relevant here: she argues that the Copenhagen School's framework assumes a clear distinction between security and politics that may not hold in contexts where authoritarian governments or dominant parties routinely securitise political opposition. India's democratic context does not raise this particular objection, but the broader question of whether securitisation theory's assumptions travel across political cultures remains pertinent, and this article addresses it through empirical engagement rather than purely theoretical means.

The application of CDA to foreign policy and international security — what has been called 'critical foreign policy analysis' or the 'discourse-historical approach' in international relations — has a growing but still modest presence in the field (Hansen, 2006; Doty, 1993; Weldes, 1999). Hansen's (2006) analysis of Western discourses of the Balkans provides a methodological model for close reading of official texts that this article undertakes. Her focus on Western liberal democracies highlights the need to examine how similar discursive processes operate in other political and cultural contexts.

This article addresses the identified gap by applying a rigorous CDA framework, grounded in securitisation theory and constructivism, to a systematically assembled corpus of Indian official documents across two major crisis events. In doing so, it contributes to three overlapping conversations: the study of securitisation in South Asian contexts; the discursive construction of national identity in crisis conditions; and the role of official language in reproducing and potentially transforming the conditions of the India-Pakistan conflict.

3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

3.1 Constructivism as Foundation

This study proceeds from a constructivist ontological premise: the social world, including the threats that states perceive and respond to, is not objectively given but intersubjectively constituted through practice, language, and shared meaning. Following Alexander Wendt's (1999) foundational argument that 'anarchy is what states make of it,' constructivism directs attention to the processes by which identities and interests — including India's identity as a 'secular democracy' and the interest in resisting 'Pakistan-sponsored terrorism' — are reproduced as natural and inevitable. These constructions are not merely rhetorical; they shape what actors perceive as threats, what responses appear legitimate, and what futures seem possible.

3.2 Securitisation Theory

Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) define securitisation as a speech act through which a securitising actor designates a referent object as existentially threatened and thereby claims the right to extraordinary measures that would not otherwise be politically available. The analytical model has three core components: the securitising actor (who speaks?), the referent object (what is claimed to be threatened?), and the audience (whose acceptance of the threat designation enables the extraordinary measures?). The study operationalises these components across both cases, examining how different institutional actors — the Prime Minister, External Affairs Minister, Home Minister, Parliament, Foreign Secretary — performed securitising moves directed at different audiences across multiple venues.

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

The primary analytical method is Fairclough's (1992, 2003) three-level critical discourse analysis. At the level of text, the analysis examines lexical choices, semantic fields, naming and categorisation practices, metaphor, rhetorical structure, presupposition, intertextuality, and the grammar of agency and passivity. At the level of discursive practice, it examines how texts are produced — under what institutional conditions, by whom, for what audiences — and how they are distributed and consumed across different social and political sites. At the level of social practice, it situates discourse within broader structures of power, ideology, and social relations, asking not only what is said but what dominant discourse makes unthinkable or unsayable.

CDA's critical orientation — its insistence on examining how discourse serves power and what it conceals — is the analytical move that most significantly extends securitisation theory's explanatory reach. While securitisation theory examines how threats are constructed and claims are accepted, CDA examines the ideological conditions that render certain threat constructions plausible, the material interests those constructions serve, and the alternative understandings that are suppressed in the process.

4. Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Case Selection and Comparative Logic

The study employs a comparative qualitative case study design across two theoretically selected cases. The 2001 Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai attacks were chosen because they represent the two most significant instances of attributed cross-border terrorism in the post-1947 India-Pakistan relationship; because they share key structural features (external attribution, democratic-institution targeting, MEA-led official response) that enable meaningful comparison; and because they are separated by seven years, during which India's domestic politics, strategic environment, and international standing changed substantially. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance was in power in 2001; the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance was in power in 2008. India had not yet concluded its civilian nuclear agreement with the United States in 2001; by

2008, that agreement had been signed, and India's emergence as a recognised global power was well advanced. These contextual differences create the comparative variation that makes the study analytically productive.

4.2 Corpus Construction

The primary corpus comprises twenty-nine official documentary events retrieved from MEA digital archives (mea.gov.in) and the Indian Embassy digital archive (indianembassy.org). The 2001 corpus encompasses twenty-one events produced between 13 December 2001 and 16 May 2002, including national broadcasts, parliamentary statements, cabinet resolutions, party executive addresses, MEA spokesperson briefings, diplomatic press conferences, an international television interview, and parliamentary Q&A across both houses. The 2008 corpus covers eight events between 27 November 2008 and 13 February 2009, including the Prime Minister's address to the nation, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha interventions, a cabinet resolution, an MEA statement, a UN Security Council statement, the Foreign Secretary's press briefing, and the EAM's Suo Motu statement. Documents were selected based on institutional source (official government communication), accessibility (publicly archived), and relevance to the research questions. The corpus is limited to government-produced documents to maintain analytical focus on state discourse.

4.3 Analytical Procedure

Analysis proceeded in three stages corresponding to Fairclough's three levels. At the textual level, each document was subjected to close reading, attending to recurring phrases and framing terms, semantic fields, metaphors, naming practices, rhetorical appeals, and intertextual references. A systematic catalogue of high-frequency framing terms was constructed for each corpus. At the level of discursive practice, each document was analysed in terms of its production context, institutional authority, intended audience, and distribution channel. At the social practice level, the discourse was situated within the broader India-Pakistan strategic context, the post-9/11 global counterterrorism order, and India's evolving international positioning.

4.4 Limitations

This study focuses exclusively on Indian official discourse, which means it cannot tell us how Pakistan's government, media, or citizens understood and responded to these same events. The analysis shows *how* Indian officials constructed the terrorism threat through strategic framing and language choices—but it doesn't evaluate whether their claims were "correct" against Pakistani counter-narratives. To fully understand India-Pakistan security discourse, there is a need to examine both sides: how each state constructs, contests, and reproduces competing threat narratives. That comparative work remains to be done.

5. Constructing the Attack on Democracy: CDA of the 2001 Parliament Corpus

5.1 Textual Level: Language, Metaphor, and Framing

The 2001 corpus is texturally dense, rhetorically assertive, and saturated with military and civilisational registers in ways that distinguish it sharply from the 2008 material. Four textual features warrant particular attention.

The first is what might be called lexical militarisation. The Cabinet Resolution adopted on 13 December 2001 — produced within hours of the attack and read simultaneously by Home Minister Advani at his press conference and by the MEA spokesperson — states that 'we will liquidate the terrorists and their sponsors wherever they are, whomever they are.' The verb 'liquidate' imports

the vocabulary of military and intelligence operations into the domain of public governmental communication. It denotes physical elimination rather than legal prosecution, and its precise repetition across multiple institutional venues on the same day — the Cabinet, the press conference, the spokesperson briefing — performs governmental consensus and lethal resolve. The phrase 'wherever they are, whomever they are' deliberately echoes the rhetoric of the Bush administration's post-9/11 war on terror, embedding India's bilateral conflict within the global counter-terrorism project and borrowing American moral authority in the process. This is not a rhetorical accident but a calculated intertextual strategy.

The second feature is the metonym for democracy. Across the corpus, Parliament is constructed not as a physical building targeted by armed men but as the embodiment of democratic governance and national identity. The Cabinet Resolution frames the attack as being 'not just on a building but on what is the very heart of our system of governance, on what is the symbol and the keystone of the largest democracy in the world.' Prime Minister Vajpayee's 13 December message elaborates: 'The Parliament is the highest representative of democracy, and they chose Parliament deliberately as their target. The attack was not on the Parliament but on the entire nation.' This metonymic move — Parliament equals democracy equals nation — accomplishes three things at once. It elevates the attack from a security incident to a civilisational assault. It creates an indivisible victim, foreclosing any suggestion that particular political actors were targeted. And it inserts India into a global ideological conflict between democratic pluralism and jihadist extremism, a positioning particularly resonant in the months immediately following September 11.

Home Minister Advani extends the metonymic logic to the J&K Assembly attack of 1 October 2001, noting at his press conference that 'on October 1, 2001, the terrorists had chosen the J&K Assembly symbolically... terrorist and terrorist organisations are targeting democratic and free societies.' The effect is to construct not an isolated incident but a pattern — a systematic ideological campaign against democratic institutions — which in turn demands a systematic response rather than incident-specific crisis management.

Third, the corpus deploys a sustained temporal framing built around what might be called the 'two decades' motif. Prime Minister Vajpayee's New Year address characterises the events as 'an outrage' that 'has breached the limit of the nation's endurance' after 'nearly two decades' of cross-border terrorism in which India 'has lost tens of thousands of innocent men and women and security forces.' Home Minister Advani's parliamentary statement describes the Parliament attack as 'the most audacious, and also the most alarming, act of terrorism in the nearly two-decades-long history of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in India.' This temporal framing performs a specific argumentative function: it constructs Pakistan-sponsored terrorism as a chronic, structural, and long-tolerated phenomenon rather than a novel or contingent one. By invoking two decades of victimhood, the discourse implicitly rebukes international observers — particularly the United States and its allies — who had discovered terrorism only after September 11. India had been warning the world for twenty years, the PM suggests; the world had remained 'indifferent to this proxy war.' This is a claim to credibility, priority, and moral authority over a newly attentive international community.

Fourth, and most analytically distinctive, is the explicit naming of state institutions and organisations. The 2001 corpus names the ISI repeatedly and without diplomatic hedge: Advani's parliamentary statement attributes the attack to groups 'known to derive their support and patronage from Pak ISI' and notes that the principal coordinator 'had earlier been trained in a camp run by Pak ISI at Muzaffarabad in Pak Occupied Kashmir.' This directness reflects the BJP government's ideological inclination toward confrontational anti-Pakistan framing. The naming of

Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad as specific, identifiable organisations and linking them to the ISI is an effort to substantiate the claim rather than to make an abstract attribution: it says, in effect, these are not shadowy forces but known entities with addresses and patrons, and that address is Pakistan.

5.2 Discursive Practice: Production, Distribution, and Audience

The production characteristics of the 2001 corpus reveal an intensive, coordinated institutional response. Four documents appeared on 13 December alone — the PM's message, the Cabinet Resolution, Advani's press conference, and the MEA briefing — each reinforcing identical core phrases. This synchronised multi-document production is not simply a feature of a government responding to a crisis; it is a deliberate discursive performance of cohesion, decisiveness, and institutional consensus at a moment of political pressure. The identical repetition of 'dastardly assault,' 'attack on democracy,' and 'nation accepts the challenge' across the Cabinet, the Home Ministry, and the MEA suggests a centrally drafted narrative disseminated to multiple institutional spokespersons rather than independently produced responses.

The distribution of this discourse across multiple channels — national broadcast, parliamentary chamber, MEA press briefing, party executive, and international media — reveals a sophisticated, multi-audience communication strategy. Domestic audiences are addressed through national broadcasts and Parliamentary interventions; international audiences are addressed through MEA briefings, evidence-sharing with the governments of the USA, UK, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia; and American audiences specifically through Advani's Fox News interview and Washington DC press statement. The channel selection is not incidental: Fox News in January 2002 was the flagship platform of the American conservative politics that most energetically supported the war on terror, and Advani's choice of that platform signals a deliberate appeal to the political constituency closest to the Bush administration.

The BJP National Executive address of 29 December warrants particular attention as a discursive practice event. It is the only document in the combined corpus addressed primarily to a political party rather than to the nation or international community. Its framing is correspondingly more partisan and more openly mobilisational: Vajpayee appeals to party workers to 'launch a Jan Jagaran — a mass awareness campaign' and concludes with the exhortation 'Prepare the nation... to face any eventuality and march as one. Our victory is certain.' This language — 'march as one,' 'our victory is certain' — is war rhetoric addressed to a political base, and it sits in marked tension with the restrained, legalistic language deployed for international consumption. The contrast reveals the dual-audience structure of the entire discourse: a domestic register of mobilisation and resolve, and an international register of restraint and legitimacy.

5.3 Social Practice Level: Power, Ideology, and What Is Concealed

Three ideological silences in the 2001 corpus warrant sustained critical attention, for it is in these absences rather than in the presence of explicit claims that the discourse does its most significant ideological work.

The first and most consequential silence concerns structural explanations for the existence and persistence of Pakistani militant networks. The discourse constructs LeT and JeM as products of Pakistani state malice — organisations 'created' and 'sustained' by ISI for anti-India purposes. What this construction systematically forecloses is any acknowledgement of the historical and geopolitical context within which these organisations emerged: the Cold War-era US-Pakistani sponsorship of the Afghan mujahideen, the 'blowback' of that project into Kashmir and Pakistan's domestic politics, the economic and social marginalisation that makes militant recruitment

possible. Prime Minister Vajpayee does ask, rhetorically, 'Why do some people choose the path of terrorism?' but the answer he provides — 'murderous ways, intolerance, extremism' — is psychological and moral rather than structural or political. The structural conditions that produce the social bases of militant recruitment are not merely absent from the discourse; they are made unthinkable by a framing that locates the origin of terrorism entirely in the intentional decisions of the Pakistani state apparatus.

The second silence concerns Kashmir. The discourse acknowledges the existence of 'the contentious issue of Jammu and Kashmir' and offers the possibility of dialogue, but it systematically forecloses any acknowledgement that the Kashmir dispute generates political grievances that non-state actors can exploit for recruitment and mobilisation. EAM Jaswant Singh's press conference is revealing: when asked about Musharraf's references to the Kashmir 'freedom struggle,' Singh responds that 'the Government of India rejects entirely and categorically the comments of the President of Pakistan about the situation in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir.' The phrase 'Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir' performs a legal and ontological closure: Kashmir's status is settled, its Indian identity is constitutional fact, and any terrorism connected to it is therefore purely externally sponsored rather than rooted in local political conditions. The closure is ideologically productive: it allows the Indian state to claim victimhood without accepting any dimension of responsibility for the political conditions that sustain the conflict.

The third silence is perhaps the most politically sensitive: the denial of Indian intelligence and security failure. Home Minister Advani, at his 13 December press conference, explicitly frames the security forces' response as 'a remarkable case of success' and states that 'he did not see the attack as resulting from a security or intelligence failure.' This claim — that five armed men penetrating the Parliament complex and killing nine people constitutes a security success — is ideologically necessary rather than empirically defensible. Acknowledging security failure would have subjected the government to domestic accountability; framing it as success redirects attention entirely toward the external perpetrators. The discourse thus performs a double move: constructing India as victim while insulating the government from the institutional accountability that victimhood might otherwise invite.

A final observation at the level of social practice concerns the ideological function of the 'proxy war' frame. By repeatedly characterising Pakistan-sponsored terrorism as 'a war in the form of cross-border terrorism... thrust on India' (PM Vajpayee, New Year address), the discourse imports the legal and moral framework of interstate warfare into the domain of what had previously been treated as criminal terrorism. This reframing is not merely descriptive but performative: it legitimates military response as self-defence under international law, constructs Pakistan as an aggressor state rather than a negligent host of non-state actors, and makes Operation Parakram — the military mobilisation that followed — appear not as an escalatory choice but as a proportionate sovereign response to ongoing aggression.

6. Constructing the Responsible Power: CDA of the 2008 Mumbai Corpus

6.1 Textual Level: Precision, Restraint, and the Legal Register

The 2008 corpus is textually distinct from the 2001 corpus in ways that are difficult to attribute to any single cause but that reflect a coherent shift in communicative strategy. Where the 2001 discourse was mobilisational and assertive, the 2008 discourse is measured, legally precise, and institutionally calibrated. Several textual features are analytically significant.

Most immediately striking is the near-total disappearance of military register vocabulary. 'Liquidate,' 'proxy war,' 'no means will be spared,' and 'breached the limit of our endurance' — phrases that recurred throughout the 2001 corpus — have no equivalent in the 2008 documents. In their place is a legal-diplomatic vocabulary: demarche, bilateral commitments, jurisdiction, extradition, UN Security Council resolutions, evidence-sharing, accountability. This register performs India's identity as a responsible, institutionally embedded, rule-of-law actor — in pointed contrast to Pakistan, which the discourse constructs as a state that has violated its bilateral commitments, harboured criminals, and failed to discharge its international legal obligations.

The affect-loading vocabulary of moral condemnation is retained: 'dastardly,' 'heinous,' 'ghastly,' and 'barbaric' appear across the corpus. However, these terms are now embedded within a more controlled argumentative structure rather than serving as rhetorical anchors for mobilisational appeal. The Prime Minister's Lok Sabha speech is characteristic: it opens with expressions of outrage, moves immediately to specific legislative and institutional proposals (the National Investigation Agency, NSG decentralisation, coastal security reorganisation), and concludes with an explicit statement of restraint. The emotional and the institutional are held in careful balance throughout.

The most analytically important textual feature of the 2008 corpus is the disaggregation of 'Pakistan' as a discursive object. Where the 2001 corpus named the ISI directly and repeatedly, the 2008 discourse consistently distinguishes between 'the Government of Pakistan,' 'the Pakistani people,' and 'elements in Pakistan.' External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee is explicit about this choice: 'I have never accused that Pakistan Government is responsible. Very carefully, I have used the words elements in Pakistan.' This terminological precision is not diplomatic nicety but a strategic discursive decision with multiple simultaneous functions. It preserves diplomatic channels with the Pakistani government while sustaining the attribution claim; it prevents the characterisation of India's position as an accusation of state terrorism (which would trigger escalatory obligations); and it enables the construction of a shared interest between India and Pakistan in addressing the 'elements' responsible.

This strategy of implication without formal accusation reaches its apogee in Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon's press briefing of 5 January 2009. Asked whether state elements were involved, Menon responds: 'It is hard to believe that something of this scale that took so long in the preparation, and of this nature which amounts really to a commando attack, could occur without anybody anywhere in the establishment knowing.' He then immediately adds: 'I am not going to go into that.' This is a rhetorically sophisticated move — the state-complicity implication is planted in the audience's mind through the first sentence, while the second sentence maintains formal deniability. The discourse thus achieves attribution through implicature rather than assertion, a technique that is both more legally defensible and, arguably, more rhetorically effective than direct accusation.

A second distinctive textual feature of the 2008 corpus is the 'epicentre' metaphor deployed by both the Prime Minister and EAM Mukherjee. Pakistan is designated as 'the epicentre of terrorism.' The geological metaphor is analytically rich: an epicentre is not merely a location but the point of maximum seismic intensity, the structural origin from which destructive force radiates outward. To describe Pakistan as terrorism's epicentre is not merely to say that Pakistani actors were responsible for a particular attack; it is to characterise Pakistan as the constitutive centre of a global phenomenon — an ontological attribution rather than a contingent one. The metaphor naturalises Pakistan's role as structural rather than incidental, making it harder to dispute and harder to remedy through incremental policy changes.

The 2008 corpus also explicitly and decisively rejects the non-state actor framework. Foreign Secretary Menon states: 'We do not think there is such a thing as non-state actors. Even the so-called non-state actors function within a state, are citizens of a state.' This ontological claim — that the non-state/state distinction is conceptually invalid — directly attacks the framework Pakistan used to deny state responsibility. By dissolving the conceptual boundary between state and non-state, Menon reframes the attribution question: not 'was this the Pakistani state?' but 'within which state did these actors train, plan, and operate?' The answer, within India's discursive construction, is self-evidently Pakistan, and the further question of whether the state knew or directed the operation becomes secondary to the question of territorial and institutional responsibility.

6.2 Discursive Practice: The Internationalisation Strategy

The most analytically significant feature of the 2008 discursive practice is what might be termed the systematic internationalisation of the Mumbai attacks — the deliberate construction of the event as a global rather than bilateral phenomenon. This strategy operates across multiple dimensions simultaneously.

The UN Security Council statement of 9 December 2008, delivered by Minister of State E. Ahamed is the most explicit expression of this strategy. Ahamed's statement emphasises that '179 persons, including 26 foreigners from 13 countries' lost their lives. The deliberate foregrounding of international casualty data — which was numerically secondary to Indian casualties — transforms the attack's discursive status from a bilateral India-Pakistan incident into an assault on international order. The statement further claims that 'the Mumbai attack also made it clear that terrorism is a direct threat to international peace and security,' explicitly invoking the UN Charter framework and positioning the Indian grievance within the mandate of the Security Council.

This internationalisation strategy is reinforced by EAM Mukherjee's explicit statement in the Rajya Sabha: 'This is not an India-Pakistan issue, this is a part of global terrorism.' The strategic function of this framing is to convert bilateral diplomatic pressure into multilateral pressure, enrolling the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, and others as agents of pressure on Pakistan rather than as interested spectators in a bilateral quarrel. The contrast with 2001 is instructive: in 2001, India's internationalisation strategy worked primarily through its relationship with the US, appealing to American post-9/11 sensibilities and to bilateral India-US alignment. In 2008, the internationalisation move was more institutionally embedded, working through the UN Security Council and formal multilateral frameworks — reflecting India's growing confidence and institutional standing in the seven years between the two events.

The corpus also reveals a sophisticated accountability sequencing strategy. The EAM's *Suo Motu* statement of 13 February 2009 maps India's diplomatic communications in careful chronological sequence: the 28 November telephone call, the 29 November speaking note, the 1 December demarche, the 5 January dossier, and subsequent international briefings. This documentary sequencing portrays India's diplomatic patience and procedural correctness while constructing Pakistan's non-response as a pattern of 'prevarication, denial, diversionary tactics and misplaced victimhood.' The narrative of sequential accountability is itself a discursive resource. Each step in the process is a documented act of good faith, and Pakistan's failure to respond at each step is both a diplomatic failure and further evidence against it.

6.3 Social Practice Level: Identity, Power, and the Architecture of Concealment

The 2008 discourse constructs Indian national identity with notable sophistication. Three identity claims are particularly prominent. The first is India as civilisationally restrained sovereign — a state that has suffered severe provocation, possesses the capacity to respond militarily, but chooses

restraint as a matter of civilisational principle rather than military incapacity. The PM's Lok Sabha speech is the fullest expression of this: 'We have so far acted with utmost restraint. But let not our commitment to civilised norms be misconstrued as a sign of weakness.' EAM Mukherjee invokes Gandhi's wisdom that 'an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind' — positioning India in a tradition of non-violent, principled response. This restraint-as-virtue construction performs India's identity as a mature democratic power and simultaneously signals to the international community that escalation is India's choice to make, not something imposed on it by its weakness.

The second identity claim is India as ascending economic and political power. Mukherjee's Rajya Sabha intervention introduces an economic register absent from the 2001 corpus: 'India is emerging and India will rise. India has emerged as a strong economic power, more than a trillion dollars economy.' This framing situates the Mumbai attacks within a narrative of Indian ascent disrupted by terrorism's 'thousand cuts' strategy — an implicit argument that those invested in Indian growth and stability have an interest in joining India's campaign against Pakistan-based terrorism. The referent object here is not simply national security but India's developmental trajectory and its place in the global economic order.

The third identity claim constructs India as a secular-democratic polity whose very existence is threatened by jihadist ideology. The Prime Minister's Lok Sabha statement frames the attacks as an assault on 'the idea of India as a functioning democracy and a pluralistic society.' This is identity construction at its most fundamental: the claim is not that a particular attack occurred but that a particular way of being a nation — pluralist, secular, democratic — is under existential threat. The Parliament Resolution of 12 December 2008 consolidates this: it resolves that 'the ideal of a secular and democratic India shall prevail.' This resolution is a performative as much as a descriptive act: it calls into being the identity it claims to protect.

The ideological silences in the 2008 corpus partially mirror those in 2001, but with important variations. The structural conditions producing Pakistani militancy remain unaddressed; the Kashmir political grievance is effectively absent; and Indian intelligence and coastal security failures — which allowed ten men to arrive by sea from Pakistan without detection — are acknowledged only obliquely in the PM's apology to the Indian people, which is immediately followed by a comprehensive assertion of reform and institutional strengthening. More distinctively, the 2008 discourse is silent on the regional geopolitical context in which Pakistani militant networks operate: the ongoing war in Afghanistan, the US reliance on Pakistan as a counter-terrorism partner, and the fundamental contradiction between American pressure on Pakistan to act against terrorism and American reliance on Pakistan for Afghan logistics. These structural constraints on Pakistan's capacity and willingness to dismantle militant networks are absent from the Indian official discourse, which treats Pakistani non-compliance as a function of malice rather than of a complex strategic environment.

7. Comparative Analysis: Continuity, Evolution, and the Architecture of Ideology

7.1 What Changed

The most striking transformation between the 2001 and 2008 corpora lies not in the basic securitisation structure — both corpora construct existential threats, identify Pakistan as their origin, and invoke India's right to an extraordinary response — but in the register, institutional sophistication, and strategic calibration of the discourse. The BJP government of 2001 produced a mobilisational, confrontational, and domestically oriented discourse strongly marked by its ideological commitments and by the post-9/11 political context. The Congress government of 2008

produced a discourse that was simultaneously more legally precise, more internationally oriented, and more carefully calibrated in its balance between coercive signalling and diplomatic restraint.

The shift from direct ISI-naming to 'elements in Pakistan' reflects not merely diplomatic caution but a more sophisticated understanding of how attribution claims function internationally. The 2001 discourse's directness was politically satisfying domestically but diplomatically counterproductive internationally, allowing Pakistan to construct India's position as an escalatory and unverifiable accusation. The 2008 discourse's use of implicature rather than assertion produced a more legally defensible and rhetorically durable attribution — one that the Foreign Secretary could elaborate in considerable technical detail without triggering the reflexive Pakistani denial that direct accusation invites.

The construction of the Pakistani other also evolved significantly. The 2001 discourse's characterisation of Pakistan as 'a product of the indefensible Two-Nation Theory' and 'a theocratic State with an extremely tenuous tradition of democracy' represents ontological delegitimisation — a challenge to Pakistan's right to exist as constituted rather than merely to its foreign policy behaviour. This framing was politically potent domestically but internationally alienating, particularly among Muslim-majority states whose support India was simultaneously seeking. The 2008 corpus's more calibrated construction of Pakistan — simultaneously as government, people, and 'elements' — is less emotionally satisfying but more strategically functional: it preserves diplomatic channels, enables targeted accountability demands, and situates India's critique within a framework of international law and bilateral obligations rather than civilisational antagonism.

India's self-construction underwent a parallel transformation. The 2001 discourse constructs India's identity primarily through historical suffering and martial virtue: the 'twenty years' of terrorism, the Punjab precedent, the willingness to 'fight this battle on its own.' By 2008, that identity had expanded to incorporate economic ascendancy, global responsibility, and institutional maturity. The shift from a nation that had endured to one that had arrived is perhaps the most consequential discursive transformation over the seven years between the two events, and it reflects a genuine change in India's material circumstances as much as a strategic communication choice.

7.2 What Endured

Despite these significant differences, the two corpora share a foundational ideological architecture that the comparative analysis makes visible precisely because the surface differences obscure it. This shared architecture rests on three pillars.

The first is the systematic exclusion of structural explanations for political violence. Neither corpus acknowledges the Cold War origins of Pakistani militant networks, the social and economic conditions that sustain militant recruitment, or the regional geopolitical dynamics that constrain Pakistani counter-terrorism capacity. Both corpora construct terrorism as a product of the Pakistani state's intention — either the ISI's direct sponsorship or the government's calculated tolerance of 'elements.' This intentionalist framing makes terrorism appear both more explicable (it is Pakistan's doing) and more remediable (Pakistan could stop it if it chose to), while making its deep structural roots invisible.

The second shared pillar is the foreclosure of the political dimension of Kashmir. Both corpora acknowledge Kashmir as a bilateral issue while simultaneously removing it from the causal account of terrorism. In 2001, EAM Jaswant Singh rejected Pakistan's 'freedom struggle' framing; in 2008, the Kashmir question barely surfaced. This foreclosure is not merely diplomatic; it is constitutive of the securitisation move itself. To acknowledge that the Kashmir dispute generates political conditions that organisations like LeT exploit for mobilisation would be to introduce a

political dimension into what Indian official discourse constructs as purely criminal violence. It would imply, however indirectly, that Indian policies in Kashmir bear some relationship to the conditions that produce the violence directed at India. This implication is systematically excluded from both corpora — not through direct denial, but through the deeper ideological move of rendering it unthinkable within the established discursive frame.

The third shared pillar is that Indian discourse naturalises what it claims as Indian dominance in the bilateral relationship. Both corpora construct India as the legitimate, law-abiding sovereign and Pakistan as the violating, norm-breaking other. This binary is not merely a description of specific events but a naturalisation of a broader power hierarchy in which India's perspective, India's legal framework, and India's account of bilateral history are taken as the authoritative reference points. The Pakistani account — of Indian subversion in Balochistan, Indian interference in East Pakistan, Indian aggression in Kargil, Indian human rights violations in Kashmir — is absent from both corpora, not because these claims are necessarily valid but because the discursive structure makes them unrepresentable within India's official framework.

8. Conclusion

This article has examined Indian official discourse surrounding the 2001 Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai attacks through a combined framework of critical discourse analysis and securitisation theory, grounded in constructivist ontology. The analysis has demonstrated that both events were the objects of sophisticated, multi-venue securitisation projects through which the Indian state constructed existential threats to democratic identity and sovereign integrity, constituted India's national self as a restrained and ascending democracy, and positioned Pakistan as the structural origin of regional terrorism — a claim made through direct institutional naming in 2001 and through strategic implicature in 2008.

The comparative dimension of the study has revealed a significant discursive evolution across seven years: from mobilisational, confrontational, and domestically oriented communication under the BJP to legally precise, internationally calibrated, and institutionally embedded communication under the UPA. These differences reflect genuine changes in India's strategic context, international standing, and domestic political environment. However, beneath these differences lies a shared ideological architecture that both corpora reproduce: the systematic exclusion of structural explanations for political violence, the foreclosure of the Kashmir political dimension, and the naturalisation of Indian dominance and Pakistani culpability as the authoritative framework for understanding the bilateral relationship.

Several avenues for future research follow from this analysis. The study's focus on production requires complementary reception-focused work: how did domestic and international audiences actually process and respond to India's official discourse? What counter-discourses — in Pakistani official communication, in Indian civil society, in international media — challenged, absorbed, or transformed the official narrative? How has Indian counterterrorism discourse evolved in the years since 2008, particularly in the context of India's continued rise, the changing Pakistan-US relationship, and the post-2014 BJP return to power? These questions point toward a richer and more complete account of discourse, power, and security in South Asia than any single study can provide. What this article has sought to establish is the analytical framework and empirical grounding for such an extended inquiry.

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