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SPECIAL ISSUE

Partition an Its Aftershocks:  
South Asian Cultural and Literary Throbs, Seventy Years On



## INTRODUCTION

*To Rohith Vermula.  
You will always remind us of the accident of birth.*

Last year I volunteered to commission a special issue of RCEI on British India's Partition and its effects in literature, culture, language and the other fields in the scope of the journal. I invited colleagues to contribute and published a call for papers to complete a project that I had expected would include seminal or ovular texts on Sir Salman Rushdie, Sir V.S. Naipaul etc. I wondered if someone ventured to write on Sunny Leone's career as a cultural palimpsest. Well, I was the first disappointed at all that.

Little did I know then of the timely but ominous process that would develop in the following months. While manuscripts were arriving and messages exchanged, events took place that turned compiling this number into a personal experience for me. I managed to understand Partition not necessarily by reading more on the communal bloodbath in South Asia in the second half of the 1940s. Day after day, week after week, an eerie atmosphere was settling—and continues to at the moment of writing- in Spain on account of belonging, identity, nation, state, and other items on the semantic field of the *motherland*. An uncommitted teenager in the 1970s, I barely have any significant (much less traumatic) memory of the last years of Generalissimo Franco's regime. I used to feel happy to belong to the first generation ever of Spaniards spared from scarcity or war. However, the *procés* towards independence of Catalonia, supported by over a half of the population in that region, conjured the ghosts we all thought had banished from Spain's collective imaginary. Division has cut across different layers: among Catalans themselves, but most prominently between (those who assume to exclusively represent the vindications of) Catalonia and (those who steal the voice of) Spain. Happily, communal skirmishes seem to go no further than partisans displaying separatist *estelades* on their balconies in Barcelona while their antagonists in Madrid, Seville, Salamanca or Tenerife, show off the official Spanish flag. Up to now, the caption "hijos de pu... igdemont" I recently read on a T shirt a middle-aged man wore is the closest war cry that could poorly stand to "Qabristan ya Pakistan!" Luckily.

But this experience has managed I curate my commissioned issue with less exotic, academic, eyes. It remains for the reader to assess if I succeeded too in taming my Orientalist, initial prospect of an issue on "India at 70."

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I wish to thank all contributors for their generosity and their confidence in this project. And I appreciate them too, for allowing me to think about Partition as a process (beyond the *procés*) more than an historical event. As a student trained in the erstwhile old-school Philology, I appreciate William Gould's study on the political implications of the debate on Hindi and Urdu to be the hegemonic language in the region; the controversy eventually led them to be the official language of either India or Pakistan (including the Eastern part!). One of the individuals responsible for this linguistic anomaly was Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the *Quaid*, father of a Pakistan he would not be able to recognise today (the same way Gandhiji would ponder current India as "an interesting idea.") In his article on Jinnah, Faisal Devji sheds light on questions of sovereignty based on representation beyond "belonging to the land," a prescient idea on what would later be a cultural battlefield. Jinnah understandably aimed to liberate his culture from the Hindu Raj. The development failed sometime later as Pakistan became a piece in the Great Game of the postwar. Western powers turned Muslim Zion into the talibanised, failed but nuclear-capable state they now malign —and Jinnah most certainly abjured. As Maurice O'Connor has it, however, the intrusion to spark communal hatred was being politically exploited in the destruction of Bengali nationalism by colonial authorities since early in the twentieth century.

When the blood caused by Partition soaked and dried up, "India" and "Pakistan" commenced to be gathered as texts to discuss in many fields in and outside Academia. In fact, Canary Islanders came to terms with multiculturalism long before the term was coined, thanks to the small, almost hermetic community of Hindus who settled here as a consequence of their flight from their native Sindh. Bhavani's article on the Sindhi diaspora is most welcome in this issue, as she offers clues about their construction of an ideal lost land. Globalisation, and neoliberalism via online shopping has diminished the economic clout of the Hindu community, natural-born merchants who in past decades had managed to hold an oligopoly on electronics trade in a duty-free territory. As economic conditions have changed and social mobility has forced arrogant "Indios" to reluctantly reach out to indolent "Canarios," the old sanitized Sindh of exiled traders is giving way to a more cosmopolitan placeness that their liberal professional grandchildren aspire to inhabit.

It goes without saying of the flood of cultural artifacts the Partition *has been creating*. Italics are intended, because rewriting will not end in the foreseeable future. Comparisons with the Spanish Civil War are daring —and India wins. While the reconstructions of our latest national trauma were stemmed in until the late 1970s (excluding the Spanish intelligentsia in the diaspora), India began to rewrite its birth in the wake of the atrocities that led to it. The poetry of the Partition that Raychaudhuri discusses witnesses the immediacy of the events in the minds of the writers; much the same can be said of Ritwik Ghatak's treatment of the refugees in his films, as Diamond Oberoi Vahali contends in her contribution —a topic that invites reflecting on one of the most glaring outrages in our own times. By 1947 British India was a battlefield with no well-delimited trenches where the enemy was among yesterday's beloved neighbours. It was not unusual thus, in societies structured on warped patriarchal affirmation, that all women and men from the minority



on the wrong side of the border (or even the town and the village) were legitimate targets. Not the only land, the bodies became war bounty too. This we can learn from Bodh Prakash's essay on the Muslims as Others in their own country, and from Escobedo's and Mookerjea-Leonard's respective articles on rape as an instrument of cultural annihilation. Arundhati Roy described the much later riot that took place in Gujarat in 2002, "how they had folded the men and unfolded the women. And how eventually they had pulled them apart limb from limb and set them on fire." This quotation from *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* directs me to Nalini Iyer's piece on the narrative strategy that Roy followed to describe the fragmented puzzle that is today's India. These fragments seem to be kept together by the nationalist discourse against archenemy Pakistan, by proxy (Kashmir, Balochistan) or in direct confrontation (nuclear deterrence, intelligence services covering terror attacks on either side of the Line of Control, etc). The military confrontations of 1965, 1971, 1999 seem to be hot exceptions in the low-intensity war that Indian nationalism played against its nemesis on Bollywood films, as Vinay Lal contends. The "Gujarat development model" that led Narendra Modi to victory in the elections in 2014, has been for other contributors in this issue an ominous reminder of the changes operating in India, an emerging, modern economy with records of inequality and brimming on another communal Armageddon. How the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is managing to have leverage on more sectors of the state everyday via Hindutva and its affiliates (or vice versa) is the arena of the comments by Baghwah Josh (the rise of Hindutva), Sucheta Mahajan (doctoring the historiography of India) and Tanika Sarkar (legitimizing fascistic moods that imperil Indian democracy).

However, far from being a dystopia established by a saffron plutocracy, India struggles to keep alive the project of peoples who keep their religious-ethnic affiliation in private for the common good. While "cow vigilantes" under bovine protection punish people who consume beef, and paramilitary groups drill their khaki hatred filmmakers and writers, illiterate people from rural areas, and working poor from the slums INSIDE India struggle to keep the nation holding the record of the country from the global South where seemingly the military have always waived their power to the body politic (thanks to Vinay Lal for this point) no matter how dysfunctional the latter may be. In 2016 students protesting at JNU University managed to turn Bollywood songs into protest anthems, as Rosinka Chauduri points out. It was and continues to be a signal of resistance to classist, casteist and extremely sexist policies condoned by the Modi regime. "Dancing in the Street" is long relegated as a footnote in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s in America, and "Si yo tuviera una escoba" is a piece of anti-Franco memorabilia. But "Mere kesh ki dharti" is kept well alive since its release in 1967 —incidentally the same as Lluís Llach's "L'estaca."





# 'REMEMBERING' SINDH, RECONSTRUCTING SINDH: THE POLITICS OF MEMORY AMONG SINDHI HINDUS IN INDIA

Nandita Bhavnani  
Independent Scholar

## ABSTRACT

When India was partitioned in 1947, the province of Sindh went in its entirety to the newly-formed state of Pakistan. The bulk of the Hindus (and Sikhs) of Sindh migrated to India in the months that followed. Given that there was no part of Sindh in India, and given the harsh visa regime shared by the two countries, Sindhi Hindus have had little or no contact with their original homeland for the last seven decades. Some among the generations of Sindhi Hindus that migrated to India (and subsequently formed the diaspora) have shared their recollections with their children and grandchildren. There has been a corresponding move among a section of Sindhi Hindus to distance themselves from memories of a culture shared with Muslims, and a history that was largely dominated by Muslims. Yet, as is the case with many communities, Sindhi Hindus too feel the need for a community history. Consequently, when Sindhis recall Sindh, they often refer to a 'sanitized' Sindh, which they have supposedly 'inherited'.

KEYWORDS: collective memory, Hindu, Muslim, Partition, Sindh, Sindhi history.

## RESUMEN

Con la división de la India británica en 1947, toda la provincial de de Sindh pasó a formar parte de Paquistán, y la mayoría de los hindúes (y sijs) de Sindh emigraron a India en los meses siguientes. Puesto que ninguna parte de Sindh pasó a la nueva India y el régimen de visados entre esta y Paquistán era muy estricto, los hindúes procedentes de esa región han tenido poco contacto directo con ella. Una parte de quienes migraron a India (y en última instancia formaron parte de la diáspora) han transmitido sus recuerdos a sus descendientes. Se puede entrever que han relegado la cultura que compartían con sus vecinos musulmanes a un lugar secundario, así como la historia de su región, mayormente dominada por el poder islámico. Sin embargo los sindhis, como otras muchas comunidades, tienen la necesidad de construir una historia 'heredada', muchas veces 'purgada' de factores adversos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Memoria colectiva, hindúes, musulmanes, la Partición, Sindh, Historia de los sindhis.

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*Jiye munhinji Sindh,  
Maan ta ghoriyaan penhinji jind  
Penhinje abaarne vatan taan!  
Abaarne vatan taan,  
Sindh je chaman taan,  
Jiye munhinji Sindh...*

*Kiyan visaryaan Sindh ja nazaara  
Sadhbela Manorhe vaara  
Chand jyun raatyun ain behraarna*

*Lal ja panjda gayindar muhaarna  
Jiye munhinji Sindh...*

*Sufiyan santan ji aabe Sindhri  
Mast faqiran ji aabe Sindhri*

*Shah Sachal Sami-a jo dero  
Shaal vanya ute aaun hik bhero  
Jiye munhinji Sindh...*

*Mohan jo daro jehinji nishaani  
Jeko na samjhe kare tho naadaani  
Jeko bi Sindh visaararn chaabe  
Sacho sapoot so Sindh jo naabe  
Jiye munhinji Sindh...  
Marui-a vaaangur piyo baadaayaan  
Ajhaa abaarna shaal vasaayaan*

Long live my Sindh  
I would gladly give my life  
For my ancestral land!  
For my ancestral land,  
For the garden that is Sindh  
Long live my Sindh...

How can I forget the sights of Sindh  
Those of Sadhbela and Manora<sup>1</sup>  
New moon nights and ritual offerings to the  
river god<sup>2</sup>  
Muhanas singing praises of [Jhule] Lal<sup>3</sup>  
Long live my Sindh...

My beloved Sindh is [the land] of Sufi saints  
My beloved Sindh is [the land] of ascetics lost  
in a trance  
The home of Shah, Sachal and Sami<sup>4</sup>  
May I go there once again  
Long live my Sindh...

Its symbol is Mohan jo daro [sic]<sup>5</sup>  
Whoever doesn't understand this, errs  
Whoever wants to forget Sindh  
Is not a true son of Sindh  
Long live my Sindh...  
I lament like Marui<sup>6</sup>  
May I settle down again

<sup>1</sup> Both these are sites of Hindu temples in Sindh.

<sup>2</sup> *Behraanas*, or ritual offerings to the river god, were generally made on the day of the new moon.

<sup>3</sup> Muhanas are an ancient tribe of Muslim fishermen and ferrymen in Sindh. Many of them live in houseboats. They revere the water, which is their home and the source of their livelihood, and are known to have faith in the river deity, known as Khwaja Khizr to the Muslims, or Jhule Lal to the Hindus, or Zinda Pir to both Hindus and Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689-1752) and Sachal Sarmast (1739-1829) were both Muslim poet-saints. Chainrai Bachomal 'Sami' (1743-1850) was a Hindu merchant in Shikarpur, who synthesized Sufi and Vedantic thought in his poetry. Together, these three names form the triumvirate of Sindhi Sufi poetry.

<sup>5</sup> Moenjodaro, Sindhi for 'the mound of the dead', is often misspelt as Mohenjodaro or Mohan jo daro, meaning, 'the mound of Mohan', sometimes further wrongly interpreted to mean 'the mound of Krishna'. Ironically, often Sindhis themselves commit this mistake.

<sup>6</sup> Marui is the heroine of a well-known Sindhi legend. A beautiful village belle, Marui was abducted by Umar, the king of Umarmkot, who wished to marry her. But Marui remained constant to her fiancé, to her community, and to her own land, and thus became a byword for loyalty and patriotism.



*Jhularn Asha kando hia poori*  
*Jhumariyun payindas umar samoori*  
*Jiye munhinji Sindh...*

Jhulan<sup>7</sup> will fulfil this hope of mine<sup>8</sup>  
I will dance [his praises] all my life  
Long live my Sindh...

(Chawla and Thakur 61)

## I. THE CONTEXT FOR THE SONG

This Sindhi song was written by the late Sindhi film director, actor and writer, Dharam Kumar Tolani (1919-1993), whose pen name was 'Deepak Asha'. Its intended audience was probably Sindhi Hindus in India or in the diaspora, who had migrated from Sindh after the Partition of India in 1947. The song seeks to not only memorialize, but also celebrate, Sindh, the poet's 'ancestral land'.

After the Partition of India in 1947, when Sindh became a part of Pakistan, the bulk of its minorities chose to migrate to India. While it is not possible to arrive at the exact number of the Hindus and Sikhs who migrated from Sindh in 1947-48, it has been estimated at approximately 1 million people (Bhavnani 162; Boivin and Rajpal 45).<sup>9</sup> In India, these Sindhi Hindus were scattered mostly across western India. During the colonial period, some Sindhi Hindu traders and merchants were living abroad for business purposes, and in the years after Partition, this diaspora not only became cemented, but also grew exponentially, both in numbers as well as in distribution.

In the early years after Partition, Sindhi Congress leaders, such as Dr Choithram Gidwani and Jairamdas Doulatram, had strongly advocated that Sindhi Hindu refugees should learn local languages and adapt to local cultures and assimilate in local populations, wherever they resettled. This was bolstered by the then-prevalent Nehruvian ideology of Indian citizens rising above their ethnic affiliations and religions to unite as 'Indians'.

However, there were also some Sindhis like the professor, writer and community leader, Ram Panjwani, Deepak Asha and others, who battled these trends to dilute Sindhi identity by exhorting Sindhis to keep their language and cultural identity alive. According to the writer Bhagwan Bhagchandani, 'Deepak Asha' (like Ram Panjwani) toured Sindhi Hindu refugee camps and resettlement colonies in those early years after Partition. They entertained Sindhi Hindus with music, while encouraging them not to forget their Sindhi culture and identity. It is likely that this song was written during this early period of resettlement, and with such a purpose.

---

<sup>7</sup> Diminutive term for Jhule Lal.

<sup>8</sup> The poet puns on his hope for the community, and his pen name 'Asha' which also means 'hope', and traditionally appears in the last verse of the poem.

<sup>9</sup> It should be remembered that minorities have continued to migrate from Sindh to India and other countries through the intervening decades, albeit in much smaller numbers.



While Deepak Asha's hopes for a robust sense of ethnic identity among Sindhis in India may have had limited success, his song became highly popular at Sindhi gatherings. Over the intervening decades, it has been sung or played at numerous Sindhi events. However, it is a highly selective representation of, or 'remembering' of, Sindh.

The song portrays a somewhat 'Hindu-ized' Sindh. It refers to only Hindu places of worship, such as Sadhbelo and Manora, and also the ritual offering of the *bahraana* on days of the new moon.

What is interesting is that although Sindh had a predominantly Muslim population and history, these have been largely ignored in the song. Muslims formed a majority of 76% of Sindh's population according to the 1941 census. (Lambrick 17). Further, Sindh had been under continuous Muslim rule for roughly eleven centuries, from the invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim in 711-713 CE until the British conquest in 1843. Consequently, most of the antique architectural remains found in Sindh are Muslim in style and origin. Traditionally, Sindhi handicrafts and textiles have also been produced mostly by Muslim artisans. However, the song clearly underplays the considerable Muslim presence in Sindh. It mentions Sindhi Muslims in a highly selective manner, and highlights only those elements of Sindhi history and culture that Hindus can easily identify with.

The song refers to Muhanas, the marginalized Sindhi Muslim community of fishermen and ferrymen, but only in the context of their singing praises of Jhule Lal, the god of the river Indus. It also refers to Marui, the Muslim heroine of a Sindhi legend, famous for her loyalty to her homeland while in forced exile (here Marui is invoked as an ideal or as an allegory, for those Sindhi Hindus who still yearn for their homeland.) The only other Sindhi Muslims mentioned in the song are the famous Sufi poet-saints, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (1689-1752) and Sachal Sarmast (1739-1829). Finally, the poet invokes Moenjodaro as the ultimate symbol of Sindh.

The poet also makes two ironic claims. Firstly, he asserts that anyone who wants to forget Sindh is not a true son of Sindh, despite himself disregarding the not-inconsiderable Muslim aspects of Sindh in this very song. And secondly, he repeatedly claims that he would gladly give his life for Sindh, but actually the opposite appears to be true, since he himself migrated to India.<sup>10</sup>

Using this song as a springboard, this essay proposes to delineate motifs that recur in this selective 'remembering' of Sindhi history. It further examines possible causal factors in pre-1947 Sindhi society as well as post-Partition developments that possibly contributed to this reconstruction of Sindhi history.

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<sup>10</sup> Born in 1919, Deepak Asha would have been a 28 year-old adult in 1947, and not a child, subject to the decisions of his parents.

## II. A SELECTIVE ‘REMEMBERING’ OF SINDH

The selective ‘remembering’ of the Sindh portrayed in this particular song is a symptom of the Sindhi Hindu community’s ‘remembering’ of Sindh in general, which has been borne out in the community’s popular writings on Sindh and its history.<sup>11</sup> A few salient tropes stand out.

### A. AN ‘ARYAN’ MOENJODARO

Firstly, a salient feature of this Sindh ‘remembered’ by Sindhi Hindus is that of Moenjodaro and the Harappa, or the Indus Valley, civilization. Notwithstanding archaeological research and academic findings that state that it is not yet possible to conclusively prove the identity of the inhabitants of this civilization, numerous Sindhi Hindus choose to believe that the denizens of this ancient culture were Aryans, who were also the authors of the Vedas, and therefore the founders of Hinduism (and also the ultimate ancestors of the Sindhis of today).

A prominent example of this ‘belief’ is the popular work of fiction *The Return of the Aryans*, by Bhagwan S. Gidwani and its subsequent adaptation, *The March of the Aryans*.<sup>11</sup> Forgoing any archaeological evidence or other historical proofs, Gidwani holds up Sindh as the birthplace and cradle of Hinduism. In his own words, “This novel tells the story of the Aryans [...] I must present this as a work of fiction. But fiction is not falsehood. Nor a dream. Nor guesswork. Ideally it should be seen as a fictionalized alternative history that our mainstream historians have not attempted to write” (Gidwani 1994: xi). In the same vein, he holds that “... the imperishable remembrance of the Aryan movement and migration from India; and the message in these songs is clear —that the Aryans originated from India and nowhere else” (xi). He also maintains, “The Aryans of 5000 BC were born, grew up and died as Hindus. They were anchored in the timeless foundation of the Hindu tradition” (xii).

While Gidwani’s writings are clearly fiction, and as yet are unsupported by any hard proof, they are often assumed as facts by some Sindhis. For example, Gidwani posits that the Aryans originated in “the land of the Sindhu,” but dispersed in different directions in 5000 BCE and returned to India centuries later. This has been stated as fact (citing Gidwani’s work) by Prem Matlani in *The Indus Empire: History of Sindh* (21). Again, during a Sindhi seminar-cum-cultural festival titled ‘Hojamalo’ hosted by Jai Hind College, Mumbai, on 24-25 January 2018, placards were placed around the campus with information on Sindhi history and culture. One such placard quoted Gidwani, and suggested that Hinduism took birth in

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<sup>11</sup> Gidwani was the son of Shamdas Gidwani, the pre-Partition head of the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha in Sindh. However, Sindhi Hindu identity can be complex. Gidwani dedicated his book to his two sons, the elder named Manu, possibly after the Hindu lawgiver, and the younger named Sachal, after the Sufi saint.



Sindh prior to 8000 BCE, and that a Sindhi person was the first to chant ‘Om’, a mantra held sacred by Hindus.

Other Sindhi Hindus have also voiced similar beliefs, and maintain that they are the heirs to the Indus Valley civilization—even though Sindhis, along with the modern world, became aware of this civilization only in the early 1920s. For example:

With Sindhi culture being a synthesis of the Indus Valley and Vedic civilisations, its language also inevitably showed the influence of these cultures (Buxani, 39).<sup>12</sup>

The society of Sindhis [...] is more Aryan and undiluted than the Hindu society in the rest of India. (Thakur, 24).

The origins of the Sindhi community can be traced back to the period of Mohan-Jo-Daro civilization, the oldest in the world. As such Sindhi culture with its deep roots has been a source of inspiration to the community. (Jawhrani, xv).

## B. THE ‘OPPRESSOR MUSLIM’

Secondly, Muslims in general are recalled, or ‘reconstructed,’ in a negative light, and portrayed as oppressors of Hindus. These generally include Muhammad bin Qasim’s invasion of Sindh and the concomitant slaying of Hindus;<sup>13</sup> as well as the reign of the Talpurs (the last indigenous rulers of Sindh, who were ethnic Baloch Muslims), and their occasional oppression of Hindus. See the following examples:

... I am the dancer of Mohen jo Daro ...  
... I am the first and foremost civilization of the world - the epitome of culture  
The Sindhu Valley civilization in this depleted condition! ...  
... Greeks, Turks, Persians, Arabs, all had crossed my land ...  
... I remember everything, the foreign invaders, the horses of the savage riders  
galloping away ...  
... I remember everything. They came raising dust storms causing havoc and devastation and crossed my border  
From Alexander to Muhammad bin Qasim, from Ghaznavi to Ghoris, from Changez Khan to Babar, they played Holi of blood colouring my dust red.

(Quoted in K.N. Vaswani, 82-83)

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<sup>12</sup> The Indus Valley script remains to be deciphered.

<sup>13</sup> Buddhists are rarely if ever mentioned, even though the majority of Sindh’s population at the time was Buddhist.



... but the Arab invasion [...] brought in wave after wave of foreign hordes. The Tartars, the Arghuns and the Tarkhans, the Moguls, and the Baloch as if the whole world fell upon the country from the west or through the Punjab. And the subsequent history of the Sind Hindus is therefore nothing but a tale of woe of their degradation, conversion and surveillance.

(Thakur, 15-16).

The Sindhis ruled Sind till they were defeated and conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century. And from that time onwards they have played the role of refugees.

(Bharadwaj, 15).

This 'narrative' of Muslims as *only* 'foreign invaders' and 'oppressors' is at odds with historical facts. Minorities —Hindus, Buddhists and Jains— continued to live in Sindh for centuries after the Arab conquest of Sindh in 711-713 CE. Buddhism declined in Sindh around the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, as it did in the rest of India, and Jains remained a numerically small community, who nevertheless lived in Sindh till 1947. Hindus too continued to live, and prosper, in Sindh, and while there may have been migrations eastwards at various points in history, there were also inflows of Hindus from the subcontinent. Different sub-communities of Hindus dominated various Sindhi cities at different points in time, and further, were primarily responsible for the prosperity of these cities. Hindu merchants and traders flourished in the southern Sindh capital of Thatta from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Similarly, Hindu merchants and administrators were actively encouraged to come to Shikarpur by the Durranis, as well as to first Khudabad and later Hyderabad by the Kalhoras, all in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These Hindus wielded considerable power and prestige and were patronized and protected (to a large extent) by the Muslim rulers of their cities (Markovits, *passim*; Allen, 40).

There are also two important exceptions to this anti-Muslim stance: the two eminent Sufi poet-saints, Shah Abdul Latif and Sachal Sarmast.<sup>14</sup> To begin with, their Sufi poetry and their philosophy of humanism eschew a rigid practice of Islam on the one hand, and on the other, they also embrace Hindus; both these naturally do not antagonize the latter. Consequently, Sindhi Hindus are able to appreciate the heights of excellence reached by the poetry of these two Sufi saints, and are happy to acknowledge them as fellow Sindhis.

Sufism and Sufi practices were widespread in Sindh, among Muslims as well as Hindus, and if the latter visited Sufi *dargahs*, or became followers of Sufi *pirs*, these practices were quite socially acceptable in Sindhi Hindu society, and were not frowned upon. Similarly, it was common for Sindhi Hindus to exclaim "Ai Al-

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<sup>14</sup> On occasion, other lesser-known Sindhi Muslim Sufi poets —such as Bedil, Bekas and Rohal— are also cited. See for example, T.L. Vaswani, 44-45; Dhameja, *passim*.



lah!” when surprised or startled. As in Deepak Asha’s song, we can see that Sindhi Muslims are remembered, but only as Sufis, tolerant of, and acceptable to, Hindus.

### C. THE ‘DISAPPEARANCE’ OF SINDH

Sindhi Hindus, especially those that migrated during Partition, generally refer to themselves as ‘Sindhis’, while referring to Sindhi Muslims as *jat*, the name of a tribe of camel herders, but used derogatorily to denote a crude and illiterate country bumpkin, the Hindu stereotype for all Sindhi Muslims. In turn, Sindhi Muslims refer to themselves as ‘Sindhis’, while referring to Sindhi Hindus as *diwan* (meaning minister with reference to older practice of Hindus acting as ministers to the Muslim rulers of Sindh) or *vaaniya* (meaning merchant or trader). Clearly, prior to 1947, there was little or no sense of an overarching Sindhi provincial identity that transcended religious differences.

At the time of Partition, there was negligible communal violence in Sindh between Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims. Two anti-Hindu and anti-Sikh pogroms—the first in Hyderabad on 17 December 1947 and the second in Karachi on 6 January 1948—were perpetrated, largely by Muhajirs who sought property belonging to Sindhi Hindus that became available to them after the latter migrated. These two pogroms were largely responsible for the exodus of Hindus and Sikhs from Sindh. As a result, Sindhi Hindus came to perceive Sindh (and concomitantly Pakistan as well) as a land dominated by Muslims, here they as Hindus had no place and were no longer welcome—and indeed from where they had been forcibly ejected. Consequently, there has been a turning away from Sindh, especially among the younger generation that migrated in 1947-48, and Sindh has been relegated to the past in some ways, at least at a subconscious level. Perhaps this has been a coping mechanism on the part of the Sindhi Hindus, as a means to deal with the trauma of being ejected from their homeland.

This has been reflected in popular writing among and about Sindhis as well. For instance, the writer Kavita Daswani, while describing Sindh, refers to it almost completely in the past tense, as though it ceased to exist after 1947 (Daswani, 5-6). In a similar vein, another writer, Saaz Aggarwal, titled her book *Sindh: Stories from a Vanished Homeland*; one section in this book is subtitled ‘Sindh, the lost homeland: undivided, it vanished’ (Aggarwal, 66). However, it must also be said that Aggarwal’s book does cover Sindhi history briefly, and also touches upon modern Sindh.

This ‘erasure’ of Sindh is further aided and accentuated by a statement occasionally made publicly at Sindhi gatherings: *Jite Sindhi, hute Sindh*, meaning, “Where there are Sindhis, there is Sindh.” This is a ‘reconstruction’ of a new, mobile Sindh (which is composed of only Sindhi Hindus in this context) and the spirit of this statement implies that ‘Sindh’—here possibly used as shorthand for a transportable homeland, a place of belonging—exists wherever Sindhi Hindus are to be found, whether in India or in the diaspora.

In tandem with this viewpoint, most Sindhi Hindus are not interested or perhaps even aware of the sociopolitical, cultural or environmental realities of present-



day Sindh, a land with which they find it difficult to identify today. Further, there is little knowledge or acknowledgement of the relatively small number of Sindhi Hindus that remain in Sindh and the various issues that they face.

#### D. EXCEPTIONS

It should be pointed out that, over the decades, there have been exceptions to this 'selective' remembering of Sindh. After 1947, there was an entire generation of Sindhi Hindu writers in India that wrote extensively about their Partition and post-Partition experiences. Of a literary bent of mind, they were also better informed about Sindhi history. Further, these writers maintained contact with their counterparts and friends in Sindh, and hosted Sindhi Muslim writers and friends who visited them in India. Several of them made journeys back to Sindh, to attend literary conferences, but also to meet their friends and revisit their old homes and hometowns; they published their travelogues subsequently, and almost uniformly had high praise and warmth for their Sindhi Muslim friends.

Moreover, in the two decades spanning the turn of the 21st century (i.e. the 1990s and the 2000s), there were various magazines and journals published, most of which were in English but specifically for a Sindhi readership (given that the Sindhi community had moved away from the Sindhi language and towards English). These include *Sindh Sujaag* ("Awakened Sindh," in Sindhi) and *Sindh Rises* (in English), both published by the late Sindhi writer, Kirat Babani (1922-2015), which specifically dealt with various issues faced by Sindhis in Sindh. Other English-language magazines, such as *Aseen Sindhi* ("We the Sindhis"), *Sindh International*, and *Sahyog Times*, covered a wide range of subjects such as Sindhi personalities and issues relating to Sindhis in India as well as the historical aspects of various towns and regions of Sindh, apart from various Sindhi legends.

Overall, it appears that a greater interest in Sindhi history, particularly with respect to the eleven centuries of Muslim rule, or actual friendships with Sindhi Muslims, were largely confined to the small community of writers among the Sindhi Hindus.

### III. POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

There were various significant factors that distanced Sindhi Hindus from their history. From interviews with a few of the generation of Sindhi Hindus who were children at the time of Partition, the picture that emerges is that most Sindhi Hindus were not aware of their provincial history in great detail, especially beyond the regimes of the Kalhoras (1737-1783) and the Talpurs (1783-1843). Similarly they were not aware of, or had not visited historical landmarks in Sindh. This was an era of highly undeveloped tourism, in Sindh as well as in other parts of India, when travel was mostly limited to pilgrimages, work-related travel or visits to relatives. It appears that in the pre-Partition period, Sindhi Hindu children were actively kept away by





their families from visiting Muslim tombs, mausoleums and mosques, although they may have visited Sufi *dargahs*, which historically have been more welcoming to, and tolerant of, Hindus. Fear of religious conversion was likely a prime cause, as well as an avoidance of sites relating to death (see Bhavnani, xxxi-xxxii)

As a result, it appears that most Sindhi Hindus remained unaware of the richness of the Muslim medieval architecture — tombs and mausoleums, graveyards and mosques— found in Sindh. These architectural sites could have functioned as a means of accessing Sindhi history, and their beauty could have functioned as a gateway to an appreciation of the civilization or historical era that produced that particular monument, and ultimately to a sense of pride in being Sindhi, but sadly, visits to such sites were actively discouraged among Sindhi Hindus.

While some Sindhi Hindus had interactions with, and friends among, Muslims in schools, colleges, offices and neighbourhoods in Sindh, other Sindhi Hindus (especially those from the upper-middle class) recall that their only interaction with Sindhi Muslims was limited to those from the lower-middle class e.g. washermen, butchers, etc. Further, during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hindu right-wing organizations had put down roots, and acquired a significant presence in Sindh (Kothari, 2006; Bhavnani, xxxix-xlii).

After Partition, Sindhi Hindus distanced themselves to an even greater degree from Sindhi Muslims. This happened for several reasons. Firstly, the subsequent migration from Sindh of a large number of Sindhi Hindus to India (and later to various countries across the globe) resulted in the simple fact of the physical separation from Sindh and Sindhi Muslims, in an era of highly limited communications. This was further cemented by the stringency of the mutual visa regime that subsequently evolved between India and Pakistan, ensuring that Sindhi Hindus would find it difficult if not impossible to visit/revisit Sindh, unless they had relatives living across the border.

Secondly, like other Partition refugees, many Sindhi Hindus chose to blame the trauma of Partition on the ‘other’ community (Bhavnani, 260-1). As mentioned earlier, it could also have been a coping mechanism to deal with the Partition trauma. Consequently, there was little desire on the part of several Sindhi Hindus to revisit their old homes, which were now occupied by Muslim strangers.

Further, over the many centuries of living under Muslim rule and in a Muslim-majority country, and in the absence of any state patronage for Hinduism, the Hinduism as practised in Sindh was distant from Sanskrit Hinduism in several respects. Sindhi Hindus ate meat and did not practise caste-based untouchability; they sometimes believed in Muslim *pirs* and visited *dargahs*; many Hindu schoolchildren learnt Persian and/or Arabic even till 1947, and wrote Sindhi in the Perso-Arabic script, which had Muslim connotations. Sindhi Hindu women wore their traditional dress of *suthan-cholo*, a tunic worn over trousers, and not the sari or bindi. These various factors served to create the image of the Sindhi Hindu as a ‘quasi-Muslim’ in the eyes of other Hindus in India, which was especially ironic, considering that the Sindhi Hindus had fled Sindh on the basis of their religion (Balasubrahmanyam, 479-80; Kothari, 116; Nandy, xviii).



As a result, in an effort to adapt to local societies and to gain some degree of acceptance, Sindhi Hindus began to jettison these aspects of their culture, and also began to turning to the Hindu right to a greater degree, embracing Sanskritic customs and rituals. Hence the “Aryanizing” of Moenjodaro, and even the name “Mohan jo daro” interpreted as the ‘Mound of Krishna’. All these developments further cemented the turning away from Sindh, now perceived as a “Muslim” country, which had no place for Sindhi Hindus, and from where they had been literally ejected. (This was later exacerbated by the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971, and the Kargil conflict of 1999, which turned Pakistan into an “enemy country” for many Hindus in India.)

There was a concomitant turning away from Sindhi language, culture and identity, which were perceived as belonging to the ‘past’. However, this occurred in varying degrees. It appears to have occurred more in the younger generation that migrated, i.e. those who were teenagers or children in 1947. Older Sindhi Hindus had a deeper and more rooted sense of their ethnic identity. Similarly, upper-class Sindhi Hindus were more likely to turn away from the Sindhi language towards English and a more Westernized lifestyle.

#### IV. RAMIFICATIONS

As mentioned earlier, Congress leaders had also encouraged this philosophy of downplaying Sindhi ethnicity. As a result, both Sindhi language and identity underwent a decline. In the initial years after Partition, several Sindhi-medium schools had been founded in India; similarly, the new generation of Sindhi writers (who had undergone the trauma of Partition) published numerous books, newspapers and magazines. After several decades of downplaying Sindhi ethnicity, the bulk of these Sindhi medium schools have shut down, as have many Sindhi language newspapers and magazines. Younger generations of Sindhis have also distanced themselves from their ethnic identity over the decades.

However, ethnic identity in a multi-ethnic society like India is also reinforced from the outside. Much as they may want, Sindhi Hindus cannot wish away their ethnic identity and become Nehru’s idealized ‘Indians’. Hence the writer Popati Hiranandani’s observation: “I am also a refugee; I want to assimilate but the local population always reminds me that I am a refugee” (personal interview, November 1997).

As is the case with many communities, at times Sindhi Hindus too feel the need for a community history. The current trajectory of their political affiliations, however, has been moving more and more towards the Hindu right. As a result, when they search for a sense of community history, they largely reject the eleven centuries of Muslim rule in Sindh, and instead turn towards the single, most significant non-Muslim element of Sindhi history: Moenjodaro. This element has further been transmuted into an “Aryan bastion” or a “fountainhead of Hinduism” to give it far greater value, especially when judged by the yardsticks of right-wing Hinduism. In a concomitant vein, Muslims are depicted mainly as “oppressors”. And thus Sindhi history is ‘rewritten’.



These trends dovetail with larger, more widespread trends towards right-wing Hinduism among Hindus in India today (and indeed, trends towards more hardened right-wing positions across the world). In other parts of India, there have been similar urges to ‘rewrite’ Indian history in a more saffronized vein, as for example, when textbooks in Rajasthan were amended in 2017 to state that Rana Pratap, and not Akbar, won the battle of Haldighati of 1576.<sup>15</sup>

## V. EPILOGUE

However, technological innovations have revolutionized communications in an unprecedented way. Today, any person with access to the internet can create and upload a message or video which has the potential for “going viral” in a matter of minutes, that too on an international level. Consequently, Sindhis in India can connect with far greater ease with other Sindhis —Hindu or Muslim— in Pakistan, or elsewhere in the world. Over recent years, this has resulted in the wide dissemination (given the borderless nature of the internet) of messages, videos, etc which promote Sindhi language and identity among Sindhi Hindus. It is interesting to note that several of these videos —songs, skits and comic sketches— are created, or co-created by young Sindhis, in their twenties or even their teens. Further, email and What’s App groups have sprung up, which connect Sindhis in both India and Pakistan.

To return to the song “Jiye munhinji Sindh” that started this essay, it remains a highly popular vehicle for promoting Sindhi identity. In recent years, there have been multiple renditions of this song posted on the internet, including pop and remix versions (which are likely to appeal to younger generations of Sindhis), and also videos of Sindhis dancing to this song; these videos have been viewed literally thousands of times. (Juriani 2012; Pahlajani and Udasi 2017). These videos also include one (with slightly modified lyrics), actually created by a Sindhi Muslim in Pakistan, which depicts Hindu-Muslim communal harmony among Sindhis (Mughal 2018). The song’s multiple incarnations over the years are a testament to its enduring popularity. However, this also means that the selective ‘remembering’ of Sindh that it embodies continues to be perpetuated.

Clearly, the internet has provided Sindhis across the globe (and indeed all people) with innovative ways and means of recreating and disseminating new expressions of their identity, and sometimes even ‘rewriting’ their history. The story of this song continues, as does the parallel story of Sindhi ethnic identity.

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<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, the Rajasthan Minister of State for primary and secondary education (then and now) was a Sindhi: Vasudev Devnani.



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# RETHINKING RELIGION AND LANGUAGE IN NORTH INDIA: THE HINDI-URDU DISPUTE AND THE RISE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM

William Gould  
University of Leeds

## ABSTRACT

In 1930s and 1940s Uttar Pradesh, the question of the relationship between Hindi and Urdu in debates about a possible 'national' language has been widely assumed to interface with a politics of communal antagonism between Hindus and Muslims. However, the politics of figures on the 'left' of the Congress in this period suggest that the role of language in relation to religious antagonism was complex and sometimes paradoxical. We will explore the ways in which characteristics of the two languages were associated with particular forms of social and political behaviour, and how these associations between language and behaviour came to characterise the rise of Hindi.

KEYWORDS: Communalism, Hindi, Language policies, Urdu.

## RESUMEN

Durante las décadas de 1930 y 1940 en Uttar Pradesh los debates sobre la primacía del hindi o el urdu como la lengua oficial, 'nacional' se solapaban en gran parte con el enfrentamiento entre hindúes y musulmanes. Atendiendo a la postura que adoptó la 'izquierda' del Partido del Congreso, vemos que la relación entre lengua e identidad religiosa es bastante compleja y en ocasiones paradójica. En este artículo exploramos cómo las características de sendos idiomas se asociaban a determinado comportamiento social y político y cómo de esa co-relación de fuerzas surgió la hegemonía del hindi.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Hindi, Política lingüística, Sectarismo religioso, Urdu.



On 6 January 1936, in reaction to Gandhi's attempts to promote Hindustani in both scripts —Persian and Devanagri— within the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (hereafter HSS),<sup>1</sup> the newspaper *Sudha* described the Mahatma as a 'blind devotee of Muslims'. Because of Gandhi's pious wishes it reported, poor Hindi would have to put on an awkward half-rustic, half Muslim costume and would be 'cremated'. Hindi, it claimed, was 'sanskrit's daughter and the language of cow protecting, non-violent image worshipers who considered India their only land.' How could it come to terms, *Sudha* argued, with the communalist language of cow-eating image destroyers, who considered Arabia and Iran their motherland, and whose foreign culture was violent, brutal and harking back to the days of Muslim empires?<sup>2</sup>

The image-laden reaction of *Sudha* provides a snapshot into one of the most important political divisions of late colonial India —a debate that had clearly emerged in the north of the country's mainstream media by the mid 1930s, around the issue of script and language. What we might describe as the 'Hindi world' —the sphere of politics and culture that sought to promote the idea of a single national vernacular— was split into two camps. On the one side a 'Hindustani' group, promoting a language which recognized the mixed scriptural and vocabulary bases of Hindi and Urdu as conjoined languages. This included the likes of Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinoba Bhave, Kaka Kalelkar, Rajagopalachariah, and Jamnalal Bajaj. On the other side, promoting Hindi in the Devanagri script, as a language effectively in competition with Urdu in Nastaliq script, was, for example, P.D. Tandon, Babu Sampurnand, V.N. Tiwari, and Balkrishna Sharma. The debate, which reached its peak and raged through the HSS sessions of 1938-41 at Simla, Banaras, and Abohar, was conducted in and through the Hindi press itself, which tended to take the side of Hindi rather than Hindustani. Throughout, as is also evident in the writings of the likes of Tandon and Sampurnand (explored below), the Hindustani side was largely associated with a politics of religious community accommodation, a proto-secularism that embraced the essentially composite nature of India's political and social histories. The other side was more clearly aligned with a Hindu revivalist trend that worked both within and alongside mainstream political institutions such as the Indian National Congress.

This divide has been the subject of extensive academic commentary. And arguably, the division between Hindi and Urdu has, itself, been reinforced by subsequent literature exploring it.<sup>3</sup> This article will not revisit this well-trodden terrain in terms of the languages themselves, but presents a survey of how the supposed Hindi-Urdu divide became an increasingly 'communal' issue, despite late colonial common knowledge about the largely non-religious/non-communal associations

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Hindi Literature Convention' —the principal organization promoting Hindi as a national language in India.

<sup>2</sup> *Sudha* 6 January 1936.

<sup>3</sup> The literature on the Hindi-Urdu debate is extensive but can be explored in depth. See for example, Rai 1984; King 1994; Rahman 1999; Faruqi 2001



with each language. It will not look in detail at the means by which we arrive at a language that has distinctive overlapping provenance with a range of dialects and then to a bifurcated language based on script, but it will explore the politics that accompanied this division. In the first part of the article we will explore the ways in which Hindi and Urdu were mapped onto particular readings of India's political history, which became more closely related to religious community in the late colonial period. The second part of the article will examine the agencies and individuals who made this possible, exploring in particular the work and writings of Sampurnand and P.D. Tandon in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. The article will argue that particular forms of political change in the late colonial period shaped the polarization of Hindi and Urdu in debates about language. Specifically, the forms of anti-colonial and populist protest brought a new urgency to the promotion of a common vernacular at the right moment. Secondly, the forms of anti-colonial protest that dominated parts of northern India —the politically most significant regions of India— also generated forms of cultural nationalism that shaped Hindi promotion as a 'Hindu' project.

## I. DEFINING HINDI AND URDU ORIGINS

Much of the debate around language, and specifically Hindi and Urdu, made references to deeper historical contexts. In many cases, this was a deliberate 'invention of tradition', which served the aesthetic purposes of literature; and as we will see below, key political publicists in the Hindi belt tied their nationalist mobilisation to historical developments of a pure dialect. As with most examples of nationalist hagiography, these histories obscured a far more complex reality, but themselves drew on certain myths of linguistic origin. Most linguistic scholars relate the variable roots of modern Hindi and Urdu to 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Century Prakrits and dialects, which eventually developed to Khari Boli —a language spoken around Delhi in that period (Orsini 2009). The literary languages of those centuries, further east, were Awadhi and Brajbhasha. These variable dialects from that time, also related to their use in a range of contexts. What eventually became Urdu then (what language scholars describe as 'Hindvi'), had certain origins in the courts of Delhi and the regional courts to the East of that city (Awadhi and Brajbhasha). From these languages, a range of temporally shifting forms developed —Hindvi, Rekhta, Dakhani, which flourished in different areas at different times— in the Deccan in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and then in Delhi by the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The word 'Urdu', which first appeared in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century in the writings of the court of Shah Alam II of Delhi, was derived from the Turkish word 'camp'. But was a misleading term, in the sense that it was spoken beyond the permanent or shifting courts of regional rulers. As I will argue more below, the lack of accuracy here was, at least from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century a deliberate nationalist construction, in promoting the idea that Urdu was somehow 'new' and 'foreign' —a language brought to India by the Mughals. At the same time, Urdu did develop its own historical mythologies and literary associations. It became a recognized language of poetry





in the 18th Century, which was thought to have a specific relationship to 'Persian', although in many respects this was an invented or 'pseudo' ancestor.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Urdu emerged as a highly developed language of poetry, especially in the cities of Delhi and Lucknow, although it had flourished earlier in the Deccan. In some ways, this was a period of the renaissance of the arts, including poetry. But these social and literary associations reinforced the idea that Urdu was somehow largely a language of governance and a tongue that had been 'changed' via association with the languages of invaders such as Arabic, Persian and Turkish. This is a distortion. 95% of Urdu verbs have their roots in Sanskrit/Prakrit, which assimilated other languages into its dialects. The assumption of Mir Amman in 'Bagh-o-Bahar' (1802), later taken up by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and initially G A Grierson, that Urdu was largely a 'camp' language, was a popular misconception based in misreadings India's Muslim histories (Parekj 2011).

Far from being 'foreign' then, Urdu was an example of a local language, which was enriched with Persian literary currents, in fact displacing, gradually Persian itself as the language of elites. This issue of the extent to which language changed in relation to government is crucial —in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the British dispensed with Persian as the language of governance and replaced it with English at the highest levels and the vernaculars at provincial and more local levels. For north India, from Bihar across to Punjab, this became Urdu for educated elites. It became much more of a prose language, used in journalism and the novel, which affected the significance of the language overall (Metcalf 29-37). Importantly, even organizations associated with the Hindu revival, such as the Arya Samaj generally used Urdu in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. (Jones 1976).

Urdu in the Persian script was, then, doubtless the most important language of governance as the British began to establish their dominion over north India.

But as colonial power became increasingly complex and formal from the 1880s onwards, debates and decisions took place around 'vernacular' languages in the project of governance. The crucial phase in these language debates therefore corresponded to the critical transformations in colonial power and its administration on the ground around the turn of the Century. From this stage then, the association of language with its formal and informal 'use' in a multi-lingual setting, became a common point of reference in all discussions of political reform or constitutional advance. And it was from this position, that the politics of religious community came to be grafted too, on the question of language. We can see this most directly in the decisions of the Lt Governor of the NWP (later United Provinces), Anthony Macdonnell at the turn of the century. In 1900, Macdonnell took the decision to recognize the growing movement among publicists writing in the devanagri script, to establish the principle of an equality of Hindi and Urdu (Robinson 1974).

It was through the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and into the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, that Urdu came to be more clearly associated with an older 'decadent' Nawabi culture (Metcalf 31), as the colonial state formalized rules of administration, attempted to root out local fiefdoms in some cases, and sought to rationalize the bases of its district administration. What David Lelyveld describes as 'language repertoires' —the use



of Hindi or Urdu, or another dialect in different places or for different functions, became hardened in this phase of high imperialism (Lelyveld 107-117). The state, not being an autonomous entity as far as social change was concerned, was also responding to changes in communication technologies: Increases in the outputs and subjects of publishing and journalism not only created the physical medium for language propagation, but also became the vehicle for its discussion. Alongside new reading publics, were new forms of educational institution — school and university movements, epitomized by Syed Ahmed Khan's Aligarh movement, but also a range of revivalist institutions, such as the Gurukuls. These promoted new forms of cultural communication, which cut across and included writing, literature and music (Bhakle 2005). They also accompanied a growth in colonial anticipation of administrative Indianisation, as it attempted to rationalize its power, and the need to consider languages of administration and the courts.

Debates about which languages should be used in any particular region or across India, for education, commerce, the courts or administration, became particularly intense then just as the projects of regional and national publishing and journalism developed on a large scale. The journal, newspaper and tract made new forms of literature, or debates about language possible. And those with the skills and finance to publicise literary pursuits, were able to open up such debates about language. Print culture was therefore at the centre of these endeavours, and moreover, the issue of promoting vernaculars took place against the ever present power of English as a language of rule. Colonial hierarchies were developed through the 'high' literacy associated with English, and it was in reaction to this that literati across India promoted the vernaculars (Naregal 4-5). A central figure here was Syed Ahmed Khan in the debates around and promotion of Urdu. Attempts to define a clearer and dominant language in Nagri, were led by figures such as Harischandra Bharatendu in his promotion of a nationwide standardised Hindi through publishing and educational endeavours. For the Banaras based journalist, language, literature, religion and territory were all important in defining Hindu identity and he linked Sanskritised Hindi unambiguously to the Hindu community, and high caste Vaishnavite belief (Dalmia 432-434).

For most of the period up to the 1910s, the promotion of vernacular literatures, although it began to map, for example, Hindi onto the 'Hindu' community and Urdu to Muslims, did not generate lasting antagonism or controversy. It was not until the 1920s that, for example, movements for the promotion of Hindi began to be represented in earnest as communally competitive. The question as to how this came about and why such controversies appeared at all is extremely important and warrants careful consideration. How they were sustained will form the key theme of the arguments that follow. Certainly, the idea that the Hindu community might be connected to the promotion of Hindi was certainly something on the horizon of some of the key political publicists and leaders of the 1900s and 1910s. And in the 1888 session of the Indian National Congress, local issues such as the prevention of cow slaughter, as they applied to cities such as Allahabad, could still create the suggestion of a potential Hindu-Muslim divide (McLane 1997). Nevertheless, none of these developments created a uniform or broad sense that the interests of



populations might be defined by ideas of religious difference; or that such differences existed uniformly across the entire subcontinent.

However, over the period up to the 1910s, the issue of language increasingly entered into broader political discussions about the nation. For example, Hindi and the Devanagiri script were at the centre of the project of late nineteenth-century Hindu revival. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, shared with Keshub Chandra Sen and a range of other Bengali leaders the desire to promote Hindi as a national language (Jones ch. 2-3). Moreover, the particular form of Hindi chosen by these intellectuals was important, and defined later language debates of the interwar period. Dayanand and figures like him, chose to concentrate on the promotion of a highly Sanskritised Hindi, as part of the project for the rejuvenation of the 'true' or 'original' language of Hindus. This was despite the fact that most speakers in what came to be known as the Hindi belt would have spoken neither a standardised Hindi, nor one that was entirely devoid of Persian influences (Orsini Intr.)

A key element of Hindi promotion in the late nineteenth century revolved around script, particularly the use of Devanagiri, and it was around the issue of script that some of the most important controversies of the period raged. An important institution, linked to the Arya Samaj in this project, was the Nagri Pracharini Sabha based in Banaras, whose first secretary, Shyam Sundar Das, claimed that the idea for the Sabha had come out of a meeting of the Samaj (Kumar 4-26). The Nagri Pracharini Sabha was a crucial institution at the end of the century in promoting Hindi as a language of the law courts in Uttar Pradesh. The Arya Samaj educational institutions, such as the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic Colleges were also instrumental in pushing the cause of Hindi. However, it was through Hindi journalism and literature that perhaps some of the most important progress in publicising Hindi in Devanagiri was made. As well as Harischandra, the journals *Brahman*, *Ksatriya-patrika*, *Hindi Pratap* (edited by Balkrishna Bhatt), and *Anandkadambini* (edited by Babu Radhakrishnadas) were important in forwarding the cause of Hindi as the language of Hindus and as a national language (Dalmia 141-142). The cause of Hindi literati was also furthered by the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) project, driven by Madan Mohan Malaviya. In a manner similar to the Aligarh University, BHU started off in 1905 as a project that had a wider significance than just the establishment of a University. The finance for the University was the result of fund raising among India's Hindu landed interests across the Hindi belt, through north and central India. Like Aligarh, it was designed to impart a particular kind of cultural and 'national' education that brought with it qualities not to be found in other institutions. This related to the symbolic and religious significance of Banaras itself, a town considered as the heart of Hindu culture. BHU slowly developed too into the centre for the development of a standardised Hindi syllabi for teaching in other colleges around the country.

The promotion of Hindi and its relationship to Urdu was always executed in tension with the politics of region over nation. In other words, its proponents' claim that it constituted a 'national' language was always limited by Hindi's demographic and spatial reach. In exploring the largely 'invented' religious community associations between Hindi and Urdu therefore, we might also consider its relationship



to, and similarities with parallel language movements in other parts of India. In western India for example, from the late 1870, Marathi was acquiring a dominant place in high literary pursuits in Bombay presidency, led by Chitpavan Brahman intellectuals. Over the same period that Hindi was being promoted, Marathi literature and the politics of bilingualism were furthered by voluntary associations, such as the Bombay Education Society, and the earlier Students' Literary and Scientific Society. These organisations acted as intermediaries between the local intelligentsia of urban centres and colonial officialdom, in producing a corpus of printed literature both in English and the vernaculars (Naregal 2001: 232-235). But in Pune, the high caste intelligentsia's intermediary position in the literary and educational sphere was challenged by the low —caste Satyashodak Samaj, led by Jotirao Phule, which used non literary public performances such as the *tamasha*, to contest high caste dominance of the municipalities (Naregal 268-270).

In India in the late colonial period, the politics of the journal was never far away from the politics of the streets and the assemblies. As anti-colonial nationalism extended and expanded beyond the initial petitioning movement of the Indian National Congress, the question of language also became more intensely political. In 1920, M.K. Gandhi rewrote the constitution of the Congress, lowering its membership fees to open the doors to wealthy peasants and workers. The language of that movement had been dominated by the cosmopolitan English-speaking elites of the Presidency cities. From 1920, if not much earlier, it was forced to keep pace with peasant and worker organisations that it had increasingly co-opted or swallowed as a means of building electoral strength and anti-state leverage (Pandey 1978). The languages of these communities were the vernaculars. Simultaneously, a new generation of publicists working in Hindi or Urdu took the place of provincial political mobilisations, as the 1920s-30s system of dyarchy pushed the foci of power more into the provinces and districts. These leaders had cut their political teeth in the city and district organisations, or had been educated through vernacular medium schools. Most importantly, they were representatives not of the large urban interests of previous years, but increasingly of agrarian communities, small traders, blue —collar workers and to some extent, the landless poor (Gooptu 2001; Gould 2004: Intr).

This was important context then, for the development of political controversy around language, not least because the medium of political rhetoric itself drew in the question of vernaculars. On the one hand the question of Hindi's place, for example, in the new political structures and societies of north India, created new debates about 'national' language and how the promotion of particular vernaculars encouraged forms of cultural autonomy. On the other hand, the use of vernaculars assisted in the development of political rhetoric that more clearly drew on community themes, religious questions, and issues of ethnic difference. This is not to argue that Hindi or Urdu were inherently vehicles for communal expression. Rather, the development of mass politicization in a context of language hierarchies, in which English was placed at the centre of urban cosmopolitanism, endowed vernaculars with the power of cultural difference. Such a politics easily wedded the issue of language to notions of anti-western mobilization, a critique of the presupposed structures of modernity, and the use of tradition to defend 'national' culture.



The debate around Hindi was also related to its inherent limitations, in the sense that there were many arguments against it ever fulfilling a role as a truly national language. It had to fill the extended ‘national’ space that the larger British presence had helped to establish, but it was by no means the *lingua franca* in all of those regions. The ‘Hindi belt’ itself was actually not uniformly Hindi speaking; it is still made up of related dialects such as Bhojpuri. Hindi then was a language that had enough mass and speakers at the commercial epicentre, to morph into a ‘language’ and was a very large regional language therefore, but not easily a ‘national’ one. The idea of it being based in ‘Sanskrit’ was also, in some respects, a fiction. The idea of ‘sanskritized’ Hindi was actually something quite modern, and a response to the idea of Hindi being sidelined by English —speaking elites in India. This led to deliberate abstruseness, which was used to change, and artificially bolster a natural language. This also involved an ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Urdu from the language, and a like for like unnatural translation of English terms into Sanskrit.

## II. HINDI, HINDUISM AND CULTURAL EXCLUSIVISM

In writing about the development of language politics in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India, historians and literary scholars have frequently made use of the idea of the ‘public sphere’ (Orsini 2009; Naregal 2001). This framework presents the idea of a hegemonic middle —class public, who developed voluntary institutions and publishing enterprises which defined the idea of public space in new ways in India. However, most scholars have also sought to complicate the traditional model of the public sphere presented by Jurgen Habermas in looking at European society in the modern period. Francesca Orsini, for example, has argued with reference to the Hindi literary sphere, that instead of a twofold division of ‘public’ and ‘private’, we might consider Indian society in terms of three layers —public, private and ‘customary’. For Orsini, this ‘customary’ sphere related to cultural practices and beliefs that unevenly overlapped between both private and public matters (Orsini Intr.) Certainly, the development of literary spheres in India was very different to the experience of most European states, not least because of the complication of bilingualism among the social and literary elites.

The symbolic power of the English language, and its association with governance in India, also recreated forms of colonial hierarchy in cultural affairs, and in popular media. Perhaps most significantly, the sphere of vernacular literary pursuits was more commonly associated by the politically powerful in India with the politics of the disadvantaged.<sup>4</sup> And just as appeals to the grassroots were often

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<sup>4</sup> This was a constant refrain of M.K. Gandhi in the 1910s and 1920s, who associated the gulf between India’s urban educated and rural peasant communities in terms of knowledge of vernaculars, and in particular, Hindi. See ‘Gandhi’s Speech on Non-Cooperation in Calcutta’, 13 December 1920, in Gandhi 1972: vol. 22/25, pp. 84-89.



made via a religious idiom, so too, did the use of Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Bengali, or other regional languages, presuppose a different level of political mobilisation, which was often deliberately divorced from western notions of secular mobilisation. Finally, the promotion of particular vernaculars involved projects of standardisation and definition, which reinforced institution and organisation building as a means of asserting particular kinds of collective identities. Insofar as language movements were concerned with the future shape of state power, as well as literature, the arts and 'culture', such institutions were tied to the whole process too, of how different communities shaped their approach to an imagined free Indian state.

There was also a sense in which the promotion of Hindi was about the development of a popular vernacular —an idiom used outside the formal constitutional structures of politics. In this sense, as Orsini and A. Rajagopal also argue, the politics of Hindi runs alongside this dualistic English/vernacular divide in India. For Orsini, this was also about opening out forms of peasant mobilisation, via the politics of figures such as Sahajanand Saraswati and the Kisan Sabha movement in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Orsini ch 3; Rajagopal 1999). Equally, we can talk about an urban popular idiom of politics in this region, via the work of Nandini Gooptu and the mobilisation of lower castes in the towns and cities (Gooptu 2001). However it is via the political idiom of Hindi too, that we see a specific form of cultural exclusivism emerging from the 1930s, just as the idea of non-constitutional mobilisation was widening out. This final part of the paper will look at that via religious symbolism and the press and via the political writings and thinking of two leaders in particular —P.D. Tandon, and Babu Sampurnanand,

In the early stages of journalism in the Indian vernaculars from the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, language use in the media clearly reflected the role of each language in governance. In 1870 for example, there were 15 Urdu papers with a circulation of 2050, and 8 Hindi ones with a circulation of 384. From the 1910s onwards however, the Hindi weeklies and dailies started to expand —in this sense catching up with the growing political importance of the Hindi belt as a region and the language itself, but in important ways, defining the conflict between the two branches of the language.

Some key new publications were started from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into the 1920s, for example, *Abhyuday* (Malaviya) in 1907; Ganesh Vidyarthi's *Pratap*, (1913 weekly, and daily from 1920), V.N. Tivari's *Bharat*, *Prabha*, *Vartman*, and *Adhars* all founded around 1920, and K.D. Paliwal's *Sainik* (1925 weekly, 1935 daily) from Agra. Banaras, the home of the Nagri Pracharini Sabha was a key city for Hindi papers, and it was from here that *Aaj* (1920) *Jaḡaran*, (1929), and *Hams* (1930) were published. In Lucknow, after the 1924 riot we have *Arti* and *Anand*, which started as a result of the riot there and which displaced *Hamdam* somewhat (which was Urdu).

These newspapers were promoted and supported then, by a specific kind of journalist/publicist, often with a political career, and in some cases with leanings towards forms of cultural nationalism that derived from Hindi's popularization. This included leaders and publicists like K.D. Paliwal, M.M. Malaviya, P.D. Tandon, and V.N. Tivari. These editors and political publicists often promoted forms of



cultural nationalism which tied festivals and local events to national movements, as a form of popular mobilization. For example, Paliwal's *Sainik* published in Agra, ran a series of articles at the beginning of Holi in which the imagery of religious symbolism was given a kind of political edge — Gandhi would dye the bureaucracy with splashes of his blood. Both this paper and the *Abhudhaya* which was published in Allahabad, talked about Holi in terms of the demon that still existed in India today, Hiranyakashyup (Gould ch 2). In other respects, these newspapers used the occasion of local events to tie support for anti-colonial protest to activities such as cloth boycotts, especially during the early 1930s.

### III. SAMPURNANAND AND TANDON

We might more effectively look at these processes in the dual promotion of Hindi with forms of anti-colonial mobilization/political ideology, by exploring specific leaders in the period, and particularly from the regions where the Hindi debate was most prominent — The United Provinces or Uttar Pradesh. The final part of the paper will explore this in relation to two prominent figures in Uttar Pradesh — P.D. Tandon and Sampurnanand. Both leaders applied certain assumptions about Indian society, which presupposed the efficacy of vernacular forms of mobilization. The common man could be reached via vernaculars through folk forms or a religious idiom. This, interestingly, took on a peculiarly colonial idea about the organisation of Indian society overall, in which the politics of the poor was associated with pre-modernity and religious community. Through the use of the vernacular, language itself became a means of expressing certain kinds of boundaries, rights and forms of political behaviour. In the case of Sampurnanand, as we will see, this was that the use of Hindi allowed for the promotion of a Hindu organicist view of the nation. In the case of Tandon, this was about the ways in which a particular form of standardised Hindi should be seen as a framework for full citizenship rights. In both cases, it involved the representation of Urdu in terms of decadence and decline.

Babu Sampurnanand was from a kayastha family and would have been Urdu speaking but his father insisted on teaching him Hindi. He was drawn to yoga and toyed with the idea of joining the Radhaswami sect and in his early career worked as a teacher and university lecturer. In April 1930, he was appointed 'dictator' of the Banaras Congress, and in 1938 was appointed education minister in the United Provinces Ministry. Sampurnanand was known in the early to mid 1930s as a Congress socialist, although it was an interpretation of that philosophy that had distinct north Indian characteristics (Gould ch 2). The implications of his socialism, was that notions of social equality and cohesion were rooted, specifically, in Vedantic Hindu religious traditions, and the notion of an oversoul of the universe (Virat Purusha). This informed his writing on a range of larger political issues, including the role of democracy in India. It also generated an important take on 'secularism', as a phenomenon, Sampurnanand believed, known by ancient India long before western Europe. Added to this were his organicist ideas about the nation in relation to Hindu culture and society: Indian society, he argued, had historically been



at its weakest when influenced by semitic religions like Islam and Christianity. He suggested that Hindu culture was more 'confident' when not influenced by these groups (Sampurnanand 1939).

The wider implications of Sampurnanand's politics was seen when he was in office as Education Minister in the UP, and he decided to implement the Wardha scheme across the province. The scheme tended to present, according to Muslim organisations, a one-sided view of history and focused very much on the promotion of Hindi as a medium of education. This was reflected in Sampurnanand's own views about Urdu, which he found to be 'unacceptable... and not suitable to be adopted as a national language' (Sampurnanand 1962: 88-92). At the end of August 1938 at the Kashi Nagri Pracharini Sabha, Sampurnanand talked too about the qualitative differences between Hindi and Urdu, and made the point that there should be a retention of Sanskrit in the language, for the sake of speakers from other regions like Maharashtra, Gujarat and Bengal.<sup>5</sup>

The policies of Sampurnanand towards Urdu led to a reaction among Muslim organisations —some picking up, specifically on the Wardha scheme and the promotion of Sanskrit, and others, such as the Jamiat-ul-Ulema— more generally about the attitude of the Education Minister to Urdu. This formed the backdrop to a more direct and focused Hindi campaign for Sampurnanand after Independence. As Chief Minister of UP between 1954 and 1960, he helped to implement a range of state —level policies that cemented a Hindi— only policy, over-riding instructions from the Central government to allow for the promotion of Urdu as a minority language of instruction in educational institutions (Jaffrelot 161).

Sampurnanand's promotion of a mono-linguistic culture in north India was, in the main, focused on education and culture. But for another key Congress leader and contemporary, Purushottam Das Tandon it entailed the rejection of Indo-Persian cultural influences on the idea of the citizen. P.D. Tandon was best known for his successful challenge to Jawaharlal Nehru as President of the Congress in 1950, with the backing of Vallabhai Patel, but his political career spanned back to the 1900s. He first represented the city of Allahabad at the All India Congress Committee in 1906, and was involved in the main Gandhian protests of the 1920s and 1930s. Throughout the 1940s, although seen as a radical in the Congress in these earlier years, he came to be associated with spin-off Hindu organisations. Tandon also maintained a keen interest in the promotion of Hindi as a national language, but as we will see below, combined it with a form of majoritarian politics, which was often channeled through the HSS.<sup>6</sup>

Tandon's espousal of 'Hindu' unity linked into a range of other cultural activities for him, and it is here that the significance of this politics for the idea of

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<sup>5</sup> Sampurnanand Papers (Varanasi Regional Archives), Sampurnanand to Gandhi, 5 September 1938.

<sup>6</sup> 'Appreciation of the Political Situation' (hereafter APS) 11 May 1945; 25 May 1945. 'Confidential Report', Fortnightly Report for the first half of April 1945, 19 April 1945 Frampton Papers, Centre of South Asian Studies, Cambridge (hereafter SAS).





the citizen plays out. The relationship between active opposition to Pakistan and the promotion of a majoritarian position on Hindi were directly related, and espoused simultaneously. For example, Tandon's chairmanship of the 31<sup>st</sup> HSS between 17 and 19 May 1943, entertained amongst its alumni representatives of the Mahabir Dal and RSS, and contained speeches criticizing the Muslim League.<sup>7</sup> In April 1945, as well as collecting funds for a Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Bhavan in Jaipur, he supported Sampurnanand's criticism, via the UP Provincial Sammelan, of the pro-Urdu policy at All-India Radio.<sup>8</sup> In the same month at the Kangri Gurukul in the western UP district of Saharanpur Tandon was again vocal about his opposition to Gandhian non-violence.<sup>9</sup> The promotion of Hindi then, became a vehicle for the development of an exclusively defined, majoritarian concept of citizenship in which linguistic difference potentially positioned the nation's denizens. At open session of the HSS held in Bombay in December 1947, attended among others by V.D. Savarkar, Tandon had suggested that there was still an attempt to satisfy Muslims in relation to the national language, and that in the past the British had encouraged the idea that their culture was different. At that same meeting, Seth Govind Das argued that while Muslims were voicing their loyalty to the Indian Union, they were still following the same old policy and that if they did not want to show loyalty, they should go to Pakistan ("Samelan" 1948).

But it was shortly after independence that these totalizing representations of Indian culture were developed most directly into exclusive and ethnicised ideas of citizenship. At an open meeting of the HSS in the spring of 1948, Tandon suggested that use of Hindi should be a means of testing Muslim loyalty to India. If the Socialists supported Urdu-inflected Hindustani,<sup>10</sup> Tandon argued, they would be continuing to support the two-nation theory. The country's salvation lay instead in everyone having, in Tandon's words, 'one culture and civilization'. Muslims, therefore, had to "own the Indian culture and civilization like they have done in China." The partition of the country for Tandon was an illustration of the failure of this monolithic nation, which naturally revolved around Hindu culture. In the UP Assembly, Tandon argued that partition was due to the past sins of Hindus and that if they did not open the doors of Hinduism to Muslims, they would experience worse grief.

Tandon's correspondence also shows support for organizations that sought to directly question the citizenship rights of Muslims, including an All-India Refu-

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<sup>7</sup> APS 12 February; 21 May 1943.

<sup>8</sup> APS 11 May 1945; 25 May 1945. 'Confidential Report', Fortnightly Report for the first half of April 1945, 19 April 1945 Frampton Papers, SAS.

<sup>9</sup> 'Confidential Report', Fortnightly Report for the first half of April 1945, 19 April 1945 Frampton Papers, SAS.

<sup>10</sup> The promotion of Hindustani related to a section of the *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* in the late colonial period, who favoured the idea of a national vernacular which embraced vocabulary drawn from Urdu. This group opposed those in the *Sammelan*, such as Tandon and Sampurnanand who argued for a 'pure' and more sanskritized Hindi. See Orsini 2009.



gee Association (AIRA), a Sindhi-dominated organisation headed by Choitram P Gidwani. The Association had developed out of refugee agitations for property compensation, and directly lobbied the Prime Minister's Office. Tandon was seen as a key supporter, with the Association seeking his help in rent disputes,<sup>11</sup> and in preventing the recovery of income tax demands issued on Sindhi refugees by the Pakistani authorities.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, his stance on refugees and Muslim properties was a key dynamic of Tandon's dispute with Nehru himself and the AIRA spared no ire in denouncing Nehru as a man whose "culture" was Muslim and who showed too much open "appeasement" of Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

The role of these organisations had a material effect on the substantive citizenship rights of Muslim communities. In 1950, the Sindhi Hindu Refugee Panchayat, based in Dugapur Camp, Jaipur, wrote to Tandon for help in preventing Muslims from selling and mortgaging properties in Rajasthan. The Panchayat provided lists of Muslim government servants who had retained properties but migrated, or who had "deceived refugees".<sup>14</sup> In 1950, Tandon presided over the All-India Refugee Conference in Delhi, at which the speech of Choithram P. Gidwani complained of inadequacy of refugee loans, suggested that the evacuee property law had failed to prevent a "drain of crores of rupees from India to Pakistan", and charged the Jamiat-ul-Ulema with agitation against the ordinance. Gidwani summed up his list of accusations with the doubt that "elements returning to India who have breathed the poisonous atmosphere of Pakistan will ever remain loyal to our country."<sup>15</sup>

Tandon helped rich and poor alike manoeuvre the everyday state in this majoritarian world of citizens' rights. Other correspondents to Tandon requested help in acquiring evacuee property, such as one P.R. Kishanchand, also from Sindh, who wanted help acquiring a shop in Kanpur in 1952;<sup>16</sup> or the letter of complaint sent by the District Refugee Corporation, Jhansi about a rationing officer (B.R. Sharma) and the inadequacy of his call for tenders for evacuee properties.<sup>17</sup> This led to a host of other smaller colonies of displaced persons seeking Tandon's support, including the poorly-provisioned Lajpatnagar Panchayat Settlement near Delhi which requested a

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<sup>11</sup> Choitram P Gidwani All India Refugee Association to Tandon, 23 July 1952, Tandon Papers, File 301 National Archives of India (hereafter NIA).

<sup>12</sup> Statement of the Displaced Income-tax payers' association, New Delhi. Draft Resolutions of the All India refugee Conference, 29-30 July 1950, Tandon Papers, File 301 NAI.

<sup>13</sup> All India Refugee Conference, 29-30 July 1950, General comments on the resolutions. Tandon Papers, File 301 NAI.

<sup>14</sup> From representatives of the Sindhi Hindu Refugee Panchayat, Jaipur, Durgapur Camp, Gopaldas H. Ladhani, Congress Social Worker, to Tandon. 29 January 1950, Tandon Papers, File 301 NAI.

<sup>15</sup> Speech of Dr. Choithram P Gidwani, Chairman Reception Committee, All India Refugee Conference, Delhi, 29-30 July 1950, Tandon Papers, File 134 NAI.

<sup>16</sup> P.R. Kishanchand to PDT, 19 December 1952, Tandon Papers, File 128 NAI.

<sup>17</sup> District Refugee Cooperative Society to B.R. Sharma, TRO cum R and R Officer, 9 January 1950, Tandon Papers, File 119, NAI.



training or work centre.<sup>18</sup> Supporting Hindu refugee organisations also meant that Tandon became a forum of partisan complaints about ‘Muslim’ brutality. His papers are littered with accounts of such alleged excesses.<sup>19</sup> In extension of this patronage, Tandon was targeted by members of the RSS calling to be reinstated in government service following the ban on the organisation, including one missive from a Sindhi migrant seeking help for his son who had been jailed as an RSS member.<sup>20</sup> Another letter compared the apparent “tolerance” shown to Pakistani Muslims to the treatment of RSS men.<sup>21</sup> Other correspondents to the leader sought support for complaints against Muslim government servants in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>22</sup> Later, Tandon was even a sympathetic voice for the likes of Baburao Patel, a columnist who wrote a strongly anti-Muslim article in *Film India* in March 1952, against the Pakistani documentary *Josh-e-Jehad* (The Passion of Religious Crusade).<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is possible to write a history of Indian politics for the second and third quarters of the 20th Century as a history of language. The question of which vernacular should be promoted as the principal language of governance, the courts and administration, and thereby the putative ‘national’ language, connected to a wide range of other issues surrounding community, political authority, institution building and state patronage. Most importantly, as the period progressed, new, more popular forms of vernacular politics mobilized larger and more diverse constituencies, and the issue of language appeared yet more urgent. The role of the rapidly expanding press in the interwar years was central to this, both in terms of providing the medium for language propagation, but also in the linguistic forms that the content of new presses promoted: particular forms of symbolism, and the connection of linguistic forms to social questions imbued Hindi in particular in north India, with a specific role in creating new spheres of public debate.

There was no necessary reason, given the very complex linguistic roots of Hindi and Urdu, that this explosion in interest in language should have provoked religious community —based controversy. Both languages, by their nature, were described as homogenous or standardized in a way that distorted not only the wide

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<sup>18</sup> Lajpatnagar Panchayat Statement, nd, Tandon Papers, File 301 NAI.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Statement of S S Bhasin, of district Campbellpur, 22 August 1947 (at present taking shelter under the roof of Arya Samaj, Old Hospital Road, Jammu), in Tandon Papers, file 29, NAI. This letter described Hindu deaths near Wazirabad.

<sup>20</sup> L.H. Ajwani, Prof of English, Sind College, Karachi to PDT, 21 November 1947, Tandon Papers, file 29, NAI.

<sup>21</sup> S. No 734, S.C. Sharma, Tundla, to PDT —24 July 1950, Tandon Papers, file 28, NAI.

<sup>22</sup> ‘The responsible citizens of Ghaziabad’ to Tandon, 21 September 1947, Tandon Papers, File 29, NAI.

<sup>23</sup> Baburao Patel to M.I. Quadri, 24 March 1952, in Tandon Papers, file 11, NAI.

variations in dialect and form across space, but also through time. Clearly, different forms of both languages were used in different modes of social life. But these differences might not have had an effect on relations between Hindus and Muslims without the emergence of new forms of Hindi populism, promoted by a range of figures in the Congress movement itself. The process of linguistic standardization for Hindi went hand in hand with a quest to find the ‘pure’ elements of Indian civilization—a set practices and ways of life that distinguished it from foreign rulers and invaders. In this sense, the Hindi movement came to polarize around a debate about exclusivism versus inclusivism—the very same parameters of discussion that shaped ideas about the future Indian citizen.

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# EXPLORING THE HINDU/MUSLIM DIVIDE THROUGH THE PARTITION OF BENGAL\*

Maurice O'Connor  
Universidad de Cádiz

## ABSTRACT

In this paper we shall explore the move from localised to politicised identities in Bengali society and evidence how religious affiliation became a central consideration within this shift. The growth of communalism, we shall argue, has much to do with the colonial strategy of establishing separate electoral systems for Hindus and Muslims, cementing the separation between these religious groupings. Our critical interest centres around the Partition of Bengal, and we shall employ memoirs and literary texts, written in Bengali and translated into English, so as to elucidate upon the complexities of the Hindu/Muslim relationship. We shall argue that the unresolved issues of Partition still cast their shadow on contemporary India, and shall draw connections between past and present manipulations of religious identities for expedient political ends.

**KEYWORDS:** Communalism, Hindu/Muslim divide, Historicity, Partition, Religious identities.

## RESUMEN

En este artículo estudiaremos el cambio de identidad local a identidad nacional en la sociedad bengalí y cómo la religión tuvo un papel central en el mismo. El auge del sectarismo religioso estuvo relacionado con la estrategia de las autoridades coloniales de crear colegios electorales distintos para musulmanes e hindúes, lo que claramente abrió una brecha insalvable entre ambas comunidades. Para conocer mejor la complejidad de las relaciones siorreligiosas, nos centraremos en los efectos de la Partición en Bengala y al efecto recurriremos a memorias y textos literarios escritos en bengalí y traducidos a inglés. Inferimos que la Partición dejó irresoluta una serie de problemas que afectan a India en la actualidad, debido a la manipulación de la identidad religiosa con fines políticos, en el pasado tanto como en el presente.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** enfrentamiento, hindúes-musulmanes, historicidad, identidad religiosa, partición, sectarismo religioso.

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The measure of which religious belief plays a central part in defining Indian political realities needs to be contextualised within a specific historical context. Certainly, as Gyanendra Pandey assures, Partition brought about an intensification of religious affiliation as an identity marker and resulted in, “zamindars stopped being zamindars and started being Hindus and Muslims” (50). For the majority of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, survival came before the defending of any specific religious identity. On the contrary, as Alok Bhalla assures, the peasant’s affiliation with their *zameem*, a term that refers to a “piece of land” in Hindi, Urdu, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam alike, indicates that an intimate connection with the local held more importance in contrast with the abstractions of religious identity (4). One, therefore, cannot understand contemporary India, its divisions and conflicts, without a profound engagement with Partition and the question of religious identities. Considering that the partition of West Pakistan has received greater critical attention, it is our aim to examine the partition of Bengal through the lens of the religious affiliation as a means to enhance an understanding on current communal conflicts in India. In this light, we shall question the veracity of the so-called Hindu/Muslim divide by providing a more layered reading of religious identity in both East and West Bengal, firstly through a historiographic perspective, and secondly through an analysis of post-Partition Bengali literature, translated into English.

## I. THE INSTRUMENTALISING OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN BENGAL

First of all, one must differentiate between Bengali Muslim identity and the Muslim identity of the western provinces of India. In the latter, many Muslims can claim Persian ancestry, whilst in the former, as Sumit Sarkar (1973) evidences, many Bengali Muslims were of low-caste Hindu origin, Buddhists or simply people who had never been fully assimilated into the structure of Aryan society and thus were attracted to Islam’s message of egalitarianism (346). Despite having converted to Islam, these new Muslims displayed large degrees of syncretism, a perception Sarkar verifies through his reading of the 1909 *Imperial Gazetteer* which evidences how lower-class Muslims joined in the Durga Puja and other Hindu festivals, while Muslims also consulted Hindu almanacs and worshiped Sitala and Manasa. This syncretism worked both ways as Hindu peasants (and sometimes even zamindars) offered their respects to Muslim pirs. Historical evidence of syncretist cults such as Satyapir also exists where the Sufi tradition supplied an intellectual sanction to these “eclectic admixtures” (Sarkar 347).

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The aforementioned thus evidences how one cannot view the category of Hindu and Muslim as being incommensurable and, as Rakesh Batabyal (2005) indicates, communalism was moreover “a product of the modern age, which unleashed these historical forces in the colonized countries” (21). To gain a deeper understanding into the birth of communalism and its supplementary discourse, the perceived “Hindu/Muslim divide”, one must look at Lord Curzon’s 1905 division of Bengal, a division aimed at weakening the Indian nationalist movement. This lasted until 1911 when Bengal was reunified due to a united front against it; proof that a common Bengali identity had prevailed over communalism. Therefore, interpreting communalism as something essential within the Indian “character” denies, “the existence of a colonial context, and of the historical experience of a substantial section of humanity as colonial subjects” (Batabyal 24). When the colonial state negotiated between different communities so as to safeguard its own interests, what it was effectively doing was to give new political meaning to the concept of what it meant to be Hindu or Muslim and this, ultimately, created new antagonisms that previously did not exist. Therefore, one must look deeper into the affirmation that conflicting religious identities were the root cause of Partition and that violence was a natural expression of these incommensurable positions. While we cannot deny that socio-cultural differences did exist and that certain antagonisms came about as a result of these differences, these came into sharp focus at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Sarkar assures that the administrative arguments in favour of this partition were a “deep imperialist design of ‘divide and rule’”, and this is a view that is endorsed by the majority of Indian scholars writing on the subject (11). In his speech in Dacca (18 February, 1904) Curzon assured that this partition would, “invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman Viceroy and kings” (quoted in Sarkar 1973: 16), and for this reason a large section of the Muslim gentry supported partition due to the devolved powers it afforded them. Although the Swadeshi movement (1903-1908) was a heterogeneous movement that encompassed “a common culture at the village level based upon an amalgam of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and primitive folk elements”, it was, moreover, the initiative of a Hindu elite that saw partition as a clear affront to its hegemony (Sarkar 1973: 19). So, although many Muslims were involved in the movement, the Muslim intelligentsia felt more comfortable with securing its own hegemony in East Bengal.

The second and final Partition of Bengal came about precisely because of a breakdown of mutual trust between Hindus and Muslims. Bidyut Chakrabarty (2004) assures that, “Capitalising on the disproportionate development between the two communities, the Muslim political forces strengthened their claims for a separate state”, and the Hindu elite, seeing that its own influence was becoming eroded, gave no real opposition to this idea (36). In Bengal, nine-tenths of zamindaris were held by Hindus, while the landless peasants were mostly Muslims. Furthermore, the *bhadralok* (Hindu elite in Bengal) had performed a more successful assimilation to the colonial culture when compared to their Muslim counterparts who fell behind in education and had lost political leverage as a result. The rise of communalism





can thus be viewed as a Muslim middle-class struggle that was provoked by the imbalances created within a colonial/capitalistic system. Having lost faith in colonial politics due to the aforementioned lack of assimilation, Muslims turned to communalism as a means of garnering power (Batabyal 24).

Therefore, the idea of communalism, as we know it, was a modern phenomenon, something separate from the older discourses of mere cultural difference and, as Prabha Dixit assures, it was, moreover, a political doctrine (3). The modernisation of the Muslim community as heralded by Syed Ahmed, a Bengali nineteenth-century Islamic reformer, was only focused on upper-class Muslims and, in this context, communalism was a convenient tool to gain power (Dixit 56). The conclusion Dixit reaches is that this doctrine of creating a Muslim identity for political ends provoked the birth of Hindu communalism as a reaction to Muslim communalism. The tragic outcome of this was that a strategic positioning through communalism gave way to old grievances becoming magnified within this new political scenario.

The eventual Partition of Bengal was in the making long before its overt political expression. The 1932 Communal Award was the outcome of the 1909 Morley-Minto Administration Reformation Act that established separate versus joint elections, and this cemented the separation of Hindus and Muslims through the splitting of the Indian electorate primarily upon religious/ethnic grounds. This was, no doubt, an instrumentalisation of communalism through the establishing of rival modes of election and, as Chakrabarty (2004) assures, the 1909 Morley-Minto reform “stamped the two-nation theory on the political fate of the country” (152). We must also remark upon the failure on behalf of the Indian National Congress to integrate Muslims into the nationalist movement, and it is notable that at the 1932 Unity Conference, convened at Allahabad so as to discuss the nefarious effects of the Award, no Muslim leaders attended as they saw separate electorates as being the only means for Bengali Muslims to truly come into power. A common Bengali identity was now replaced by a communal identity, and the aforementioned colonial rubric of divide and rule conveniently worked in tandem with a strategic positioning by Muslim leadership to garner their own new set of privileges. This configuring of Muslims and Hindus into separate political groupings played an important role in creating an ambience of animosity.

In conjunction with the 1932 Communal Award, one, however, must also look at the changing socio-economic situation in Bengal and, specifically, at the role of the Hindu *talukdars* (the landowning aristocrats) who were also *mahajans*, money lenders and lenders of grain during lean periods. The Great Depression in the 1930s in Bengal greatly affected the demand for jute and made the peasant community much more economically vulnerable. This Great Slump also affected the Hindu aristocracy who could no longer sustain their function of *mahajans*. This created a socio-economic schism in that the *talukdars* lost social credibility within the Muslim-dominated small peasant economy of East Bengal and were now conceived as parasites (Chakrabarty 48). Muslims with different political commitments became united under a religious banner and this, in turn, gave credence to a communalistic ideology. The founding of the Krishak Praja Party (KPP) helped galvanise Muslim identity against Hindu economic dominance, and the subsequent



KPP-Muslim League alliance after the 1937 elections changed the nature of politics in East Bengal (Chakrabarty 2004: 50). It was in the interests of political leaders to insist upon the religion of the zamindar oppressors and, for example, to underplay the exploitive role of the Muslim landlords (Chakrabarty 36). Islam, therefore, now provided the Muslim peasants a unifying ideology against the zamindars, and although their grievances derived, moreover, from issues of class privileges, these grievances took on a communal colour (Chakrabarty 2004:86). Certainly, the Bengali *bhadralok* traditionally had always guarded their own interests first; for example, the Indian Congress, dominated by upper-caste Hindus, vetoed the 1928 Bengal Tenancy Act which proposed to give peasants rights over a traditional zamindar privilege, and the fact that the landless peasants happened to be Muslims made it easier for them to adopt their position. In the face of new political realities, this rentier Hindu class made no real move to attend to Muslim fears class, and they became more interested in their own privileges, less interested in opposition to foreign rule. Especially in rural East Bengal, the Muslim peasantry saw Hindu party politics as a tool of oppression against them and this consolidated the idea of political Islam (Chakrabarty 2004: 41).

The Scheduled Castes also suffered from poverty and social exclusion, and this created a certain sympathy for the Muslim League as excluded Hindus and Muslims alike suffered under a Hindu zamindar elite. However, from 1937 onward, the League Ministry brought in legislative acts to protect the interests of the Muslim community, which created an in-built communal bias regarding most of the legislations adopted by the Muslim ministry in Bengal. These communal devices, overseen by Chief minister Fazlul Haq, were introduced to re-address a historical disadvantage (for example, 80% of all recruited teachers were now Muslims, the rest being divided between Hindus and Scheduled Castes), and the effect was to create what Chakrabarty (2010) defines as an “unprecedented toxin of communalism” (114). Feeling that they were being side-lined by this rise in Muslim power, Bengali Hindus rallied together under the figure of Rabindranath Tagore to protest against the diminishing of Hindu stature within Bengali politics. The 15 July, 1936 rally, in Calcutta was an indication of Hindu unrest, and this was paralleled by the Scheduled Castes who had also become disillusioned with the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. This was aggravated by the fact that, during the Calcutta and Noakhali riots, they were equally targeted as much as high-caste Hindus. The outcome of this was that what was once a heterogeneous group now cohered into a single, political identity. The Scheduled Castes, traditionally situated outside of the upper-caste Hindu sphere, now affiliated with the umbrella term “Hindu” and, especially in East Bengal, this took on a communalistic identity. Re-establishing Hindu dominance in Western Bengal was thus preferable to national unity in the eyes of the upper caste leaders of the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha and, as Chatterji has suggested, this political manoeuvring stalled the possibility of a Dalit-Muslim alliance.



## II. AN INTIMATE OTHER

What emerges from this analysis is that the instrumentalisation of religious affiliation created a new configuration of identities which was, in a greater part, manipulated by a colonial apparatus for its own expedient ends. A paradigmatic shift placed communities seeing themselves vis-à-vis an “other” which was, in many cases, an uncanny extension of the self. Yet, while the established narrative has been that Hindus and Muslims could not live together and therefore Partition was the only solution, many literary texts deny this Manichean assumption. In Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *Arjun* (1987), set in the era following the partition of East Bengal, the protagonist’s father longs for a return to an older time where, “The drums and cymbals would once again deafen the ears as the devotional rituals of the arabi was carried out [...] Hindus and Muslims will embrace each other as brothers and the past will be past” (48). This sentiment is repeated by the dislocated peoples of Partition, and Chakrabarty (2010) has identified the idea of a close bond between the two religious communities. This idea of inter-communal rapport is, however, seen more as a myth, existing within a utopian ideal with no historical frame. Chakrabarty juxtaposes the recall of this idealised era, where there was harmony between Hindus and Muslims, with the eruption of violence at Partition and how this was perceived as “sudden” and thus inexplicable (148). This leads to a tendency to imagine a pure pre-Partition homeland, located on a de-contextualised plane (150).

To explore further how Hindu/Muslim relationships were perceived, we shall turn to Sunanda Sikdar’s *A Life Long Ago* (2012), which describes the author’s life as a young girl growing up in rural East Bengal in the 1950s. The narrator, a refugee in Calcutta called Daya, assures she has suppressed all memories of East Bengal: “I’d block all this out [...] It was as though my life had actually started from January 1961” and the recuperation of these memories is, in part, an attempt to re-create the idyll of childhood (2). The singular topography of interconnecting river ways isolates the village from the political violence that Partition creates and, in part, lends to the trope of idealism present within Sikdar’s memoir. This geographical isolation means that the political realities of the new nation state have not impinged upon the village and, as the narrator Daya observes, “I doubt that anyone knew that the village of Dighpait was situated in a Muslim nation. People trembled in fear of the Hindu zamindar” (40). The text, furthermore, examines the relationships between Hindus and Muslims through the trope of pollution, a fear that one will lose one’s caste if strict codes are not observed. This form of social apartheid also extends to Muslims; despite the fact that Ma shows solidarity to a repudiated Muslim by employing her to pound rice; she will not allow Dibya to pound certain rice as it must, first of all, be soaked in water which means she will pollute the rice. While the Muslim woman understands and accepts this ritualised behaviour, ultimately, this hierarchical ideology mars conviviality. How this Hindu ideology creates social friction is contextualised through the intimate relationship between Daya’s father and the Muslim, Sobahan. Daya’s father is headmaster of a prestigious school in East Bengal and is now returning to Dighpait for the last time before moving to West Bengal. In a gesture of admiration and love, Sobahan sets about elaborate food



preparations so as to honour his friend, despite knowing that, “the zamindar will excommunicate him and ensure that even the washermen and barbers don’t work for your family” (110). Food celebrations are a central cohesive ritual in rural India, and Sobahan’s insisting upon a rite he knows will never come to fruition evidences how conviviality is compromised by these codes of pollution.

This thwarting of conviviality is furthermore transmitted in a scene where Daya and her mother are passing through the neighbouring village of Beltia. Perhaps emboldened by the new political realities of East Bengal, the Muslim, Siraj da, reproaches Daya’s mother on her adherence to pollution rites: “Your homes are burnt, you are leaving the country but you won’t let go of your obduracy,” he tells her, and then adds, “I’m saying this because I find it painful and upsetting. Have you ever invited me into your house and offered me a glass of water?” (25). While Ma attempts to explain her behaviour by arguing she is tied to the dictums of her faith, this mitigation does not alter Siraj da’s attitude and, towards the end of the novel, his position has hardened: “[O]nce you folk leave for Hindustan I will not even enter a Hindu house to pee in it” (111). His reaction against the symbolic violence exerted upon the Muslim other has many parallels with the question of class oppression and, in this respect, the trope of pollution explored in the text helps shed light upon Chakrabarty’s observation of how her informants see Partition violence as being “sudden” and thus unexplainable. Siraj da’s animosity towards Daya and her mother is, nonetheless, tragic considering that Daya has already transgressed the codes of pollution through her intimate relationship with Majam, a family employee whom she considers as an older brother. In the face of warnings that Daya has “no ties of blood” with their Muslim servant and that there is “no point getting too close to him” she, nonetheless, assures that “Majam, my Dada, was the person I depended upon most, throughout my childhood” (3). In this respect, Sikdar sheds a different light upon received attitudes about the nature of the Hindu/Muslim relationship but, on the contrary, celebrates her unconditional bond of love for a Muslim peasant. For this reason, Siraj da’s violent reproach becomes all the more poignant, and Daya assures the reader that his violent reaction, “has come back to haunt me at various points in my life” (111).

The aforementioned questions of pollution thus evidence how Hindus are also victims of their own intransigence inasmuch as their faith values impose an adherence to cultural mores that, ultimately, alienate them. It must be remarked that caste is not always a bulwark against poverty, something that *Arjun* shows us through the protagonist’s impoverished family -Arjun’s father died as a result of, “poverty, anxiety, and fear” (51). Yet, despite being set adrift and destitute, Arjun’s mother clings to Hindu pollution rites and will not cook rice while waiting for the ferry to take them to West Bengal for fear of contamination by other inferior castes who have become their travelling companions.

Dibyendu Palit’s “Hindu” (2006), set in Rampur, East Bengal furthers this premise on how caste imprisons consciousness through the story of a devout elderly man, Mathuranath, respected by Hindus, Muslims and the marginalised alike. On discovering the grotesque body of an unknown man, left to die at the side of the road, his initial reaction is to succour him. His altruistic action, however, receives the



attention of his fellow villagers who, on the contrary, are more concerned that the flies that buzz around the man's open wounds might pollute them. They set about undermining Mathuranath's resolve, alleging that he is a Brahmin and, as such, should not pollute himself in this manner. In response, he assures that it is his duty to serve a fellow human being and that, otherwise, he will become a Sudra from that day onwards. Rather than awakening any empathy within his fellow villagers, they are railed by his pious attitude and, in an ironic tone, assure that "This almost equals the deeds of the great Mahatma. This news should reach the President of the country" (235-236). Upon Mathuranath's insistence, the body is moved to a house, yet, once it is suggested that the man in question is a Muslim, he is expelled under the pretext that the situation in Rampur is tense. In the face of this pressure, the Muslim is left to rot on the streets and the pious old man capitulates against his own better judgement. Here, we can find an indictment on how caste constructs a parallel moral universe that, while flying in the face of human dignity, becomes normalised within the collective consciousness. Mathuranath suffers from cognitive dissonance inasmuch as there exists a strong conflict between his own humanism and the codes of untouchability (in this case the Muslim other) which form the cornerstone of his religious identity. Pretending that the incident never happened becomes a mechanism of denial that restores his internal psychological consistency. The manner in which Mathuranath applies this self-regulatory cognitive process can be seen as a stand-in for a collective attitude as regards the unfathomable violence of Partition. Just as Mathuranath needs to deny to himself that he can no longer recognise the humanity of the Muslim other, the collective body performs a similar act of realigning its cognitions (the perceptions of the world) with the actions in the real world through a process of dissonance reduction.

Many Bengali writers have, nonetheless, consistently insisted upon how there has been an excessive focus laid upon questions of religious affiliation, whilst class issues have been underestimated within the historiography of Indian Partition. Batabyal, in this respect documents specific cases of class solidarity between Muslims and Hindus, something that Manik Bandyopadhyay's "The Ledger" (2006) bears out through the depiction of the lives of a Hindu and a Muslim factory workers who, having previously fought side by side for their worker's rights, now find themselves on opposite sides of the communal divide. The way one man dresses over the other is the only indication of their difference, while their shared struggle against capitalist oppression becomes their common bond. Whilst visiting his Hindu friend, the Muslim becomes trapped in a sudden spiralling of communal violence and, in his escape, finds himself in the European and upper-class Indian neighbourhood. On his way he is greeted by the smell of burning human flesh, yet once at the *Sabehpara* area he encounters an oasis of tranquillity. The following day he meets up with his Hindu friend at the factory gates. As agitators, neither are offered work and both are subsequently taken away by the police for protesting. Inside the police van, the Hindu advises the Muslim to, "Just say that neither you nor I have caste. You are poor and so am I. We belong to the poor community"(150). Achintya Kumar Sengupta's "Treaty" (2006) similarly explores how class can be a more pragmatic manner to define one's identity, over caste or religion, by exploring a similar bond between the



slum dwellers, Johurali and Dinonath. Caught up in the spiralling violence of the 1946 Calcutta riots, these comrades suddenly adopt communal positions and set out to kill each other for reasons the story never reveals. Their fortuitous reencounter whilst in hiding from this same violence they have participated in rekindles their old friendship and shows them the absurdity of their actions.

Nabendu Ghosh's "Insignificance" (2006) echoes the question of class present in "The Ledger" by exploring how the instrumentalising of religious hatred compromises both the Hindus and Muslim underclass alike. This is contextualised through the story of Aziz, who is part of an ongoing tram-drivers' strike in Calcutta. Despite his tenacity in maintaining his class struggle, it is with resignation that he informs the reader that "They [the Muslim League] were handing over shining knives to young Muslim men, in order to safeguard their own narrow interests", whilst "The noble Indian ministers had tried to neutralize their strike by trying to instigate the average Muslim youth into communal violence" (121-122). When Aziz engages with a Hindu on the street to try and ascertain the level of communal tension, the Hindu replies, "You are the ones who have kept the matter alive, *miyan*" (124). Aziz shows the Hindu his strike card: "He wanted to say, *Bhaisaab*, we are different. [...] We are hungry workers. We are landless labourers [...]. Those that stab people and those that are stabbed by others are the same too" (124, 125). Aziz's fears, however, are materialised, and the irrationality of communality thwarts the forthcoming general strike through orchestrated rioting (we presume that these are the Calcutta riots of 1946): "They have become addicted to blood-like alcohol", the narrator observes and the short story's tragic ending sees Aziz stabbed to death while wearing a card that says "Striking Tram Worker" (127). In this respect, the narrative establishes a continuum between colonial practices and those of the autochthonous ruling class that, in a more direct manner, also monitor communal hatred. Here emerges a distinct understanding on religious identities; both the Hindu and Muslim Indian underclass are denied social justice in the name of religious unity, constructed through a fear of the other.

In *A Life Long Ago* we saw how the local peasants, defined as "soil-lickers", went half-starving under the indifferent gaze of the Hindu zamindars. Whilst the majority of these peasants were Muslims, many pertained to the lower Hindu castes and, as such, had more in common with the Muslim underclass than with the high-caste Hindus. However, on having lost power in the provincial Bengali institutions from 1930s onwards due to the communal awards, the *bhadralok* class began a campaign of *shuddhi* (purification) and *sangathan* (mobilization) as a means to co-opt the lower castes such as Namasudras of north Bengal and Rajbangshis and Santals of East Bengal to create a pan-Hindu movement (Fraser 13). Gangopadhyay's *Arjun*, in this respect, gives witness to this strategy within an East Pakistani context where the zamindar Hindus "were desperately trying to establish a common identity of Hinduness with them [dalits] so that they could swell our ranks" (41). Caste consolidation and the creation of an artificial sense of Hinduness, however, never meant class equality, and Nabendu Ghosh's "The Saviour", in this light, becomes an indictment on the cynical nature of this new caste politics. Set near Bhabanipur, Western Bengal, the narrative opens up with the Dantesque scenes of chopped-off



heads, bodily mutilations, and a catalogue of the horrors that, while observed from the safety of a middle-class neighbourhood, has reduced its privileged residents to a mesmerized state of catatonic fear (131). Sandwiched-in between this neighbourhood and the “other neighbourhood” are the *doms* who, whilst being ostracised from this “aristocratic neighbourhood”, feel they too are Hindus and, as such, maintain an affiliation with the Shiva temple. In the face of ensuing violence, the *doms* are co-opted by the *bhadralok* community with cheap liquor and holiday sweets so as to serve as buffers against the imminent violence of the Muslims marauders. Despite the fact that they are not allowed to enter the temple because of pollution rites, (they are only allowed to touch its outer walls), the *doms* defend Shiva with their lives against the attacks. As mere cannon fodder, the Dalit hero, Jhogru, dies in the melee, “because people like Jhogru were always born to save the likes of Mr Bose [the stand-in for class hegemony]” (143). “The Saviour” thus becomes an allegory on the indifference of the *bhadralok* class for the *dom* underclass and serves to dramatize the hypocrisy of this elite that hijacks faith identity for expedient ends.

## CONCLUSION

The division of Bengal had a trans-regional impact within India and, as Sengupta assures, the violence that erupted between the Bodos and the Muslims (2012) in Assam or the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 in Uttar Pradesh are clear examples of this. Chakrabarty, in this respect sees the 2008 Bombay massacre as having its roots in the politics of Partition, and she assures that historically, “the mutual relationship between the Hindus and the Muslims was without any sort of differential hindrance: there was a profound understanding as well as a strong feeling of brotherhood prevailing between the two communities” (147). The outbreaks of violence leading up to demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque (1992), or the 2002 Gujarat pogroms against the Muslim population are just a few examples of how the communalism born out of the violence of Partition continues to play a fundamental role in contemporary Indian life. Communalism, furthermore, is continuing to be instrumentalised for expedient ends and, as Fraser argues, the December 1992 Kolkata riots, which were daubed as a Muslim reaction to the 1992 destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque Ayodhya were, in fact, a ruse for land grabbing (Fraser 39). In a similar vein, Arundhati Roy in *Listening To Grasshoppers: Field Notes On Democracy* (2008) evidences how the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party in India is directly linked to the strategic manipulation of religious sentiments for political ends. Rather than learning the lessons of Partition, the BJP’s renewing of Hindu exceptionalism stirs up unnecessary and dangerous communal sentiment. Roy provides the specific example of the BJP politician, Varun Gandhi of the Nerhu dynasty, who, in the 2009 Indian election campaign, called for the forced sterilisation of all Muslims as a means to stir up communal animosity and “consolidate his vote bank” (Roy xxxii). Other forms of symbolic violence against Muslims can be seen in the resurgence of what Chakrabarti evidences as the Bengal Legislative Politics between 1912 and 1936 of restricting cow slaughtering in Bengal. This was



a historical affront to Muslim sensibilities, yet we have seen a current resurgence of these restrictive practices in January 2017, when the Mumbai High Court upheld the cow slaughter ban in Maharashtra. Communal violence is also present in Bangladesh where aggressive Islamic policy with little regard for religious minorities is also being implemented (despite the fact that the Bangladeshi state was founded upon a secular-socialist principle under the auspicious of the Awami League). The result of this cultural intransigence based on an ideological interpretation of religious practice, has resulted in direct violence against Hindus in 1990 and 1992 “perpetrated in connivance with the state machinery” (Fraser 38). Pakistan, as an ideological entity, was formed upon the idea of the new nation as being a home to Islam, and the rise of Hinduvta ideology in contemporary India is a mirror image of this pernicious coupling of national belonging and faith. Constructing nationhood within this exclusive ideology inevitably leads to the incitement of hatred against the excluded other. In the case of Hindu extremism, it is a convenient subterfuge to mask India’s social ills, such as a persisting caste violence, the appropriation of tribal lands by corporate conglomerates, the continuing impoverishment of a large segment of the population, and so forth. One of the great paradoxes of contemporary Indian society is that, whilst many Hindus no longer support the oppressive nature of the caste system and eschew all forms of communal violence, the dark and unfathomable violence of Partition continues to cast its shadow upon present events.

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# JINNAH AND THE THEATRE OF POLITICS

Faisal Devji  
University of Oxford

## ABSTRACT

In this essay I will look at the way in which Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, managed to lead Muslims without claiming to resemble them in any way. His heretical background, anglicized character and sheer arrogance instead served to augment rather than detract from Jinnah's popularity, because he represented a politics based on novelty rather than heredity, artifice rather than authenticity. Muslim politics in colonial India was founded upon the rejection of blood-and-soil forms of nationality, which could only define the Prophet's followers there as a minority and not a nation. Pakistan therefore had to be fought for in the purely ideal terms of a political logic, whose iconic representation was to be found in the biography of the man hailed as its creator.

KEYWORDS: Hinduism, India, Islam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Nationalism, Pakistan.

## RESUMEN

En este artículo estudio cómo el fundador de Paquistán, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, consiguió ser el líder de los musulmanes a pesar de su comportamiento herético, educación británica y arrogancia que, lejos de alejarlo de las masas, apuntalaron su popularidad. Jinnah venía a representar una política basada en la iniciativa más que en la búsqueda de lo tradicionalmente auténtico. La política musulmana en India rechazaba el nacionalismo por pertenencia a un espacio físico, que habría reducido a los seguidores del Profeta a una minoría, no a una nación. Por eso la idea de Paquistán se forjó en términos de lógica política y la representación más icónica de aquella era la biografía de su creador.

PALABRAS CLAVE: hinduismo, India, islam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, nacionalismo, Paquistán.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is possible to imagine India achieving independence without a Gandhi or Nehru at the helm, and in fact historians routinely quarrel about what freedom might have looked like for her without these founding fathers. But nobody has ever been able to think of Pakistan's birth without Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Indeed historians regularly argue that if Jinnah had died a year before he actually did, Pakistan may never have come into being. Though far less influential internationally than his illustrious rivals, Jinnah is the one indispensable figure in the history of India as much as Pakistan. Jinnah's career serves to exemplify an extraordinarily dynamic period in the political life of India, when the limits not only of European imperialism, but of liberal nationalism, as well, were being tested in creative ways much beyond the tradition of British political thought. For in many ways his radically novel idea of Pakistan, with its lack of any prior history, conceptual as much as geographical, and with its two wings audaciously separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory, belonged to the twentieth-century world of ideological politics on a global scale. Indeed Pakistan can be said to have appeared on the world's map so as to confound any naturalized vision of the nation-state, dispensing as it did with every notion of territorial or cultural integrity for a political artifice.

Pakistan does not belong in the nineteenth-century context of nationalism, with its emphasis on common histories, geographies and traditions that were based on language or ethnicity. And I shall argue here that the abstract and even empty identity that constituted the single foundation for this country can be found mirrored in the biography of its founding father. For by his words as much as his character, Jinnah represented a denial of blood-and-soil forms of nationalism that relied upon notions of heredity, authenticity and intimacy. Whether by accident or design, Jinnah was the perfect father for a Pakistan created as a piece of theatre, the representation of an idea that had little if anything to do with the kind of nationalism characterized by deep histories and geographical continuities—all of which could only bind Muslims to an India in which they were forever doomed to be a minority.

## II. THE OBSCURITY OF ORIGINS

Ever since he entered public life in the early years of the last century, Jinnah's character had been defined by an apparent contradiction. He was remarkably reticent about his background and private life on the one hand, while being flamboyant in his dress and comportment on the other (see Wolpert 1984). This contradiction could be seen in every part of Jinnah's personality, with his well-known shyness and sensitivity being compensated for by a sometimes rude and always self-assured manner. This character trait allowed Jinnah to make of Indian politics a piece of theatre whose action concealed as much as it revealed. His friends as well as enemies strove throughout Jinnah's career to understand not only what he was really up to but also who he really was. Jinnah himself was determined to remain an enigma.



He wrote very little, apart from speeches, a few articles and brief, workaday letters, extraordinary in a period when Indian leaders like Gandhi and Nehru wrote tomes.

While it was no doubt born out of his own experience and psychology, this contradiction of personality might also have had something to do with Jinnah's ethnic and religious background. For the man who would be acclaimed as the Qaid-e-Azam or Great Leader of his people was in fact the most unlikely of Muslim politicians, coming as he did from a small community of Gujarati traders who declared one of the most heretical versions of Islam as their ancestral faith. A branch of the minority Shia sect, the Ismaili creed professed by these Khoja merchants dispensed with the religious law altogether and was open to considering Muhammad and his successors as incarnations of ostensibly Hindu deities like Vishnu. Indeed the Khojas rarely used the name Muslim for themselves, though they acknowledged Islam as their religion.

Out of step with the majority of India's Muslims, and even execrated by many among them, the Khojas emerged as a prosperous and influential trading community in cities like Bombay and Karachi during the nineteenth century, finding their business partners and clients among Hindus, Jains, Parsis and other Shia or Gujarati Muslim merchant groups. All this was true of Jinnah's father, a Karachi businessman hailing from the small Hindu princely state of Gondal. Given their relative distance from what passed as Muslim norms in India, and their greater intimacy with Hindu mores in particular, it had always struck men like Gandhi and Nehru as astounding that the Khojas could have produced a leader like Jinnah, whom they very frequently described as being more Hindu than Muslim. And in this they were quite correct, since Nehru, scion of a family that had served the Mughals, represented the dominant Muslim culture of North India in his dress and language, while Gandhi was certainly more knowledgeable about the Quran and Muslim devotions than the famously irreligious Jinnah.

Jinnah's Khoja background necessarily made his claims regarding both Hindus and Muslims into histrionic ones, since his intimacy was and in fact continued in his closest friendships to be with Hindus, Parsis, Christians and other Shias rather than with the vast population of Sunnis that he claimed to represent. Jinnah's intimate self, in other words, stood at some distance from his public persona. As a Khoja, Jinnah's relations with the majority of India's Muslims were distant apart from any personal inclination, while his links with Hindus in particular were close and even intimate. His partisanship of the country's Muslims had little to do with any personal experience or identification with them. Indeed it was precisely his distant and as it were "secular" definition of Islam that allowed Jinnah to transform Muslim identity into a modern and non-theological political form. And given the ambiguous position that he occupied between Hindus and Muslims, it is not surprising that Jinnah came to be convinced that it was the intimacy between these groups that made them vulnerable to hurt and posed the greatest political problem for India.

One of Jinnah's great enemies, the Hindu nationalist leader Savarkar, made the same kind of argument in his polemical tract of 1926 called *Hindutva*, where he argued that while Hinduism was by its nature pluralistic and tolerant, it was the otherwise admirable intimacy that groups such as the Khojas enjoyed with its



followers that forced the latter to draw a line excluding outsiders from their inner being, though of course the Khojas were free to rejoin the parent body of Hinduism and be welcomed into it (Savarkar 101-102). Jinnah eventually reached the same conclusion, to sunder the ties of a cruel brotherhood that bound India's two great religions together with the hurt of fraternal betrayal, so that a genuine friendship could emerge in its place. This intimacy was on full view in Jinnah's relations with Gandhi, which were marked precisely by their regional, linguistic and trading-caste commonalities. The President of the Muslim League would assert that he knew how to deal with the Mahatma of the Indian National Congress, since he spoke to him as a Khoja did to a Bania, which is to say as a member of one Gujarati trading community to another (Khan 1976: 44).

### III. ACTING THE PART

For someone who was admired as well as accused in later years of being so highly westernized in his language, attitudes and behaviour, Jinnah came from a completely Indian family background in which English was neither spoken nor indeed understood. Eventually his father picked up enough English to do business with British companies, and the young Mohammad Ali and his siblings are described by his sister, Fatima, as imitating the sound of English conversation: ish-phish-ish-phish-yes being answered with ish-phish-ish-phish-no (Jinnah and al Mujahid 48). Even at the end of his life, by which time English had long become his preferred language, Jinnah neither spoke nor wrote it with any degree of sustained accuracy. And while his knowledge of Urdu, the official language of Muslim nationalism, was poor, Jinnah apparently spoke Gujarati and Kutchi beautifully if never in public, and seems even to have had a working knowledge of Persian, which he sometimes interjected into Urdu speeches when he couldn't remember the grammatical gender of certain words.

This disparity between his formidably anglicized demeanour, so utterly convincing to most observers, and a fundamental inability to assume complete mastery over the culture of the Raj, was also evident in other aspects of Jinnah's life. So his Calcutta lieutenant, M.A.H. Ispahani tells us that when he once offered to get Jinnah some bowties on a trip to Paris, his leader surprised him in admitting that he used ready-made ones, after which Ispahani taught Jinnah to tie these signs of European high culture by practising doing so around his thigh (Ispahani 99). It was almost as if Jinnah, far from rejecting his background to become a "brown Englishman," was content to treat his westernized self as a kind of role there to convince others but not pushed beyond the bounds of theatre to become a form of conversion or self-delusion. And theatre in this sense was of the essence in Jinnah's personality, allowing him to advance a persona while retreating from it at the same time, and to make audacious decisions or outrageous claims as part of the spectacle of politics.

This character trait became evident early in Jinnah's life. When this son of a petty trader who'd done well was sent off to London as an apprentice to a firm of port wine merchants with whom his father did business, he suddenly decided



to abandon a promising commercial career and, much against his father's wishes, become a lawyer. The only other future he'd envisaged for himself was that of an actor, with Jinnah confessing that his great ambition had been to play Romeo on stage (Jinnah and al Mujahid 80). Given his early political career as the "ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity", this choice of character is illuminating, since apart from being a lover, Romeo is a tragic hero who sought to reconcile two warring families but succeeds only in undoing himself in the process. Savarkar, writing at around the same time as Jinnah had left a Congress that had been revolutionized under Gandhi's leadership, would also refer to *Romeo and Juliet* to describe the intimacy of religious conflict in India (Savarkar 1-2).

Jinnah's love for theatre, both Bombay's Gujarati-language stage and the English one of Shakespeare, Wilde and Shaw, was evident from his library and conversation. Facing a choice between the stage and the law, he opted for the latter, and in doing so only chose a version of the stage. The young Jinnah was fascinated by the sheer theatre of politics, and saw the law as his ticket of entry into this world dominated by his social superiors. For as the patrician Nehru, a graduate of Harrow and Cambridge, would sneeringly remark in times to come, Jinnah was man of no cultivation or systematic reading, having never been to a university. In this he was much like Gandhi, both being autodidacts from traditional mercantile backgrounds, though the Mahatma's recourse to the language of native authenticity made him acceptable to Nehru by the same token that Jinnah's claim to the West rankled i him.

#### IV. A DANDY'S CODE OF HONOUR

The young wife to whom his marriage had been arranged just before he'd left for London was dead, and his father on the verge of bankruptcy. Taking charge of the family, he managed to set up a precarious legal practice in Bombay and moved them all there, ensconcing his father and younger siblings in Khoja Mohallah, the traditional community neighbourhood in the "native quarter," while he took modest rooms in the colonial city near Apollo Bunder, where the Gateway of India stands today. India's great commercial metropolis, Bombay exerted a magnetic attraction for all those who wished to make their name and fortune, with Jinnah just one of many young men drawn there from provincial towns like Karachi. He behaved in exactly the way that the son of an Indian trader was expected to, working hard to support his suddenly impoverished family, educating his brothers and sisters and eventually marrying most of them off.

But the young man whose family lived in Khoja Mohallah was a very different individual from the aspiring lawyer who lived in the colonial city and was soon to become a rising star of the Indian National Congress. And in this sense the fact that Jinnah's life was divided between two very different parts of Bombay was indicative of his ambiguous personality more generally. For while Jinnah did not seem to be particularly close to his family, apart from his father and sister Fatima, he was impeccable in doing his duty by them. Similarly, he appears to have had little fondness for the city's various "native" mohallahs or quarters, though he depended



upon them for much of his career. For Jinnah was a representative of Bombay's Muslims in the separate religious electorates that were created by the colonial state just before the First World War, and gradually expanded by the colonial state until its dissolution.

But if Jinnah didn't bring the world of the mohallah to his practice at the Bombay High Court, neither did he simply accommodate himself to that institution's conventions and expectations, displaying instead a propensity to outrage the very respectability he seems otherwise to have craved. More than a propensity, this desire to claim the norms of a certain culture only to break them may be described as an urge fundamental to Jinnah's personality, one that was evident in this initial phase of his legal career in the young Mohammad Ali's unprecedentedly rude and risky remarks in court to judges both British and Indian. It was the kind of arrogance that was taken as a sign of nationalism once Jinnah's political career had begun, but that he exercised far more routinely and generally with no political intent. By such behaviour Jinnah may have sought to outrage the very society into which he wanted admittance, but not because he had already mastered its ways and become an insider. On the contrary, he appears to have entertained a degree of contempt for the insider's conventionality, and sought to guard against it by stressing the sheer individuality of his will.

This high-risk strategy of pushing the margins of respectability, and therefore situating himself at their edges, also took the form of dandyism, with Jinnah fashioning himself into an exquisitely dressed gentleman of a distinct kind, laconic and epigrammatic. This studied and possibly ironic pose, complete with monocle and cigarette holder, was much commented upon during his lifetime, when journalists, for example, often prefaced their weightiest interviews of Jinnah with descriptions of his elegance, as if they were writing for society magazines. Whether in European or Indian dress, Jinnah flouted sartorial convention. On the one hand his two-tone shoes and double-breasted suits with their exaggerated lapels belonged more to the fashionable man about town than to the lawyer and politician that he actually was. On the other hand Jinnah's north Indian *sherwani* was topped by a *karakuli* cap, which not only bore a striking resemblance to the cap still worn at prayer by the Khojas of Bombay, but which was also donned at a rakish angle as if in defiance of religious opinion, for which this indicated a dissolute character.

Dandyism, its first great theorist Charles Baudelaire tells us, emerges during times of transition, when the position of entire social classes is shifting, and certain men find themselves caught between them (Baudelaire 28). Thrown upon his own devices rather than the conventions of inheritance, the dandy's art is as much about the discipline of self-making as it is about ephemeral pleasures. Jinnah's dandyism was also a form of stern discipline, as ascetic in its own way as any of Gandhi's habits. And the discipline he showed in his dress and deportment, making no concessions to comfort and the Indian climate, was mirrored in every aspect of his political life. This included a rigorous schedule as well as otherwise pointless and even obsessive activities like painstakingly filling out receipts for the most minor sums donated to the League or turning off unnecessary lights.



Together with his appearance and behaviour came a distinctive speaking style, one that carried effect even when Jinnah wasn't being rude. As we may expect, what he was most concerned about in his public utterances was the theatre of appearances, and Jinnah's courtroom manner is still recalled as part of the Bombay High Court's lore. Because his voice wasn't very strong, Jinnah varied its timbre and emphasized the cadences of his delivery, which he accompanied by arresting gestures. What he eventually produced thereby was a unique mode of political speech in a time that came to be dominated by leaders declaiming from balconies to assembled masses. Of course none of the leaders who dominated Indian opinion during the age of mass politics in the 1930s and 1940s, Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah, ever made use of declamation or its militaristic potential, with Gandhi speaking in a rather monotonous and matter-of-fact way, while Nehru imitated a certain high-flown and high-pitched English style with the kind of fidelity that Jinnah despised.

Jinnah's prose, marked as it was with grammatical infelicities, was neither as spare as Gandhi's nor as rhetorically accomplished as Nehru's. But what it lacked by way of content was more than made up for by a dramatic delivery and fine use of silence. Indeed Jinnah is the only one of the three about whose speaking style we have a great deal of description and commentary, all of which concurs in stating that its power resided not in projecting the force of Jinnah's personality outwards with his voice, but rather in drawing an audience inwards by the deployment of low and sometimes almost inaudible tones (Morales 181). In fact Jinnah's oratorical secret seems to have been his ability to turn even speeches to mammoth audiences into the kind of private, exclusive and even intimate performances that might be associated with courtrooms and drawing rooms. His low but perfectly modulated voice and elegance of gesture apparently transformed large and rambunctious Indian crowds into quiet and attentive audiences, to the extent that during Jinnah's speeches we hear almost none of the exhortations to silence and discipline that were so common at Gandhi or Nehru's public appearances.

Reducing one's interlocutors to silence, which is something Jinnah did quite regularly not only to his audiences but also his associates in the working committee of the Muslim League, is not necessarily a democratic skill, though it certainly demonstrates the hypnotic quality of Jinnah's charisma. And indeed when he met Gandhi for their last session of intense negotiations in 1944, the Mahatma greeted Jinnah by saying that he had "mesmerised the Muslims," to which the Great Leader of his people responded by remarking that Gandhi had "hypnotized the Hindus," each man seeming to realize that however hedged it might be by the procedures of democratic institutions like political parties, his power in drawing the adulation of millions derived from a quite different source (al Mujahid 90). Of course all this was to come in the future, but it is clear that Jinnah's political style had its origins in his early career, when the only audiences he sought to dominate were to be found in courtrooms and drawing rooms.





## V. REPRESENTING THE FUTURE

A rising star in India's political firmament, hailed by the poetess and Congress propagandist Sarojini Naidu, one of his many female admirers, as the "ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity," Jinnah truly represented the future of India herself in a period whose end coincided with that of the First World War. He envisioned his task as bringing Muslims into the mainstream of Indian politics. Then divided into many associations, some of the "modern" among these followers of the Prophet were gathered in the Muslim League. The party had been founded in 1906, by a collection of Bombay-based merchants, rich aristocrats and anglicized North Indian Sunnis, to defend Muslim interests once the British had announced the introduction of limited political representation. Jinnah thought that India's vast Muslim population possessed no politics of its own, and he was determined to have it play its proper role in the struggle for India's freedom. His great triumph in this endeavour came with the Lucknow Pact in 1916, which brought Congress and League together on a single platform and allowed for a common membership between them.

Even after he had abandoned the Congress in 1920, Jinnah did not cease to work for a political agreement between Hindus and Muslims, though what he meant by this was a genuine coming together and not merely the latter's dissolution in a Hindu-dominated Congress, which he thought was only a recipe for future confrontation. His last such effort was made during the 1937 elections, when, despite his estrangement of more than a decade from the Congress, Jinnah returned from his English exile and took over the Muslim League, with a view to bringing it closer to the former. Even when he had become Congress's greatest enemy, Jinnah continued to hold up Hindu politicians, and the party that he thought they dominated, as models for Muslims. Indeed with the exception of the Prophet's followers in Bombay, among whose trading communities he counted himself, Jinnah was openly and routinely contemptuous of the generality of Indian Muslims, as far as their intellectual and political skills were concerned, holding them to be treacherous, greedy, swayed by emotions and worst of all, lacking faith in themselves. Given his opinion of them, as well as his own singular character, Jinnah's claim to represent Muslims had little to do with any identity, history, culture or even interest that he might be said to share with his constituents. Instead his charisma seemed to derive from the very immensity of the difference between the leader and the led.

Insofar as Jinnah can be said to have represented Muslims at all, he did so in the way a lawyer does his clients, which is to say by focussing on their objective interests and from outside their own sense of themselves. Indeed he had little patience with the existential aspect of identity and always sought to turn what he considered its accidental facts into political principles. This lawyerly style of leadership seems to have been understood by Jinnah's Muslim followers, who remained undeterred by all attempts to tar him as a half-English heretic who ate pork and drank alcohol. So when the retired civil servant Sir Malcolm Darling embarked upon a horseback tour of northern India in 1946, speaking with country folk about their visions of the future, one of his Muslim interlocutors in the Punjab responded to a question



about Jinnah's distance from Islamic norms by repeating the Qaid's own statement. Jinnah, he said, was a good Muslim leader because he could speak to Gandhi as a Khoja spoke to a Banya. In other words it was the Qaid-e-Azam's intimacy with his Hindu enemies that in the eyes of this pious Muslim made him an ideal leader (Darling 107).

As their lawyer, Jinnah thought that the problem with Muslims was their propensity to being seduced by petty theological issues and an outdated cultural or historical sensibility, thus forsaking what he imagined as their preordained role in the politics of India. This role had to do with Muslims performing their duty as India's chief minority in order to keep the majority true to their country's plural society. What interested Jinnah, in other words, was not the Muslim or even religious nature of this minority, but rather the way in which its constitutional position could be transformed into a political principle. And if Jinnah was used to accusing his fellow Muslims of degrading their community by stressing doctrinal matters over political ones, he appears to have felt real betrayal only when his Hindu friends in the Congress started doing the same under Gandhi's influence. Whatever else it was about, Jinnah's lifelong quarrel with the Mahatma had its alleged origin in the latter's attempt to reduce India's Muslims into a merely religious minority and thus deprive them of a political principle.

While Jinnah was certainly irritated by what he saw as Gandhi's dangerously unrealistic politics, this was not sufficient to provide the cause of his disenchantment with Congress. It was instead the Mahatma's first great movement of non-cooperation in 1919, which included the mobilization of Muslims for the cause of the caliphate, now supposedly at risk following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the First World War, which seems to have particularly horrified Jinnah. Like the Hindu nationalists who tended to be his friends, Jinnah saw the Khilafat Movement as being a piece of political hypocrisy by which Gandhi obtained Muslim support for a reactionary cause, and in the process gave Muslim divines and their divisive theological concerns a political platform for the first time. Savarkar's book *Hindutva* was written precisely during this period to pose a Hindu politics against this new Muslim one. In later years ideologists of the Muslim League like the journalist Z.A. Suleri would see the Khilafat Movement, ostensibly the high point of Muslim mobilization in India, as nothing more than a "butchery" of their political life, even describing it as an absorption into "the fold of Hindudom" (Suleri 41, 53).

Unlike the Hindu nationalists, however, Jinnah's objections had to do with what he thought was the Mahatma's aim, reducing Muslims to a merely religious minority with no political principle or contribution of their own to the cause of India's freedom. He hadn't minded supporting the cause of a defeated Turkey against the colonial desires of victorious Britain and France, and like other Shia politicians of the time was thoroughly ecumenical in upholding the rights of a caliph who was considered nothing more than an illegitimate usurper within their sect. But to bring Islam into politics in order to bolster Congress, was, he considered, a foolish and ultimately dangerous move for all concerned, and one that forced him out of the party forever. The break was made in good theatrical style, after he stood up to Gandhi during the Congress's annual session in 1920 and, to the jeers and physical



threats of the Mahatma's new Muslim allies, accused him of bringing religion into politics.(see Alvi 60).

## VI. FALLEN ANGEL

Having left Congress, Jinnah dallied for over a decade with other political parties formed among those conservatives and Hindu nationalists, like Motilal Nehru or Madan Mohan Malaviya, who were also exiles from it. But after the Round Table Conferences on the early 1930s that were meant to bring India's various interests into constitutional agreement, Jinnah decided to settle in England and practice before the Privy Council. The 1935 Government of India Act that resulted from these conferences, and pleased none of India's parties, widened the franchise further and called for elections to be held under separate electorates in 1937. Asked by a divided Muslim leadership to return and lead the Muslim League in these elections, Jinnah acceded and embarked upon a campaign to purge the party of "reactionaries," fill it with Congress Muslims and popularize it in alignment with the Congress, with which he'd reached an informal, power-sharing agreement. Congress emerged from the 1937 elections as the country's largest single party, though one that hadn't managed to secure the majority of the Muslim vote, which went instead to regional parties in Muslim majority provinces like the Punjab and Bengal. The Muslim League, in the meantime, though it hadn't won over the Muslim majority provinces, had done very well in areas where Muslims were in a minority, and so Jinnah fully expected to be taken into ministries in those provinces where they were a significant if not overwhelming force.

The Congress was entirely within its rights to refuse such an alliance, but went further and announced that it would be happy to include Muslim Leaguers who renounced their party to sign the Congress pledge, with Nehru even going so far as to make unwise comments about the League disappearing from Indian politics altogether. For Jinnah, this was not only a betrayal, but also what he described as a fascist and dictatorial tactic to eliminate opposition parties by a politics of bribery and blackmail, with the Muslims' true representatives, the Leaguers for whom they'd voted, being replaced by token Congress Muslims. He saw in this procedure nothing more than an attempt to destroy India's political plurality, or rather reduce it to a merely religious, ethnic or caste diversity. His own politics, by contrast, had always been about transcending the materiality of such identities and anchoring them to a political principle so general that it could be represented by anyone.

This was to be his last disappointment with Congress, for shortly afterwards Jinnah abandoned the language of minority rights altogether to announce that the Muslims were a nation, and thus to be dealt with on the basis of parity rather than by the counting of heads. Not coincidentally, this rejection of minority politics occurred once the internationalism of the League of Nations, with its famous minorities protections, entered into crisis with the rise of fascist wars in Europe and imperialist ones abroad. By 1940 Jinnah was asking for a vaguely defined state or states, independent or simply autonomous, in which this new nation could find a



home. The name eventually adopted for this state had been thought up a decade earlier by a Cambridge undergraduate, and though it meant something like “land of the pure” was also an acronym describing “Punjab, Afghania, Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan,” with Bengal, the most populous Muslim province, being conspicuously absent. Jinnah’s task was now to get the Muslim majority provinces to support the League and thus make it an equal player with Congress in Indian politics.

As founder of the “two nation” theory, Jinnah was often asked how Muslims constituted one. His standard response, running down a list of national characteristics, was always perfunctory, ending in the assertion that Muslims alone could fitly be described as a nation. But given the dispersed and diverse character of India’s Muslim population, Jinnah’s idea of nationality could have no blood-and-soil connotation, since history, geography and everything connected to them served to relate rather than distinguish Muslims from Hindus, and in doing so allow them to remain nothing more than a minority. Muslim nationality instead resided in nothing but the will alone, a self-sustaining and indeed devilish quality appropriately represented not only by Jinnah’s own character, but also by his clear rejection even of the Islamic past and India’s Muslim history in particular, which he on occasion compared to British imperialism. And this completely “unnatural” concept of nationality also made the Muslim “homeland” for which Jinnah fought a mere instrument of the national will, with Pakistan able to derive neither name nor notion from any past real or imagined. Indeed for Jinnah crucial about Pakistan was precisely that it was unprecedented.

We might say that only by rejecting what was given them by nature and history could India’s Muslims exchange the role of minority for that of nation, if this latter was defined by religion conceived of not as the attribute of any particular population but rather as a universal idea or even an ideology. But if Muslim nationalism was to present itself as an ideology, or at least an idea transcending all that was given a people by history or nature, it could not be religious in any conventional sense. And it was this lack of religious familiarity in the Muslim League that explains its rejection by so many Muslim clerics, who preferred supporting the Indian National Congress, which was pledged to continue the colonial policy of granting them jurisdiction over an Islam defined by personal law and ritual practice. It also explains Jinnah’s much discussed and yet inexplicably popular lack of religious feeling, which for him was simply an historical accident that made a national will possible among India’s Muslims.

In an interview with the *Daily Herald* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1942, Jinnah responded to a question about the possibility of a compromise between Hindus and Muslims with an epigram: Hindus want to worship the cow while Muslims want to eat it (Ahmad 409). Far from being a statement simply dismissive of Indian prejudices, Jinnah’s laconic response actually takes them seriously. Unlike Gandhi, who took such prejudices seriously by trying to build a compromise between them, Jinnah wanted to dissolve them altogether by addressing the constitutional situation that he thought provided their basis. This was a situation in which various interests and constituencies, religious, regional and caste-based, had been created by imperialism in such a manner that turning India into a national state on some



European model would annihilate the weakest among them. A national state of this kind would be Hindu by default rather than by intent, because its elimination of constitutional privileges like separate electorates would affect only minority groups as disadvantages.

The problem of India, thought Jinnah, was that it had adopted the language of democratic nationalism, with its majorities and minorities, in a situation where neither democracy nor nationality existed. But it was more than colonialism that prevented such a nation from coming into being, since constituting as they did a gargantuan population of 70 millions which also formed absolute majorities in a number of provinces, India's Muslims could by no means be considered a minority without deforming this term out of recognition. A constitutional solution to this problem was required, therefore, which for Jinnah meant nothing less than what he called a social contract. But this was only possible if all parties to the contract negotiated from a position of equality. Thus Jinnah's demands for parity in the discussions leading to independence, which Indian nationalists considered a disingenuous ploy to deny their numerical majority. On his part Jinnah saw in Congress attempts to refuse him parity a demonstration of Hindu dominance, since it was a specifically confessional majority that was being used to force a weaker community into the position of minority even before the establishment of a national state, one which he thought should be founded upon the heartfelt agreement of its constituting parts.

Jinnah accused the Congress of being idealistic by refusing to take Indian realities seriously. But he remained true to the Congress creed in other ways, a loyalty we can see demonstrated most clearly and ironically in the demand for Pakistan. One of Jinnah's catchphrases in the making of this demand was that the freedom of Pakistan presupposed that of India. Giving priority to Indian freedom here meant not that the Muslim League would hold up her independence until its demand for Pakistan was met, but rather that India could only be free as the kind of state Congress wanted it to be with Pakistan as its neighbour. Otherwise, whether as a centralized or federated state, it would only be some version of an empire, Mughal or British in form, where politics meant the state's manipulation of autonomous groups which were unable to constitute a citizenry. The freedom of Pakistan, therefore, meant the freedom of India, because in splitting the Subcontinent's enormous Muslim population between both countries, it would make possible the creation of "proper" majorities and minorities in each one, and thus a secular citizenship as well. So in the new India, for instance, Muslims would suddenly cease to exist as a nation and become what Jinnah called a sub-national minority, as too would Hindus in Pakistan.

The Qaid refused to consider a large-scale transfer of populations between India and Pakistan until the violence of partition forced him to agree to what we would today call the "ethnic cleansing" of a divided Punjab. Indeed he wanted the two countries to retain effective minorities for the sake of their own freedom, for only in this way, he said in an address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in 1948, would Hindus cease to be Hindus politically and Muslims cease to be Muslims, both becoming the citizens of their respective states in a real sense, because of and



not despite the other's presence (Burke 29). Only by eliminating what he thought were the impossible majorities and minorities of colonial India by its partitioning, could these religious groups lose their stranglehold on the region's politics and subside into civil society. And this would allow real democracies to emerge there by making possible the creation and destruction of temporary majorities and minorities based on a variety of different interests.

Apart from making a democratic citizenship possible, Jinnah thought that the minorities in India and Pakistan might also constitute a link between the two countries, one that could provide a basis for the relations and indeed mutual dependence of both. This scheme, branded by Congress supporters as the keeping of hostages, succeeded neither as an attempt to keep the Hindu and Sikh areas of Bengal and Punjab, provinces that the League claimed in their entirety, nor to retain such populations in other parts of what became Pakistan. This failure to shape the future of the state he had created can be blamed not only on the recalcitrance of others, but on the abstract idealism of Jinnah's own ideas, which is exactly what Gandhi did when speaking to Lord Casey, the Governor of Bengal, in 1946. For the Mahatma was one of the few who realized that Jinnah's ostensibly hard-headed political realism, one that disdained Congress calls for communal harmony as woolly idealism, was itself the most utopian of dreams dedicated to making visions like the social contract into political realities.

## VII. SATAN INCARNATE

The originality of Jinnah's political style, relying upon affectation and disdain, is made evident in books like Z.A. Suleri's *My Leader*, which appeared in 1945 with a drawing of Jinnah in high hauteur on its cover. The book's first chapter begins with a list of accusing quotations from Jinnah's enemies. "Jinnah Sahib is vain [...] Prouder than the proudest of Pharaohs [...] He is an egoist who would own no equal [...] Arrogant and uncompromising." To these Suleri responds in the following way. "Precisely this 'proudest of Pharaohs,' this 'egoist,' this 'India's political enemy Number One,' this 'arrogant and uncompromising,' this 'disruptor of India,' this 'essentially bad man' is MY LEADER." If Suleri can exult in his leader's demonization, it is because he recognized in the man's elegant disdain a force of negation that would break the language of Indian politics down to its most basic parts, so as to make what Jinnah called a new "social contract" out of the colony's state of nature. It is this force of negation that the great man's vanity exhibits, a demonic force that makes for an iconography full of grim and unflattering images, quite different from the handsome and urbane gentleman that we know Jinnah to have also been.

Quite different, too, from the iconography surrounding "Papa" Gandhi and "Uncle" Nehru, who was acute enough to recognize negation as Jinnah's greatest political weapon. Of course Jinnah imagined as an indomitable will in a frail body, an image calling for both obedience and protection approaches the cult of the Mahatma. But Jinnah's will is indomitable in the most self-consciously secular and civilian way, which is why it is satanic in Milton's sense, upheld by nothing but



itself. And it is ambition, pride and other qualities of satanic solitude that make Jinnah heroic in a peculiarly modern sense, a heroism that the poet of Muslim nationalism, Mohammad Iqbal, glorified precisely in the figure of the Devil. For if certain mystics and poets in the past had seen in the Devil's refusal to bow before Adam at God's command a sign of his greater devotion to the latter, Iqbal made of Satan a modern hero, one whose disobedience signalled the virtue of independence or freedom, as well as the willingness to suffer for his convictions. And Jinnah, I want to argue, comes to fit this new, satanic image of heroism for India's Muslims, who were under few illusions about his heretical background, propensity to alcohol and pork and disinclination to pray.

Jinnah's rise to eminence was made possible by the increasingly parochial politics of the once dominant Muslim gentry in northern India, and by the political emergence on a country-wide scale of Muslim groups in other parts of the land. Jinnah himself was from one of these new groups, the merchants of Gujarat and Bombay, and his achievement was to bring them together with gentry, aristocrats and professional men from other regions, to lead the first popular party in India's Muslim history. How appropriate it was that this most unrepresentative Muslim should come to lead a party in which no group could claim to represent any other. It was the disparate character of the Muslim League that Jinnah's political style, his satanic solitude, addressed in the most original way. For might not his dandyism and love of masculine beauty have counter posed a self-fashioned and wilful sense of Muslim individuality to some impossible Muslimhood made up of common characteristics like belief, ritual or everyday practices? Jinnah, then, represented neither the Muslim past nor present, but perhaps, in the man's very departure from his community's various norms, nothing more than the future that was being imagined for it.

In one respect Jinnah's satanic character, depending as it did on what Nehru repeatedly described as his politics of negation, made him quite different from and indeed more devilish than the Devil himself. And this had to do with his refusal to tempt anyone —just as he was famously beyond all temptation. Jinnah certainly advocated the cause of Pakistan, but without ever painting it in the bright colours of utopia, as Congressmen were always doing for their vision of India. No doubt Muslim League propaganda came to develop its own rhetoric of a glorious if thoroughly ambiguous future, but Jinnah only ever spoke of Pakistan in terms of dry principles. So we often hear of those who were convinced by the mesmeric force of his personality suddenly losing faith in Jinnah's arguments once they were no longer in his presence.

In fact Jinnah himself admitted to being stirred by the seductions of Congress rhetoric, and so like Ulysses he not only chained himself to the mast of his political principles in order to resist the siren song of Indian nationalism, but had to make sure that his associates were protected from its temptations as well. During their talks of 1944, for example, Jinnah indignantly refused to allow Gandhi to address the League's working committee, since both the Mahatma and he seem to have realized the effect of Congress's temptations upon even the highest officials



of the Muslim League. And indeed Jinnah had regularly to rein in his men when they appeared to be leaning too closely in Congress's direction.

Eventually it seems to have been a fear of the "Hindu Raj" Jinnah was constantly mentioning that came to dominate the popular imagination of India's Muslims, not any vision of a utopian future in Pakistan. But despite the increasing tempo of communal violence across the country, did this fear actually refer to any lived experience? Jinnah's accusations of Congress perfidy, at least until the Bihar riots of 1946, in which some ten thousand Muslims were killed, tended to rely upon infractions of principle rather than any real instances of persecution, which were after all to be found on both sides of the religious divide. Thus his contention that Congress forced all those under its provincial governments to sing its anthem as the national anthem, salute its flag as the national flag, abandon the Urdu language favoured by North Indian Muslims for Hindi and reverence India as a Hindu goddess in a song taken from a famously anti-Muslim novel of the nineteenth century. And when he did describe the miseries of "Hindu Raj" the only example Jinnah could proffer of its malignity had to do with discrimination and oppression among Hindu castes, so that he ended up asking Muslims to see their own future in the present misery of the "Untouchables." It was a curiously vicarious fear.

But if Jinnah disdained tempting either his friends or enemies with glorious visions of the future, it was his own immunity to temptation that truly made Jinnah into a satanic figure, one who famously refused Gandhi's offer that he should become the first prime minister of an independent India. Indeed he had similarly dismissed the Mahatma's desire that the League take the lead in forming an anti-Congress opposition in 1939, once Congress governments had resigned office in protest against India being taken into the Second World War without her consultation. Like Jinnah himself, Gandhi seems to have realized by the close of the 1930s that Congress was not India's sole representative, and that a quasi-democratic politics had already emerged in colonial India, with the existence of opposition parties that could not be reduced to creations of the British. So when a number of these parties, including the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League came together to celebrate a "Day of Deliverance" once Congress resigned office, the Mahatma wrote to Jinnah recommending that he lead an opposition that might well assume government in an independent India.

Gandhi had understood that as India's biggest opposition party, the Muslim League had come to set the pattern and model for all the others. Dalits or "Untouchables", for instance, who were a minority everywhere in the country, adopted the League's pre-Pakistan politics of positive discrimination and constitutional safeguards, while the non-Brahmin movement of the South adopted a Pakistani-style rhetoric of regional autonomy and even secession. Jinnah, of course, spurned all such attempts to lure him back to Indian nationalism, though he also appears to have held back from pressing his advantage and working towards the political fragmentation of India. Thus his attempts from the days of exile to build an alliance of minorities were abandoned once Jinnah opted for Pakistan, and he went out of his way to refuse support to low caste movements claiming autonomy, as much as to potentially secessionist agitations in different parts of the country. Was this because





Jinnah wanted to be the only one to defy Congress, or because he envisioned his role as defending India from fragmentation as much as subjecting her to it?

## VIII. THE LAST INDIAN

Jinnah was reluctant to utter the final word confirming India's partition, which has made historians speculate that he didn't really want a separation after all. This, I think, is an illegitimate argument, though Jinnah was certainly displeased with the way in which India and Pakistan eventually came to be created. He used to say that the last word was never spoken in politics, and this idea Jinnah apparently took so much to heart that the Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, could only manage to extort a slight inclination of the head from him as a sign of agreement to India's partition and the creation of Pakistan. Hesitating at the last moment to take responsibility for the momentous future he had been instrumental in making for the Subcontinent, it seemed as if Jinnah wanted to assure himself of saving India by the same token as he would free Pakistan, since he thought of himself as being the well-wisher of both countries. We have already noted his reluctance to participate in the wider fragmentation of India as far as supporting caste and regional movements was concerned, and during the transfer of power Jinnah similarly appears to have made very little effort to bring the princes or Sikhs into his camp if only to discomfit India.

For his was a politics of principle, and what delighted Jinnah most about the emergence of two new states out of the Raj was that he thought such a double independence represented an achievement unprecedented in history, one in which these states had come into being not by war or revolution but as the result of negotiations among civilians that might be described as a social contract. The violence that soon broke out among refugees shifting in either direction disturbed Jinnah primarily because it tarnished this great achievement, with the movement of Hindus and Sikhs out of Pakistan serving to annul it altogether, since without minorities Pakistan no longer had any political meaning as India's counterpart. In fact he blamed the exodus on Congress, which Jinnah thought was deliberately spreading fears among Pakistan's minorities in order to pull them out of the country and thus destroy it.

Revealing his abstract and idealistic notion of politics, Jinnah spoke repeatedly during this period about forgetting the past and starting anew, as if history and experience could be undone so easily and by an act of will. But then he had never paid history much attention and was taken up instead by matters of principle above all. The violence that accompanied the independence of India and Pakistan served only to betray Jinnah's utopian desires for the future, signalling as it did the beginning of a war between the two countries that has been going on now, sometimes openly and sometimes surreptitiously, for over sixty years. And indeed the partition of India provoked the famously cold and unsentimental Jinnah to shed public tears for only the second time in his life, the first being at the grave of his estranged young wife. Like the Devil himself in Iqbal's rendering, Mohammad Ali Jinnah ended up as a tragic hero, undone by the very idealism of his politics.



Even the most fervent nationalists among his Pakistani biographers have tended to see failure and tragedy in Jinnah's last year, not only because of the "moth eaten" country the Qaid famously said he had been given by a partition whose geography was entirely decided by the British, nor even because of the violence of Partition, but given his own marginalization in the new country he had done more than anybody else to bring into existence. Like Gandhi in this respect, who was also sidelined once India had become independent, Jinnah found himself with a great deal of constitutional power in Karachi, but isolated from his own government which had begun playing regional power-politics from a new base in Lahore. Dying of tuberculosis, Jinnah appears to have lost the affection of a number of his people in places like Bengal or Baluchistan. And eventually he probably even started fearing his own fellow-Pakistanis and co-religionists.

Jinnah had always pooh-poohed threats of assassination, and had once even been known to coolly wrest a knife from the hand of a would-be assassin who had slipped into his Bombay house. So despite warnings from the police and intelligence services that he might be targeted by Sikh or Hindu assassins, Jinnah insisted on riding in an open coach or unprotected car and refused to have walls built around his official residence in Karachi. During the ceremonial coach ride with Lord Mountbatten on the day when he was vested with the powers of Governor-General, Jinnah had annoyed the Viceroy, who was after all a military man, by claiming to have brought him through the event without an assassination attempt. But this courage was premised upon the supposition that the Qaid enjoyed the complete devotion of his people. On the very day that Gandhi was assassinated by a fellow Hindu, who accused him of betraying India to Muslim Pakistan, Jinnah asked for walls to be built around his residence (Bolitho 210). Had he realized that the threat of assassination came from one's own people rather than their professed enemies?

In any case it was the Mahatma who, in what the Qaid might be described as his last trick, ended up dying as a martyr for Pakistan and thus depriving Jinnah of that particular privilege. For Gandhi had been assassinated by a Hindu nationalist just before he set out on a pilgrimage to Pakistan, and was seen by his murderer as being so sympathetic to Muslims as to have practically offered them a state of their own. So it was no wonder that the Qaid's perfunctory statement of regret for the death of his old rival emphasized Gandhi's character as a great leader of the Hindus alone (Burke 99). Jinnah's own death had none of the public drama that Gandhi's did, though it occurred as a piece of theatre in the kind of intimate space that he so enjoyed dominating. Flown back to Karachi from the hill resort of Ziarat, Jinnah suffered anonymously in an ambulance that had broken down on a road choked by the ramshackle vehicles and pitiful belongings of Muslim refugees coming from India. It was in some sense a fitting end to one of the most remarkable political careers of modern times, that the leader who had always been an outsider should die as one among the wretchedness of the people he had almost singlehandedly put on the map of the world.



## CONCLUSION

Every biographer of the Qaid-e-Azam, like every historian of Pakistan, has wondered how a man as unrepresentative of Muslim norms in India as Jinnah was, should have become the most popular leader of his community. They have either dismissed his background and personality as inessential to the narrative of Pakistan's independence, or made Jinnah out to be more conventional than his contemporaries believed, whether as a Muslim or a "brown Englishman". But if we are to take biography seriously as a genre, neither of these options should be available to us, for the Qaid's character stands front and centre in all the accounts we have of him, each one of which strives to showcase his departure from the accepted standards of any culture. Even Gandhi, with all his originality and eccentricity, can be said to have represented a certain type as a political icon, if only that of a holy man or "half-naked fakir", as Churchill famously called him. And though it was always the Mahatma who was accused by his detractors of hypocritically playing a part, Jinnah has a much truer claim to making politics into a piece of theatre.

Yet the Qaid embodied no generic type, and in this way alone could he come to represent a Muslim community in which no group was able to speak for another. We might say it was the lack of hegemony in Muslim politics that made Jinnah possible as the kind of political icon he became, one whose own sectarian and regional background was both heretical and marginal enough to make him into a politician with no "natural" constituency. As someone absolutely singular and therefore satanic, he turned out to be the most appropriate leader for a dispersed community that possessed little political integrity. It was the need to reject blood-and-soil forms of nationalism that allowed the Muslim League to fix on a purely abstract national identity, one that made for a theatrical politics in which ideas and principles stalked the stage. Superficial because detached from narratives of national authenticity, and tenacious because based upon "logic" and ideas, Muslim nationalism found itself personified in the figure of Jinnah, who represented his people as a lawyer did his clients, by reducing the messiness of their actions to a set of ideals.

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# NATION, NATIONALISM AND THE PARTITION OF INDIA: TWO MOMENTS FROM HINDI FICTION\*

Bodh Prakash  
Ambedkar University, Delhi

## ABSTRACT

This paper traces the trajectory of Muslims in India over roughly four decades after Independence through a study of two Hindi novels, Rahi Masoom Reza's *Adha Gaon* and Manzoor Ehtesham's *Sookha Bargad*. It explores the centrality of Partition to issues of Muslim identity, their commitment to the Indian nation, and how a resurgent Hindu communal discourse particularly from the 1980s onwards "otherizes" a community that not only rejected the idea of Pakistan as the homeland for Muslims, but was also critical to the construction of a secular Indian nation.

KEYWORDS: Manzoor Ehtesham, Partition in Hindi literature, Rahi Masoom.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia la presencia del Islam en India en las cuatro décadas siguientes a la Independencia, según dos novelas en hindi, *Adha Gaon*, de Rahi Masoom Reza y *Sookha Bargad*, de Manzoor Ehtesham. En ambas la Partición es el eje central de la identidad musulmana, que en todo caso mantiene su fidelidad a la nación india. Sin embargo, el discurso del fundamentalismo hindú desde la década de 1980 ha ido alienando a esta comunidad, que no solo rechazó la idea de Paquistán como patria de los musulmanes, sino que fue fundamental para mantener la neutralidad religiosa del estado en India.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Manzoor Ehtesham, Partición en literatura hindi, Rahi Masoom.



The Indian anti-colonial struggle culminated in the birth of not one but two independent nations in August 1947 —India and Pakistan. The rationale for Partition was the two-nation theory, premised on the idea that religious communities constituted nations. Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League argued that Muslim interests (or the Muslim nation) could not be safeguarded in an undivided Hindu —majority India. The Congress disagreed, but several factors, including rapidly escalating communal violence, forced the issue and the British government decided to carve out Pakistan by dividing Punjab and Bengal and other contiguous Muslim majority areas. It led to a massive migration of people across the newly created borders both voluntary and involuntary, but mostly the latter.

While the Muslim League had fought for and succeeded in creating what it perceived as a Muslim nation, there were innumerable Muslims who did not buy the argument and stayed behind in India. Their faith in a secular and democratic Indian nation was the strongest challenge to the two-nation theory whose proponents were not just the Leaguers but also those who belonged to Hindu communal parties like the Hindu Mahasabha. Like their counterparts in the Muslim League, they argued for a Hindu *rashtra*, in which the interests of the Hindu majority would be supreme. While the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Hindu communalists was a major blow to communal forces, they have continued to persist and witnessed a revival and consolidation in the last three decades. At the heart of Hindu communal politics espoused by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its affiliates is the vision of a Hinduised Indian nation, in which all minorities, particularly the Muslims, are not accepted as full citizens and constantly hounded on account of their allegedly extra-territorial loyalties. This is in sharp contrast to the vision of a secular India espoused by the founding fathers and sought to be preserved by secular, liberal and progressive Indians.

More than any other community or group, the position of Muslims in India, how they are perceived and their self perception, can provide a fair measure of the success or failure of the secular project in post-colonial times. While all minorities, including Christians, Dalits, women and gays are the target of regressive Hindu communal formations, Muslims are singled out as the principal enemy and obstacle to the achievement of the goal of a Hindu *rashtra*. This is mainly due to the primacy of Partition in the Hindu communal discourse on Indian nationalism from 1947 onwards.

For Muslims in India<sup>1</sup> the journey from 1947 when they acknowledged their faith in a secular nation to the nineteen-eighties, when the foundations of that faith began to shake, has been a mixed experience. If 1947 was a moment of reckoning when many refused to be swayed by divisive politics and asserted their right to be

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\* Some parts of this essay are based upon my earlier work, *Writing Partition: Aesthetics and Ideology in Hindi and Urdu Literature* (Pearson, 2009).

<sup>1</sup> The more commonly used terms, Indian Muslims or Nationalist Muslims, are problematic. One rarely comes across the corresponding terms, Indian Hindus or Nationalist Hindus, the underlying assumption being that while Hindus are axiomatically Indian and nationalist, Muslims are not.

counted as equal partners in the nation-building project, the nineteen-eighties were a second moment when a resurgence of communal forces challenged the belief of secular Muslims in the same nation. Two Hindi novels located in these two moments narrate the seminal role of Muslims in defining the scope and limits of Indian secular nationalism. By studying the two novels together, one can understand how the trajectory of the Indian nation and the minorities continues to be, in some ways, impacted by the Partition and its construction in the post-colonial period.

Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon*<sup>2</sup>, written in the 1960s, explores the Partition of 1947 from the perspective of the residents of a Muslim Shia-dominated village, Gangauli, located in the heart of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). Manzoor Ahtesham's *Sookha Bargad*, written in 1986, is set in Bhopal (a city in state of Madhya Pradesh), against the backdrop of the first 1965 war with Pakistan, and narrates the transition of an educated, progressive and liberal Muslim family (the first generation of independent India) to one that becomes insular and narrow-minded as communal propaganda gains traction. While Muslim characters in the two novels belong to different social classes, there is nevertheless a continuity that can be traced at many other levels. Both authors are a part of the progressive realist tradition in Hindi literature; both come from progressive Muslim backgrounds and both write in Hindi, a language that has been claimed by Hindu communalists as the exclusive property of Hindus.<sup>3</sup> Both of them also belong to regions from where numerous Muslims migrated to Pakistan resulting in families getting divided across ideological and national divides. Hence studying the two novels together can provide us an insight into how the Muslim minority attempts to define itself within the larger space of the Indian nation.

*Adha Gaon* literally means half a village or a divided village and the novel plays on this idea in a variety of ways. In the translator's introduction, Gillian Wright states that the half village in the title refers to the author, Reza's half—the Dakkhin Patti—to which his family belongs. The village Gangauli is actually split between two groups or families of Shia Muslims who reside in two geographically opposed locations, Uttar Patti and Dakkin Patti. Both sides prepare throughout the year to compete for the honor of being the one whose *tazias* are bigger and more ornate, whose *marsiya*s and *nohas* are more soulful and more evocatively rendered and the one whose expression of pain or *karb* is more dramatic and cathartic than the others, on the occasion of Muharram. An annual ritual observed by Shia Muslims, Muharram commemorates the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of Prophet Mohamad at the Battle of Karbala. Spread over ten days during which Shias remain in

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<sup>2</sup> Rahi Masoom Reza, *Adha Gaon*, translated into English by Gillian Wright as *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* (Penguin, 1994 [1966]). All references are from the translated version. Page numbers follow quoted passages in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Languages too have religious identities, according to communalists. The association of Urdu with the Perso-Arabic script and hence Muslims as well as the association of Hindi with the Devnagri script and hence Hindus was clearly the work of communal minded people from about the second half of the nineteenth century.





a state of mourning, the tenth day, called *Ashura*, witnesses a re-enactment of the battle when Imam Husayn and his children were killed by the forces of Yazid, the tyrannical ruler. But the split that divides Gangauli in pre-Partition times is innocent and culturally meaningful for the inhabitants when compared to the divisions that emerge after the Partition. Half the village leaves for Pakistan, leaving the other half which remains committed to the homeland. The village gets divided not in a simple way on the basis of ideology, but because communalism creates an environment in which some people succumb to the lure of a better life in Pakistan while others are reluctant and refuse to abandon their land and graves.

Ghazipur and Gangauli function as a template for the nation, with different castes and classes living together, and identifying primarily with their village. Conquests by Muslim princes or their generals have not changed the inter-community relationships. According to local belief, its original name was Gadipuri, which was changed to Ghazipur, when it was taken over by Syed Masood Ghazi, a chieftain of the ruler Mohammad Bin Tughlaq. But names mean little, according to the author/narrator. "There is no unbreakable bond between names and identity, because if there were then Gadipuri too should have changed when it became Ghazipur, or at least the defeated Thakurs, Brahmins, Kayasths, Ahirs, Bhars and Chamars should have called themselves Gadipuris, and the victorious Saiyids, Sheikhs and Pathans should have called themselves Ghazipuri" (4). Similarly (or conversely) Gangauli was named after a Hindu raja Gang. But even after Nuruddin's Saiyid family established its hold over it, "Gangauli did not become Nurpur or Nuruddinagar" (5). Reza contrasts this with present times when "the residents of Gangauli have been dwindling in numbers and the percentage of Shias, Sunnis and Hindus has been growing (5)."

What is particularly interesting about the social organization of Gangauli is that caste hierarchies that are evident in the Hindu community extend to the Muslims of Gangauli. The Saiyids (like Brahmins) are the highest in the four communities of Muslims, followed by Sheikhs, Pathans and Mughals and then the "lower" caste weavers and Raqis (Sunni traders). This is evident in the notions of ritual purity as well as that of family descent among the Saiyids. While caste is definitely regressive and the basis of exploitation in *Adha Gaon*, it subverts the overarching communal divide between Hindus and Muslims. Further, by conflating caste and class (both Hindu Thakurs and Rajputs and Muslim Saiyids are the dominant zamindars), Reza shifts the terrain of the conflict from religious identities to class. Kamaluddin, or Kammo as he is called, is stunned at the suggestion of the Aligarh students, who are canvassing for the Muslim League, that Muslims would become "untouchables" if Pakistan was not created (cfr. Hasan 1987: 123-126). "Eh bhai, it looks to me as if it's been a waste of time educating you. What else? If you people don't even know that Bhangis and Chamars are the untouchables. What sort of Bhangis or Chamars do you think we are? And how can anyone who's not an untouchable be turned into one, sahib?" (238).

The repositioning of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims (pre-Partition camaraderie and post-Partition hostility as in many other Partition narratives) to one in which both communities are fractured along lines of class/ caste is a significant counter to the communal divide that engulfs the world outside Gangauli



and threatens to overrun it also. The communal appeals of both the Hindu fakir and the Aligarh students are countered by the villagers by the local specificities of their existence. When Anwarul Hasan, the Sunni trader's son Farooq, argues for the creation of Pakistan and the threat of Hindu rule, Phunnan Miyan counters him by referring him to their local realities. Firstly he says that if Gangauli is not going to be a part of Pakistan, the issue is irrelevant to him. "Eh bhai, our forefathers' graves are here, our tazia platforms are here, our fields and homes are here. I'm not an idiot to be taken in by your 'Long live Pakistan!'" (149). To Farooq's warning that Hindus would rule them after the British left, he retorts, "you're talking as if all the Hindus were murderers waiting to slaughter us. Arre, Thakur Kunwarpal was a Hindu... and isn't that Parusaram-va a Hindu? When the Sunnis in the town started doing *haramzadgi*, saying that we won't let the bier of Hazrat Ali be carried in procession because the Shias curse our Caliphs, didn't Parusaram-va come and raise such hell that the bier was carried" (149).

The Quit India movement of 1942 that was marked by violent protests, with government properties and police stations being attacked, also finds its echo in Gangauli but in a somewhat different context. The villagers are fed up with the corrupt Thanedar of the local police station at Qasimabad, Thakur Harnarayan Prasad, who has forcibly extracted contributions from them for the War Fund, meddled in their internal affairs, taken bribes and falsely implicated some of them. Many young men who had volunteered for the War have died or come back maimed and the villagers are incensed with the oppression of the police officials. The Bhars and other retainers of Thakur Prithvipal Singh, the Hindu landlord of Barikhpur and those of Ashrafullah Khan of Salimpur, another Muslim landlord, surround the police station, with the intention of teaching the Thanedar a lesson. Their resentment is local, it is directed against a man whom they see as an oppressor. "In this crowd there were few people who knew the slogan, 'Quit India'. There weren't even people among them who knew what freedom meant. These were the people from whom one-and-a-half amount of land revenue had been taken, from whose fields the grain had been seized, who had been forced to contribute to the war fund, whose brothers and nephews had been killed or were about to be killed in the war, and from whom the police of Qasimabad had been extracting bribes for generations"(164). The crowd includes members from the Chamar community, Baburam Chamar and Gobardhan as well as Harpal Singh the grandson of Thakur Prithvipal Singh and Phunnan Mian's fifteen-year old son Mumtaz. In the firing, Mumtaz, Gobardhan and Harpal Singh are killed, after which the crowd overruns the police station. The Thanedar and all his constables are tied to a tree and burnt to death. The opposition to the police brings together people from different castes and classes. Even though the Shias are able to protect themselves in the aftermath as they are counted as loyalists and "Hakim Sahib had been responsible for the recruitment of one-hundred-and-eleven men", Hammad, who has a personal grudge against Phunnan Miyan, falsely testifies against him and he is "consequently arrested for the martyrdom of Mumtaz." (166). Reza emphasizes the caste and class equations over and above the religious identities in this case too.



The loyalty of the Hindu “lower” caste Ahirs and Bhars who are patronized by the Shias constantly stands as an obstacle to communal ideology. The alleged threat of Hindu domination by the Muslim League proponents makes little sense to the Saiyids. In fact, it is not the Partition but the abolition of zamindari that constitutes the real threat to their world. The Saiyids are caught between a loyalist position that suited their class interests and the threat of the abolition of zamindari on the one hand, and on the other, their emotional attachment to Gangauli. This is evident in the debate on the issue of whom to vote for in the elections of 1946, between Tannu of Dakkhin Patti, the “black shervanis” (an euphemism for the students from Aligarh who come to seek votes for the Muslim League and appear out of place with their formal dress and polished Urdu in rustic Gangauli) and Hakim Sahib of Uttar Patti. After some quibbling about Jinnah’s inaccessibility which Hakim Sahib dismisses as a joke (“When Jinnah Sahib doesn’t meet anyone and neither does Allah Miyan, then why don’t we vote for Allah Mian?” p. 248), Tannu who has fought in the War and is more educated than the rest, explains to the students in chaste Urdu:

This Patti of loyal government Muslims can’t vote for anyone but the League. But you will not be able to take the vote of Musammat Kulsum. She will vote for her “Muntaz”. ... He was shot dead at the Qasimabad police station. I was not here at that time but I have heard that he died very bravely... They say that he caught hold of the hem of the shirt of a man running away and said, “Eh, bhaiya, if you go to Gangauli tell my mother I’m dead. This *behenchod dard* is going to take my life.” Perhaps you will not have understood his language because you gentlemen have made the Urdu tongue Muslim. But I swear to God that the language I am speaking now is not my mother tongue. My mother tongue is the one in which Mumtaz sent that message to his mother. (248)

Bhojpuri or Bhojpuri Urdu, the language in which the novel was originally written, draws the ire of Urdu purists even today.<sup>4</sup> But its local specificity is fundamental to the identity of Gangauli and its residents. When accused of being a traitor to the cause of Islam and Pakistan, Tannu questions the conflation of the two. “I am a Muslim. But I love this village because I myself am this village... On the battlefield, when death came very near, I certainly remembered Allah, but instead of Mecca or Karbala, I remembered Gangauli” (249).

But while the argument against voting for Pakistan can be easily demolished, the more difficult question of zamindari remains. After all the Congress was clear that zamindari had to be abolished. This meant that the power equations of Gangauli would change and the Saiyids would lose their hold on the “lower” castes

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<sup>4</sup> According to some the term “Bhojpuri Urdu” itself is an anomaly. The sophisticated Urdu that belongs to urban and educated speakers from Lucknow, Aligarh and Delhi has little in common with the language of the villagers in Gangauli. Their unpolished language, peppered routinely with abuses and curses is a distinct marker of their identity.



whom they had exploited for a long time. Yet even this loss cannot be enough reason to abandon one's home. In the final analysis, the tragedy of Gangauli is that an older social and economic structure collapses with the coming of Independence. Sukhram, a "lower" Hindu caste retainer of the Saiyids and his son Parusaram suddenly acquire political power when they are patronized by the Congress party. As Husain Ali Miyan bursts out angrily: "Sukhram-va's son Parusaram-va has become a political leader the moment he's stepped out of jail. He's roaming around wearing a Gandhi cap and making speeches everywhere that times have changed, now the zamindars' force and cruelty won't work!" (265). Even between the Saiyids the hold over land becomes a contested issue. Alienation within families leads to Mighdad even redefining his relationship with his own father. "I don't know about his being any father of mine," said Mighdad. "He's a zamindar and I'm a cultivator" (268). When several of them try to grab a piece of land illegally, Mighdad simply goes and ploughs it, staking his claim as a tiller. As Parusaram tells him, "by putting your hands to the plough you have broken your connections with the zamindars" (268). As the Shia landowning families lose power and prestige, their young men migrate to Pakistan in search of better opportunities leaving behind older family members, wives, and children. The author/ narrator does feel nostalgic about the older order but he also recognizes that the change is inevitable and to an extent empowering for the subalterns even though he may not approve of the opportunist Parusaram who suddenly becomes powerful after joining the Congress. Reza is perceptive enough to recognize that the pace of change in the social and political order did not necessarily imply a greater consciousness among the "lower" castes. "He [Parusaram] really didn't know why he had accepted Gandhiji as his leader... Perhaps more than Gandhiji he needed the Gandhi cap, due to which government officials had begun to fear him, and due to which his status had increased and income too" (269). In fact after getting elected, Parusaram becomes exceedingly corrupt and flaunts his power and wealth before the Mians. He gets embroiled in the internal conflicts of the Shia families and when challenged by Phunnun Mian, he gets him killed. Reza shows how the corrupt local Congress workers use their political power to enhance their personal interests rather than for amelioration of other victimized groups.

Given the class interests of the Shia landlords, they are not sympathetic to the democratic, socialist impulse of the Congress that abolishes zamindari. For them, Muharram becomes a symbol of their own pain —both the separation of families and the dissolution of zamindari. With the impending loss of their zamindaris, the Saiyids begin to gradually build alliances through marriages with non-Saiyid families. Mighdad was ostracized by his own family and the Saiyids for marrying a barber's daughter, Saifunya. But when she dies, his father Hammad wants to reconcile with him so that the land can be worked jointly again. "The wheel of zamindari tradition turned. The barbers came... A grave was dug a short distance away from the family cemetery, and the Saiyid gentlemen set out carrying the bier of the barber's daughter" (287). A new social order in which the caste hierarchies among the Shias have been subverted comes into existence. Blood lines can no longer remain pure. Saiyid girls are married off to non-Saiyid and even illegitimate boys.



And many young men migrate to Pakistan in search of a better life. And Gangauli is irreversibly altered.

Yet the communal canker fails to take root in Gangauli. When the old enmity between Thakur Prithvipal Singh of Barikhpur and the Khan Sahib of Salimpur flares up, some outside communal elements try to take advantage. They infiltrate the ranks of Thakur Prithvipal's retainers and the Hindu fakir incites the crowd against the Muslims. "It [the crowd] thought that Muslims are Muslims and the only difference between the Muslims of Salimpur and Barikhpur was that the Salimpur Muslims were rather far away and those of Barikhpur were nearby" (274). But they are shocked when Prithvipal Singh turns against them when his "own" Muslims are threatened. He not only chases them away, but even threatens to beat up his own Muslims when they ask his permission to leave Barikhpur for Muslim majority areas like Mubarakpur and Bahadurganj.

Reza constructs Gangauli as an oasis in the midst of the communal violence that breaks out in places like Calcutta, Noakhali, Lahore and Bihar. News of the terrible massacres of Muslims keeps coming but the Saiyids and other Muslims refuse to succumb to the pressure of communal ideology. Even the blatant prejudice against Muslims, does not make them despair. When a martyrs' memorial is unveiled at Qasimabad police station to honor those killed in the 1942 movement, and Balmukund Varma, a Congress leader, keeps on praising the role of Haripal and Gobardhan, and their "sacrifice to the Motherland", Phunnan Mian interrupts him. " 'Eh, sahib! A son of mine was killed here too. It looks like no one told you his name. His name was Muntaz!' Having finished what he had to say, Phunnan Miyan turned to look at the crowd. His head was held higher than anyone's" (268).

Muslim League propaganda is rejected by the villagers, Pakistan means nothing to them, Gangauli is all. In fact Raza shows how for the villagers, even the idea of a national identity, that supersedes their local identity is inexplicable. Hence while Pakistan is a ridiculous idea, the Indian nation too means little. Pakistan is linked to the abolition of zamindaris and hence seen as something that robs them of their rightful privileges and power. Though the argument seems somewhat illogical, Sakina, one of the Saiyid ladies, lashes out at Pakistan for their impoverished plight. " 'If that wretched Pakistan hadn't been made, zamindari wouldn't have been finished. Gandhiya said, "All right, Miyans, you've made your Pakistan, now go to hell...zamindari's over" (300).

While the novel does highlight the Hindu communal threat in 1947, it does not show the Muslims backing off. While the circumstances of the Saiyids may have pauperized them, they do not take the easy way out by accepting the argument for Pakistan. They try to reconcile themselves to their straitened circumstances, unwilling to abandon their homes and village. They make what seem to them humiliating compromises with the "lower" castes, and struggle to find the means to sustain themselves. But not one of the principal characters is ideologically or emotionally invested in the creation of Pakistan. While they do not see themselves consciously as equal citizens of an independent Indian nation, their commitment to their village and opposition to communal forces can be read as a positive aspect of their self perception. This is something that is reiterated



by the narrator/author, Rahi Masoom Reza himself, in the unusual introduction that he inserts towards the end of the novel to mark the transition from one age to another. "My bonds with Gangauli are unbreakable. It's not just my village, it's my home... And I give no one the right to say to me, 'Rahi! You don't belong to Gangauli, and so get out and go, say, to Rae Bareilly.' Why should I go, sahib? I will not go." (290-291) Even in his most impassioned moment, Reza cannot bring himself to say "Pakistan", a minor detail that reveals his complete aversion to the very idea (cfr. Ansari 1999).

In his book *Remembering Partition*, Gyanendra Pandey has cited the insertion of this introduction as a "challenge to the claims of nationalism and nationalist historiography" because it "subverts the rules of the writing of novels, and of nationalist thought" (200). Pandey's assumption that nationalism is being challenged is in fact not borne out through a careful reading of the text. Firstly, Reza himself provides an explanation for the introduction in the middle of the text: "The fact is that now our story has come to a place where one age ends and another begins. And doesn't every new age demand an introduction?" (290). The narrative is split neatly by the introduction between the period prior to Partition and the one that comes after it. While in the former Partition/abolition of zamindari is troubling everyone, in the post-Partition period, it is a settled issue, and the reality of what has happened has finally seeped in. Secondly, Reza's central statement about his bonds with Gangauli is made in the context of a Hindu communal assumption about Muslims, viz.: "The Jan Sangh says that Muslims are outsiders" (290). Hence what Reza is questioning is the Hindu communal position that Muslims are aliens in India, a position that links religion with nation and not nationalism itself, as Pandey suggests. The critique of nationalism as a statist ideology by Pandey and others like Homi Bhabha, elides the idea of a secular nationalism that is implicit in Reza's critique.

If *Adha Gaon* locates Muslims within the "moment" of Partition, *Sookha Bargad*, takes up the story several years later. Though the novel was published in 1986, it is set against the backdrop of the 1965 war with Pakistan. It is possible to trace a link between these two years with regard to the re-emergence of Hindu communalism. The Nehruvian era that was marked by a spirited and robust secular politics was followed by a slow re-emergence of Hindu communal forces, particularly around the time of the 1965 war during which Muslims in India were demonized for their alleged sympathies with the enemy. Identity politics during the 1970s and the early 1980s led to a strengthening of communal forces and the consequences were reflected in the demand for Khalistan, the Shah Bano case and the Ram Janmabhoomi issue that culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. *Sookha Bargad* is set in the aftermath of the 1965 war, but in some ways it is a narrative of the 1980s, when the anti-Muslim sentiment had severely dented the secular forces.

While Reza's Saiyids may have countered the communal challenge by recourse to their identification with Gangauli and their Hindu neighbors around 1947, in *Sookha Bargad* Rashida and Sohail have to contest the enemy in a different form and context. Wahid Khan, their father, like the narrator/ author of *Adha Gaon*, had refused to leave his home in Bhopal to migrate to Pakistan, with the rest of his family. An educated and liberal-minded lawyer, Wahid Khan has invested in



a modern education for his children. A secular nationalist to the core and an atheist, he consistently refuses to allow his “religious” identity to define him in any way (cfr. Naim 1999). Thoroughly disgusted with how religion was used to distort and mutilate human values, he chose to practice “secular” law and fight for what was morally right, even though it meant going against his family elders. His children Rashida and Sohail have imbibed his liberal values and strongly argue against the communal beliefs within their extended family and the Muslim community.<sup>5</sup> Their closest friend is the Hindu boy, Vijay, who also shares their beliefs and is equally committed to the secular cause. Interestingly, his refugee parents were saved by Muslim friends during the Partition riots, and far from harboring any grudge against Muslims, Vijay is strongly opposed to any communal stereotyping. Sohail and Rashida refuse to succumb to the pressure of Muslim communal elements who try to play upon feelings of victimization. Sohail derives strength from Vijay who shares his views. Both recognize that the fault lies with their own communities. When Sohail is critical of Muslims who put religion above country and humanity, Vijay accepts that it is the majority community that is responsible for the fear and ghetto-isation of Muslims. However what the novel narrates is the erosion of their faith in the possibility of countering communal forces, both Hindu and Muslim.

Wahid Khan’s commitment to secular practice and his refusal to participate in the Islamic rituals because of his rational approach, draws the ire of both his extended family and the Muslim community at large.<sup>6</sup> The extended family and the community ostracize him socially and while he is willing to pay the cost, it is not easy for his children. In their school going years, Rashida and Sohail feel uncomfortable with their alienation, but Wahid Khan constantly tries to convince them about the moral and ethical bankruptcy of those family members whose vision is narrow and sectarian. As young adults they are exposed to communal ideas of both sides and the novel represents their conflicts sensitively.

Their faith in Wahid Khan’s secular values, however, comes under severe pressure during the war with Pakistan. One of the consequences of Partition that continues to find resonance till today is the tragedy of divided families. While families try to keep up the connections, in times of war and hostility between the two countries Muslims in India are conveniently targeted by Hindu communalists. The natural interest in the fate of their relatives across the border is deliberately misinterpreted as sympathy for the enemy. Their listening to Radio Pakistan for

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<sup>5</sup> For a first person account of how Muslims accept India as their country despite allegations about their disloyalty see Salman Khurshid 2014.

<sup>6</sup> “Those who got the worse of it, both in India and Pakistan’, commented a well-known Urdu writer, ‘were the honest, sincere Nationalist Muslims who, in the eyes of Hindus, were Muslims, and vice versa. Their sacrifices were reduced to ashes. Their personal integrity and loyalty were derided. Their morale was shattered like a disintegrating star; their lives lost meaning. Like the crumbling pillars of a mosque they could neither be saved nor used.” Shorish Kashmiri, *Boo-i gul Naala-i dil Dood-i Chiragh-i Mehfil*, cited in Hasan 1993: 2/145. . jan.ucc.nau.edu/sj6/hasanprologueintro.pdf. Accessed 15 December 2017.



news is projected as irrefutable proof of their subversive activities. Rashida, whose paternal aunt lives in Karachi and close maternal relatives in Lahore, is naturally worried about their safety, even though she has never met them. But she is also troubled by why she should be interested in the wellbeing of people who belong to the enemy nation. Rashida's inner conflict reveals how complex Muslim Indian identity is and the challenges of retaining a secular outlook when one is constantly being suspected of extra-territorial sympathies.

A second important issue raised in the novel is marriage across the Hindu-Muslim divide. While both Vijay and Sohail believe that such relationships would be a significant counter to communal sentiments, their own personal relationships fail in the face of social pressure. Sohail's relationship with Geeta Sharma, a Hindu girl comes to a premature end when her parents force her to get married to a Hindu boy. And Rashida, though committed to Vijay, finds it impossible to resist the pressure of her family after the death of her father. She is forced to break off with Vijay, though she refuses to get married to the educated, well-off Hamid who is settled in Pakistan.

Social (and communal) opposition to a Hindu-Muslim relationship is rooted in racist and patriarchal ideologies and communalists build upon these to create insular identities. The idea that Hindus and Muslims are two races that come from different stocks is a myth perpetuated by both Hindu and Muslim communalists. Given that patriarchy is also an integral part of communal ideology, a Muslim boy converting and marrying a Hindu girl (or vice versa) is considered a victory of Islam (or Hinduism in the opposite case) and Muslims (or Hindus) in a perverse way. It is significant that some traces of this approach can be found in the educated, liberal Rashida also. In her private moments she recalls how when Salim, a distant cousin, converted and married a Hindu girl, it was greeted with great joy, not just by the fanatics but also by her. Rashida, as a woman, is unable to completely distance herself from the hold of patriarchal and communal forces, despite her best efforts. As a man Sohail has greater agency, but in the absence of a livelihood, and completely disillusioned after the breakup with Geeta, he breaks down. The novel ends with his inability to reconcile to opposing pulls —trying to become a pious Muslim and relapsing into a state of drunkenness by turns.

The two novels problematize the issue of a national identity for Muslims in India after the creation of Pakistan. Characters in both novels oppose the communal discourse that equates Muslims and Pakistan and emphatically insist on their rights to their homes. While the Saiyids in Reza's novel cannot imagine a world outside Gangauli, Abdul Wahid Khan is an educated, rational, liberal Muslim who considers himself to be an equal citizen in secular India. Home for him is the entire nation, the space that he believes that he shares with all his fellow countrymen. In one sense he extends the argument put forward by Phunnan Mian who demands that his son Mumtaz be honored along with the Hindu martyrs of 1942. As a rational humanist, he ridicules his own community for its insularity and narrow thinking. However Partition continues to cast its long shadow even after several years. While the Hindu communal forces carry on from 1947 in their demonization of Muslims as treacherous aliens who properly belong to the other side of the border, the Muslim





communalists build on the insecurity of the community to propagate a narrow, conservative Islamic identity that needs to be nurtured. Secular-minded Muslims like Wahid Khan and his children exist in a state of siege, cornered by communalists of both hues, fighting what seems to be a losing battle. Even the Saiyids seem better off in Gangauli despite their losses.

By putting together two moments from the recent history of Muslims, one can trace the trajectory of national identities and nation formation, in the shadow of Partition. What has Partition meant for Muslims in India, what has been its long term fallout, why do Muslims continue to bear the brunt of the actions of their co-religionists even though many of them did not support the demand for Pakistan and what does it mean to be secular and a Muslim in recent times when Hindu communal forces are spreading mayhem and blatantly discriminating against the minorities? These are some of the questions raised by Rahi Masoom Reza and Manzoor Ehtesham. On a broader level, the novels inscribe the centrality of Muslims in India to the conception of a secular Indian nation and the challenges that threaten to derail it even many years after Partition.

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# PARTITION AND THE BETRAYAL OF INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF RITWIK GHATAK'S CINEMA

Diamond Oberoi Vahali  
Ambedkar University, Delhi

## ABSTRACT

At Partition the dream of India's independence from British colonial rule transformed itself into the horrific nightmare of communal violence. Ritwik Ghatak, one of the most important film makers of India, served the crucial function of chronicling this mass tragedy. The independence of India resulted not only in the partition of the subcontinent but in the mass migration of people. This inevitably led people to homelessness, unemployment, segregation and abject impoverishment. However, the reduction of the middle class into the lower class was not because of partition alone but also a result of the anti-people model that the Indian government adopted post-independence. This chapter will look at the ongoing trauma of Partition and the way the people experienced it by analysing Ritwik Ghatak's films.

KEYWORDS: Betrayal, Exodus, Ritwik Ghatak, Homelessness, Independence, Partition, refugees.

## RESUMEN

La Partición convirtió el sueño de emancipación de India en una pesadilla de violencia religiosa. Ritwik Ghatak, uno de los mejores cineastas indios, hizo de su obra una crónica de aquella tragedia. La Independencia no supuso ya la división del subcontinente en dos países, sino también un trasvase de población sin precedentes, con las consecuencias de personas sin hogar, desempleo, segregación y miseria. Por otra parte, el descenso social de la clase media iniciado con el proceso de independencia se vio agravado por las políticas antipopulares del gobierno indio. Este artículo estudia el trauma de la Partición en la obra de Ritwik Ghatak.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Exilio, Independencia, Partición, Personas sin hogar, Refugiados, Ritwik Ghatak, Traición.

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In South Asia one of the most painful human tragedies took place in 1947, when the Indian subcontinent got divided into India and Pakistan. The dream of India's independence from the British colonial rule transformed itself into the horrific nightmare of partition of its people. Ritwik Ghatak (1925-76), one of the most important film makers of India, served the crucial function of chronicling this mass tragedy in the context of the Partition of Bengal.

## I

Born in 1925, a time of political turmoil and subordination, Ghatak grew up amidst political awakening and Marxist uprising. His family atmosphere and the surroundings around charged him with a consciousness that was deeply political. In the Second World War, the Quit India Movement (1942) and the Bengal famine (1943) Ghatak joined active Marxist politics. Beginning as a writer, he published several of his short stories in leading magazines of Bengal. Eventually he joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA, 1942) and in 1948 acted in the revised version of Bijon Bhattacharya's *Nabanna* (*New Harvest*, 1944), a play about the Bengal famine. *Nabanna* revolutionized Ghatak's thinking and served as a turning point in his life. It led him to a conviction that in terms of immediate and spontaneous communication theatre is much more effective than literature, and cinema with its mass appeal, he felt, could do wonders. Ghatak passionately participated in theatre but cinema as a singularly powerful means of expressing the agony of the people drove him in the direction of film making.

In 1947, Bengal along with other parts of India, especially Punjab, was partitioned and he along with so many people was exiled from his homeland in the erstwhile East Bengal. In one of his interviews he states "At the start of a creative career, however, when one is beginning to work, if one goes bankrupt of the provision of his past what is he to do? [...] A work which is pastless, unsupported, fairy nothing, is no work at all. But who will give me back my past? [...] But I am a film maker. No one has lost like me: What I have seen I am not able to show" (Rajadhyaksha and Gargan 19). Believing that it was the unconscious dynamics of an artist that determined his art form, Ghatak intensely felt that the *roopkatha* (fantasy) of his childhood had been completely eliminated, for what he had seen in East Bengal he no longer could find in West Bengal. He writes: "I have lost that forever, and without that I have not the ability to create a new *roopkatha* out of my reality... the simple tale that silences argument" (Rajadhyaksha and Gargan 19).

He could neither undo the historicity of this event nor reconcile with it. His films thus are an attempt to understand the dynamics of this event and its impact on the lives of people. Exploring the socio-economic, historical aspects of Partition, his cinema enters deep into the psychic and existential dimensions of Partition and the beingness of exile, especially in films like *Meghe Dhake Tara* (*The Cloud Capped Star*, 1960) and *Subarna Rekha* (1962). Though I do not trace the psychic and existential dimensions of Partition yet I will explore in the first part the formation of the communal psyche as presented in Ghatak's short film *Yieh Kiun*



(*The Question*, 1970). This part also develops the underline discourse related to the desire for unification of the two Bengals in Ghatak's cinema. The second part of the paper is an attempt to explore Ghatak's cinema within the matrix of the socio-historical aftermath of Partition which was perceived by him as a grand betrayal of India's dream for independence.

Like Marxists, Ghatak strongly believed that the independence of India from the British colonial rule was a sham. Though the Britishers had left, yet the model that the Indian government had adopted was no better than that of the Imperialists'. Moreover Independence was made possible through the division of the nation and this he felt was not only unnecessary but absolutely brutal. In one of his interviews he clearly states the futility and the baselessness of the acceptance of the Mountbatten Plan to partition India by the Indian National Liberation Movement in order to attain Independence:

The British Empire in India at that time was finished or totally broken down. The economy had collapsed because of war. They were finished but for the Americans. Churchill, all these heroes had collapsed. From one end came Subash Chander Bose. He created a strong impact on people's mind, his image was working vehemently... the people were so full of anger. Then came the 1942 August Movement. That shook everything, then the Naval Mutiny in Bombay, then the Air force Mutiny in Madras. Nobody knows about these. The Britishers suppressed everything about these Mutinies. They were at that time in a completely shaky condition. If we could have just continued the fight for some few more days, could have continued, sustained our vocal protest for some more days and could have sacrificed a few more lives, we would have compelled them to leave the country. But our leaders made this pact with Lord Mountbatten and the Britishers for power. They betrayed the country's whole National Liberation Movement. Gandhi was against it but our National Liberation Movement got hold of the seats in the name of Independence. That's what I am trying to say, I have earlier also spoken about it and I repeat again, I scream and I will do so everywhere. (Atanu Pal 13)

Ghatak explores the genesis and the possibility of the division of the nation across two significant planes: the signing of the Mountbatten Plan and its acceptance by the people which manifested itself in the communal riots that followed. It is the latter, when the brutal manner in which the Partition was carried out in the nation, that Ghatak explores in his short film *Yieh Kiun*. The film problematizes the notion of communalism, the subtlest form of state violence; wherein the individual through the process of hegemony is convinced that he/she is fighting a personal war. Communalism creates divisions at such a deep-seated level, that people become the instrument of their own destruction and begin to align themselves with forces that basically are victimizing and using them. In *Yieh Kiun*, Ghatak presents two close childhood friends, Ali and Nayak, who meet after a number of years in a very precarious situation amidst communal riots. They nostalgically recall the days when they had struggled for the independence of the nation and now bemoan the futility of this struggle. Amidst communal riots, they try to save each other, until they witness a grotesque death. It is at this moment that Ali and Nayak no longer remain



individuals but become representatives of communal identities. They suddenly feel intimidated and in self defence towards the end of the film kill each other. Ghatak presents the fear psychosis operative during communal riots and depicts how deep-seated the communal hegemonic processes are. The film subtly dissolves the notion of an individual and presents the power of communal hegemony that infiltrates into an individual, and converts him/her into a puppet of a divisive system. Thus it was by using the instrument of communalism that India and Pakistan actually attained statehood and made possible the partition of the nation. State in the form of communalism not only expedited the process but divided a single people. The result was division, which was not merely a geographical division but the division of a culture. It smashed the very roots on which a culture exists and inherently created rootlessness and hence moral degradation. Giving vent to this feeling Ghatak writes, “on the eve of Independence came the Hindu-Muslim riots, and with Independence, the Partition of Bengal, dividing a single people with a common inheritance and leading to a mass migration that was to leave its scar on a whole generation of Bengalese” (Ghatak 77).

Ghatak further states that though so many years have passed, yet one needs to vehemently oppose the division of Bengal as it was absolutely artificial and imposed. The issue of Bengal, he believed, was related to love and culture and a single people despite the fact that all geographical and political boundaries cannot be divided. Hence the division of Bengal he asserted, should not be accepted nor should one pardon or forgive it.

In *Bari Theke Paliye (Run Away 1959)* he explicitly states through one of his characters, that some poet has said that if a child breaks a toy we get angry but here the country had been divided and cut into two and we did nothing about it. While commenting on his play *Dolil*, he writes, “then with my own eyes I saw this ‘*Vasthuhara (dispossessed)*’, who had been compelled to leave everything, and I saw them seeking shelter, they became ‘*Sharannathsi (refugees)*.’ I simply could not endure to see this reduction” (Atunu Pal 13). Ghatak reiterates this feeling in *Komal Gandhar (E-Flat 1961)* when a character from the first theatre performance within the film states, “I have land and cattle, I am not a refugee.” Throughout his cinema, there is an attempt to demystify this aura of communalism and division and to state that a single people sooner or later will be reunited.

Further he felt that the division of Bengal and Punjab was shocking as it shattered the economic and political life of the people. This politics and economics was the cause of a certain cultural segregation to which he never reconciled. In one of his interviews he says: “I always thought in terms of cultural integration. They played ducks and drakes with this country by causing balkanisation. I have no role in changing the historicity of this event” (Rajadhyaksha and Gangar 92). He restates; “I just kept on watching what was happening, how the behaviour pattern was changing due to this great betrayal of national liberation” (Ghatak 1987: 80). He further states, “Being a Bengali from East Pakistan, I have seen untold miseries inflicted on my people in the name of Independence which is a fake and a sham” (Ghatak 76).



As Ghatak refused to reconcile himself with the political-cultural disintegration of the country, the need for cultural integration forms the basic theme in his works. In *Komal Ghandar*, the soundtrack contrary to the narrative of division sings of Ram and Sita's wedding, signifying the need to reunite the two divided nation states which despite the division constitute a single people. He states: "The central theme for *Komal Gandhar* was the unification of the two Bengals, this accounts for the persistent use of old marriage songs, even during scenes of pain and separation music rings of marriage" (Ghatak 39). Thus while all along in *Komal Gandhar* we witness separation at the visual level, the music theme of the union of Sita and Rama (the legendary characters from the *Ramayana*), is synchronized; on the one hand suggesting reconciliation and, on the other, further mythicizing and hence connecting the contemporary theme of Partition with the myth of exile and abandonment. Similarly through the incorporation of the East Bengali dialect in his cinema, especially in *Subarna Rekha* and in *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* (*Argument and a Story* 1974), he once again brings to the surface the similarities among the people across the borders of East and West Bengal.

Thus the discourse of 'exile', is embedded not merely in the thematic and structural configurations of his cinema but within the structural discursivities of language itself. The juxtaposition of dialects constitutes the context of exile and division. The domain thus turns dialogic. In almost all his films, Ghatak presents characters speaking altogether different dialects. In the film script of his short film *Yieh Kuin*, Ghatak presents Ali speaking the East Bengali dialect as against Nayak who speaks in West Bengali dialect. Mukherjee, the foreman in *Subarna Rekha*, speaks the Behari Bengali dialect as against Kaushalya, Abhiram's mother who speaks the East Bengali dialect. Kaushalya is juxtaposed with Ishwar, Sita, Abhiram and Hariprasad who, though they are refugees from East Bengal, speak the West Bengali dialect. Similarly in *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo*, Bangabala and Jagannath speak the East Bengali dialect as against Nachiketa and Neelkantha who speak the West Bengali dialect. In *Meghe Dhake Tara*, the mother, as against the other members of her family, speaks the East Bengali dialect. It is by juxtaposing several dialects of Bengali that Ghatak opens up a dialogic arena at the level of discourse; on the one hand the notion of division is further developed while on the other its antinomy, the reunion of characters speaking different dialects reflects Ghatak's bottom-line discourse of the unification of the two Bengals.

Moreover through his films he sets a scathing inquiry into the consequences of the independence of India. In *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo*, which forms the culminating point of Ghatak's oeuvre, he reacts most violently to the untold miseries inflicted on the people in the name of Independence by portraying several different aspects of this new regime.





Independence resulted not only in the partition of the Indian subcontinent but in the mass migration of people. This inevitably led people to homelessness, unemployment, segregation and abject impoverishment. However, the reduction of the middle class into the lower class was not because of Partition alone but also, a result of the anti-people model that the Indian government adopted after Independence. The ongoing trauma of Partition is clearly seen in *Nagarik* (*The Citizen* 1952-53) *Bari Theke Paliye* and *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* besides *Meghe Dhake Tara* and *Subarna Rekha*. These films in particular are marked by the imprints of the nation's failure and the resultant national trauma. All the above mentioned films focus on the continual and unending search of the refugees for a missing promised homeland.

The space between the new independent states —India and Pakistan— became the space of the refugees, the displaced, the homeless; of people who suddenly were compelled to make sacrifices for the formation of the new nations. Ghatak presents the shadow of the exodus, which exists on the peripheral margins, as doomed to move perpetually in a state of disequilibrium wherein any state of settlement is merely a semblance. It is this notion of the exodus, both literal and metaphoric, that forms the essence of Ghatak's cinema. Literally beginning as a shadow in *Komal Gandhar*, the exodus moves across *Subarna Rekha* where even after twenty years of Independence, the homeless refugees continue to travel in trains in search of a place they can claim as their own. The exodus once again becomes a shadow in *Yeh Kiun* only to culminate into an ultimate state of homelessness, the pavement in *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo*.

In film after film, Ghatak depicts how the people across the two borders were reduced to becoming homeless refugees. But the Indian state, in order to repress the spirit of uprising of the refugees offered the model of legal transaction that involved a contractual type of exchange. As a compensation for the loss of their multiple identities, the displaced refugees were offered a single identity, that of an Indian citizen. The process of offering citizenship was a double-edged sword: on the one hand it justified the partition of the nation and on the other, by offering citizenship to the people, the state apparatus sanctified itself. The displaced refugees became the citizens of free India merely on a legal transaction. But what kind of citizenship did India offer to its citizens? Ghatak explores this question across his cinema, from *Nagarik* where he begins to formulate this question down to *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* where he directly confronts the Indian state and asks: "What prospects does the Indian state offer its citizens?" Through the delineation of the post independence reality of India, Ghatak brings to the fore the state of unemployment, retrenchment and homelessness.

Beginning his oeuvre with *Nagarik*, Ghatak presents the story of unemployment and homelessness where the search for a job and consequently for a home becomes the ultimate search till the realization dawns on Ramu, the protagonist that 'everyone around is another me.' *Nagarik* in a different form finds its replica in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* where once again the struggle to survive in the face of an extreme crisis marked by unemployment and economic deterioration becomes the main is-



sue. *Subarna Rekha* continuing this state presents characters who are compelled to compromise their convictions because of their post Partition reality and who yet end in a desperate condition. *Bari Theke Paliye* and *Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* both reiterate the theme of unemployment and homelessness and present the eventual economic degradation of an India that can offer nothing to its people. The films end with the realization that the reduction of the people to pavement dwellers is inevitable in a system that survives through class discrimination and economic disparities.

The pavement dweller thus in Ghatak's cinema is a convergence both literal and metaphoric of class as well as of geographical displacement that eventually results in psychic displacement as living with splintered realities the people no longer are in a position to recollect and relocate themselves in their past. In almost all his films Ghatak creates characters who are amnesiac of their past and of their closest relations. The questions that these films pose are: Is not this amnesia the most violent form of displacement? And living with this reality, where one ceases to exist even for one's own self as one has forgotten one's identity, what does a refugee do?

*Nagarik*, situated in the era of the Telengana uprising (1946-51), is the story of a citizen among other citizens who struggles hopefully to support his family until the realization dawns on him through Jatin babu, a fellow victim, that everyone around is going through the same crisis. The story depicts an incessant deterioration of the middle class. The film formulates the chronotope of the street. It depicts people either as pavement dwellers or as moving towards the pavement under economic circumstances that are constantly being manipulated by the system. Towards the end, *Nagarik* states that all paths will inevitably end in slums and it is only then that the people will have a different a dream, one about building a life along with and not isolated from the ordinary toiling masses.

The film brings to the fore the condition of unemployment, homelessness, retrenchment, inflation and the consequent increase in poverty. The narrative operates at two levels. At the central level is the story of Ramu, the individual, who throughout struggles hopefully for a job and a home. He along with his mother is convinced that they will rise again economically and refuses to believe that life will always be like this. But Ramu's story is constantly subverted through the voice of Jatin babu, as well as that of his old father. They both are convinced that only by accepting the reality can one find a solution. The father warns Ramu to remove his blinkers, to disassociate himself from his false hopes which are a part of the hegemonic process through which a system operates, for only then will he be able to see the world open up before him. "Only through the acceptance of the reality of the impending storm can one gather one's resources and collectively encounter it", he tells Ramu. "It is only by accepting destruction, that one can build something new and that too not alone". The film states through Jatin babu that it is only by teaming up that one can survive. All individual dreams are illusions and will lead the people nowhere and so these dreams must be replaced by new collective dreams about an egalitarian social order. Throughout the film the characters experience the pain of being crushed under a millstone. They only dream, the dream to find employment, but realize that finding a job in the present era is like gambling. And



still it is expected that the poor cannot be lucky in the lottery. They are doomed to miss opportunities. As Jatin babu says, all my life I have only missed chances”. And those who are employed work but on their heads hangs the sword of retrenchment”. The characters feel that they too, like the rich, get tired and deserve rest and security—but unlike them they do not get it. They are crumbling like a sandbank but are unaware and wonder if a new land is being built anywhere. This feeling of being crushed and choked is objectified through the sound of hammer-strokes that persists in the film. It signifies the hard realities of existence, that teaches lessons to people through a thousand and one hammer-strokes” (Ghatak’s Personal Notes on the conception of *Nagarik*). And probably these alone, the film suggests will break their illusions and demand a rebellion from them. The characters know that there is no break, no escaping from the grind that is crushing them unless and until they take some desperate plunge.

*Nagarik* makes it explicit that the problem of unemployment is related to the anti people economic policies that India adopted after Independence. Even if Ramu gets a job, he knows that he will be depriving others by accepting it. The film brings to the fore the contradictions of the system when through Sagar, another significant character, a scientist who lives as a lodger in Ramu’s house, it states that although India is the richest in the world in mineral resources, yet strangely there is so much poverty here. It ends with the realization that there is no escape. And since everyone is finally going to end in the same place, that is the slums, then why this separation? Further in the process, the film states that the people will inevitably have to leave many things behind including their individual dreams and aspirations. The film towards its end dislodges itself from Ramu’s story by stating, “that is another story.” The main story is the question, ‘What is the journey towards?’ The tale is one of post-Partition Calcutta as the arena of class struggle where for better or for worse, Ramu’s declassment has begun. But the endless march continues and other people, other hopeful dreamers, will probably step into Ramu’s shoes and dream unattainable dreams. Sooner or later their declassment will begin like Ramu’s. They too will end up in the slum, inhabited not by educated dreamers but by simple working people who in spite of their sufferings, are trying remorselessly to build a new life. (Ghatak’s Personal Notes on the conception of *Nagarik*).

Continuing the discourse of *Nagarik*, *Bari Theke Paliye* depicts the worsening conditions of the middle class. Haridas, an erstwhile school teacher, is compelled to leave his home due to the Partition of Bengal. In spite of struggling for ten years, Haridas has failed to secure a job. Unlike Ramu Haridas is no longer on the lookout for a job; he has accepted the reality of unemployment. He is now a vendor selling puffed corns. He is doubled in the several nameless characters of *Bari Theke Paliye* who too are displaced due either to the 1943 famine in Bengal or to Partition. They too live on the pavement and scratch a living by doing odd jobs. Unlike the characters in *Nagarik*, they look neither for a home nor for a job. Jagannath, a school teacher was compelled to leave his home due to Partition. He too is unable to get any job now.

Both *Bari Theke Paliye* and *Meghe Dhaka Tara* continue the discourse of *Nagarik* in a subtle, less overt form. The notion of the pavement dweller and the process of marginalisation that are but suggested in *Nagarik* are developed further



in terms of a class perspective in *Bari Theke Paliye*. Ghatak presents the gradual recession of the people to the margins when he presents their reduction into the pavement dweller and this is further reflected metaphorically in their eventual loss of memory, and hence the self.

If the characters in *Nagarik* struggle to get a lower clerical job, Montu, Nita's younger brother in *Meghe Dhaka Tara* accepts his work in a factory as something significant. Further, Nita, along with Montu, reassures their father, Haran Master, regarding the prospects that a labour job has today. The film with several variations presents the economic displacement of the refugees who once belonged to the middle class directly through Nita but contextualises and universalizes Nita through her unnamed friend. The film presents this class in such a terrible condition that women are now compelled to remain unmarried and support their families by work. *Meghe Dhaka Tara* offers a variation to the theme of economic deterioration as projected in Ghatak's oeuvre. It expresses the agony of women brought up under a patriarchal regime which exalts and romanticizes marriage as the *raison d'être* of one's existence. The economic pressures that compelled women to discharge the role of 'bread earners', and so to remain unmarried was an experience of extreme agony for them. Though the perspective shifts in *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, yet the discourse of the plight of the middle class in post-independence India is developed even more painfully by including a patriarchal perspective. The film problematizes the agony of the middle class, to compromise its values and social norms.

*Jukti Takko Ar Gappo* revolves around the odyssey of four homeless characters driven away from their homes for several different reasons. All these reasons are highly political. Banglabala, who metaphorically represents the spirit of Bengal, is driven out of her land due to the massacres of 1971. Lost, deserted she walks across the city roaming around in search of her lost father and a shelter, in 'vast worthless Bengal'. Nachiketa, an engineer, like hundreds of other young engineers, moves around in search of a home and a job but soon realizes that the country does not need engineers. He finally reconciles himself to working as a labourer but even that job is not available, for the big industrialists are shifting their factories to other states and are creating artificial lock-outs. As Neelkantha, Nachieteka and Banglabala pass through the streets, Ghatak presents on both sides of the roads, rows of closed factories, depicting the massive problem of unemployment, retrenchment and exploitation. Moreover, being a Bengali from East Bengal it is impossible for Nachiketa to get a job; as he states, he is not a 'son of the soil'. By presenting the model of discrimination that the Indian government followed, Ghatak emphasizes the lack of any prospects for its so-called citizens. Jagannath, a school teacher, has been compelled to leave his village as the situation due to riots is very tense there. He arrives in Calcutta in search of a shelter and a job and finding neither he wanders around but finds no place to rest. Neelkantha, a representative of the irresponsible middle-class intelligentsia, is presented as wasted and degenerated not because he is not willing to do anything but because the times have worsened and very few options are available to him as a revolutionary artist. The film also brings to the fore the plight of the artisans in the form of Panchanan Ustad and their gradual marginalisation as the times and the context are changing.



It is with *Yieh Kiun* that the discourse of *Bari Theke Paliye*, *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, *Komal Gandhar* and *Subarna Rekha* finds a different echo. If all these films deal with the aftermath of the Partition and the Independence of the nation and its grotesque repercussions, then *Yieh Kiun* deals with the genesis of the division of the nation as stated above. It analyses the way the state disseminated itself by making the people imbibe and internalize its politics in the development of the communal psyche. The film was shot in 1970, twenty three years after Partition. The date of its production suggests Ghatak's ongoing trauma related to the Partition and further brings to the fore the situation of India after independence, both in terms of the economic crisis and the communal riots. Thus the production of *Yieh Kiun* even in 1970 does not seem to be out of place, as the issues that the film raises, situated though it is in 1947, are very contemporary still. Though Ghatak throughout had been preoccupied with the theme of Partition, it is for the first time in *Yieh Kiun* that he analyses the issue of communalism in the context of the creation of the communal psyche. By doing so, the film refers to the process through which the state apparatus works in its most hegemonic form by apparently generating a fear psychosis but subtly creating a psyche that imbibes the politics of the state in its totality as already discussed.

This is on going trauma in the form of endless class displacement of people and perennial communal riots and tensions between Hindus, Muslims, and other ethnic communities in India. The riots associated with the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhumi debate (1992) and its current resurgence, the Godhra riots in Gujarat (2002), the 1984 atrocities committed against the Sikhs, the Dadri Lynchings (2015); the current "cow vigilantism" since 2014 and the continuing atrocities against Dalits, the peoples of the Northeast, the Kashmiris and other minority groups in India—all these events prove the salience of Ghatak's cinema today, 70 years after the partition of the Indian subcontinent.

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# THE HINDU, THE MUSLIM, AND THE BORDER IN NATIONALIST SOUTH ASIAN CINEMA

Vinay Lal  
University of California, Los Angeles

## ABSTRACT

There is but no question that we can speak about the emergence of the (usually Pakistani or Muslim) ‘terrorist’ figure in many Bollywood films, and likewise there is the indisputable fact of the rise of Hindu nationalism in the political and public sphere. Indian cinema, however, may also be viewed in the backdrop of political developments in Pakistan, where the project of Islamicization can be dated to least the late 1970s and where the turn to a Wahhabi-inspired version of Islam is unmistakable. I argue that the recent history of Pakistan must be seen as instigated by a disavowal of the country’s Indic self, and similarly I suggest that scholarly and popular studies of the ‘representation’ of the Muslim in “Bollywood” rather too easily assume that such a figure is always the product of caricature and stereotyping. But the border between Pakistan and India, between the self and the other, and the Hindu and the Muslim is rather more porous than we have imagined, and I close with hints at what it means to both retain and subvert the border.

KEYWORDS: *Border*, Communalism, Indian cinema, Nationalism, Pakistan, Partition, *Veer-Zaara*

## RESUMEN

Así como el personaje del ‘terrorista’ (generalmente musulmán o paquistaní) está presente en muchos filmes de Bollywood, el nacionalismo hindú está tomando la iniciativa en la esfera política del país. Sin embargo el cine indio también puede hacerse eco de acontecimientos ocurridos en Paquistán, donde desde los años Setenta se ha manifestado un proceso de islamización de la sociedad, con una indudable impronta wahabí. Estimo que la historia reciente de Paquistán intenta deshacerse de su legado hindostánico, a la vez que señalo que los estudios sobre el musulmán en “Bollywood” pecan de simplificarlo como un arquetipo, si no una caricatura. Pero la frontera entre India y Paquistán, entre Yo y el Otro, es decir, entre musulmanes e hindúes es más porosa de lo que cabe imaginar, lo que me lleva a concluir en las opciones de mantenerla y subvertirla.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Border*, Comunalismo, Cine indio, Nacionalismo, Paquistán, Partición, *Veer-Zaara*.





Most film scholars in India, as well as urban, sophisticated film viewers, take it as nearly axiomatic that mainstream Indian cinema has since around the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Hindu nationalism was exercising considerable force in Indian politics, become nationalistic and even jingoistic. There certainly appears to have been a proliferation of films which take as their subject the turmoil in the north Indian state of Kashmir: not only is this disputed territory, to which Pakistan also lays claim, but it has been the site of secessionist tendencies and a sustained resistance movement against the Indian state. Much like the Palestinian Intifada, the resistance movement in Kashmir has gone through several iterations and phases, but the underlying roots of the conflict seem far from being resolved. The official Indian view has long been that the struggle over Kashmir is driven less by the aspiration for an autonomous homeland and much more so by the nefarious activities of Pakistan and its various agencies, in particular the military and the country's premier intelligence gathering organization, the Inter-Services Intelligence (more popularly known by its acronym, ISI). Pakistan is held by India to be a principal sponsor of what is called cross-border terrorism, and nearly everyone agrees, whatever one's views about the aspirations for Kashmiri independence, that the problems in Kashmir have been compounded with the advent of Islamic terrorism. Consequently, mainstream Hindi-language cinema may be viewed as reflecting some of these political developments. A spate of recent popular films has also taken as their subject the presence of the terrorist within Indian society; others have conjured up scenarios of India being held hostage to the design of Islamic terrorists in the hunt for a nuclear bomb; and yet others have attempted to place India within the orbit of geopolitical Islam. We should certainly recall, if the last scenario seems improbable, or if the battles presently raging in many Muslim societies in the Arab world seem to be at a considerable distance from the vastly different contours that Islam has taken in South Asia over the course of a millennium, that Osama bin Laden's various manifestoes calling for a worldwide jihad against infidels enumerate Kashmir alongside Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan as one of the sites where Islam needs to be freed from the shackles of oppression.<sup>1</sup>

In all these respects, then, it can scarcely be doubted that popular Indian cinema for something like three decades has displayed a growing propensity and capacity for engaging with the idea of conflict between India and Pakistan, largely over Kashmir but also, in various often unstated ways, over the interpretation of Islam and the social mores of two societies that in the aftermath of Partition and

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<sup>1</sup> Kashmir is listed in Osama bin Laden's "Declaration of Jihad," 23 August 1996, among those places where Muslims have been massacred. Kashmir was mentioned again by bin Laden as a place that required liberation from the infidel in a wide-ranging interview that he gave on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001, to the al-Jazeera reporter, Taysir Alluni, at an undisclosed location near Kabul. On 26 December 2001, in what would become his lengthiest celebration of the nineteen "students" who had shaken America to the core, bin Laden described the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> as "merely a response to the continuous injustice inflicted upon our sons in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, southern Sudan, and other places, like Kashmir."



the creation of the new nation-state of Pakistan began to drift apart in significant ways. It must not be supposed, however, that it is only on account of the insurgency in Kashmir in 1989, following the disputed election of 1987, that Indian filmmakers became sensitized to the simmering conflict in that state, or that they have been only capitalizing on, as it were, the anxiety over Islamic terrorism that has been seen the world over. One could easily point to several other considerations that have facilitated Indian filmmakers' relatively new-found engagement with the question of Kashmir, the political contours of Islam, or the difficulties in which Indian Muslims have found themselves in a pluralistic society as representatives of a faith over which hangs the ever-deepening shadows of suspicion. I have briefly adverted already to the rise of Hindu nationalism in the 1980s, an emergence all the more striking in view of the fact that Hindu nationalists, in the wake of the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948, were cast into the wilderness. Just days after Gandhi's murder, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the same organization of which India's present Prime Minister is a card-carrying member, was banned as it had engaged in violent activities and exhorted people to violence. (Guha 110-111). The conventional account speaks of the Nehruvian consensus, built around the values of a secular Republic and socialized state planning, as regnant in Indian society and politics until around a decade after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964, and it is unquestionably true that Hindu parties and organizations were shut out of formal politics until around the mid-1970s. The Bharatiya Janata Party, built in part from the remnants of the Hindu nationalist party Jana Sangh, was founded in 1980; and few people will remember that the BJP, which now commands an absolute majority of 282 in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, (the lower house of the Indian Parliament), won only two seats in the general election of 1984. That is one, rather unambiguous, indication of how far Hindu nationalism has traveled in the last three decades. But even burgeoning Hindu nationalism in a transparently political register does not furnish the entire story. Many of those who played a critical role in the expansion of popular Hindi-language cinema in the aftermath of independence —directors and screen writers K.A. Abbas, Zia Sarhadi, Mehboob Khan, and Abrar Alvi, lyricists and poets Sahir Ludhianvi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Kaifi Azmi, and Jan Nisar Akhtar, the music director Naushad, to mention just a few names— were Muslims, and even those who were not had grown up, matured, and prospered in a social milieu where Hinduism and Islam inhabited the same space. By the mid-1970s many of the veteran Muslim personalities in the film industry had retired or passed away; the element of Urdu in conversational Hindustani had greatly diminished as well, and by around 1990 the generation that became prominent in various aspects of the film industry had no awareness as such of the Indo-Islamic synthesis that had been so characteristic an aspect of the culture of north India. The circumstances were ripe for the confluence of Hindi, Hindu, and Hindustan.



If Partition was an immensely traumatic moment, and there is little reason to doubt that, it becomes a question of paramount importance to ask why there were no cinematic treatments of this subject until twenty-five years after the vivisection of India or what in Pakistan is called the attainment of *azaadi* (freedom). Popular Hindi films were scrupulous in their avoidance of the very mention of Pakistan, and it is striking that the film *Upkar* (1967), which is set against the 1965 India-Pakistan war, was able to become a paean to patriotism without so much as mentioning Pakistan. Its story of two brothers, the younger of whom acquires an education overseas at his older brother's expense and then returns home to demand his share of the family property, echoed the story of India and the demand of the adherents of Islam, the younger faith, that there be a division of the country. If Pakistan was never mentioned, should one suppose that its very existence was thus never recognized, or that this signified the inability of Indians to recognize the finality of the Partition? Were the wounds of the psychic trauma so deep as to prevent an interrogation of many cherished assumptions about the uniquely syncretic nature of the Indian past or of the willingness of Muslims to accept their place as the younger siblings within a Hindu dispensation? I have elsewhere suggested, however, a contrary view, one that insists on the Hindi film's fundamental and insistent engagement with the Partition throughout the 1950s and 1960s, except that this was always effected through an act of displacement (Lal 2010: 10-11; Lal 2013: passim). The prevalence of what might be called the 'lost and found' motif in popular films, or the frequently encountered plot of siblings—often two brothers, sometimes two sisters or three brothers—who veer off in different directions, only to reconcile or, where they were separated in infancy or early adolescence and thus unaware of the presence of each other, unite towards the end of the film cannot satisfactorily be understood on any other grounds.<sup>2</sup> The catastrophe that strikes the rich merchant in the film *Waqt* (Time, 1965), directed

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<sup>2</sup> The most iconic representation of the two brothers whose paths diverge, but who are attached to their mother's bosom, and more than anything else vie for her love and affection, is the film *Deewaar* (The Wall, 1975), directed by Yash Chopra (for an interpretation of this pivotal film, see Lal 2010). A skeptic might well argue that the Abel and Cain story is universal, or that variants of this story are to be found across cultures; but the sheer ubiquitousness of this motif in popular Indian culture gives it a different standing, arising as it does both from the marvelously rich world of Puranic literature and the immediacy and gravity of the experience of the partition of India, which left few families in north India untouched. Other popular Hindi-language films in this 'genre' include *Ram aur Shyam* (1967), *Seeta aur Geeta* (1972, featuring female twins), and *Kishen Kanhaiya* (1990). Manmohan Desai's *Amar Akbar Anthony* (1977) has most often been understood as a plea for religious tolerance: three brothers are separated in childhood, and one is raised in a Hindu household, another by a Muslim tailor, and the third by a Catholic priest. But *Yaadon ki Baarat* (Procession of Memories, directed by Nasir Hussain), which preceded Desai's film by four years and also revolves around three brothers separated by dint of circumstances in childhood and eventually brought together by a song they often sung in unison as children, suggests why it is also possible to read these allegories of national integration as commentaries on the trauma of Partition.

by the Lahore-born Yash Chopra,<sup>3</sup> is not only what the Gods have in store for those who are consumed by hubris: the earthquake that shatters his home, sets the town ablaze, scatters his family, and separates the three brothers bears unmistakably all the signs of the tragedy that became the Partition. It is perhaps not accidental that the Hindi cinema's first and to this day the most moving full-length engagement with the Partition motif, M.S. Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (Hot Winds), came in 1973, shortly after the 1971 war between Pakistan and India that, leading as it did to the separation of East Pakistan and West Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh, dealt the most decisive blow to the two-nation theory and to the idea that identity in India was determined predominantly and sometimes exclusively by religious affiliation.

The Hindu nationalist turn in popular cinema may also have owed something to developments in Pakistan, and more specifically to the fact that South Asian Islam was beginning to fall hostage to the notion that it was an inauthentic and feebler version of the Islam of Muhammad's homeland. Scholars and activists who have rightly deplored the tendency in India to doubt the Indian Muslim's loyalty to the motherland, which is of course greatly aggravated not just at war-time but in the course of events such as India-Pakistan cricket matches, are however oblivious to the fact that South Asian Muslims have over the decades been slowly weaned from their distinct socio-cultural and religious practices.<sup>4</sup> The proximity of Hinduism to Muslims in the Indian sub-continent was always discomfoting to the orthodox. Colonial ethnographers had documented the presence of hundreds of communities which claimed allegiance to both Islam and Hinduism, refusing to identify themselves as purely Muslims or Hindus: in this respect, the Shias were held by the orthodox to be especially culpable, and the last Shia ruler of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah, who staged dramas based on Hindu myths at his court and himself played the role of the god Krishna, was pilloried as an illustration of the manner in which Hinduism had made inroads into Islam. Speaking of comparatively contemporary times, there is a considerable body of work on the Islamization of Pakistan that commenced with the military regime of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, who took power in 1977, unabashedly described himself as a "soldier of Islam," and ruled until his death in a plane crash in 1988. The establishment of Sharia benches in Pakistan's High Courts,

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<sup>3</sup> The émigré origins of Yash Chopra, who grew up in Lahore, significantly if not decisively shaped his oeuvre.

<sup>4</sup> The murder in broad daylight of the Sufi singer, Amjad Sabri, on the streets of Karachi two years ago is one of the many ominous portents of the growing intolerance in Pakistan for anything but the Wahhabi version of Islam. Though it has become somewhat fashionable for liberal academics in the West to speak of the 'varieties of Islam', partly in a bid to distance themselves from the ever-increasing din about 'Islamic terrorism', there is little appreciation of the fact that in South Asia there was what may be called a distinct Indo-Islamic cultural synthesis forged over several centuries. Muslims in Pakistan, especially, have been encouraged to believe that the only 'authentic' home of Islam is Saudi Arabia, and that one must be ever watchful that the idolatry of the Hindus which purportedly led to the contamination of Islam —worship at mausoleums of Sufi saints, the faith in *pirs* (teachers), the presence of Sufi music— does not creep back into the life of the devout Muslim. See Lal 2016.



and the imposition of the Hudood Ordinances, which mandated punishments such as amputation and stoning by death for fornication, adultery, and other like offences, was justified by Zia-ul-Haq with the argument that “Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of [an] Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country”<sup>5</sup> (see Ispahani ch 5; Haqqani 127). Relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had always been good; under Zia-ul-Haq, the two countries were deemed to have a special relationship, and Saudi support for Pakistan grew exponentially and today continues to play a critical role in the shaping of Pakistani society. It is in Zia-ul-Haq’s time that Pakistani cinema, which had flourished in the two decades preceding his assumption of power, and had even received a boost with the ban on Indian films that came to be rigorously enforced after the war of 1965, began to flounder and would soon find itself decimated. Movies became stigmatized as un-Islamic, even if Zia-ul-Haq’s own family were addicted to Bombay cinema, and many cinema halls were torn down in Pakistan to make way for shopping plazas. One may argue that the destruction of cinema halls was precipitated by many other considerations as well, preeminently the video cassette boom which was followed by the video CD revolution, both of which facilitated the easy viewing of pirated films at a fraction of the cost of a movie ticket. Lahore, the cultural center of Pakistan, is said to have been deeply affected (Rizwan 2005).<sup>6</sup> One writer has even alleged, though I have not found any confirmation of his claim from any other source, that cinemas were completely shuttered in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan (Altaf 2013). If that was the case, Islamabad would have shared that dubious distinction with Riyadh of a capital city without any cinema halls. What is much more likely is that clandestine venues developed for screening films: we may have to work with a much more heterogeneous, mobile, and vernacular conception of the cinema hall itself.

Among India’s Muslims, similarly, the infusion of Saudi money has strengthened the hands of those who view with disdain the Indo-Islamic synthesis that was forged over centuries of interaction amongst Hindus, Muslims, and even Sikhs. If Pakistan has over the last 25 years been increasingly convulsed by violence, this is scarcely only on account of the turmoil in neighboring Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion of 1979, the rise of the Taliban, the advent of global jihad, or what Kipling poignantly termed ‘the great game’; it also has much to do with Pakistan’s disowned Indic self, and with the attempt to repudiate Pakistan’s moorings in the dense cultural substratum of Indic civilization. It may even be that just as the turn to ‘Islamization’ is perhaps best understood as an attempt by Pakistani elites to have common people embrace an allegedly more authentic version of Islam, one

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<sup>5</sup> The quote is from Zia’s first address as Martial Law Administrator and appears in nearly every work on the history of modern Pakistan.

<sup>6</sup> In the heyday of Pakistani cinema, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, there were well over 2000 cinema halls in Pakistan; by 2005, according to Rizwan, the entire country had just 300 cinema screens. However, the fall in film production was, if anything, even more precipitous. In 1979, nearly 100 feature films were produced in Pakistan; by 2001, the number had fallen to two.



less contaminated by the close proximity to Hinduism, so Hindu nationalism is also shaped by the attempt to Sanskritize Hindu traditions.

## II

Let us allow, then, the argument that scholars and commentators of secular, liberal, and left disposition insist on, namely that popular Indian cinema began to take a different and alarming turn around the late 1980s in its open hostility towards Pakistan and in its open expression of the idea that the country was becoming increasingly vulnerable to the threat from terrorists, almost always envisioned as Pakistani Muslims often working in collaboration with Muslim informants from India. Often these threats to India were viewed as emanating not from non-state actors but from functionaries of the state of Pakistan who were driven by radical ideologies, a palpable hatred for India, and an extraordinarily cunning ability to lure Indian Muslims into the den of terrorist activity.<sup>7</sup> I have thus far suggested that a number of factors appear to have converged in the 1980s to lend this narrative credence. What is called the 'Nehruvian consensus,' which upheld the idea of secularism as a core value of the Republic, had begun to crack at the seams by the 1970s. The film Indian industry had long been associated with a stellar group of Muslim directors, lyricists, music composers, screenwriters, and actors, whose own conviction in a secularism that was derived from their faith rather than from the worldview of the Enlightenment had shaped the outlook of Indian cinema. Their presence by the 1970s had greatly diminished; though a new crop of Muslim actors, in particular, now rules the roost,<sup>8</sup> the changing language of popular films shows how far Indian cinema has gone towards embracing the continuum of Hindi,

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<sup>7</sup> The Hindi feature film, *Sarfarosh* (1999), which features Aamir Khan in the role of an Indian policeman who is determined to prevent arms trafficking and cross-border terrorism, is wonderfully illustrative of many of these trends. The famous actor, Naseeruddin Shah, plays the role of Gulfam Hassan, a ghazal singer who, greatly embittered by the partition of India, laments the fate of his fellow Muslims and becomes an informant for Pakistani intelligence services. The word *sarfarosh* means 'fervor', passionate excitement. It is not an accident that the film was released in April 1999, at a time of greatly heightened tensions between the two countries, and that just three months later a conflict between India and Pakistan broke out in Kargil.

<sup>8</sup> I refer, of course, to the three Khans, not related to each other, who have carved up much of the space for Hindi commercial cinema among themselves. Salman Khan appeals largely to the working class and to the urban proletariat; Shah Rukh Khan's films speak mainly to the middle class, while Aamir Khan's constituency, however widespread it may be, has the characteristic also of drawing from the upper middle class and the relatively well-educated. What is more germane is that none of these actors can be described as flaunting their religion; they do not appear to the public as religiously-marked individuals. It is noteworthy that both Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan are married to Hindu women; Salman has dated several Hindu women and remains, in film society parlance and middle-class gossip, one of India's most "eligible bachelors." Shah Rukh is the nephew of the director Nasir Hussain, in whose film *Yaadon ki Baarat* he played one of the three brothers in childhood.



Hindu, and Hindustan (Trivedi 51-86). On the political scene, the Hindu right-wing came to have representation in Parliament, and its strength on India's streets may be gauged by the fact that the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth-century mosque allegedly built on the site of what was once a Hindu temple constructed to honor the birth of the Hindu deity and king Lord Rama, was destroyed by Hindu nationalists in December 1992 even though it had been placed under state construction (Lal 141-185); in Kashmir, meanwhile, a number of secessionist groups, some of them advocating armed resistance to the state, had gained prominence. But even this is a narrative in skeletal form: to understand what might have moved the popular Hindi film into new terrains, one might think of such developments as the entry of India and weeks later of Pakistan into the nuclear club in 1998. I have also suggested, however, that the Indo-Islamic socio-cultural synthesis was, in various ways, under assault in both India and Pakistan, and that the gravitational turn towards more rigid, puritanical, and less accommodating forms of Islam in Pakistan cannot be ignored in our attempts to understand the shifting contours of opinion towards Islam and Pakistan, especially among the Indian middle classes. It is these middle classes that have also gained the most from the neo-liberalization policies which became ascendant around 1990.

It is safe to aver that a consensus has emerged in the scholarly community and among public commentators alike that strands of commercial Indian cinema are now heavily compromised by their overt nationalism and even that much of this cinema tacitly works as a handmaiden to Hindu nationalism or what in India is called *Hindutva* (literally, 'the essence of Hinduism'). One recent scholarly writing embodies this view in its most transparent form, as must be evident from the very title of the article, "Constructing the Nation's Enemy: *Hindutva*, popular culture and the Muslim 'other' in Bollywood cinema." Its author argues that "Bollywood cinema has exhibited an overt bias towards producing films that capitulate to this radical nationalist discourse professed by the *Hindutva* ideologues." Though the author claims to engage in "discourse analysis," he effectively summarizes briefly the plots of a number of films revolving around Muslim characters, before moving expeditiously to his conclusion that with the "Hindu majoritarian setting" as its background, "Bollywood cinema has actively engaged in the politics of nationalism engendered by the right-wing neo-fundamentalist *Hindutva* movement" (Kumar 458). Writing a decade earlier, the political analyst Saibal Chatterjee noted that in the several decades of its existence before around 2000, Hindi cinema had produced no more than four war films, but that it had since churned out several films that dealt, "in one way or another, with the perfidies of Pakistan while singing paeans to the courage and commitment of India's brave young soldiers." Chatterjee deplored the fact that "an influential section of the film industry has willingly accepted the onus of furthering the cause that is central to the perpetuation of the might of the rightwing — kindling and sustaining the fire of patriotism in the hearts of the masses." Chatterjee contends that censorship codes forbid the mention of the enemy's name until the 1990s, but that the lifting of this restriction means that now "there is no stopping the you-have-to-hate-Pakistan-if-you-love-India juggernaut" (2003). Supposing it were true that India's strict Film Board censorship



codes prevented the mention of Pakistan,<sup>9</sup> what is equally striking, and calculated to generate some unease, is Chatterjee's easy endorsement of censorship and the unreflective assumption that censorship can play a productive part in facilitating relations between the two nations.

In marshalling evidence of the jingoistic turn in commercial Indian cinema and its attraction to the Hindutva worldview, scholars have made the question turn largely upon representation. Just how is the Muslim depicted in these films, they ask, and what are the various modes in which the Muslim is othered? A few examples will suffice before we turn to a set of more critical questions about the possibility of reading what appear to be overtly nationalist films in different registers. In seeking to ask how "Hindi cinema since the 1990s has pictured minority Muslims pejoratively, mainly to validate the hegemonic designs embedded in Hindutva majoritarianism," Kumar argues that the films rehearse the cliché about "the inherently arrogant Muslim and the supposedly tolerant Hindu." Kumar obviously recognizes that representations of Muslims are not monolithic, but, quite reasonably, he does not allow himself to be distracted by the trope of the 'good Muslim'—most often an older Muslim male who is a redemptive figure of old-world humanity, who treats every younger woman as his daughter, is mindful of the honor of women, and acts on principle rather than from self-interest<sup>10</sup>—into thinking that the Hindi film is catholic in its attitudes towards Muslims. The good Muslims of the Hindi film are generally frail, without material influence, powerless in the best of circumstances—in a few words, as T.S. Eliot said of the English romantic poet John Keats, much

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<sup>9</sup> I have found nothing in the manuals or guides of the Central Board of Film Censors as such that forbids the explicit mention of Pakistan in commercial Indian films. Nevertheless, Chatterjee's point is not without merit, even if he is not fully cognizant of the implications of his own argument. References to Pakistan were implicit in the film *Upkar* (1967), and the 1973 film *Hindustan ki Kasam*, directed by Chetan Anand, was unambiguous in its reference to Pakistan, though even here Pakistan is not named. In the interim, the two countries had fought a war which led to the independence of East Pakistan and the creation of the new nation-state of Bangladesh. Just as tellingly, the same director, Chetan Anand, made a film on the 1962 Sino-Indian War where the Chinese are unabashedly shown as villainous and brutal. China could be named unambiguously as the enemy as Pakistan could not. When, if at all, did it become possible to name Pakistan as the unequivocal enemy and when did Pakistan, in mainstream cinema, cease to become the splintered half of India and move towards occupying the space of a country that was henceforth to be identified only with its aggressive militaristic self?

<sup>10</sup> One of the most endearing examples of 'the good Muslim' is Rahim Chacha, the imam of the village Ramgarh where most of the action of the film *Sholay* (1975) is set. He provides good counsel to the villagers and impresses upon them the necessity to fight injustice; in retaliation, the criminals take his son's life. In Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala* (1987) the good Muslim appears in the form of Abu Mian, a wizened old man who is the watchman at the *masala karkhana*, a factory where red chillies are ground into powder. The local tax collector (*subedar*) has set his eyes on Sonbai, a village woman of stunning beauty; when on one occasion he finally succumbs to his lust and makes a grab at her, she spurns him and seeks refuge in the chilli factory. Abu Mian shuts its doors in the face of the subedar's henchmen. He holds the fort, so to speak, and his defense of Sonbai eventually emboldens others; though he is eventually shot dead, the women of the factory throw chilli powder at the subedar's face and blind him.





like “ineffectual angels.” For Kumar, as for many others who believe themselves to be deeply committed to the values of a liberal, secular India, the portrayal of the Muslim as the repository of feudal and anti-modern values is offensive. The film *Pinjar* (Cage 2003), whose plot turns around a Hindu woman who is forcibly married to a Muslim but then accepts him even when, in the midst of the turmoil of Partition, the Hindu man to whom she was first betrothed expresses his willingness to take her back, is characterized by Kumar as engaging “the audience in a dialogical discourse between barbaric Muslims and harmless innocent Hindus.” Leaving aside the question of whether Kumar’s interpretation doesn’t reinforce the very communal outlook that he disdains, it must be asked whether he doesn’t too readily accept that the popular Hindi cinema is captive to the idea that ‘all Muslims may not be terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims’. Popular cinema is vitiated by “the recurring image of the terrorist as Muslim.” (Kumar 464-465).

Sunera Thobani turns her attention to several popular films — *Dev* (2004, directed by Govind Nihalani); Nandita Das’s *Firaaq* (2008); Rahul Dholakia’s *Parzania* (2007); and the little-known *Road to Sangam* (2009, directed by Amit Rai)— that reference the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. The man who was then Gujarat’s Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, today presides over the destiny of India in his capacity as Prime Minister; sixteen years after the killings which left 2000 Muslims dead and 200,000 homeless, scarcely anyone has been convicted of the crimes perpetrated largely against members of one religious community. Thobani comes to much the same conclusions as Kumar regarding the depiction of “intransigent Muslims,” except that her analysis offers greater nuance. She argues that “collective violence is overwhelmingly portrayed in the four films as either sparked by, in response to, or escalated by Muslim behavior, when not actually instigated by Muslims themselves.” Indian Muslims are shown cheering for Pakistan as they listen to the commentary of a cricket match in *Parzania*, and this act of perfidious betrayal of the nation instigates the Hindus to violence; in *Dev*, the eponymous hero, who acts as a senior police officer, finds himself permitting a demonstration by Muslims who, notwithstanding the promise by their leaders that their protests will be peaceful, turn violent and thus force a police firing. Colonial writers invented the trope of the ‘fanatical Muslim’ who is always excitable, prone to wild anger, and easily led astray (Pasamsee 2005); and in these films this figure, who spurs his brethren to a vigorous defense of the community and the extirpation of the infidel, finds a new lease of life. Thobani admits that even Hindus are often cast as hate-mongers, filled with irrational animosity for the Muslim; but there is a difference, for “religiously inspired hatred” is “intrinsic to Muslim communities but only to extremist Hindus.” (Thobani 493).

Other, perhaps more sophisticated or nuanced, readings of the politics of representation of Muslims and the Pakistani ‘other’ may yet be possible, and I shall now turn to these in an attempt to probe the central problematic of this paper. The question is whether what is apparently a nationalist cinema in both Pakistan and India is read by the supposedly unlettered masses of South Asia in multiple registers, many of which are, in fact, at cross-purposes with what appears to be full-blown nationalism, and whether popular cinema may not be one of the more arresting ways



of bridging the ‘border’ between India and Pakistan. I shall, for various reasons, not least of them being the fact that popular Pakistani cinema is generally little accessible, confine my remarks to popular Indian cinema, though if the supposition that the Indic worldview has not yet been entirely obliterated from Pakistan holds true, then much the same arguments can be advanced for the cinema on the other side of the border. What do we know, for example, of modes of spectatorship on both sides of the border? Is it possible that what appears as jingoism to the secular critic or a reasonable spectator is viewed by Indians who are not assimilated to the values of urban elites as Puranic or mythic lore? The question cannot be reduced only to rituals or protocols of spectatorship, though such a consideration is far from being unimportant, and I shall summon two examples of the possibilities inherent in such a mode of analysis. The “mythological” as an Indian film form is *sui generis* to popular Hindi cinema, and the 1975 low-budget film, *Jai Santoshi Maa*, became wildly successful in a year when it faced competition from two of the most iconic works of mainstream cinema, *Deewaar* (The Wall) and *Sholay* (Embers). Santoshi Maa was, until the release of the film, a low-brow, little-known goddess with a small following in north India; however, the film generated a cult of the goddess, especially among women who saw in the story an enactment of the female life cycle that might lead to a life of spiritual equipoise and material contentment. The plot of the film is not germane to my argument, but what is much more to the point is the evidence furnished by many film-goers, who have reliably reported that many viewers would take off their shoes before entering the cinema hall. As those with even a sprinkling of knowledge of Hindu religious practices know, worshippers take off their shoes before entering a Hindu temple: here the very space of the cinema hall was sacralized and transformed into a temple, and the very screen becomes the *sanctum sanctorum*.

The “war film” *Border* (1997) furnishes my second example. *Border* is supposed to be based on the ‘history’ of a specific battle during the 1971 India-Pakistan war in which a regiment of 120 Indian infantrymen successfully defended a border post over a long night of battle against a Pakistani tank regiment with 600 soldiers. In such so-called war films — “so-called” because the notion of distinct *genres* can be applied only with much reserve if at all to popular Indian cinema, since nearly every film, whether it is a romantic comedy, a horror film, a war film, a thriller, or a social drama, is to some extent an all-purpose carnival— it is important to have one or two loveable Muslim characters among the heroes so that one might be able to distinguish Pakistan from Muslims, akin to the manner in which every liberal in the West, beginning with the supposed leader of the free world, the President of the United States, painfully struggles to distinguish between Islam and those Muslim terrorists who have given their religion a bad name. *Border’s* storyline, as I have written elsewhere, appears to be extraordinarily apposite for such representations, but the film entirely dispensed with such conventions. Its heroes are over the top, not only patriotic and dedicated, but aggressively manly and capable of the supreme sacrifice. The villains, Pakistani Muslims, are one-dimensional, with leery looks and a crafty countenance; perfidy and insincerity are written all over their face. There can be no transgression without a border, and ambiguity is only pos-



sible and desirable when the lines are clearly drawn: notwithstanding the title of the film, *Border* does not appear on a casual reading to hint at in-between spaces. Nor was *Border* sensitive to Muslims within India: as is quite common in such films, it makes the point that a fifth column within India exists to give aid and succor to Pakistanis. Nearly every film reviewer and critic panned the film, and the otherwise witty Nikhat Kazmi, then the film reviewer for the *Times of India*, condemned the film in unambiguous language: “It is no celebration of patriotism, but jingoism all the way” (Kazmi 1997). *Border* is still understood in journalistic circles as the anti-Pakistan film that generated an entire wave of war films (Ayaz 2017). However, the critics had no explanation for why the film was a hit with audiences not only in India but in Pakistan as well, and why its songs were also immensely popular across the border. The Pakistani scholar Muhammad Shoaib Pervez must similarly be put to interrogation when he asserts that “the anti-Pakistan dialogues in the film are its hallmark, punctuated with nationalist melodrama to impress the Indian audiences. However, it may be asked, what message is being conveyed to the Pakistani audiences? It reflects the stereotyping of Pakistan as the ‘Other.’” (Pervez 132). If Pakistanis are not keen on self-flagellation, or unless they have an unusual appetite for tolerating insults, one must assume that *Border* was viewed in a very different spirit than is imagined by many of its learned critics. If, furthermore, as is often argued, diasporic communities are more ebullient in their profession of zeal for the country, it should be no surprise that Pakistani Britishers sought, without success, a halt to the distribution of video copies of the film in Britain on the grounds that the film was painfully humiliating to Pakistan.

The viewer who has been assimilated to liberal values and believes in the fundamental humanity of every person would doubtless have found scenes in *Border* to lift his or her hopes. Perhaps the most famous of such scenes has an Indian army officer dive into the burning home of an Indian Muslim astride the border which has been shelled by the Pakistani army and, at great peril to his life as the beams of the house fall all around him, retrieve the villager’s copy of the Holy Quran. This act of magnanimity elicits a wondrous look and remark from the villager, “*Aur woh tanne kaafir kabe hain*” (‘And they call you a non-believer’). The critics were less than visibly impressed by this scene, viewing it as a feeble attempt on the part of director J.P. Dutta to affirm the secular credentials of the Indian state and of its uniformed men. The scene’s authenticity, moreover, seems to be compromised by the melodramatic setting in which the handover of the sacred book is accomplished to the accompaniment of didactic dialogue. When the villager expresses astonishment that a Hindu army officer would go to such lengths to rescue his Quran, Captain Bhairon Singh replies: ‘Hindu: To forget oneself and serve others, this is what is Hindu *Dharma* [religion]. For centuries, this is what a Hindu has been doing.’

To the secular critic in India, this is yet another instantiation of the vanity of Hindus, an arrogant expression of the idea of Hindu tolerance. Yet, as I would like to suggest, audiences in both India and Pakistan would have been alert to a different reading, one which belies the widely accepted notion that a jingoistic film such as *Border* cannot possibly be interpreted in registers which allow one to think both of conflict resolution and shared cultural assumptions across borders. Significantly,



though the film seeks to establish Captain Bhairon Singh's predisposition towards Hindu beliefs at a number of points, the scene in question is an affirmation of the secular worldview, if by secularism we also mean, as is evidently the case in India, respect for all religions. Captain Bhairon Singh thus derives his secularism from his faith as a Hindu, a point that would have been well understood both among Indian Muslims and in Pakistan. The Holy Quran provides a critical semiology, too: though Hindus are not even 'people of the book', the reverence for the sacred word is shared across religious cultures. *Border* does not only point to the idea that the religious sensibility and the secular worldview are complementary; it, more transparently, adopts the view that a secularism that is not derived from the practice of religion has, at least in South Asia, no ethical standing.

Let me, in closing, direct my attention very briefly to the "romantic blockbuster," *Veer-Zaara* (2004), the plot of which revolves around the apparently ill-fated love affair of an Indian air force officer and a Pakistani woman. Fate brings together Veer Pratap Singh (Shah Rukh Khan) an officer in the Indian Air Force, and Zaara Hayat Khan (Preity Zinta), the daughter of a well-established Pakistani politician living in Lahore. Zaara is in India on a short visit to immerse the ashes in the Sutlej river at a Sikh pilgrimage site of a Sikh woman who, by dint of circumstances arising from the Partition, found herself taken in by Zaara's family and over the decades becomes deeply attached to members of the family. An unstated romance develops between Zaara and Veer, but Zaara has already been committed to another man by her family; she returns to Pakistan, and as young women in her situation are wont to do so, frets, agonizes, and pines for her lover. Her female companion places a call to Veer, who, turning in his resignation as an Indian Air Force officer, arrives at Zaara's doorstep to ask for her hand in marriage. Zaara's fiancé, whose honor, reputation, and manliness have now been put at risk by this interloper from India, has Veer framed as a spy with the encouragement of Zaara's father. Veer, who has been compelled to sign a confession stating that he is Rajesh Rathore, an employee of India's spy agency RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), languishes in a Pakistani jail for upwards of twenty years, though the word is put out that he has been killed in a road accident. A young Pakistani lawyer, Saamiya Siddiqui (Rani Mukerji), is drawn to Veer's cause, and takes a pledge to restore his name, his identity, and his country to him. Veer and Zaara are united by dint of a Pakistani court's finding that Veer Pratap Singh was framed, that he consented to sign a false confession only to save the honor of a Pakistani woman, and that his freedom must be restored to him.

*Veer Zaara* became a landmark film that was generally held in high regard both in India and Pakistan as a work that highlights the social norms and cultural values that are common to both countries and thus had the potential to heal relations between them. Oddly enough, though this subject cannot be unraveled at this juncture, the ban in Pakistan on the official screening of Indian movies which went into effect in the aftermath of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, was still in place and would not be lifted until 2008; however, as was the case with nearly all Indian movies, bootlegged copies of *Veer Zaara* were widely available and were often screened openly. Many film reviewers in Pakistan embraced the film as it appeared to humanize Pakistanis, furnish Islam with a human face, and suggest that the border is an artifact of history.



Such a reading, of course, obscures the fact that contingency marks every border. Moreover, once we are past the tiresome cliché that love transcends all borders, it remains to be asked how exactly *Veer Zaara* effects a departure in its treatment of Pakistan and in its more than tacit assumption that political culture might help in conflict resolution? It has long been argued rather vociferously by activists, artists, and scholars on both sides of the border that whatever the animosity between the two states, the people of Pakistan and India only harbor goodwill towards each other; in other words, it is civil society rather than the state that is invested in the peace process. When Veer submits his resignation and abandons the uniform of an officer of the Indian Air Force, should we only read this as an instance of love triumphing over patriotic militarism? Or does that sartorial gesture signify something much more profound, namely that institutions of the state hinder rather than facilitate the building of bridges between the two countries?

The film's deployment of the legal motif, and the consequent denouement, offers one further opening. Though Pakistan and India both inherited the legal system bequeathed by the British, Pakistan's legal system, certainly in comparison to India, became seriously compromised by the adoption of Sharia courts, the Hudood ordinances, the designation of certain groups of Muslims such as the Ahmadiyyas as apostates, and so on. This reading is, of course, tenable only on the assumption that the legal system of the modern West, based on the principle that all defendants brought before a court are to be treated with equality, with absolute indifference to one's race, gender, class, and standing in society, can reasonably be viewed as a model which might be rightly emulated. In either country, there is little awareness of how the law has taken its own course since Partition. Indian viewers would have been surprised at the film's denouement: presiding over a case brought by the lawyer Saamia Siddiqui to secure Veer's release, the court is moved, after the assessment of the evidence and Zaara's own testimony, to order his release. That a large portrait of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, hangs behind the sitting judge is not merely a matter of protocol. Despite the fact that Pakistan was created explicitly as a state that would shelter the sub-continent's Muslims, Jinnah himself was resolutely wedded to the secular notion —if again we can countenance the idea that secularism must always permit rather than inhibit religious practice, not only in the privacy of one's home but in public. However, *Veer Zaara* is not without ambiguity on the question of whether the legal framework of the modern nation-state can be enabling in the quest for conflict resolution. The film subtly makes the point that the lawyer Saamiya represents Veer on behalf of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan —and herein lies the suggestion that transnational organizations, international conventions, and allegedly universal protocols of justice today intrude, often to the advantage of those without a voice, upon the autonomy of the nations-state.

The few instances that I have summoned of popular Hindi cinema's engagement with the analytic and problematic of the border between India and Pakistan nevertheless permit me to offer a few concluding thoughts. Let me propose an odd and imperfect analogy: It is the inescapable nature of water to be free; it will seep through the tiniest crack, and tiny rivulets diverge from the main body and chart



their own journey. The engineer confronted with a body of water is moved only by one instinct, namely the desire to dam it, contain it, or otherwise find ways to render it efficient in the service of human beings. The realists who have dominated our imagination only construe the border as a problem, as something that must be monitored, regulated, patrolled, and maintained in its status quo. However, the physical border —enforced through rituals, an armed presence on either side, and such contrivances of modernity as the passport— between the states of India and Pakistan is the least of the problems. Many other films besides those which I have mentioned here seem riveted around the border or what is more menacingly called the Line of Control that divides India from Pakistan, yet the central questions they tacitly probe are much more far-reaching in their implications. Something in popular Hindi cinema hints at a more profound notion, one that we shall have to continue to reflect upon as we ponder the border between India and Pakistan, the Hindu and the Muslim, the self and the other. There is something of the Hindu in every South Asian Muslim; there is also something of the Muslim in every Hindu. That recognition allows us to both retain and subvert the border at once.

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“FRIENDS FROM AN EARLIER LIFE”:  
RADICAL POSSIBILITIES OF NOSTALGIC MELANCHOLY  
IN POEMS OF THE 1947 INDIAN PARTITION

Anindya Raychaudhuri  
University of St Andrews, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper will examine poetic responses to the trauma of Partition, and will consider both poetry written at the time and since. I will examine works in Bengali, Urdu and English, by such poets as Agha Shahid Ali, Jibanananda Das, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and Achintya Kumar Sengupta. I will examine how poets deal with the memory of the violence and the resulting legacy of dislocation and alienation. I will examine the possibilities of poetic melancholy as a tool in order to respond to and negotiate the enforced and violent change in identities that Partition precipitated. In the process, I will make a case for the radical potential of what might be called nostalgic melancholy. I argue that in these cases poetic melancholy can be read as a corrective to the imperialist act of Partition, as well as a gesture which defies the nationalist appropriation of history by the independent, postcolonial states. I will analyse how poets from both countries have tried, through their writing, to question the very legitimacy of the border that divides them.

KEYWORDS: A. Ali, J. Das, F.A. Faiz, Melancholy, Partition, Poetry, A. Sengupta.

RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia la poesía sobre la Partición, tanto la contemporánea con los hechos como la que se ha generado después. Prestaré atención a poemas en bengalí, urdu e inglés, de autores como Agha Shahid Ali, Jibanananda Das, Faiz Ahmed Faiz y Achintya Kumar Sengupta, que hacen memoria de esa violencia, así como de su legado de desestructuración alienación. También estudiaré la melancolía poética como instrumento para responder y renegociar las identidades forzadas abocadas por la Partición. La melancolía poética puede leerse como una enmienda a la división de India como un hecho imperialista, que a la vez desafía la apropiación histórica que han hecho los estados poscoloniales de esa violencia. Así, poetas de ambos lados de la frontera han cuestionado la legitimidad de la frontera que los separa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: A. Ali, J. Das, F.A. Faiz, melancolía, partición, poesía, A. Sengupta.

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Few events in the history of the Indian subcontinent have had as seismic an impact as Partition. Virtually every arena of public and private life of the subcontinent has been coloured by the events of Partition in ways too numerous to list. From the periodic wars the countries insist on fighting with each other, to communal riots and terrorist attacks to literary and cultural production —in all of these spheres the postcolonial nation-states and their people are still working through the trauma caused by the events of seven decades ago.

Even though the bare outlines of the events might be fairly well-known, it is perhaps still wise, especially when examining literary responses to such a traumatic event, to always turn first to history. As the British left India after two hundred years of official and unofficial colonial rule,<sup>1</sup> the country was divided along religious lines, with Punjab in the west and Bengal in the east divided in two. The land and its people were divided into two new states, broadly along religious lines. West Punjab, along with Sindh, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province, together with East Bengal, formed the new state of Pakistan with a majority Muslim population. This was a state of two halves, separated by hundreds of miles of India, which had a Hindu majority.

In part the significance of Partition comes from the unprecedented levels of violence —estimates of actual numbers of casualties remain controversial. The most conservative figure of the number of deaths was that suggested by the eyewitness account of British administrator Penderel Moon (293) who, in 1961, wrote that he believed only about 200,000 people were killed in the Punjab. At the other end of the scale, Kavita Daiya is one of a number of South Asian scholars who has put the figure at ‘at least two million’ (6). Ian Talbot has argued that the number ‘is conventionally reckoned at around 1,000,000’, (420) though Gyanendra Pandey has questioned the basis for this acceptance on the grounds that ‘it appears something of a median’ (89). In short, the exact number will probably be never known. What is generally accepted is that along with the death toll, the Partition led to the largest forced migration in human history, with an estimated 18 million people forced to leave their homes forever (Talbot 420). In addition between 100,000 and 150,000 women were abducted, raped and often forced to convert (See Butalia 1998; Menon and Bhasin 1998). The emotional losses were also huge, as people had to leave ancestral homes —communities where they had been living since time immemorial. Most were unable to take any of their property with them; some deliberately chose to leave everything behind because they were convinced they could come back at a future date. Millions of people became destitute overnight. Returning home proved impossible, as conflict between the two states intensified, leading to multiple wars in the past seven decades.

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<sup>1</sup> The exact start date of British rule in India is contested and beyond the scope of this paper —technically it was acquired by the British State in 1858, though British rule through the East India Company had lasted for at least a hundred years prior to that.



Given the scale of mass-suffering, it is not surprising that scholars have looked to psychoanalysis and trauma theory to model the way Partition gets narrated or silenced, the way it gets repressed and returns as a haunting. Scholars like Joe Cleary (2002), Jill Didur (2006), Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2005) and Ashish Nandy (foreword to Sengupta 2003), among others, have repeatedly returned to psychoanalysis. Here is Nandy, for example, analyzing the legacy of Partition in such terms, when he says that the trauma of Partition,

... haunt[s] not only the victims and the perpetrators, but also the following generations, which inherit without as much as an exchange of a word on the subject, the fears, the anxieties, tensions ... [the] unexamined past has to be lived out over the succeeding generations. (Sengupta ix)

It is this haunting presence of a past trauma that leads to, in the words of Terri Tomsy, 'melancholia [becoming] the affect that dominates Partition scholarship. (61)

Tomsy joins a long list of scholars looking to reclaim the radical possibilities inherent within the affect of melancholia, wanting, as she puts it, 'to break with the Freudian concept of 'good' mourning versus 'bad' melancholia to consider ... melancholia ... as a critical force' (Tomsy 64). Freud's famous distinction between mourning and melancholia has been referred to many times, but it might be worth returning to it briefly here. Freud defines mourning as the 'the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on.' (203) In their summary of Freud's ideas, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian write that, for Freud, 'mourning is a psychic process in which libido is withdrawn from a lost object. This withdrawal cannot be enacted at once. Instead, libido is detached bit by bit so that eventually the mourner is able to declare the object dead and to move on to invest in new objects'. (Eng and Kazanjian 3) Melancholia, on the other hand, is a pathological manifestation of mourning, typically,

characterised by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self directed insults, intensifying into the desultory expectation of punishment. (Freud 204)

In Eng and Kazanjian's words, 'Freud describes melancholia as an enduring devotion on the part of the ego to the lost object. A mourning without end, melancholia results from the inability to resolve the grief and ambivalence precipitated by the loss of the loved object, place or ideal.' (3)

Interestingly, however, as Eng and Kazanjian also point out, though Freud is careful to set up and police this distinction between normal and healthy mourning, and pathological melancholia, the reader gets the sense that he, Freud, is not quite comfortable with the simplicity of the distinction. 'The only reason, in fact, why [mourning] does not strike us as pathological is that we are so easily able to explain it.' (204) As Eng and Kazanjian put it, 'Were one to understand melancholia



better, Freud implies, one would no longer insist on its pathological nature.’ (Eng and Kazanjian 2003: 3)

Eng and Kazanjian suggest that ‘a better understanding of melancholic attachments to loss might depathologize those attachments, making visible not only their social bases but also their creative, unpredictable, political aspects.’ A melancholic attachment to past trauma, then, can provide a way of leading to Walter Benjamin’s conceptualization of historical materialism which is, he argues,

... a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, acedia, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly. Among Medieval theologians it was regarded as the root cause of sadness ... empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers ... A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain. (Benjamin 247-248)

In other words, and following Benjamin, Eng and Kazanjian suggest that a melancholic reading of history might represent ‘an ongoing and open relationship with the past’ leading to different ways of ‘rewriting the past as well as reimagining the future’. (5)

Ranjana Khanna, in her study *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* makes a similar intervention when she ‘reformulates melancholia as an ambivalent dynamic of loss and critical agency’. (Tomsky 69) Elsewhere, Khanna has argued that the affect of melancholia ‘implicitly provides ... an ethico-political gesture toward the future’ because ‘the melancholic’s critical agency, and the peculiar temporality that drags it back and forth at the same time, acts toward the future’. (Khanna 2006) For Khanna, this affect of melancholia is a fundamental part of postcolonial theory itself:

this temporal shift is particularly evident in studies of colonial and postcolonial subjectivities in relation to spatiality ... Melancholia is endemic to the field of postcolonial studies, and has always been the driving force behind it, because it is not only recently that lament, the elegiac, and the melancholic response have been constitutive of the field ... [T]here has also been an affect of melancholia in play that involves a relationship to loss and death of something somewhat difficult to locate, resulting in a critical agency distinct from overt self-critical rejection. (Khanna 2006)

It is in this context that I wish to study poetic responses to the Indian partition. It is my contention that this body of literature can be read as a defiantly melancholic attachment to the history of Partition, which works as an explicit or implicit challenge both to the colonialist-imperialist project of Partition in the first place, and to the way this history has been appropriated by the nation and state building process of all three of the postcolonial nation-states.

It is slightly surprising that more attention has not been paid to the poetry of Partition. As Tomsky has argued, most of the scholarship on Partition literature ‘concentrate[s] on novels and short stories in ... discussions of collective cultural memories’ (65) Separately, Kabir has also called for the need ‘to move beyond the



scholarly preoccupation with narrative modes of remembering Partition'. (15) In this chapter, I hope to begin to demonstrate the important role played by poetry in the cultural afterlives of Partition. It is my contention that this role is particularly important when examining the radical nature posed by the affect of melancholia because so many of the poets I am examining are using forms of nostalgic melancholy in order to construct alternative, oppositional readings of history.

The body of poetry I am studying represents work from four different communities which were most directly affected by the events of Partition —Bengali, Kashmiri, Punjabi and Sindhi, as well as the three major religions— Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. In many cases the poets themselves became refugees and used their work as an elegy for the lost homeland. The poems represent a particularly radical, critical engagement with history, through which, in Tomskey's words, melancholia 'does not stultify but actually energises, becoming the agent for remedial anti-state activity.' (69) The poetry represents at least five different linguistic and poetical traditions: Bengali, Punjabi, Sindhi, Urdu and, inevitably, English. In my study, I have used established, published translations where possible —where such translations do not exist, I have provided my own.

Given the exilic background of many of these poets, it is not surprising that the poetry often exist in the margins, capturing the moment of transience as the East/West border is being crossed. Here, for example, are the opening lines of Bengali poet Achintya Kumar Sengupta's poem titled 'Refugee':

Come on, quickly,  
No more waiting —we have to leave now  
No point giving in to the  
Dreamy delightful sleep of the dawn  
We have to get up, there is no time  
This chance will not come again  
...  
The small boy with sleep-filled eyes asks,  
'Where are we going from there?'  
'Where? To our new home.' (Sengupta 9)

It is no accident that the journey starts at dawn. One of commonest images of the birth of the country used at the time and since is that of the dawn of a new day. Midnight, as the moment of the birth of a new day, and dawn, as the moment of a new sunrise, have both been used as powerful symbols of independence. Famously, the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru referred to this image in his inauguration speech:

At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance ... At the dawn of history, India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and grandeur of her success and failures. (Nehru 25)



One of the ways in which the body of poetry I am studying poses a radical challenge to the state-building process is by appropriating the image of the start of a new age not in order to reinforce the state-endorsed narrative, but to highlight the melancholia, the suffering of the marginalized and displaced. Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam provides a perfect example in her poem 'At Midnight':

Your memory knocks at my door.  
These are not words of song  
But drops of sweat on love's brow.  
These are not words of song  
They are tears that choke my pen.  
These are not words of song  
Wounded silence weeps. (Pritam 21)

If the official nationalist hagiographers were celebrating the birth of the nation, the poets were, often, deliberately using birth-related imagery to undermine the triumphant nationalism which was, for them, entirely inappropriate to the trauma of Partition. In "The Scar of a Wound," Pritam powerfully re-writes the mythology of the birth of a nation:

When they forced my mother's womb  
I came as every child must come;  
I am the mark of that blow,  
Violation bade me grow;  
In my country's agony  
They seared my mother's brow with me  
When they forced my mother's womb. (Pritam 97)

Far from Partition being the 'birth-pangs' of the new nations, as is discussed *ad nauseum* in numerous newspaper articles and school textbooks, it is the source of the trauma that results in the deformation of the nation that is being born. The nation is 'the scar of that wound/That in my mother's body burned' —Pritam uses words such as 'curse' (revealingly and wonderfully rhymed with 'nurse'), 'agony', 'stench', 'loathsomeness' and 'torment' (Pritam 97-98) to reinforce the notion that the birth of the nation was no natural act, but a violent and horrific act of the child being 'forced' from the 'mother's womb'.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz, an Urdu poet originally from Kashmir, who moved to Pakistan after Partition makes a very similar point in a poem entitled 'Freedom's Dawn (August 1947)'

This leprous daybreak, dawn night's fangs have mangled—  
This is not that long-looked-for break of day,  
Not that clear dawn in quest of which those comrades  
Set out, believing that in heaven's wide void  
Somewhere must be the stars' last halting-place  
Somewhere the verge of night's slow-washing tide,  
Somewhere an anchorage for the ship of heartache. (Faiz 123-125)



By comparing the journey of the displaced to the journey of the struggle for independence, Faiz is able to highlight not the state-endorsed euphoria of independence, but the disillusionment of promises broken —of the realization that the reality has not matched up to its expectation. Achintya Kumar Sengupta makes this point even more explicitly:

Who are those travelling with us —Who?  
They too are refugees.  
They have suffered, been imprisoned  
...  
They have crossed violent peaks and suffering seas  
...  
Till tired at the end of the chapter  
Looking at the torn broken tattered map  
They suddenly see a dazzling heaven's call  
And they run breathless  
To be paid for all their work  
...  
Yes, they too are refugees  
Some from their homes  
Others from their ideals. (Sengupta 12-13)

Faiz and Sengupta are both making a causal link between the seeming despair of the refugees' journey and the fact that the metaphorical national journey to independence went wrong and, thus, in the process, they are able to use the figure of the refugee and the melancholic longing of their homeland to highlight the dissatisfaction with the new independent, but partitioned nations. Indeed, it is the very fact of the refugees' transience that stands as the marker of failure of independence.

An enduring symbol of melancholic transience is the train. Train journeys and railway stations feature prominently throughout all forms of cultural production of the Partition. From novels like Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and John Masters' *Bhowani Junction* to photographs of Margaret Bourke-White, to numerous short stories, films such as Ritwik Ghatak's *Komal Gandhar* and Deepa Mehta's *Earth* —it seems that railways and train journeys are all-pervasive in Partition narratives. This might be partly because seemingly naturalised orderliness which is associated with railways as signifiers of stable, modern secular public life becomes the perfect contrast to depict the chaos of Partition. The refugee family from Achintya Kumar Sengupta's poem, too, travels from their old home to the new by train:

Travelling almost to the horizon  
By boat from here to the pier  
From there to the railway station.  
What fun —your first train journey today  
All the way to the checkpoint  
From there —walking walking walking. (Sengupta 9)





Even when journeys aren't being documented —trains and stations feature prominently as transitional spaces full of rootless people. A case in point is Sujata Bhatt's poem called 'Partition':

She was nineteen-years-old then and when she stood in her garden she could hear the cries of the people stranded in the Ahmedabad railway station. She felt it was endless —their noise— a new sound added to the city. (Bhatt 34)

The melancholy of exile is contrasted with a deeply nostalgic longing for the lost homeland. In her analysis of Debjani Sengupta's anthology of Bengali partition stories, Terry Tomskey identifies this characteristic feature of Partition narratives:

... a melancholic and exilic longing for the 'lost' other. It suggests that the other Bengal continues to function as an imaginary homeland, an affective site of desire, loss, and unattainability that haunts the East Bengali migrant generations. (67)

Achintya Kumar Sengupta's 'Refugee' is, once again, a case in point:

Green trees next to the shadow kissed pond  
Birds wake up and sing familiar notes  
The little boy looks out of the window  
And sees his kite dangling from the tree  
Buffeted by the wind but not letting go  
The moss on the river banks  
Looks sadly back —where will you go?

...  
Further, the gurgling burbling river  
Asking, where will you go without us?  
Are we friends from an earlier life?  
No one in this? No one dear? (Sengupta 10)

The deliberate poignancy of describing the pastoral idyll that has been left behind as being full of 'friends from an earlier life' highlights both the strong affective relationship with the landscape (which is now apparently that of a foreign, othered country, and demonstrates the trauma of the process through which access to that past homeland has now been lost. The anthropomorphizing of the landscape highlights vividly the trauma of the moment of parting, as well as reinforcing an apparent contrast between the timeless stasis of rural life and the pathologised, modern industrial forms of transport which is allowing the refugees to leave their home.

Sindhi poet Prabhu Wafa, in a poem called 'Shadow Play' also recreates an image of an idyllic, pre-lapsarian vision of the homeland:

Those were happy days...  
Homes, fields, cattle, fodder,  
Gardens in full bloom,  
Peace, prosperity, God's blessings. (Wafa 2010)



Sujata Bhatt, in her poem, contrasts the railway station as the symbol of the trauma of Partition, with the image of a garden as the symbol of pre-Partition paradise:

Her aunt, her father's sister, would go to the station every day with food and water —But she felt afraid, felt she could not go with her aunt— So she stood in the garden listening. (Bhatt 34)

I have written elsewhere (Raychaudhuri 474-475) about the importance of the pastoral in Bengali cinema of Partition and, similar to my readings of the works of cinematic auteur Ritwik Ghatak, it should be borne in mind here as well that this vision of a pastoral idyll is no simplistic anti-modern, anti-industrial and anti-western call to return to a more simplistic, imaginary pastoral life. What is being stressed here is the potentially powerful affective relationship between humanity and nature that can transcend the nationalistic differences that are, according to this argument, leading to the violence of Partition. In another poem called 'East-West', Achintya Kumar Sengupta makes this transnational power of the pastoral apparent:

Your Sitallakkha and my Mayurakkhi  
Your Bhairab and my Rupnarayan  
Your Karnaphuli and my Shilaboti  
Your Payra and my Piyali  
One water one wave one stream  
One cool bottomless deep of prosperous peace.  
The sunlight in your eyes warms my yard  
The wind in your heart touches the flowers in my garden (Sengupta 1)

The litany of river-names with which Achintya Kumar Sengupta begins this poem reflects the unifying potential that the poet feels is contained within the natural landscape. Similarly, Amrita Pritam, in 'The Bridge' imagines a riverscape as the antidote to what she sees as artificial divisions of the land:

Yesterday you and I  
Burnt a bridge  
And divided our destinies  
Like the two banks of a river.  
...  
Before we fade away  
Standing thus apart from each other  
Let us spread our lean bodies  
On the surface of the waters  
And you step on your own body  
To span half the river  
While I will tread on my body  
And will receive you more than halfway. (Pritam 37)



What seems to be common in both Pritam and Sengupta is that the evocation of an organic relationship between humanity and nature can be used as an antidote to the alienation that has been caused by the uprooting of people. In depicting oneself and one's people as autochthonous, one can challenge Partition as not just counter-intuitive and unnatural, but also challenge the hegemony of the new post-colonial nation state as necessarily inclusive of, and able to represent these uprooted people. When the nation-state is busy appropriating and silencing painful history in favour of a coercive, absolutist celebration of independence, these nostalgic yearnings for what has been lost, spaces that have now been hegemonically othered as part of another, enemy country, remain important as counter-normative melancholic positions.

It is perhaps too easy to scoff at such nostalgic recreation of an imaginary homeland, and nostalgia, in general, has been strongly attacked by most theorists. Writing in a different context, Susan Bennett, for example, has forcefully argued that nostalgia's 'representation of a seamless past has ... been an important strategy in the politically regressive governments of the New Right ... In all its manifestations, nostalgia is, in its praxis, conservative' (Bennett 4-5). Similarly, Svetlana Boym has described nostalgia as 'an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure.' (Boym XIV) What most of these views on nostalgia share, then, is a criticism of what David Lowenthal has called nostalgia's 'search for a simple and stable past as a refuge from a turbulent and chaotic present.' For most of these critics, nostalgia represents a need to return to politically-regressive Modernist grand-narratives. (Lowenthal 21)

I do not deny that the nostalgic re-creation of a complex, contradictory, hierarchical past into a simple, palatable and stable version is problematic. Nostalgia can and has been used to reinforce particularly reactionary political forces and, as such, is, at best, a very ambiguous force. I do argue, however, that when in contact with the colonialist or even the postcolonial state, the marginalized and displaced subject can and does use nostalgia as a particularly radical force to articulate radical notions of identity and belonging.

It is particularly interesting how Faiz Ahmed Faiz uses a poetic tradition of nostalgic and melancholic love poetry to articulate particularly radical notions. V.G. Kiernan has pointed out how

Faiz began with the stereotype of the cruel beauty ... though still only elusively suggested by comparison with Western love-poetry, and ... in some manner was able to fuse sympathy for the hard-pressed labourer or peasant with the traditional griefs of the lover ... In like fashion wine may stand now for political truth or insight instead of spiritual, madness for the enthusiast's self-sacrifice in a progressive cause. (Faiz 39)

The addressee in Faiz's poetry then is not just the target of unrequited melancholic love as in the tradition he is working from, but for Faiz this 'you' comes to mean many things — the oppressed subject, the revolutionary idealist and, also, the pre-Partition homeland. This may facilitate a fuller reading of some of Faiz's most melancholic poems, for example:



Do not ask how much I have longed for you  
Since those lost days of longing expectation;  
Your image fills these unfamiliar springs  
That are not your embrace, your arms, your lips. (Faiz 133)

A similar use of melancholic love poetry can be seen in Amrita Pritam's poems —in particular in perhaps her most famous poem of Partition, where she invokes the name of Waris Shah, an 18th-century Punjabi Sufi poet, most famous for the epic poem of tragic love, *Heer Ranjha*:

To Waris Shah I turn today!  
'Speak up from the graves midst which you lie!  
In our book of love, turn the next leaf.  
When one daughter of the Punjab did cry  
You filled pages with songs of lamentation,  
Today a hundred daughters cry  
O Waris to speak to you.'  
...  
Waris Shah!  
Open your grave;  
Write a new page  
In the book of love. (Pritam 93-94)

Like Faiz, Pritam is able to use the radical uncertainty about the nature of the addressee in other poems as well, most notably 'At Midnight' and 'The Bridge', both discussed above. Faiz and Pritam are both able to use tropes of poetic convention in order to articulate radical new sentiments. In one poem, for example, the 'you' that is the object of powerful, often unrequited and lost love is fused with the figure of Lenin, as Pritam writes:

For history's perfection  
I imprisoned you in the calendar  
Again and again;  
Stamped it with the national era;  
Stuck several nails of isms:  
They were futile imprisonments.  
Out from my wall calendar,  
Changing the dates again  
You meet me like a new day;  
With new frustrations, new salvations. (Pritam 145)

Like Faiz, who Kiernan describes as 'a socialist with a groundwork of Muslim culture and feeling' (Faiz 40), Pritam, too, is able to borrow from different, often conflicting and contradictory influences of tradition, in order to articulate new and oppositional ideas. In an interview with Carlo Coppolla for *Mehfil* in 1968, Pritam expands on the oppositional nature of her politics:



I wouldn't call myself a Marxist. I am too much of an individualist to be one. I can admire something when it's good for the welfare of the people. Of course, I admire Marxism ... I can't label myself that easily, though there are some qualities in Marxism that I admire. I have visited Soviet Russia several times, three in fact, and other socialist countries as well. I admire some of the changes there, but not all, especially the lack of individual freedom. I have spoken freely about that there. (Coppolla and Pritam 7)

If the addressee of the poems is often out of reach then the pastoral idyll which the addressee symbolizes is also often horrifically altered by the horrors of Partition:

Men's bodies sold in street and marketplace,  
Bodies that caked grime fouls and thick blood smears,  
Flesh issuing from the cauldrons of disease  
With festered sores dripping corruption —these  
Sights haunt me too, and will not be shut out;  
Not be shut out, though your looks ravish still. (Faiz 67)

Similarly, the garden in Sujata Bhatt's poem does not provide an escape from the trauma either:

Even the birds sounded different —and the shadows cast by the neem trees brought no consolation. And each day she wished she had the courage to go with her aunt— (Bhatt 34)

The idyll of pre-Partition Punjab is spoiled by violence in Amrita Pritam's poetry as well:

O friend of the sorrowing, rise and see your Punjab  
Corpses are strewn on the pasture,  
Blood runs in the Chenab.  
Some hand hath mixed poison in our five rivers  
The rivers in turn had irrigated the land.  
From the rich land have sprouted venomous weeds  
How high the red has spread  
How much the curse has bled! (Pritam 93)

Similarly, the paradise evoked by Prabhu Wafa existed only in his pre-Partition imagination. After Partition, the world has changed forever:

A leaf here,  
A leaf there,  
families rootless,  
homes plundered.  
Through the desert,  
in caravans, we departed  
treading thorny paths. (Wafa 2010)



The nostalgic memories of the lost homeland and the melancholic engagement with the experience of exile together allow these poets to cross the inter-space between the nation-states. As exiles writing about exile, they occupy the spaces in the margins between the two nation-states. Bengali poet Subhash Mukhopadhyay, in a short poem called ‘Crossings’ provides a perfect example:

We are like the pupils of Bangladesh’s two eyes,  
Whoever polices the border, or tries.  
The door is blocked, so we’ve pulled open the window  
The Bangladesh on the other side is the same Bangla on this. (Mukhopadhyay 44)

The particular radical nature of this poem is encompassed in the use of the word ‘Bangladesh’ —this poem was written before the establishment of the nation-state as it exists today. Bangladesh in this context refers to undivided Bengal. A moment needs to be spared for the Bengali word “*desh*,” which although almost always translated as “country” is actually more complex than that. Bengalis use the word “*desh*” to mean nation (as in India), territory (as in West Bengal), and, especially significant for migrant populations, the original home, village or town where the family had to move from for economic or political reasons. The deliberate vagueness with which poets like Subash Mukhopadhyay uses the word means that the characters could be referring to any or, indeed, all of these ideas. This vagueness is enormously radical as it implicitly highlights the gaps between displaced people’s emotional attachments and allegiances to the landscape they have left behind, and the political boundaries of the nation-state.

This is perhaps the most important way in which nostalgia and melancholia is mobilized in these poems for particularly radical ends —the affect of nostalgic melancholy is used to transcend the national borders and establish links across the borders. Thus, these poets are challenging the most persistent myth of the post-colonial nation building —that Partition led to the establishment of independent, homogenous, unified nations who are mirror-images of each other, and can therefore unproblematically construct their identity in opposition to the other across the border. Nostalgic melancholia, in this instance, not only involves ‘an ongoing and open relationship with the past —bringing its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images into the present’ in the words of Eng and Kazanjian (4), but it brings into the present exactly those ghosts that the postcolonial states of today would rather remain safely buried. By refusing to mourn, by insisting on melancholia instead, the poets I have studied here are also rejecting the state-endorsed narrative that these horrors can be safely relegated into the dustbins of history.

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# BORDERS AND BODIES: WOMEN, VIOLENCE, AND MARTYRDOM IN SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN'S PARTITION FICTION

Debali Mookerjea-Leonard  
James Madison University, Virginia, USA

## ABSTRACT

Through the lens of Shauna Singh Baldwin's fiction —“Family Ties” (1996) and *What the Body Remembers* (1999)— this paper addresses how for many women, national independence is a tale of trauma, how the country's freedom is inseparable from their loss of homeland through Partition, the loss of control over their bodies in the inter-community riots, and, finally, their loss of home through betrayal by their families. The paper examines how the predicament of women who died to preempt violation —whether through suicide, or murder by kin-men— celebrated as “martyrs,” and those who suffered rejections within the family after the fact, disputes cultural representations of the home as “safe space” and the family as unreservedly loving.

Keywords: India, Partition, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Trauma, Women.

## RESUMEN

A partir de la narrativa de Shauna Singh Baldwin (me centro en “Family Ties” de 1996 y *What the Body Remembers* de 1999) este artículo pone de manifiesto cómo para muchas mujeres la Independencia es un relato traumático: la libertad del país es inseparable del desplazamiento causado por la Partición, la pérdida de control sobre sus cuerpos durante la violencia sectaria y, finalmente, el repudio por las propias familias. Unas murieron para evitar agresiones sexuales (ya fuese por suicidio o por ‘sacrificios de honor’ perpetrados por los varones de su familia) y se convirtieron en “mártires;” otras, en cambio, sufrieron el rechazo de sus familiares después de haber sido violadas. Estas categorizaciones tan distintas ponen en entredicho la representación del hogar como “espacio seguro” y de la familia como un refugio de amor incondicional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: India, Mujeres, Partición, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Trauma.



In the aftermath of the sectarian violence in Noakhali, East Bengal, in the autumn of 1946, Mahatma Gandhi advised women facing the threat of intimate violence to commit suicide in order to preserve their chastity. He suggested that women “commit suicide by poison or some other means to avoid dishonour ... suffocate themselves or ... bite their tongues to end their lives” (Gandhi v. 92: 355). About a year later, on September 18, 1947, Gandhi, at a prayer meeting, again valorized Hindu and Sikh women’s pre-emptive deaths as a sign of strength, saying that,

I have heard that many women who did not want to lose their honour chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think that is really great, because I know that such things make India brave. After all, life and death is a transitory game. Whoever might have died are dead and gone; but at least they have gone with courage. They have not sold away their honour. Not that their life was not dear to them, but they felt it was better to die than to be forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslims and allow them to assault their bodies. And so those women died. They were not just a handful, but quite a few. When I hear all these things I dance with joy that there are such brave women in India. (Gandhi v. 96: 388-389)

Death, national honor, and patriarchal values coalesce in this tribute to suicide and murder. Gandhi not only sanctions violence, but he also rationalizes it as patriotism, interpreting women’s chastity as the reservoir for national honor and their deaths as the articulation of their *free* choice. Rather than condemning the ongoing violence against women, Gandhi’s response only raises more questions—questions of violence, of silences, of bodies, and of desires.<sup>1</sup>

However, not all vulnerable Sikh and Hindu women opted for “martyrdom,” and many were abducted and/or converted by Muslims. But unlike the commemoration above, the torments of women who were “taken” have been, mostly, surrounded by silence. And after many abductees were “rescued” and repatriated to India, on state initiative, they were no longer welcome in their families. Using Shauna Singh Baldwin’s short story “Family Ties” (1996) and her novel *What the Body Remembers* (1999), this paper examines the predicament of women who died to preempt violation and were, subsequently, lauded for their heroism, and those who suffered rejections within the family because they had experienced the forbidden “touch.”<sup>2</sup> The paper addresses the question of how literary representation mediates

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of Gandhi’s responses on the subject of violence against women during the Partition riots, see Mookerjee-Leonard (2010).

<sup>2</sup> In a haunting flashback in Sabiha Sumar’s film *Khamosh Pani* (*The Silent Waters*, 2003), set in a Punjabi village Charkhi, in 1947, a young Sikh woman Veero stands on the edge of a well, where other Sikh women have also lined up to end their lives by drowning rather than fall prey to Muslims. Although urged by her father to jump, Veero hesitates, and finally, runs away but is captured by a group of young Muslim men. When the film opens in the late-1970s, Veero is Ayesha, a Muslim widow living in Charkhi, a Pakistani village since Partition, with a grown son, Saleem. And then, her brother Jaswant comes from India, looking for her. I cite this part of the plot of the film because it explores similar situations and offers alternative resolutions to the two plots presented in the discussion above. On the one hand, unlike Kusum Veero rejects martyrdom by fleeing the



a cultural self-examination of the condition of women as a whole and how a place in the home is contingent on certain regimes of the body, most important among which is chastity.

## I. THE “GOOD-GOOD” WOMAN

Set in Punjab, *What the Body Remembers* weaves the political history of late-colonial India —beginning in the late-1920s through 1947—, with the domestic conflict between Satya (meaning “truth”) and Roop (meaning “form”), the co-wives of Sardarji. While the novel gives Satya a place of prominence, at the focus of this *bildungsroman* is Roop —her “education,” her transformation from a compliant young woman given in marriage to a much older man (for the purpose of bearing him a male heir), to a bolder version of herself, much like the plain-spoken Satya—a metaphorical fusing of truth with form/beauty. Tracing through the two women’s escalating animosities the growing fissures in inter-community relations, the novel navigates through the tumultuous 1930s and the political vicissitudes of the early to mid-1940s which culminate in the Partition. *What the Body Remembers* chronicles episodes of Partition’s brutalities through the eyes of Roop who journeys from Pakistan to India in mid-August 1947. Violence comes close to home in Roop’s personal confrontation with a mob, and through the loss of family members and friends. She realizes that women are subject to violence not only by members of the “other” community, but also by members of their own family.

An instance of this last is the death of Roop’s sister-in-law Kusum, the wife of her brother Jeevan. In the midst of the inter-community riots surrounding the Partition, Jeevan returns to their village Pari Darvaza to take his father, his wife and sons and other relatives out of Pakistan. He fears that as Sikhs in a predominantly Muslim village his family might be subject to violence. He finds his ancestral home empty except for the corpse of his wife Kusum, “sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again.” Jeevan is bewildered by the serenity of Kusum’s demeanor in the face of such horrific violence, “she look[s] accepting ... Her hand [is] unclenched. Her feet [are] not poised to run. Her legs cut neatly at the thigh” (447). Jeevan holds Muslim rioters responsible for Kusum’s dismemberment and death<sup>3</sup> but he is mistaken, if only partly. Roop learns from her father, Bachan Singh, that Kusum was already dead when the Muslim mob arrived. The rioters mutilated Kusum’s body and ripped out her womb, but they were desecrating a corpse. It was not the mob, but Roop and Jeevan’s father, Bachan Singh, who killed Kusum, his daughter-in-law.

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scene, and, on the other, unlike Chandini-Jehanara Veero-Ayesha, knowing that her family wanted her to die, does not plead with them for acceptance or lose her sanity, and when years later Jaswant implores her to return, citing their father’s grief, she refuses.

<sup>3</sup> Jeevan also suspects his uncle, Shyam Chacha, a Hindu, could be responsible.



Narrating the family's escape from the village, Bachan Singh tells Roop, "Kusum, she was my responsibility ... [she] was entrusted to me by Jeevan, she is young, still of childbearing age. I cannot endure even the possibility that some Muslim might put his hands upon her. Every day I had been hearing that the seeds of that foreign religion were being planted in Sikh women's wombs. No I said: I must do my duty" (Baldwin 1999: 455). And in order to pre-empt her violation by Muslim men and preclude her forcible conversion to Islam, Bachan Singh performs his "duty" —he kills her. "I called to Kusum" he tells Roop,

I told her what Sant Puran Singh said we Sikhs must do, and that I had to do it now. She understood. Always she made no trouble ... I said the first *pauri*<sup>4</sup> of the *Japji*<sup>5</sup> to give me strength and guide my *kirpan*.<sup>6</sup> Then she turned her back so I should not see her face, took off her *chunni*<sup>7</sup> to bare her neck ... I raised my *kirpan* high above her head. *Vaheguru*<sup>8</sup> did not stop it; it came down. Her lips still moved, as mine did, murmuring 'Vaheguru, Vaheguru,' as her head rolled from my stroke. (456)

By beheading her, Bachan Singh preempts Kusum's violation, and in so doing, defends the honor of his son, of his family, and that of the Sikh community. In inflicting "real but honourable death" upon Kusum, Bachan Singh averts her possible "symbolic death that marriage/[violation] and conversion entailed" (Menon and Bhasin 48). Further, he couches this familial/patriarchal violence in the language of her (and his) sacred duty regarding what "Sikhs must do" performed in the midst of items of religious significance: the prayer, the ceremonial sword, and even going so far as to justify it as divine will: "Vaheguru did not stop it." When narrating the event to another woman, his daughter Roop, Bachan Singh almost carefully emphasizes the voluntary nature of Kusum's "self-sacrifice": "She understood. Always she made no trouble." His seamless narrative of Kusum's obedient compliance and stoical heroism erases "the confusions of the moment, the uncertainty and fear felt by the victims and the frequent need for coercion before they agreed to become 'martyrs'" (Pandey 194). Discussing the episode of Kusum's "self-sacrifice," Deepti Misri notes that, "never do we hear any mention of *her* tears, nor any speculation about *her* grief over a life foreshortened for someone else's honor; we hear only of her unquestioning valor as she went to her death" (emphasis in the original; 81). This is the story that Bachan Singh wants Kusum's children to hear, of how their mother "went to her death just as she was offered it ... willingly ... for the *izzat*<sup>9</sup> of her *quom*<sup>10</sup>" (Baldwin 456). His is a narrative prepared, even selected, for posterity, one that elevates Kusum and views Bachan Singh as simply an instrument of divine

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<sup>4</sup> Section.

<sup>5</sup> Prayer hymn

<sup>6</sup> Ceremonial sword.

<sup>7</sup> A long scarf used by women.

<sup>8</sup> The Lord

<sup>9</sup> Honor, respect, dignity.

<sup>10</sup> People/Community/Nation.



will, thereby, extricating him from blame. While Kusum was mostly docile — “never saying ‘nahinji’ or ‘no-ji’” —, she had, earlier in the novel, also attempted to renegotiate patriarchal demands — “sometimes [she] did not obey ‘fut-a-fut,’ at once,” (Baldwin 1999: 457) —, but in the end, she submits. Was Kusum’s self-possession in the face of death preparedness for it, as Bachan Singh claims, or, was it simply resignation? Did she come to recognize that ultimately there was no escape from patriarchal violence? While ambiguities surrounding Kusum’s seeming submission are sustained in the novel, Roop’s reaction to her father’s narration is illuminating. Listening to him speak of Kusum’s death, Roop reflects, “*Papaji thinks that for good-good women, death should be preferable to dishonor*” (italics in original; 456). The father-in-law, acting on behalf of a repressive religious-patriarchy (the law of the Father), decides what the “good” — dutiful, obedient, chaste — daughter-in-law’s duty should be, and, demands her death.<sup>11</sup>

Neither Bachan Singh’s action nor Kusum’s response is without precedence. In March 1947, 90 Sikh women from the village of Thoa Khalsa jumped into a well in order to escape falling into the hands of Muslim mobs<sup>12</sup> — an actual incident that Baldwin’s novel mentions in passing. Commenting on the recurrence of women’s pre-emptive deaths, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin note that “So powerful and general was the belief that safeguarding a woman’s honour is essential to upholding male and community honour that a whole new order of violence came into play, by men against their own kinswomen; and by women against their own daughters or sisters and their own selves” (Menon and Bhasin 44-45). In Baldwin’s novel, Bachan Singh tells Roop that it was not men alone who killed women members of their family, “the women were ready to kill too ... Old women were giving opium to younger women ... preparing them for martyrdom” (453). In such impossible circumstances, argue Menon and Bhasin, “to acquiesce is not to consent, and to submit is not necessarily to agree” (46). Gandhi’s speech, cited at the beginning of this essay, bears testimony to the prevalence of women’s pre-emptive suicides and the killing of women by their kin, and also reflects the social acceptance of the practice. His commemoration, however, was not an isolated act, Urvashi Butalia also notes how in contrast to the silence around “abducted” and violated women, “[c]hivalrous women, for example those who had committed mass suicides in order to save themselves from being converted to the ‘other’ religion, were the subject of

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<sup>11</sup> Shumona Dasgupta notes that Kusum “is ‘martyred’ in the same room in which Roop’s mother died at childbirth, ‘martyred’ to an ambition to keep bearing sons thereby tying extraordinary instances of violence experienced by women during the Partition with everyday violence experienced by them as a consequence of their desire to be the ideal daughter, wife and mother” (46).

<sup>12</sup> On 15 March 1947, *The Statesman* reported that, “The story of 90 women of the little village of Thoa Khalsa, Rawalpindi district ... who drowned themselves by jumping into a well during the recent disturbances has stirred the imagination of the people of Punjab. They revived the Rajput tradition of self-immolation when their menfolk were no longer able to defend them. They also followed Mr Gandhi’s advice to Indian women that in certain circumstances even suicide was morally preferable to submission” (cited in Butalia, 1993: WS-16).



much discussion. In remembrance services, in *gurudwaras* they were honoured and their *shahidi* (martyrdom) valorized” (1995: 62).

It is worth noting that while Bachan Singh seems vigilant about issues of family and community honor, he is content to let his cousin Revati Bhua distract the Muslim mob so that he and others can safely escape from the village, though he knows that the mob will capture Revati Bhua and convert her to Islam. Similarly, he leaves the defenseless Gujri, the domestic help who helped raise Bachan Singh’s children after the death of his wife, by the wayside (her wish, he claims), aware that she will be picked up by the Muslims and violated and/or converted. Yet, violation and conversion are the very consequences he averts for Kusum.<sup>13</sup> The reader, at this point, wonders: Why does he allow Revati Bhua’s capture by the Muslim mob, and her (possible) conversion to Islam? Why does he abandon Gujri? What about being honorable? I suggest that because unmarried Revati Bhua and the widow Gujri are “man-less” women, their violation and/or conversion will not tarnish a man’s honor, or that of the community, conceived fraternally, and, therefore, either woman is of little value. The novel thus exposes patriarchy’s selective evaluation of women’s worth based on the presence or absence of male guardians in their lives. Misri writes that, “In Bachan Singh’s inventory of the Pari Darwaza women who voluntarily, even insistently, give up their own lives, safety, and freedom for the sake of others, what becomes amply evident is the dispensability of the women from whom such sacrifice was clearly expected” (81). And in every case—Kusum, Revati Bhua, and Gujri—Bachan Singh claims their “self-sacrifice” is of their choosing.

On the other hand, Revati Bhua and Gujri’s “man-less” condition frees them from familial/patriarchal surveillance over their sexuality, and, thus, unlike Kusum, offers them the possibility of survival. Of the original six inhabitants of Singh’s Pari Darwaza home—Revati Bhua, Bachan Singh, Gujri, Kusum, and her two young sons—only half that number arrives in Delhi. All three women (Kusum, Revati Bhua, and Gujri) are “lost” through Bachan Singh’s actions or inertia. Singh brings to Delhi the only people who matter to him, his two grandsons. The male children are important because they will continue the bloodline, and for them, Bachan Singh preserves the family’s untarnished reputation by eliminating even the possibility of the “taint” of rape through murdering their mother, Kusum. Roop’s silent contemplations upon learning of the fate of Revati Bhua and Gujri, rupture repeatedly the cohesive narrative of women’s “self-sacrifice” that Bachan Singh attempts to construct, going so far as to suggest that he might even be manipulating the truth, “Papaji is the teller of Revati Bhua’s tale and he tells it as he wishes it repeated” (458) and even rises to the accusatory, “How could you leave [Gujri]?” (460). While these remain unspoken, Misri notes that “it is through such quiet hesitations on the part of the female listener that the patriarchal investments driving the men’s narrations are laid bare” (78).

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<sup>13</sup> Shumona Dasgupta notes that Revati Bhua’s self-sacrifice renders Kusum’s martyrdom “ultimately pointless” (46).



For Bachan Singh and Gandhi, in other words, both in reality and in the literature that drew its inspiration from real events, the concern appears to be the preservation of women's chastity. But this is no simple matter of tradition; rather, for both, chastity and family honor are bound up with cultural community- and national-honor. The repeated exaltations of women's chastity by Gandhi and many others also shaped how abductees were received after they were repatriated. In many cases, the repatriated women were rejected by their families and communities because they had been touched and, therefore, were to remain "untouchable" for the rest of their lives. Baldwin's short story "Family Ties" (1996) captures the agony of women who fell into the hands of the enemy, and were later repatriated to India.

## II. THE WOMAN WHOSE "NAME WAS NEVER TO BE SPOKEN"

"Family Ties," in Baldwin's collection of short stories entitled *English Lessons and Other Stories*, is set during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan but flashes back to the events of 1947-48.<sup>14</sup> (The Indo-Pak war of 1971 is an apt choice since this war re-partitioned the subcontinent with the breakup of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation. The violence that accompanied these events revived memories of 1947 that many had tried to suppress.) The ten-year-old anonymous narrator is surprised to learn that she has a paternal aunt, Chandini Kaur, whose name and existence had previously gone unmentioned. Curious about her missing aunt, the narrator discovers that in 1947, eighteen-year-old Chandini, a Sikh woman, was abducted by Muslims from her home in western Punjab. By the time she was "recovered" by social workers, she had been converted to Islam and had given birth to a baby boy. Renamed Jehanara Begum after her conversion, she contacted her brother, the narrator's father, but he refused to acknowledge her. So, in order to make herself acceptable to her family, Chandini-Jehanara killed her child. Still, her brother did not relent. He merely "sent her money, told her his sister was dead and he was sorry for her troubles and to trouble him no more" (30). Subsequently, she lapsed into insanity. Her story is a cautionary tale for the young narrator, and framing Chandini's story is a chilling exchange between the narrator's father and her brother, Inder, concerning the ten-year-old narrator's "safety." Set in the context of the Indo-Pak war and taking as its subtext the wartime victimization of women, the narrator's father hands his son a revolver and instructs him: "[T] here is a war now, and I want you to know how to use it to defend this little kukri [chicken] ... If the Muslims come and your sister is in danger, you must shoot her rather than let her fall into their hands" (1996: 25-6); to which Inder responds, "I will" (26). While the narrator's father had failed with his sister Chandini, with his daughter, he will take no chances —if his daughter lacks the courage to die at the

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<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion of this story see Mookerjee-Leonard (2017).





“right” time she will be murdered by her brother before her abduction/violation can smear the family’s reputation.

For women like Chandini-Jehanara national Independence is a tale of trauma. The country’s freedom is inseparable from the loss of homeland through Partition, the loss of control over their bodies in the violence surrounding Partition, and, finally, their loss of home through the betrayal of their families. The predicament of the women who died, or were killed, to preempt violation and preserve family honor as well as of those who suffered rejection by the family after the fact, both present the family as a site of risk to the wellbeing of women. The young narrator in “Family Ties” sums it up thus: when troubled by the conversation between her father and brother about taking her life, she remarks that, compared with the perils of the war outside, “far more is the danger from those within” (26). For Chandini-Jehanara home proves a place of impossible longing. Desperate to return, she underestimates the potency of her (patriarchal) family’s investment in her chastity, mistakenly believing that her Muslim son is the sole impediment to her restoration. Her tragedy is her failure to realize that, as an abducted and violated woman she has lost, irrevocably, her home, her nation, and her religion.<sup>15</sup> At this time of escalating communal hostilities, any contact between a Sikh (or Hindu) woman and a Muslim man, including coerced intimacy, was regarded as a betrayal, since it was along religiously defined lines that the country was partitioned. In other words, a woman’s citizenship was made contingent not only on her residence in the *right country*, and following the *right religion*, but also, on her possessing the *right* (chaste) *body*. Discussing the unacceptability of violated women within the new national community, Sangeeta Ray writes,

The raped female body encompasses the sexual economy of desire that is denied the mythologization of the purity of one’s own ethnic, religious, and national gendered subject. ... Those who survive rape are refused entry into the domestic space of the new nation. This denial of legitimate gendered subject positions in the new nation is deemed necessary, for ... ‘nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies.’... The purity of the family mirrors the purity of the nation, and the raped woman cannot be the vehicle of the familial metaphor that enables the narration of the nation. (135-36)

The anxiety around the loss of women’s chastity was not driven by a concern for women’s wellbeing, but by the shame of what was perceived as failed manhood, a political form of castration anxiety. After all, the protection of women constitutes one of the fundamental functions of patriarchal masculinity. But here this traditional conception and traditional religious endogamy is crossed by a nationalization of the notion of family “honor.” Rather than ensuring the safety of women, this new

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<sup>15</sup> The rejection of violated women is mentioned in passing in *What the Body Remembers*, with, “The silent women are the ones who were raped; even widows pity *their* kismat; families with any sense of izzat are not likely to take them back” (Balwin 1999: 440; italics in original).



notion was concerned with preserving male prestige against men of the opposed political-national lineage. The point is illuminated further in Baldwin's story by the domestic help Nand Singh's repeated mentions of "your father" when the narrator questions him about Chandini: "For *your father*, she is dead"; "Any sister of *your father's* would have died before allowing herself to be called Jehanara Begum"; "She was dead for *your father*"; and "[N]o woman of *your father's* family would have allowed herself to become a Musalmaan and then to have a Musalmaan's child" (1996: 29-30; emphasis mine). For Nand Singh, the victim is not Chandini-Jehanara, but her brother, as her abduction was a source of disgrace for him. He was clearly overpowered by his sister's abductors, and failed to protect her. Chandini-Jehanara's brother and his devoted employee Nand Singh blame her for lacking the courage to die at the right time, with Nand Singh stating blatantly that, "She should have taken her own life when she had her wits" (30). For her brother, who cannot be fully exempted from responsibility for the murder Chandini-Jehanara commits and her loss of sanity, she is unsafe, except as a memory which her brother has preserved for almost a quarter of a century in the form of her photograph from 1947. She is allowed to be present in his life only in that time-frozen way. By thus possessing her image, he remains Chandini-Jehanara's custodian for life, controlling the discourse around her absence. He exercises this control by withholding her story even from his children before he "locks the Moonlight Princess away again in his steel almirah" (26). Protected in the steel armoire and in his memory, Chandini-Jehanara can no longer sully his family honor! His actions also reveal some residual guilt. For he has not only preserved her photograph but also the letter informing him of her recovery by the Indian state and her contact information. Chandini's transformation into Jehanara represents the triumph of the Muslims over Sikhs, and therefore, of the rival nation Pakistan over India. And to preserve community and national pride, Chandini-Jehanara must be expelled/forgotten — "Her name was never to be spoken again in this house" (29). Through the preemptive killings of women and the expulsions of violated women, women's chastity was perpetuated as a sign of national probity, and demarcated the nation's spiritual boundaries. ("Family Ties" counters Gandhi's commemoration of the preemptive deaths of women, with the narrator asking, "Is it worse to be caught, converted, killed or raped by Muslims than to be killed by a brother?" [26].)

Whereas the narrator's aunt is preserved as a chaste woman inside the armoire, her part-Muslim cousin is never acknowledged to have lived. Chandini-Jehanara's son is a standing reminder of Sikh men's failure to protect their women. Her brother is burdened by shame, and comes to terms with his failure by denying her survival. This part-Muslim male child claiming the love of his Sikh mother embodies a continued threat to the Sikh man's assertion of privilege over his woman.

Chandini's rejection by her family is reinforced by the community, embodied, in this case, in the figure of the domestic help Nand Singh. Singh dismisses any connection between Chandini-Jehanara and his honorable employer saying "They found a woman whose name was Jehanara Begum and who said she was your father's sister, Chandini Kaur ... It was a lie, of course" (29); and that "[N]o woman of your father's family would have allowed herself to become a Musalmaan and then



to have a Musalmaan's child. So I came back and agreed with your father that she must be an imposter, for she couldn't possibly be his sister" (30). Devoted to his employer almost to a fault, Nand Singh does not hesitate to assign base motives to Chandini-Jehanara's desire to return to her family: "Who knows, maybe she was mad, maybe she wanted a share of this house he got in compensation for Thamali, or who knows what she wanted" (30). He remains unmoved by her agonized desperation. The employee Nand Singh speaks not only as a loyal dependent but also as a member of the Sikh community. Since the community demands the nullification of the "fallen woman," Singh abets the process of disowning Chandini-Jehanara.

Chandini's transformation into Jehanara represents to the Indian nationalist patriarchy the triumph of the Muslims over Sikhs, and therefore, of Pakistan over India. And as a means to protect and preserve community and national pride, Chandini-Jehanara must be expelled. The genealogy of this idea reaches back to the period of anti-colonial nationalism, when women's chastity was made central in defining the sacredness of the emerging nation, by a transfer of the symbolic purity of the nation onto the bodies of women. While the discursive production of sexual purity as part of a political ideology of gender predates British colonization, in the period of anti-colonial nationalism, chastity acquired a new significance and was regarded as a political pre-requisite for inclusion in the nation. Women's chastity became a site of a struggle of discourses on manhood, nationhood and ideal citizenship. By the same logic a woman violated by the rival community, unless excluded, represented the fallen nation. Through the pre-emptive killings of women and the expulsions of violated women, women's chastity was perpetuated as a sign of national probity, and demarcated the nation's spiritual boundaries. The development of the idea of an inviolable national space that was the purity of women simultaneously enabled the colonized man, provoked by the colonizers' charges of effeminate and effeminacy, to recuperate, in some measure, his threatened masculinity. According to this modern nationalist patriarchy, it was by extending a pledge of fierce protection and regulation of women's chastity that they exercised a vigilance that they had failed to perform on behalf of the motherland.

## CONCLUSION

Women in South Asia have suffered ethnocidal violence at the time of Partition, during the Bangladesh War, in Kashmir, and in the interminable series of inter-community riots that have marked the subcontinent's modern historical experience. In a fundamental, if disturbing and frightful sense, this political rape is embedded within conceptions of home and domesticity, so that these sites themselves, conventionally conceptualized in terms of nurturance, are illuminated in their more brutal aspects by the texts under consideration here. Shauna Singh Baldwin's writings draw attention to the negotiations of national borders performed on the bodies of women, and, especially, of Sikh women. The crucial issue she raises is that of the gender pathology at the heart of South Asian modernity. Although conditioned by the experience of colonialism, this mass-psychological malaise, has



persisted, as her story “Family Ties” illustrates, beyond national independence, a fact literature has allowed readers to grasp with a degree of moral seriousness largely lacking in the public domain.

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# FEMALE NARRATIVES OF LOSS: MEMORIES OF PARTITION

Carmen Escobedo de Tapia  
Universidad de Oviedo

## ABSTRACT

The Indian English narrative has to be considered from a threefold perspective: history, nation and narration. Indian women writers have also tackled this theme. The way they represent the shock of Partition is very much related with the situation of women in India. This article aims to diachronically analyze some examples of female Indian narrative: *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain, *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by Anita Desai and *An Unrestored Women* (2016) by Shobha Rao, to specifically focus on how women characters build up their memories of the historical event as a narrative of loss through which, eventually, we can identify the trace of gender violence as linked to the concept of nationalism in an attempt to restore the past and the present.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Studies, Gender violence, Indian narrative in English, Partition, Postcolonialism, Transglobality.

## RESUMEN

La narrativa india en inglés precisa un análisis desde tres perspectivas íntimamente relacionadas: historia, nación y narración. Las autoras indias también han tratado este tema. La forma en que representan el trauma de la Partición está directamente relacionado con la situación de la mujer india. Este artículo analiza diacrónicamente algunos ejemplos de esa narrativa: *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) de Attia Hosain, *Clear Light of Day* (1980) de Anita Desai y *An Unrestored Woman* (2016) de Shobha Rao, centrándose en cómo los personajes principales femeninos construyen sus recuerdos del acontecimiento histórico como una narrativa de pérdida. A través de la narración se identifica cómo la violencia de género se relaciona con el concepto de nacionalismo, en un intento de restaurar el pasado y el presente.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Estudios Culturales, Narrativa india en inglés, Partición, Poscolonialismo, Transnacional, Violencia de género.

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Even today there is no peace. No peace outside, no peace inside. There is no peace even today. I don't sleep, there is a feeling of being unsettled. My daughters are also not at peace. There is no well-being.

*Somavanti*

...but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity.  
*William Wordsworth*

Unfortunately, the time is ripe to rethink past traumatic episodes like the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Seventy years have passed and the effects caused by this episode seem to have repercussion at this moment in the history of both the western and eastern worlds. The historical background of current times, the move towards new ways of radical nationalisms, the religious confrontations and fundamentalisms that have led to international terrorism, make it necessary to look back on the past in an attempt to hopefully search for restoration of the present. There is an objective political history and events that led to the 'Indian summer' as Alex Von Tunzelmann terms that season of 1947: "on a warm summer night in 1947, the largest Empire the world has ever seen did something no empire had done before. It gave up" (3). "Midnight's furies" were unleashed and gave rise to "the deadly legacy of India's Partition" (Hajari 2015).

But there are also hidden stories behind the great names of the Partition, names like Gandhi, Jawarhalal Nehru, Ali Jinnah, Winston Churchill, Dickie Mountbatten and his wife Edwina. The truth that lies behind the real history nobody can know, but what is true is that the Partition is a story of violence and loss. While India and Pakistan gained Independence, the British Empire lost its greatest colony, Gandhi lost his dream of achieving a united nation that would gather Muslims and Hindus, and the first leader of democratic India, Jawarhalal Nehru, felt that all his dreams of life and freedom had turned into chaos and destruction:

Millions of people would be displaced; millions would be wounded; hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions more, would die. During the next few days, riots would spread across the divided states of the Punjab and Bengal, and a holocaust would begin (Von Tulzemann 7).

Heroism and incompetence caused one of the major holocausts in the twentieth century. The days of British splendour were gone, the great names were put to the margins and the margins came to the fore. The personal stories of the common people began to be considered.

In the 1970s the rise of the social history in the west, buoyed by structuralist arguments of the Marxists and Braudelians, forced historians to shift their gaze from the men in the corridors of power to the nameless and faceless common people, men and women. The new millenium has produced some innovative studies in the Partition history (Kaushik 2014). It is in this new social framework that women appear on the scenery of Partition as a subaltern group and with specific ways of having experienced the episode.



Parallel to the political negotiations that took place over the years and that ended up in the tragic outcome, there was a movement among women pushed by Kamala Nehru, who had married the Indian leader and “who thought little of meek obedience and still less of pretty ignorance” (Von Tuzemann 70). She had married Nehru when she was seventeen, and, though being barely educated, she devoted herself to the cause of women pushing forward their fight for rights, education and struggle for their independence in the patriarchal society of the subcontinent. This was later undertaken by Edwina Mountbatten, who called for the emancipation of women despite the backwardness of the country, the illiteracy rate and the low standards of living. So women acquired an active role in the political sphere when the country was getting ready for Independence. But these efforts were unsuccessful, and, even more, women were the group that was most violently affected by the horror of Partition, which somehow was connected with the social reality of women in the subcontinent: “As always there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion).” (Butalia 3).

Therefore, despite the efforts made by great public women previous to the Partition, the stories of women that were affected by the historical episode are also stories of loss, because reality shattered their dreams to achieve any possible expectation in the aftermath of Partition. These stories are those of women who suffered silently, and who, still today, have not conquered spaces of freedom as human beings. They live on the other side of silence.

However, the partition of India is much more than just a historical fact (see Ahmed 2012; Nair 2011; Chester 2009). It is a compelling literary theme that still today continues to inspire creative outpourings by writers. History and na(rra)tion intermingle. Perhaps this is both an attempt to overcome the tremendous trauma created by Partition, and to bear witness to the forces of communalism, class divide and patriarchy behind the violent division, which continue to play out across the Indian subcontinent today and even throughout the world in different, subtle ways. Literature serves the purpose to reflect such terrible episodes in the history of humankind. By re-reading the past horrors of our history we can maybe shed light to hidden clues of understanding among us in our contemporary times.

Thus, the theme of Partition has inspired many Indian writers and has been tackled from many different perspectives, both in the corpus of Indian literature and Indian English narrative. Representative examples would be novels like *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Khuswant Singh; *Tamas* (1974) by Bhisham Sahni; *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie; short stories like “Toba Tek Singh” (1955) by Saadat Hasan Manto; and poems like those of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, who has also lamented the holocaust, in *Subh-e-Azadi (Freedom's Dawn, 1974)*.

When approaching the contemporary Indian English novel we have to depart from the idea of India as “a paradigmatic example of [...] ‘an imagined community’ whereby large numbers of people come together to constitute that political and cultural entity known as ‘the nation’” (Gopal 11). Consequently, the Indian English novel has to be approached from a threefold perspective that would gather history, nation and narration. The novel thus analyzed would reveal the specific ‘idea





of India' that the writer aims to depict and that would shape the literary in terms of the specific historical circumstances the subcontinent is undergoing because "this is a genre that began with an interest on how to read the past and continues to remain concerned with the question of 'the burden of history'" (Ghosh 312). Thus, in the anglophone Indian novel we can find a conversation between the present and the past that would hopefully allow for the future restoration of such a traumatic episode in the history of the subcontinent. In Priyamvada Gopal's words: "In its attempts to understand through reading the past, 'sufferings of the present', the anglophone novel is, finally, an engaged and dynamic participant in a conversation that is taking place across the literary spectrum of India" (187).

Following this train of thought, my aim in this article is to analyze in a diachronic perspective the novels of three Indian female authors: *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) by Attia Hosain, *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by Anita Desai and *An Unrestored Women* (2016) by Shobha Rao, to emphasize this threefold perspective and to prove how female writing in English, in its evolution, becomes a tool to denounce, once more, the reality of women in India (Escobedo de Tapia 2018).

What is the role of women in the history of this event? How does history shape their stories? Where lies the link between history and memory? In fact, what are their stories?

Ethnicity, communalism, religious fundamentalism, cultural nationalism are issues inherent to the Indian subcontinent and they were anticipated by the religious-based division of the country caused by the Partition, which "posed the question of 'belonging'", polarizing "choice and allegiance, aggravating old, and new, antagonisms" (Menon and Bhasin 21). The marginal place that women have historically, culturally and socially occupied in Indian society provides the background to the way women have given answers in their narratives to the questions previously posed. According to Joan Kelly, "women's history has a dual goal: to restore women to history and to restore our history to women" (9). So we will prove how the novels under analysis achieve the aim of "making women a focus of enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative" (Wallacht Scott 36).

Traditionally, female Indian English writing has been the space where women have found their voice claiming for a redefinition of their identity, but above all this fiction represents the evolution of the social situation of women, which has always been linked to their historical circumstances. Female Indian writing in English has been diverse: from feminist and reivindicative, such as Nayantara Sahgal and Sashi Deshpande, whose creativity was based on political ideals and who searched for an identity in the past to redefine their present, to authors like Anita Desai in *Fasting, Feasting* (1999), who aimed to transcend time trying to find answers in the concept of a global human being. On the whole, their discourses of freedom are based on the development of three attitudes which are directly related to the context of India: taking conscience of an identity, searching for freedom in the domestic environment, and identifying themselves with Mother India; three generations of Indian women writing that represent the transition from a postcolonial discourse to a gender discourse. We identify thus an evolution of a feminist conscience from documenting reality through their novels to exploring that reality subtly projecting



new values and ideals. However their reality is, and has always been, a fragmented one and they seem to be entangled within psychological conflicts rooted in their own context and in the clash with the progress brought about by the West. That is why we would find in this fiction female characters that search for their identity in their cultural roots. They represent a new class of women who moves between tradition and modernity and looks for a compromise with that new reality anchored in an image of freedom that seems to be veiled yet, as Anita Desai narrates beautifully in her short story “Winterscape” (Escobedo and De Quevedo 2018: 93-102).

Official records of the Partition appear to exclude women, but it is not due to the fact that they were absent from the event; on the contrary, no account of the horrors of Partition would be faithful to reality if it does not touch the violence that women experienced at that historical moment, because this goes parallel to the shock of Partition which, in fact, provides an opportunity to explain the representation of the language of aggression so “violence becomes a language that constitutes –and reconstitutes the subject” (Pandey 4).

Women were the silent subjects of the event and this is where Partition female fiction plays a role, because “Partition fiction has been a far richer source both because it provides popular and astringent commentary on the politics of Partition and because, here and there, we find women’s voices speaking for themselves” (Menon and Basin 2).

The official historical records of the true stories of women seem to be unreliable data, and the written history of women simply non-existent. Grandmothers told their stories to their daughters and they transmitted them to their granddaughters. Contemporary female Indian English writing aims to restore the wrecked history of women, and those stories that were part of the oral tradition seem to be given voice through female narratives. Female fiction pays homage to those hidden figures of history, and their memories from Partition aim to rehabilitate their stories since “in the history of any society, narratives of particular experiences of violence go towards making the community- and the subject of history” (Pandey 4).

These stories, as we shall see, are, intrinsically, narratives of loss: loss of homes, loss of friendships, loss of families, loss of love, and, most importantly, a profound loss of a sense of belonging; and in their loss, a shared destiny, as “accounts of history, of shared experiences in the past, serve to constitute these, their extent and their boundaries” (Pandey 4). And the same could be applied to stories. Female narratives of Partition aim to emphasize the chasm between history and memory, but with an aim for rehabilitation and restoration. Paradoxically, the Partition meant a world fallen apart, but for historians it signified the beginning of a new constitutional order and new political arrangements and, therefore, the survivors should start anew. That holocaust would bring about a reconstitution of community and history. Historical memory blends with private individual memories that ultimately shape the fictional stories of female experiences, depicting a period in the history of the nation that in turn represents the real situation of women in the Indian subcontinent.

In my analysis of the novels, I identify a threefold process regarding how the authors tackle the female experience of Partition: memories of rescue, memories



of recovery and memories of rehabilitation, the same process undergone by many abducted and raped women during the Partition (Butalia 110). For this purpose, I will focus on the main female characters and how their identities and memories are construed in relation to the historical moment of Partition.

*Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) is considered an autobiographical novel, since Hosain had to face the fragmentation of her family due to Partition. She tells the story of an upper-class Muslim family in transition which goes parallel to the events that led to important changes in the nation. The story of this family represents the situation that many Hindu and Muslim families had to suffer at that historical moment. The story presents a first person narration by Laila, and the author weaves her individual story parallel to the political crisis that the nation was facing. However, the human story overtakes the political events, since the characters take part in the political affairs of the country. Twenty years are covered both of the family story and Indian history, from 1932 to 1952, and all throughout we observe the evolution of orphan Laila, who in turn epitomizes the evolution of women in the country. There is a temporal flow that brings the reader back and forth in time. The beginning of the story shows Laila having to face her grandfather's illness and death. We are told of the resultant changes that the domestic environment undergoes at the same time, since the lifestyle of the Zenana<sup>1</sup> seems to start disappearing too. Memories here are of rescue, and the reader is told about ancestral traditions, family relations and tensions, peculiar relatives that come and go, weddings and funerals taking place. Laila is the subject of the story and would gradually evolve into an agent of the narrative. In the second part we find Laila facing a new life, since she moves to a different house and starts studying at university. Historical events seem to provoke a family turmoil, and the Taluqdars<sup>2</sup> way of life seems to be shaken. Important changes are taking place in the family, the same as in society and the nation. Laila looks for and identity in the midst of this reality and in this second part her relationship with other characters is illustrative of how she gradually adopts an active role in the development of the narrative. We find in this part a Laila who seems to be torn between two worlds, the British and the Indian. She realizes that the world background she grew up in is in decline, but not much can be done except trying to adjust to changes. She belongs to the third generation of her family and stands as the image of a new young woman who has achieved education, but she still recalls the past times of her family almost in nostalgia. She tries to redefine her identity questioning basic principles on which her class had built up the social hierarchy, influenced by changes that are taking place and by the ideas of freedom and equality brought about by the western world. In this part, Hosain portrays a very realistic picture of the Indian society as well as the mayhem it faced at the height of the Indian Independence movement. Laila is torn between

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<sup>1</sup> The women's quarters, a secluded space.

<sup>2</sup> The Taluqdars were Indian landholders during the Mughal Empire and the British Raj. They were in charge of collecting the taxes from a district.



memories of rescue and memories of recovery. She is caught up in the confusion of whether to follow what she thinks is right or what society thinks appropriate: “some things never change. Obey your elders and do not hurt them. [...] You must learn that your ‘self’ is of little importance. It is only through service to others that you can fulfil your duty” (252). We observe at this moment a kind of rebellious attitude from a quiet and docile girl, as she asks: “but why should they hurt me?” (252). She had always been a troubled and thoughtful child, keeping her thoughts to herself. Laila is constrained by social rules but she believes in notions of love, equality and independence. The conception of love and marriage is an aspect worth highlighting. For other female characters like Zahra, marriage is a means to escape from the purdah culture and the strict discipline imposed on unmarried girls; individual happiness is relegated, for “what has love to do with marriage? It is like mixing oil and water. Love is antisocial, while matrimony preserves the world and its respectability” (296). Laila marries Ameer searching for completeness; she is truly in love with him. This is one of the most important aspects through which we observe the evolution of Laila, since marriage has always been a controversial issue as related to women’s freedom in India. She rejects and even hates the sophisticated masks of high-class people, although she respects the old world and its ways. She has evolved into a logical and realistic young lady able to critically analyze important matters because education has enabled her to think and revise the old *versus* the new. Laila’s fragmentation goes parallel to the effects that the Partition had on families like hers, fractured and divided by their beliefs and many of them forced to leave their native land looking for opportunities in a newly formed nation. Laila’s assertion of her individual identity projects the freedom struggle the nation is undergoing. In this context, Laila represents a generation of young women immersed in confusion, troubled and fighting to make a place for themselves in a new changing country. This generation of women endured psychological violence, since they had to cope with the social rules of the times and their own individual desires as human beings, as when Laila’s aunt disproves her views about a love story which pushed a Muslim girl to run away with a Hindu boy; Laila says: “after all, there have been heroines like her in novels and plays, and poems have been written about such love” (134). And her aunt answers, “Laila! I cannot imagine what has come over her. It is so unlike her. She is such a quiet girl. [...] I think you may go to your room now” (134).

The novel illustrates the Indian women of the 1930s and 1940s, victims as they were of the patriarchal system even within the domestic space, as we read about a group of five girls questioning life with the knowledge they acquire through literature, which has always meant a space of freedom for women:

The five of us spent as much time together as possible. When we were not arguing we were dissecting and questioning life, with the fear and the courage, the doubts and the certainty of inexperienced, questioning youth. Our world was bounded by our books, and the voices that spoke to us through them were great men, profound thinkers, philosophers and poets (128).



Laila's evolution symbolizes the struggle for social freedom and the quest for her selfhood, despite the fact that "Attia Hosain indeed bares and exposes the limits of patriarchy that except domination it never knows anything else" (Kandhare 38).

In this novel, consequently, we find childhood memories of rescue and recovery before the arrival of the colonizer. The past is used by Laila to shape her identity in a changing present that apparently seems fragmented, just like the nation, but at the same time her memories of rescue allow for memories of recovery which turn into memories of restoration and hope, since not only are we told about the wrongs, faults and cruelties of the society of the times of Partition and the effects it had on women, but we are also left with the celebration of the past, the feudal times, that somehow allows Laila to survive as the "new woman". Finally, if the Partition in this novel is shown as the agent of loss in many spheres of life, through the evolution of the female character of Laila we foresee a positive attitude towards the future, because the fact that she is able to decide her future means triumphing over the social world in which she lives, and thus the novel ends by emphasizing Laila's divided self:

I looked more closely at the face that stared back at me from the dusty mirror [...]. She was so different from me, that girl whose yesterdays and todays looked always towards her tomorrow, while my tomorrows were always yesterdays" (319).

In the second novel under scrutiny, *Clear Light of Day* (1980), the reader finds him/herself immersed within the flow of memories that Anita Desai outlines with her unmistakably poetic prose. The narrative flows between the past and the present: the 1930s, 1947 to 1948, and a few days in the 1970s, distributing the structure of the plot in four parts. Again, the story takes place within a domestic environment, this time in Delhi; and again the climax of the Das family story is set in times of the Partition of the nation. Memories here are linked to memories about the country. There are two main female characters, Tara and Bim: two women, two options, and two destinies that in the end converge. The novel starts with Tara revisiting the family home. After having left years ago to marry Kabul, a young diplomat, and having moved to the US, Tara returns home and reunites with her sister Bim, regaining her past at the same time. We perceive the house and the characters' feelings through her eyes. It is in the second part of the novel where the author weaves the plot through memories of rescue and recovery of a lost domestic realm. Precisely in this section coalesce the individual stories of these women and the history of the nation. Childhood memories of the past evoke happiness that contrasts with the events that took place in the summer of 1947, which constitutes, the same as in the previous novel, the background for the family fragmentation. The gradual disintegration of both the country and the family run parallel. Memories bring us back to the summer when their mother falls ill and dies, which somehow becomes a metaphor that implies the death of the Nation. It is in chapter Two where we most clearly identify the relationship established among history, nation and narration:



Isn't it strange how life won't flow, like a river, but moves in jumps, as if it were held back by locks that are opened now and then to let it jump forward in a kind of flood? There are these long still stretches —nothing happens— ... and then suddenly there is a crash- mighty deeds take place... That summer was certainly one of them- the summer of '47' (42).

It is at this point that Bim refuses to ever marry and devotes herself to taking care of her aunt and brother. This shows the sacrifice of many women of the time who renounced their social destiny, matrimony, and they are further driven to the margins. However, she attends college and works as a teacher, bringing to the fore an image of an independent woman, but once more trapped in her destiny. Tara, on the contrary, stands as the image of a woman who manages to escape the social constraint of her native context; but the image that we get is that of a traitor almost, since she gets married but flees from India to the US. This contrast and division between the two sisters actually represents the division of the country. Memories of rescue and recovery seem to aim at remembering the times of school days, when the family was together, but they fail to find consolation, because the past is not comforting either, since memories are distorted. Remembrances of childhood do not really affect their freedom, nor mental or psychological stability, as opposed to another female character, Aunt Mira, who ends up committing suicide as a result of the recollection of memories from the past. The background here is the moment in which the Partition takes place; the nation breaks and Gandhi is murdered. The past seems to be shattered and destruction comes about, since “there'll be more riots-killing- they'll slaughter every Muslim they can find- anywhere” (93); likewise, “the heat enclosed the house and all of them in it, sulphur-yellow in colour and tinged, like an egg-yolk, with blood” (96). From this point of the narrative on, it aims for rehabilitation. The female characters try to find the path for understanding their present lives. Memories of rescue and recovery have provided the clues for healing wounds, and in the last chapter the past, which meant destruction, reveals itself as preserver. Tara and Bim finally come to understand the past. They end up achieving freedom as human beings, finally re-discovering their true selves. Their feelings converge and they restore the past through love, which is the place where they finally find answers that gather them together. This stands as a metaphor used to remind us that the revision of past episodes like the Partition is mainly to restore the present and to avoid making the same mistakes, but above all love becomes the means by which we can prevent our destruction and the destruction of history: “to turn to the past means to take courage and face the truth in order to live with it. If people succeed in doing so, they will realize that life means love, love for others, not self-love which needs the applause of others” (Riemenschneider 58).

Finally, these women, through recovering memories from the past, ultimately achieve freedom, the same as the nation; but contrary to the aftermath of Indian Independence that gave way to violence and destruction, they foresee a clear future, since everything had been at last cleared out of the way: “there was nothing left in the way of a barrier or a shadow, only a clear light pouring down from the sun” (177). History, nation and narration meet; by remembering, women feel part



of the history of their nation: “That soil contained all time, past and future, in it. It was dark with time, rich with time. It was her deepest self lived, and the deepest selves of her sister and brothers and all those who shared that time with her” (182).

The two previous novels analyzed tackle mainly the psychological aspects of women and use the Partition as the milieu of their recollections and as an excuse to show the social violence on women. *An Unrestored Woman* (2016), on the contrary, drives the reader into an overt context of gender violence and aggression against women. The title of the book is very significant, since the positive outlook on the future of women that we may infer from the narratives of the previous authors is clearly shuttered. The title explicitly reveals the real situation of women during Partition and the trauma of the event is the point of departure of the stories. The clear purpose of the author is to focus on the violence and horrors of the Partition on women. In the preface, the author immediately informs the reader about the brutalities inflicted upon women, and history, nation and narration are here intermingled; we cannot tell truth from fiction, and the narrative becomes almost a report of the violence that women suffered during the holocaust:

In 1988 a women’s journal, *Manushi*, published a review of a Gujarati book, *Mool Suta Ukhde* (Torn from the Roots). [...] a sort of memoir and documentary account [...] they were forced to parade naked in the streets, others had their breasts cut off, their bodies were tattooed with marks by the opposing religion, they were forced to have sex with men of the other religion, many were impregnated. They bore children, often only to have them taken away forcibly. Sometimes families traded in their women, in exchange for freedom, at other times the women simply disappeared, abducted from camps, or as caravans of people marched across the border foot. But that hundreds, indeed thousands, of women had been subjected to rape, and abduction, was now clear”

(Butalia 132).

These are the real data of the horror and this is what we find in this collection of twelve stories. Rao seizes the event to show the situation of women in current India and Pakistan. As Butalia says, “history is a woman’s body” (43), and, indeed, the writer enlightens this, driving us into desolation as we read her novel. History, nation and narration fuse, since the woman’s body in her stories becomes the metaphor for the nation, whose innocence was once stolen and violated, such as in “The Opposite Sex” (Rao 123-142). Here the power of a cartographer enables him to win the love of a woman by drawing new borders that will cause suicide, murder and riots in the streets. We find wives abused, such as in “The Imperial Police” (41-59), whose protagonist, a British head constable, falls in love with a Sikh woman and gives evidence of the lack of communication and of how women fall victims to male desire. The widow is also represented, as in “The Merchant’s Mistress” (17-40), where young Renu recalls: “it reminded her of standing with her husband, Gopichand, who’d been killed by a Muslim mob two years ago, on their scrubby acres of land, and gazing toward the blue and distant Shivalik Hills” (22). These memories of rescue and recovery do not allow her for rehabilitation though, for:



Renu was nineteen when she left the refugee camp and traveled to Ahmedabad. It was the Winter of 1949. She'd been there two years, just long enough to understand that she, along with the eight hundred other widows stationed at the camp, had absolutely no future ahead of them (19).

The very first story, "An Unrestored Woman" (1-15), renders a profound sense of loss and a pessimistic stance. The story tells us about a girl who gets married when she is thirteen, becomes a widow two years later, and is witness to her mother-in-law's suicide. It is a story of dreams vanished and lost hopes of female freedom. Neela remembers trying to restore her present; she contemplates the branches of a banyan tree, symbol of the nation, and thinks "How long had it stood there? Maybe hundred of years. She thought of her mother and wondered whether she'd been cradled in her arms for even a moment before she'd died. She thought of her father"(15).

She thought and recalled, but "she felt her eyes warm with tears" (15), and looking back into the branches she felt they gathered to hold her and "held her as she had always dreamed of being held. As she would never be held again." (15). There is no hope. Women cannot trust the Indian nation.

Memories here do not aim for rehabilitation. In fact the stories portray real loss, because the aim of the writer is to show that women have not yet been restored. And will they ever be?

Especially significant is "The Lost Ribbon" (105-122), where we find the story of a Hindu woman who remembers her past when she was kidnapped and raped, and got pregnant, like many women during the times of Partition. She was fourteen then, and she had to decide whether to kill her child to keep her from the abductor's cruelty, or let her live out of her maternal instinct. Memory is essential in this story; remembrances of rescue and recovery allow her to review the trauma of this episode in her life, and she tries to overcome it in search of rehabilitation; because memory can be cathartic since, as she herself says, "it's funny though, the things we suffer and the things we remember about that suffering [...] that's how memory works, skips like a happy pebble, even if the memory is so very far from happy. Imagine if we remembered things exactly as they happened" (107). However, she clearly remembers: "and so I looked at you and I looked at you and I held you and then killed you. I killed you" (121). Finally, she realizes her lost innocence, just like the entire Indian nation: "what happened to that girl? The one who stood in the silence of a summer afternoon and felt her heart beating. Where is that girl? That heart?" (121). Dreams of childhood lost, dreams of a united nation vanished.

We follow some of the women across the Atlantic, maybe trying to escape their destinies, like Meena in "Unleashed" (61-79). But not even in their flee do they find rehabilitation, and this links with the last story, "Curfew" (221-238), where we find Rao's true message in the last words of the novel; Safia thought:

How long the journey, [...]. How far away that abode of peace. And yes, its door may close. Its lights may dim. And it may not even be for us to enter. But this, Safia thought -running and running and running- this is how you begin (238).





In other words, Indian women's destiny (women's in general) means permanent escape, entangled in a circularity of time and history.

The narrative blends here with the actual historical records, which reveal that the recovery operation for abducted women continued over nine years after the Partition, and though 30,000 women were recovered, it gradually turned more difficult, since they were not willing to leave their children (born from rapes). Special homes were set up to allow them to make up their minds with no pressure, but "how much of a free choice this actually gave women, is another question" (Butalia 164).

As we have proved through this diacronic analysis, there is a clear evolution in the way Indian female authors tackle the theme of Partition, from the 1960s up to the contemporary times. The three examples stand denounce the 'truth,' and so the stories of women we read about tell us about the dark side of freedom which, if explored, inexorably reveals history itself. Thus, as we have seen in all the novels, history, nation and narration intermingle. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* and *Clear Light of Day* depict women psychologically affected by Partition. They are trapped in their domestic environment and silenced by the social constraints; they are women who feel identified with the Mother Nation in the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial, and in their fight for their Independence. Their stories are told through a subtle narration, making history almost elusive. On the other hand, *An Unrestored Woman* strikes us very straightforwardly, and aims to clearly show the violence suffered by women during Partition, to finally conclude that there is no hope, not even today. While the memories of rescue and recovery in the first two novels seem to search for sunlight towards a clear daylight finally turning into memories of rehabilitation, these are loudly vanished with the memories of rescue and recovery we identify in the last novel, which eventually aims to denounce that women are yet unrestored. Rao steps onto the other side of silence, and openly depicts the true stories of the hidden history of women at that historical moment, giving evidence that "the history of Partition was a history of deep violation-physical and mental-for women" (Butalia 131). The novel can be framed within the last trend of Indian female narratives which aim to make the world aware of the true reality of women in India, in an attempt to, hopefully, gain their space of freedom as human beings in the twenty first century, eventually restoring a sense of belonging lost in the midst of their stories all throughout history.

Furthermore, Attia Hosain, Anita Desai and Shobha Rao shape their narratives with a sense of loss, but their memories of rescue and recovery should remind us that revisiting the past, especially traumatic episodes like the Partition, should be central to find clues for understanding our present in an attempt to restore the errors committed by humankind, which also proves the evolution of Indian female writing from the postcolonial to the global and transnational, ultimately becoming transglobal.

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# NARRATING A FRAGMENTED NATION: ARUNDHATI ROY'S *MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS*

Nalini Iyer  
Seattle University, USA

## ABSTRACT

Published nearly 20 years after the award-winning debut novel, *God of Small Things*, Roy's *Ministry of Utmost Happiness* seeks to articulate a postcolonial nation's history from the perspective of the marginalized. Anjum, a hijra, Saddam Hussain, a Dalit, and Tilottama, a maverick young woman are among the main characters in this sprawling narrative whose tales intertwine to capture the failure of the secular democratic nation state. Although Anjum's family history begins with the Partition and its impact on the Muslims in Delhi, the prime historical focus of the novel is post-Emergency. This essay proposes that the novel's sprawling form is a deliberate aesthetic choice which reflects the author's engagement with the challenges of telling a national narrative from the perspective of multiple minoritarian perspectives.

KEYWORDS: Arundhati Roy, Dalit, Hijra, Kashmir, *Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Postcolonial India

## RESUMEN

Publicada 20 años después de su aclamada *The God of Small Things*, la segunda novela de Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* persigue articular la historia de India poscolonial desde el punto de vista de personajes marginales. La *hijra* Anjum, el intocable Saddam Hussain, y la joven disidente Tilottama destacan en esta narración polifónica, que muestra el estado laico indio como un proyecto fracasado. Aunque la historia de Anjum comienza con la Partición y sus consecuencias en la población musulmana de Delhi, la novela se centra en los años posteriores al período de Emergencia Nacional. Este artículo estudia la técnica narrativa polifónica como una apuesta estética de la autora para mostrar la dificultad que entraña explicar el relato nacional desde la perspectiva de las minorías.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Arundhati Roy, Cachemira, Dalit, India postcolonial, *Hijra*, *Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.

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Published nearly 20 years after the award-winning debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (MUOH) has been a much-anticipated novel. Unlike the first novel which had critiqued caste and gender politics in a globalizing India by focusing on a family's tragedy and pain through the coming of age story of twins, Estha and Rahel, MUOH, seeks to articulate a postcolonial nation's history from the perspective of the marginalized. Anjum, a hijra, and Saddam Hussain, a Dalit, and Tilottama, a maverick young woman are the main characters in this sprawling narrative and their tales intertwine to capture the failure of the secular democratic nation state. Although Anjum's family history begins with the Partition and its impact on Muslims in Delhi, the prime historical focus of the novel is post-Emergency. Roy writes of Dalit lynchings, the pogrom against Sikhs in 1984, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism and the communal riots in Gujarat, the impact of the army occupation and jihadi movements on Kashmir, and the growth of resistance movements against the government. The novel, thus, raises questions about India's democracy and the plight of minorities within this regime particularly in the last four decades.

In locating Anjum's family history in the Partition, this novel explores what many Partition scholars recognize as the continuing impact of the decolonization of the subcontinent in 1947 and the subsequent formation of two (and later three) new nations. As Ayesha Jalal has noted Partition marks a "defining moment that is neither beginning nor end" (1). Vazira Zamindar terms this "the Long Partition" and recognizes that Partition needs to be understood beyond the events of 1947. Zamindar notes that we must "stretch our understanding of 'Partition violence' to include the bureaucratic violence of drawing political boundaries and nationalizing identities that became, in some lives, interminable" (2). Partition scholars recognize that the events of 1947 transformed diverse ethnic identities and lived experiences of people and consolidated them into monolithic narratives of "Hindus," "Muslims," and "Sikhs." Urvashi Butalia, Gyan Pandey, Kavita Daiya among others have noted that the violence and upheaval of Partition also created discourses of citizenship and belonging on the subcontinent. Daiya writes "The Partition constitutes a field of transformation and a discourse that became the condition of possibility for the gendered ethnicization of citizenship and belonging in postcolonial South Asia" (5). In a similar vein, Roy's novel traces how the vectors of caste, gender, sexuality, and region intersect with Partition derived Hindu-Muslim-Sikh monolithic identities of citizenship, belonging, vulnerability, and precarity in postcolonial and post-Emergency India. Early in the novel when tracing Anjum's family history, Roy describes Partition as, "God's carotid burst open on the new border between India and Pakistan and a million people died of hatred" (17). When Anjum (born Aftab) meets Nimmo Gorakhpuri, another hijra, in the walled city of old Delhi, she tells him that the hijra home, the Khwabgah that Anjum wants to be a part of, is all "sham and fakery" (27). Nimmo continues,

No one's happy here... what are the things...normal people get unhappy about? ... Price-rise, children's school-admissions, husbands' beatings, wives' cheatings, Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war--*outside* things settle down eventually. But for



us the price-rise and school-admissions and beating-husbands and cheating-wives are all *inside* us. The war is *inside* us. Indo-Pak is *inside* us. It will never settle down. It *can't*. (27).

Thus, Roy deftly expands the discourse of Partition beyond Hindu-Muslim-Sikh to include the gendered body. In choosing a Dalit man, a Malayalee Christian woman, a Kashmiri man, and a hijra as her narrative focal points, Roy expands the idea of minoritization in India beyond the Partition binary of Hindu-Muslim/Indo-Pak. Whereas Anjum's experience in the Gujarat riots and the Kashmir question can be directly tied to the Long Partition, *MOUH* also insists on recognizing caste, gender, and sexuality as complicating mainstream narratives of Hindu-Muslim, patriot/jihadi that permeate political discourses in the public sphere.

Roy's sprawling narrative has confounded her reviewers, many of whom seem to have expected something similar to *The God of Small Things* with its tightly woven plot, the acerbic political commentary, brilliant word play, and tragic characters. While some critique its sprawling form, others are challenged by its politics. Michiko Kakutani writes in *The New York Times* that the new novel has "moments of ...heartfelt sympathy, but it is less focused on the personal and the private than on the 'vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation.'" Kakutani laments the structure of the novel which she argues "bogs down, badly, in the middle" (Kakutani 2017). Reviewing the novel in *The Hindu*, South Asian writer and critic Tabish Khair, guardedly praises *MUOH* for its narrative style because it is a political novel in the same way V.S.Naipaul's novels are although the writers have radically opposed political perspectives. Khair celebrates the novel for taking a political stand and thus forgives it for all the telling it does over showing in its narrative style. He ultimately praises the novel for its ability to empathise across differences which makes the novel and its writers significant in "an age of selfies" (Kahir 2017). Thus reviewers struggle between admiring the novel for its ethical and political commitment while trying to account for its sprawl. There seems to be a lingering disappointment for some reviewers about the failure of the novel to live up to its predecessor's promise in terms of form.

I suggest that the novel in its sprawling form takes on an important question for postcolonial writing-- how does one narrate a fragmenting nation? Much of postcolonial fiction grapples with the failure of the postcolonial nation state to deliver on the promises of democracy and the betrayal of the people by the anti-colonial nationalists who quickly turned into postcolonial dictators. From Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o to Salman Rushdie and M.G. Vassanji, postcolonial writers have grappled with this question. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan writes:

An exhaustion with nationalist sentiments was in any case to be expected as the first exaltation of freedom subsided and the postcolonial nation settled into the bad habits of nationhood. When the nation was newly decolonized and still «developing,» a member in good standing of the Third World community of nations, it could legitimately call forth high-minded patriotic commitment. But the nation that has begun to perceive itself as transforming into a military and economic superpower is a very different entity. It is now a big as well as bad nation. (205)



In South Asian literary works, the bloody birth of India and Pakistan often mark this shift toward disillusionment with high-minded ideals of nation. In writing about the postcolonial nightmare from the perspective of multiply marginalized minorities, Roy, as a novelist, faces the challenge of telling the many stories of contemporary India in a genre, the novel, which in using protagonists and antagonists, primary and secondary plot lines will necessarily emphasize some people and their stories above others. While Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* had confronted a similar narrative dilemma and had used magical realism and Saleem Sinai—the switched at birth boy born of Hindu working-class parents, raised by an affluent Kashmiri Muslim family, and magically able to channel multiple voices of the many midnight's children—to narrate the birth of a postcolonial nation and its subsequent crumbling,<sup>1</sup> Roy chooses a sprawling, multi-focal narrative that is loosely tied together by a foundling. Its patchwork of perspectives, many narrative lines, myriad characters, a narrative voice with a definite political viewpoint bring to mind Roy's political writings post *The God of Small Things* and *MOUH* straddles the boundaries between fiction and polemical prose. Roy is also aware of the politics of representation—how does an influential, upper caste/class writer represent the marginalized without appropriating or romanticizing their experiences?<sup>2</sup> This essay proposes that the novel's sprawling form is not failure of craft but a deliberate aesthetic choice which reflects the author's engagement with the challenges of telling a story of the nation from multiple minoritarian perspectives. The novel explores the process of minoritization of populations and reframes the discussion beyond the politics of Partition. It simultaneously engages with its own project of representation by critiquing the form of the novel and its ability to contain and manage these stories—what Michiko Kakutani sees as its flaw, that it is “so lacking in centripetal forces that it threatens to fly apart into pieces” is precisely its critique of the genre and readerly expectations. At a book tour talk in Seattle, WA, in June 2017, Roy was asked about how she holds herself accountable for her social position in relation to minorities, and her response was that her narrative is impelled by justice and that allows her to write about Dalits, hijras and other marginalized people. This essay will, therefore, examine the form of the novel and how Roy addresses the problem of narrating the nation in its fragments.

In an interview with Decca Aitkenhead of *The Guardian*, Roy remarks that “To me there is nothing higher than fiction. Nothing. It is fundamentally who I am. I am a teller of stories. For me, that's the only way I can make sense of the world, with all the dance that it involves.” In that same interview, Roy also notes that “When people say this business of ‘she's the voice of the voiceless’, it makes

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<sup>1</sup> For a deeper discussion of how Rushdie narrates the nation in *Midnight's Children*, see Timothy Brennan (1989), particularly the chapter “The National Longing for Form.”

<sup>2</sup> This question has also prevailed in the discussion surrounding the depiction of Velutha in *The God of Small Things*. Maryam Mirza (2016) offers an excellent review of these debates and an argument about the importance of Roy's depiction of Velutha not as an eroticized male body but as a representation of how storytelling progressively produces subaltern bodies.



me crazy,' ... 'I say, 'There's no voiceless, there's only the deliberately silenced, you know, or the purposely unheard.'" (Aitkenhead 2017). As a teller of stories, Roy loosely links three major storylines. The first is the story of Anjum, born Aftab, an intersexed child, who was raised male by her birth family but joins a community of hijras where her female identity is accepted. On a pilgrimage to Gujarat, Anjum and her traveling companion, an Imam, are caught up in the 2002 Godhra riots and Anjum survives because she is a hijra and people consider it inauspicious to kill a hijra. Traumatized by the experience and unable to care for her adopted daughter, Zainab, Anjum moves into an abandoned graveyard and gradually builds lodgings over the graves and assembles a rag tag bunch of people and animals who are all refugees from "Duniya," the world outside the graveyard where heteronormativity, patriarchy, caste violence, pogroms, rape, and torture dominate. In Anjum's Jannat Guest House at the graveyard, the living and the dead commune and alternate kinship networks form that include people and animals. The second narrative line is the story of Saddam Hussein, born Dayachand, a Dalit man, who had witnessed his father's lynching by caste Hindus and police because he was transporting a dead cow and was accused of having killed it. Traumatized by that violence, he adopts the name Saddam Hussein because he saw a viral video of the Iraqi dictator's execution in which the man faced his end with defiance. The Iraqi Saddam's final stance inspires Dayachand who wants to avenge his father's death. Having befriended Anjum, he moves into the graveyard with his horse and becomes part of Anjum's tribe. The third storyline focuses on S. Tillotama (Tilo), a Malayalee Christian architect from Kerala, a fictional representation of Arundhati Roy herself, who, as a college student, had had a deep friendship with three men all of whom had been in love with her. Her friend, Biplap Dasgupta nicknamed Garson Hobart in college, is an intelligence officer in Kashmir and the other two men, Naga and Musa, are a journalist and a Kashmiri nationalist respectively. Tilo's love affair with Musa draws her to Kashmir where the Indian army tortures Kashmiris seeking independence and labels them jihadis. Musa has become a freedom fighter after his wife and daughter, Miss Jabeen, are killed by the Indian army while watching a funeral parade of Kashmiri martyrs. Tilo is detained by the occupying Indian army and is being interrogated by the notorious torturer Amrik Singh when she is rescued by Dasgupta and Naga. Tilo marries Naga to avoid the Indian government forces but eventually separates from Naga and becomes the keeper of Musa's secrets. Tilo's path crosses that of Anjum and Saddam at a massive protest rally at Jantar Mantar where numerous groups from Kashmiri mothers of the disappeared to Maoist fighters and Bhopal gas tragedy victims have gathered to protest corruption and seek redress for various injustices. At this rally, an abandoned baby girl becomes the object of both Anjum and Tilo's interest and Tilo kidnaps the baby. Tilo's desire to ensure the baby's safety and Anjum's desire to raise her, brings Tilo into the Jannat Guest House graveyard community as well. What links these three stories is the assemblage of the characters at the graveyard all of whom are invested in Miss Jabeen the Second, the foundling. That loose connection between the plots challenges the reader's sense of credibility, but it is clearly a plot device intended to show that the fates of Kashmiris, Dalits, Muslims, hijras, the poor, and Maoists are all linked to how the nation is imagined





and how that dominant national narrative sustains itself through repressing the marginalized. The marginalized are not just silenced but they are unheard and the protest at Jantar Mantar is a collective refusal to be silenced. Jannat Guest House in the graveyard is an alternative national space in which all are welcome, there are no hierarchies, no birth and blood ties between people, and no rigid identity categories, no single religion, no violence, and no boundaries between the living and the dead. The stories of each of these people —Tilo, Saddam Hussein, Anjum— and that of the myriad other characters who put in cameo appearances such as Gul Kak, Azaad Bhartiya, Nimmo Gorakhpuri are those to which the novel bears witness. The novel, then, is an act of documenting these experiences.

In drawing Tilo with broad brushstrokes of her own biography —one time architect, a Syrian Christian living in Delhi, and the daughter of a feminist who established a school for girls— Roy recognizes her social position as an upper-caste, upper class intellectual telling stories of the marginalized. Tilo is a non-conformist and does not embrace mainstream notions of relationships, marriage, and motherhood. Had the Kashmir narrative been the sole focus of this novel, it would emerge as a romantic narrative of an unconventional woman and her three lovers who symbolize the different parties involved in shaping the Kashmir story —the Indian army, the journalist, and a freedom fighter. However, the Kashmir question is framed as one of the many failures of the Indian state. Kashmir is the unresolved issue from Partition and decolonization that continues to structure not just India-Pakistan relations but also the relationship of the Indian state and army with the people of Kashmir. Additionally, as Roy writes of the 1990s and beyond in Kashmir's politics, she also recognizes the global dimensions of jihad through the story of Amrik Singh. Singh who was the torturer in chief pursuing Musa, Tilo's lover, and humiliating her in his cinema theater turned torture chamber, finds his way to the US and seeks asylum claiming to be a victim of torture and of ethnic violence as a Sikh. The asylum officer buys into his story and the family lives in California where Amrik Singh works as a truck driver. The Kashmiri freedom fighters led by Musa seek him out to avenge the many deaths of the innocent that he had caused. Eventually Singh and his family have a violent end perhaps brought about by Musa with his many passports and identity cards that facilitate his travel to the US.

Roy ties the US war on terror to the politics of Kashmir emphasizing that the Kashmiri struggle is no longer a subcontinental issue but a global one where the Indian occupation is bolstered by the American war on terror. Amrik Singh's manipulation of the Sikh experience of 1984 with his own intimate knowledge of torture in Kashmir to achieve asylum in the United States underscores that subaltern identities are not fixed. To be Sikh is to be both vulnerable to ethnic cleansing as in 1984 and also to be an agent of the Indian army perpetrating violence on others, particularly Kashmiri Muslims. Amrik Singh's wife, who was a victim of domestic violence, convinces the asylum officer that her fears were from the political situation in Kashmir that put her life at risk. Her role in the asylum process marks both her position as active agent in rewriting the Kashmir narrative while simultaneously being victim of the chief torturer. Through Tilo Roy unpacks the many complex and often contradictory views promulgated about Kashmir, and



presents her character as a moral compass for the reader. Tilo documents what she sees in Kashmir, helps Azaad Bhartiya publish his newsletter about governmental atrocities, and befriends people irrespective of their caste, religion, class, or gender identity. In the alternative national space, the Jannat guest house, she becomes *ustaniji* (teacher) who equips young people with skills to continue the struggle. She is an ally of the different groups —Kashmiri freedom fighters, hijras, Dalits, Maoists— and has risked her own life in the pursuit of justice. Through Tilo, Roy articulates the need for solidarity amongst different marginalized groups. By not tying up their stories in a novel that smoothes over inconsistencies and incongruities through slick plot devices, she suggests that the genre must incorporate fable, magical realism, testimonio, reportage and abandon the compulsion to tell stories with beginnings, middles, and ends where all ends well and the world is a better place.

Roy's narrative is also punctuated by self-conscious moments where different methods of truth telling and story -telling are explored. Very early in the novel, Anjum is telling Zainab, her young daughter, a bedtime story based on her life. To the child, Anjum speaks of returning from a party with other hijras and walking over the Defence colony flyover and needing to urinate and not being able to stop to answer nature's call. To Zainab, the point of the story, was scatological humor and Anjum's conversation with a lady on a billboard advertising Bombay Dyeing bath towels. Anjum, the narrative notes, "began to rewire a simpler, happier life for herself" to please her daughter, and "the rewriting in turn began to make Anjum a simpler, happier person" (38). The reader learns that Anjum had edited out of her story the fact that this particular flyover story had occurred in 1976 at the height of the Emergency when Sanjay Gandhi and his Youth Congress terrorized ordinary people. Anjum and her hijra colleagues had gone to a wedding party when the police arrived, arrested the hosts, and beat up the hijras and their driver. The hijras ran over the flyover to save their lives and the Flyover story retained some elements of truth including that "Anjum really did piss while she ran. There really was an advertisement for Bombay Dyeing towels on the Defence Colony flyover" (39). Through this episode, Roy highlights that stories are intentionally changed in retelling sometimes because of the audience and at other times because the teller edits out traumatic and shameful moments to become a "happier person." We, the audience of this novel, then are called upon to ponder our role as audience of difficult stories and what it means for someone to express a traumatic event. The act of listening to these stories necessarily makes the teller relive the trauma and the act of bearing witness as listener then comes with the responsibility of recording it honestly and retelling it to others responsibly.

In a later episode, Kulsoom Bi, the Ustad of Anjum's hijra gharana, regularly takes her hijras to the Sound and Light show at the Red Fort. The novel tells us that this was an old government-approved version of Indian history focused on emperors who had ruled the land for the two hundred years preceding British rule. Kulsoom was interested in the brief episode focused on Mohammad Shah Rangeela's rule and the year 1739. In the show, the invading armies of Nadir Shah approach Delhi and the unperturbed Emperor orders music to play on. Ustad Kulsoom Bi waited for the moment when the show focused on the zenana and amidst the tinkle of anklets



“suddenly, amidst the soft, happy, lady-sounds would come the clearly audible, deep, distinct, rasping coquettish giggle of a court eunuch” (55). For Kulsoom Bi, this was a moment of triumph because “To be present in history, even as nothing more than a chuckle, was a universe away from being absent from it, from being written out of it altogether” (55). At the end of the novel, as the Hindutva government of “Gujarat ka Lalla” (Narendra Modi) sweeps into power, the Sound and Light show at the Red Fort is subjected to revision and “Soon centuries of Muslim rule would be stripped of poetry, music and architecture and collapsed into the sound of the clash of swords and a bloodcurdling war cry that lasted only a little longer than the husky giggle that Ustad Kulsoom Bi had hung her hopes on. The remaining time would be taken up by the story of Hindu glory. As always, history would be a revelation of the future as much as it was a study of the past.” (407). The tourist focused and government derived history of the Sound and Light show is an example of how the nation presents its history to its citizen tourists as well as to its foreign visitors. Early in the novel, the show becomes an example of how an elderly hijra seeks self representation, even a passing one, in such a show to validate her existence. In the rewriting of the show by the Hindutva government not only does Roy demonstrate ideological appropriations of history but sets her own project in opposition to the dominant historical narrative embraced by the Hindutva regime. Not only is this novel a critique of Hindu fundamentalist hegemony, it also seeks to write history from the margins. Hijras are not just a passing, disembodied laughter but a strong narrative focal point. Muslims are represented not through the binary of patrons of high culture/marauding invaders but also as transgendered bodies.

Through Tilo Roy explores alternative ways of writing history: “Tilo had been a weird, part-time stenographer to a full-time military occupation” (274). During her trips to Kashmir she had collected an assortment of photographs, story fragments, observations and they “appeared to have no purpose.” (274). She assembled an “archive of recoveries, not from a flood, but from another kind of disaster” (274) that had become dangerous. One of her notebooks titled *The Reader's Digest Book of English Grammar and Comprehension for Very Young Children* comes back to her with Musa's papers. Mimicking a children's textbook, the notebook contains various vignettes of bloodshed, violence, and oddities. From the death of innocent civilians to the conundrum of cattle crossing the Line of Control from India to Pakistan, these vignettes are followed by seemingly innocuous questions such as those found in textbooks for reading comprehension. The notebook vignettes run several pages and interrupt the main story and the reader joins Tilo for a length of time reviewing her notebook. Tilo had grappled with how to tell the story of Kashmir and in the satire of the textbook genre, Roy critiques the educational system for covering up history because educational systems are geared to produce adults who subscribe to the nation's ideology. Unlike Anjum who had edited her story to make it tolerable to a young listener and to manage her own memories of the trauma, the state produces history books to present only its version of the events. As with the Sound and Light show, these state versions change over time when governments and ideologies shift as well.



Roy's project cannot be wholly represented by Anjum's approach to history nor to Tilo's gathering of scraps of information with no purpose and rendering them into a satirical and incomplete textbook for children. At the end of the novel, Tilo writes a poem she reads to Musa on his last visit to her at the Jannat guest house:

*How  
to  
tell  
a  
shattered  
story?  
By  
slowly  
becoming  
everybody.*

*No.  
By slowly becoming everything (442)*

This brief poem encompasses Roy's underlying premise of this novel. She is writing the fragmented and broken narrative of a nation. There are many stories that must be recovered and that need a "stenographer." Such stories can be told only when the teller becomes everyone and everything. What does such becoming entail? Is it the ability to imaginatively enter the consciousness of a person or thing vastly different from you? Is it embodying everyone and everything? Can an upper-caste woman become a Dalit and tell his story? Can a cisgendered Syrian Christian woman embody a transgender Muslim? Roy's response is to write a novel that is very loosely held together by an assortment of characters and where the last words belong to a dung beetle who lay on his back "to save the world in case the heavens fell" and who celebrated the foundling girl, Miss Udaya Jabeen, born of the gang rape of a Maoist activist, kidnapped by a woman who did not want to be a mother, and raised by a hijra who passionately wanted to be one (441).

Miss Udaya Jabeen, the foundling from Jantar Mantar, becomes another element in the narrative that brings the different plot lines together. The Jannat Guest house denizens learn about her history after a letter arrives for them through Azaad Bhartiya. Her mother had been a Maoist fighting for land rights who had been gang raped by police. She named her baby, born of that rape, Udaya or "Dawn." Clearly, the baby is intended to be a symbol of the nascent alternative to the degenerating and fragmented postcolonial state. She is also named Miss Jabeen the Second by Tilo after Musa's young daughter who had died in her mother's arms when a stray bullet killed them both. Miss Jabeen had always demanded "*Akh daleela wann*" (Tell me a story) of her father (322), and he had engraved that rhyme on her gravestone. Udaya Jabeen represents that never-ending story of the next generation who will craft their own narratives of citizenship and belonging.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy radically questions the form of the novel derived from Western forms and adapted and developed by Indian writers.



She signals through her hybrid and sprawling form that fragmenting nations need narrative forms that offer diverse voices a place of expression. For her, the Indian English novel of the new millennium needs a moral compass and a relentless pursuit of justice, and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is her exploration of both justice and genre.

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# PARTITION AND THE RISE OF HINDUTVA MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Bhagwan Josh  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

## ABSTRACT

Hindutva movement is now actively seeking to capture instruments of state power and trying to impose its cultural hegemony by mobilizing Hindus. In post-Independent India, the Hindutva movement has reached such proportions because the much desired 'left-of-centre' consolidation failed to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. Over these decades, the governments of the day claimed that India was a secular country but in actual practice, because of the fear of losing Muslim votes, they constantly postponed the implementation of a secular agenda thereby opening the space for the Hindutva forces to rush in. Now the political terrain has changed drastically. Is the belief that a multi-religious and culturally diverse society can wield itself into a nation and democratic polity coming apart? Is the sub-continent returning to the European model of building ethnic nation-states underpinned by the cultural codes of a mono-culture or single religion? In a line, could this be attributed to the 'long shadow' of the Partition of India?

KEYWORDS: BJP, Cultural hegemony, Hindutva, RSS, Secularism, Two-nation theory.

## RESUMEN

Hindutva persigue, mediante la agitación entre hindúes, controlar los resortes del poder e imponer la uniformidad cultural. En parte esta preponderancia de Hindutva se debe al fracaso del "centro-izquierda" para consolidarse como fuerza política en las décadas de 1970 y 1980. A lo largo de este tiempo los gobiernos de turno se proclamaban laicos, pero se inhibían de acometer políticas en ese sentido para no perder apoyo entre los musulmanes, lo que ha permitido que el extremismo hindú capitalizara la oposición. En estos momentos el panorama ha cambiado de forma drástica. ¿Puede una sociedad multirreligiosa y multicultural desarrollarse en un estado en descomposición? ¿El subcontinente se está asimilando al modelo europeo de la nación-estado étnica, apoyada en una religión y una cultura exclusivas? En otras palabras ¿es esto una consecuencia de la Partición?

PALABRAS CLAVE: BJP, Hegemonía cultural, Hindutva, Laicismo, RSS, Teoría de los dos estados-nación.

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Since 2014, after it has been able to successfully form the Government at the centre, Hindutva movement (an exclusivist variety of Hindu nationalisms that seeks to construct Indian nation in a supremacist vision) has been actively seeking to capture instruments of state power and simultaneously trying to impose its cultural hegemony by mobilizing Hindus, especially the youth, on the issues of cow-slaughter, beef-eating, terrorism in Kashmir and the tensions with Pakistan, conversions to other religions, singing of the national song *Vande Matram* (hail the motherland), and above all, the longstanding issue of constructing the Ram temple in Ayodhya, at the exact site where Hindu idol Ram has supposed been born centuries ago. Twenty-five years ago, on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1992, three domes of a medieval mosque in a Uttar Pradesh town came crashing down. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, extremist varieties of Hindu nationalism have fought a long battle to change the cultural complexion of the nation. However, during the struggle for India's independence, this movement has been running parallel to the mainstream anti-imperialist movement led by the Indian National Congress and M.K. Gandhi. The Partition of India provided it a new fuel of tremendous anti-Muslim sediment hatred. As millions of Hindu and Sikh refugees began to pour in India by crossing the hurriedly drawn border, a new political climate of anger began to be built up against the Congress leadership, especially against Gandhi, who was seen as still being sympathetic to the Muslims. This is what Nathu Ram Godse explained his action to the trial court, embodying the frustration and anger of millions of Hindus:

I do say that I had no respect for the present Government owing to their policy which was unfairly favourable to the Muslim. At the same time I could clearly see that the policy was entirely due to the presence of Gandhiji. In the absence of such pressure the way is now open for the establishment of a secular State in the true sense of the word. I have to say with great regret that the hon'ble Prime Minister Nehruji quite forgets that his actions and deeds are at times opposed to each other, when he talks about secular State in season and out of season; because it is significant to note that the hon'ble Pandit Nehruji has himself taken a leading part in acquiescing to the establishment of Pakistan, a theocratic State. But he should have realized that it will never bring prosperity to Indian Union with a State founded on fanatically blind religious faith and basis by its side. After having considered absolutely to myself, my mind impelled me to take the action against Gandhiji. (Godse, par. 48)

The Partition of the sub-continent along religious lines convinced the extremist Hindu nationalists that since Pakistan was a Muslim nation, India should be a Hindu nation. Sections of this movement have continued to believe and preach that Indian Muslims are inheritors of a historical tradition of violence by Muslim kings. They have their own understanding of India's "medieval" past which is dubbed as inaccurate and distorted history by self-proclaimed "secular historians". In the conquest of the demolition of a mosque for them, which carried the name of the first Mughal emperor, the celebrations after the demolition appeared to settle multiple



scores. All the Muslims in India did not descend from the Muslim aristocracy, which came from other countries and made India their home. It is generally believed that about 9 out of 10 of them are converts from low-caste Hindus who were attracted to Islam's message of equality. As opposed to the view of secular historians, sections of the Hindutva movement continue to believe that those conversions of the past were forced conversions and were inimical to the organic and natural evolution of Hindu society. Hence, its agenda to stop conversions to Christianity and Islam in post-independent India by various means, including violent means. For them denationalised Christianity and Islam continue to pose serious threat even today and the only way to handle this threat was the creation of a Hindu Rashtra. This agenda, with the complicity of local police, takes the form anti-Christian violent activities at the grassroots level. The anti-conversion agenda, it must be remembered, has legal cover in Madhya Pradesh: sweeping provisions in the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1968, allow police to criminalize conversion (Josh 2009: 97-115).

The partisan ideological notions of the vigilante groups such as "ghar-vapsi" (reconversions to Hinduism) and "love-jihad" (discussed below) are attempts to create in Hindu society a strong awareness to stop such conversions and (crossing over Hinduism's boundaries by young women to non-Hindu cultural enclosures). For them state's efforts to remove poverty through economic development is not enough. The state in independent India (also must become a cultural state). For secularists the idea of such conversions to other non-Hindu religions is blown out of proportion and devised to mislead the people. Moreover, keeping in view the colonial and Congress traditions, India's multi-culturalism must be allowed to remain intact and the Indian state must remain neutral in religio-cultural matters.

For the extreme Hindu nationalist forces, the Muslims who had stayed back after the Partition, irrespective of the Constitution, in actuality, have forfeited their right to Indian citizenship as the new state of Pakistan was demanded in the name of Islam and on behalf of all the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. The Partition had been agreed to by the Congress leaders on the basis of religion. Therefore, the other half of the state, comprising the Indian territory, must now be logically considered and also must existentially become, a Hindu state. This was the agenda of extreme Hindu nationalism since 1930s and the movement embodying it continued to persist as a marginal political force till 1970s. To its credit, the leaders of this movement stood for democracy and opposed the Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975. This was the moment that the RSS was waiting for, to wash the stain of Gandhi's murder and acquire the political respectability to enter the mainstream of India's political life. This led to a sudden turn in its fortunes as it became a part of the Government at the Centre for the first time in 1977, a politically centrist Government that was also supported by the Communists.

In the 1980s, the *Sangh Parivar*, a network of Hindu organisations, sought a new symbol to stir up the Hindu nationalist fervor. It began to actively align itself with the movement seeking to build a grand temple to Hindu God Ram *at the exact site* where a Mosque built by the Mughal emperor Babur stood. In actuality, the demand was based on the "fact" of belief of Hindu masses (Hindu *astha*), and from the very beginning, was cast in the form of a trial of strength between India's



two broad cultural forces—one proclaiming secularism and other extreme Hindu nationalism.

On December 6<sup>th</sup> 1992, the demolition of a dilapidated mosque —known as Mosque— was announced to the world by the BBC correspondent: “Hindus have done something which they had not done in the last five hundred years.” This was the first moment of decisive triumph for this movement. The politicians who had been leading this movement have not looked back since then. A decade after the demolition of the mosque, the Bhataiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power at the Centre and it decided that for V.D. Savarkar’s ideology i.e. Hindutva, be officially recognised, a due ceremony was in order. By 2003, Savarkar’s dream of making India a Hindu nation had finally been moving towards its partial fulfillment. It decided to place Savarkar’s portrait in Parliament House’s Central Hall, along with portraits of the greats of India’s freedom struggle. The shunned, if not hated, ideological variety of Hindu nationalism, and its main articulator despised by many, had finally arrived on the Centre stage of Indian politics. Just like Jinnah, Savarkar had believed that Hindus and Muslims formed Two Nations. Jinnah realized his goal with Partition. Savarkar did not, could not, for India chose to follow Gandhi, Nehru and the Congress. Let it be added here, according to the Kapur Commission of Inquiry Report constituted in 1969, Nathuram Godse had a long meeting with Savarkar on January 23 or 24, before he returned to Delhi and shot Gandhi thrice at point-blank range on January 30<sup>th</sup> 1948. Savarkar was arrested in connection with a conspiracy to kill Gandhi. But there was no direct evidence to legally prove criminal conspiracy. The judge found it “unsafe” to convict Savarkar. Godse and Narayan Apte were awarded death penalty but Savarkar was acquitted.

But the rise of forces of extremist Hindu nationalism were immediately preceded by two other political developments known as—Mandal Commission and L.K. Advani’s Rath Yatra of 1990. Both were closely linked with each other. The Mandal Commission was established in India on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1979. In 1980, the Commission recommended that members of other backward classes (OBC) be granted reservations to 27 percent of jobs under the central government and public sector undertakings. The Report became the site of sharp political contest when the National Front government under V.P. Singh decided to implement this recommendation of the Report in August 1990. The BJP, which was part of this government, perceived it as a deliberate attempt to encourage the identity politics of caste, thereby undermining its ideology of organic Hindu society and denial of primacy of Hindu nationalism over the divisive politics of caste identities. Thousands of young men flocked to Advani’s call, forming the bands of volunteer army which sought to demolish the Masjid unsuccessfully in October 1990, before achieving this ‘success’ two years later. BJP leader L.K. Advani travelled across the country in a chariot from Somnath temple, a temple which had been plundered by the Turk invader Ghazni in 1024, symbolising the crimes of Muslim rulers. Anti-Muslim sentiments were roused to a fever pitch throughout this journey, peaking at levels unsurpassed since the Partition riots.

Preceding and following the demolition of the Babri Masjid were a series of riots, in which thousands of innocent Indians lost their lives. No single event



in independent India has so polarized public opinion; no single event so adversely affected life on the ground, generating widespread suspicion and hostility between groups of citizens —and leading to much violence and suffering too. Today, there are violence-oriented young vigilante groups in various parts of the country which are still continuing to raise the slogans, day in and day out: ‘Musalman kay do hee sthaan, Pakistan ya qabristhan’(there are only two places for Muslims —Pakistan or the graveyard.)<sup>1</sup> Stray incidents of mobs lynching Muslims do form a clear pattern to send the message that Muslims should know their place, that of second-class citizens. All those secularists who were egging on the Muslim leadership not to compromise with Hindus on cultural issues of conflict are now nowhere to be seen. No wonder, a sense of terror has gripped the Indian Muslims. Almost all the leading newspapers are telling the government and the leaders of the BJP to be mindful of their agenda of building a grand temple in Ayodhya before the parliamentary elections of 2019. A long quotation from the editorial of a very important daily will be in order here:

Priests of several akharas in Ayodhya, who clearly have no notion of what spirituality means, have served an ‘ultimatum’ to BJP to build a Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid as a way of ‘avenging’ the deaths of Karsevaks in Godhra in 2002. But the politics of revenge has already caused devastating riots in Gujarat after Godhra —indeed all communal riots are motivated by a similar politics of revenge. It’s a new century now and the country is striving to move past this legacy of violence and bloodshed, stemming from the 1947 Partition, towards a future of peace, development and prosperity. In the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi: ‘sab ka saath, sab ka vikas.’ Attempts to disinter the ghosts of the past, therefore, must be resisted at all costs. The demolition of the Babri Masjid itself was a criminal act to which political authorities turned a blind eye, out of the mistaken notion that nebulous entities such as hypothetical ‘community sentiment’ should gain precedence over the rule of law and constitutional values such as equality and religious liberty. Once enshrined, such a notion will become a principle of instability and anarchy, subverting democracy itself; India will come to resemble neighbouring Pakistan. (“Old obsessions” 2017).

The series of events that led up to the demolition in December 1992, began with the Shah Bano case. In 1978, sixty two years old Shah Bano Begum of Indore was driven out of her matrimonial house by her husband. When Shah Bano sought maintenance under CRPC, section 125, her husband divorced her by resorting to the practice triple *talaq* (divorce). Not only that, her husband Mohammed Ahmad Khan, refused to provide her and her five children promised maintenance of Rs. 500. Various court judgments upheld the right of Shah Bano to monthly maintenance. Rajiv Gandhi came to power in 1984 after the assassination her mother Indira

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<sup>1</sup> At many religious places anti- Christian and anti-Muslim slogans could be found written on the walls. For example these were the slogans on the walls of Shabri temple in Gujarat’s conflict ridden tribal district Dangs: *Hindu jagao, Christi bhagao* (awaken the Hindus and force the Christian missionaries to run away).



Gandhi. Under pressure from Muslim hardliners, his Government enacted a Law in Parliament that overturned the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano case. The 1986 Muslim Women (Protection on Rights of Divorce) Act diluted the Supreme Court judgment and allowed maintenance to a divorced woman only during the period of iddat or till 90 days after the divorce. More importantly, this was done after Muslim leaders protested that the judgment encroached upon the right of the community to be governed by its personal laws. This was widely seen as an appeasement of Muslim orthodoxy and betrayal of the promise of implementation of Uniform Civil Code made in the Constitution. This offended many Muslim and Hindu supporters of the Congress and exposed the hollowness of its ideology of secularism. It was widely believed that Rajiv Gandhi overturned the Shash Bano judgment for fear of losing the Muslim vote. The BJP had strongly criticized the “appeasement” of Muslims. In order to pacify the anger of the Hindus, the gates of the Babri Masjid were unlocked and, three years later, at the end of Rajiv’s tenure, the Vishav Hindu Prishad (VHP) was allowed to carry out the *Shilanyas* (to lay foundation) for the construction of Ram temple. The practice of instant triple *talaq* continued and in August 2017, ShayaraBano and four other women won their case in the Supreme Court. An overwhelming majority of Muslim women wanted an end to practices such as *talaq-e-biddat* (instant triple talaq), *halala* (wherein a Muslim woman if she wants to remarry her divorced husband, must first consummate her marriage with another man) and polygamy. On August 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017, thirty-two years after the Shah Bano case, the Supreme Court of India declared that the practice of triple *talaq* violates the right to equality and is thus against the law. Unlike the Congress Government, the BJP Government is expected to take the triple *talaq* verdict of the Supreme Court to its logical conclusion by framing a very stringent law whereby the government plans to make triple *talaq* a crime punishable with three years in jail and a fine as a “necessary deterrent.” Many Muslim organisations have denounced it as a vicious ploy of the BJP government to criminalise Muslim men.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the Shah Bano case [1985(2) SCC 556], the Supreme Court of India had aptly said: “It is also a matter of regret that Article 44 of the Constitution has remained a dead letter. It provides that the State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India. There is no evidence of any official activity for framing a common civil code for the country. A belief seems to have gained ground that it is for the Muslim community to take the lead in the matter of reforms of their personal law.” “A common civil code will help cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies. No community is likely to bell the cat by making gratuitous concession on this issue. It is the state which is charged with the duty of securing uniform civil code for citizens of the country and, unquestionably it has the legislative competence to do so. A counsel in the case whispered, somewhat audibly, that legislative competence is one thing, the political courage to use the competence is quite another.” Quoted in *The Times of India*, January 8<sup>th</sup> 2017.



## II

In today's world, even when nationalism is once again asserting itself and many governments and parties are busy promoting it, there is no dearth of individuals who still feel convinced that the "nations are lines in the sand, tomorrow they may not be there... why would you give up your life for that?" (Rajanit Kath Ganesh 2017). Yet the explosive power of these "lines" continue to create wars in the contemporary world, including the ones in the post-colonial South Asia. W.H. Auden's unsparing poem 'Partition', written in 1966, is a caustic criticism of the five weeks Cyril Radcliffe spent in the subcontinent drawing up the borders between India and Pakistan. And it is this line, known as "Radcliffe Line", which became the immediate cause of an explosion of violence that killed one million people and displaced 12 million. Retrospectively, it has now been universally accepted that "1947" created a cycle of revenge that has resonated through the decades and still plagues the subcontinent. Thus for it has led to three wars, countless acts of terrorism, polarization around the Cold War powers and both nations spending massive amounts on their military while millions live in poverty. The roots of much of today's violence in the region are in the decisions taken that year. Moreover, "this line", has left an unforgettable legacy which continues to cast a long shadow on the daily lives of Indians in many subtle and not so subtle ways. Each year Partition is being remembered in new ways. On 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2016, the Partition Museum was launched in Amritsar. The latest literary festival in Gurgaon, the place where I live, devoted a special session to "Memories of Partition". In the last few decades, scores of films have been made, novels have been written and plays enacted on the theme of Partition. Also there is a substantial amount of poetry dedicated to this theme. Hardly, a day passes in the lives of the Indian people when some "banal" incident or some statement of an utter "absurdity and stupidity" by some extremist fringe group do not remind Indians of the bitter memories associated with "this line."

With the arrival of a new type of modern colonial state the political power of the erstwhile Muslim rulers was replaced by a new centralised administration based on modern scientific methods. This massive change opened up spaces for the Muslim cultural hegemony, built during the long period of so-called medieval history, to be challenged by the Hindu groups. Thus, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, just thirty years after the great revolt of 1857, India began to be engulfed in massive sectarian riots between the two communities. These peaceful and violent, constitutional as well as non-constitutional, cultural contests on various issues between the Muslim and the Hindu cultural forces were geared towards dismantling the earlier cultural power relations. Even after Partition, this cultural strife has continued intermittently as large number of Muslims had stayed back in India. The rise of the forces of Hindutva were born and nurtured in the interstices created by the continuously occurring violent and peaceful confrontations between sections of the two communities, in this *longue duree* history.

In post-Independent India, while the nationalists in the Indian National Congress sought to contain these Hindu-Muslim cultural contests within a discourse of democracy and mass representation, sections of the Hindus found in this



democratic polity an opportunity to argue for an aggressive strategy, to establish Hindu hegemony by mobilizing Hindus on a multi-pronged agenda. One of the leading ideologues of Hindu nationalism, M.S. Golwalkar had defined the 'we' of the future Indian state:

In Hindustan exists and must need exist the ancient Hindu nation and nought else but the Hindu nation... so long, as they (Muslims and other non-Hindus) maintain their racial, religious and cultural differences, they cannot but be only foreigners... There are only two courses open to the foreign elements, either to merge themselves in the national race and adopt its culture, or to live at the sweet will of the national race... they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation... (Gowalker 19, 52-56, 62).

Since 1940, this theme/idea/ideology of Hindutva has been sought to spread throughout the country by thousands of committed cadres organized into RSS *shakhas* (groups) through regular meetings, conferences, educational institutions, and hundreds of small and big newspapers. The dissemination of this ideology by various Hindu organisations and personalities has been the subject of scores of academic studies and hundreds of research papers. The long-term impact of Partition is the creation and perpetuation of psychological mindsets where Hindus and Muslims could not be seen as one unified nation and this sediment idea now refuses to be undone through any kind of consensus. What has come to be called as 'Uniform Civil Code' (1985) and 'Ram Janambhoomi Controversy' (1992), along with the recently enacted and zealously imposed laws to protect the 'Gau-mata' (mother-cow) are three prominent issues of durable contention and sectarian social strife. As we would see in the discussion that follows that the cultural contest centering on these three issues, and some other issues indirectly associated with them, instantly invoke the deeper cultural fault-line of *longue duree* history of Hindu-Muslim relations (Joshi and Josh 1994: vol. 3, chp. 5, 6). The stoking of this fault-line, over the years, has continued to generate immense political energies, violent passions and mass mobilizations which firmly set contemporary India on to a trajectory which has finally brought a pro-Hindu political party (BJP)-into power in 2014. As a result of this continued cultural strife, post-independent India, especially after 1980s, continues to be a battleground of contesting nationalist ideologies, one claiming to be secular and the other labeled and denounced by secularists as "communalism" (Joshi and Josh 2013: vol 3).

Since 1990s, with the background of rising terrorism, a constant war has been going on between the armed groups in Kashmir and the Indian Army; some call it a 'proxy war' between Pakistan and India. The impact of happenings in Kashmir covered by TV channels, print and social media continues to influence the existing mindsets of the Indians. As a result, the day to day cultural-political atmosphere of the country remains surcharged and tension ridden under the surface of an uneasy calm. The cultural project of making India Hindu is being implemented in many ways by the Modi-led Government: from the top by its own carefully designed cultural policies and from the bottom by being complicit with mass agitations and demands in society that are challenging the freedom of expression of poets, writers,



artists and film makers. As a result of these multi-pronged cultural practices a sort of new Cultural State is being sought by partly dismantling the existing one that has evolved in the last seventy years under the banner of secularism.

In today's India, due to the deepening of cultural divide between Hindus and Muslims, the moral and ethical visions of even the most ideologically neutral individuals are not considered above suspicion by the political parties. Three years ago, the forces professing the idea of 'Hindu Nation' have acquired a position of political dominance by getting about 31 percent of the total votes in the country. Their governments are in power in majorities (29) of the Indian states. But it is still faced with the serious problem: how to translate this dominance into societal hegemony by winning over lower castes and sections of the Muslims, especially women. Only that position could allow them to perpetuate their rule at the Centre in a liberal democratic polity. How far they have actually travelled down that road as for as country as a whole is concerned would be clear only after the general elections of 2019. The BJP is still far from acquiring a cultural status, moral sagacity and political disposition where the majority of the nation is willing to accept it as a trustworthy hegemonic power with a degree of stability and certainty of cultural consolidation.

In October 2001, Narendra Modi became Chief Minister of Gujarat. Because of BJP's longstanding struggle to acquire a solid and stable mass base in this part of India, some journalists have dubbed it as a laboratory of Hindutva. The election results on December 16<sup>th</sup> 2017, have shown that BJP will be forming its Government for the sixth time.

It is in Gujarat that the project of Hindu Rashtra has reached a fairly advanced stage but it still continues to be shaky and unstable because of the challenges posed by large sections of the lower and agrarian middle castes in rural Gujarat who are dissatisfied with the unfulfilled promises of BJP regarding the creation of jobs and relatively high prices for their produce, especially cotton. In fact, this is a pan-Indian problem, inseparably linked to a deepening crisis in the vast agricultural sector: as a result of this crisis thousands of poor peasants have committed suicide throughout India. The BJP has successfully eroded the hegemony of the Indian National Congress but at the same time it is not yet in a position to create an alternative Hindu hegemony by making itself acceptable to majority of the Hindus, especially in rural areas. In the coming two decades, the whole of India is headed towards a permanent social strife in the rural areas where majority of the population lives. It is in this context that all the politically aware Indians are looking towards the results of the Gujarat elections.

The diversity of India is constituted by several divisions based on caste, religion, language, class and region. Political parties have arisen out of these divides and shifting coalitions. Every party needs to create a coalition of vote-banks to win power at the Centre. The BJP has been obliged to woo wide variety of vote-banks, especially the lower castes known as Dalits. This is not easy, and the BJP has stumbled badly on the employment front. The current agitations by dominant rural castes — Patidars in Gujarat, Marathas in Maharashtra, Gujjars in Rajasthan and Jats in Haryana-for reservations in government jobs pits them against existing Hindu beneficiaries of reservations (Dalits, tribals, and other backward castes). Thus





even an economic issue, like employment, gets converted in India into inter-caste rivalry that fragments the Hindu monolith that the BJP would love to create.

The inability of any democratic state to withstand fully or for very long the assertion of a majority culture was revealed of the Indian state from the outset. The natural corollary of this phenomenon was the necessity to tilt towards extra sensitivity to minority culture and the self-representations of leaders of the minorities. This was seen as the essential corrective to attempts by the ideologues of the majority to convert the upswing of cultural assertiveness into culturally aggressive projects striving to establish cultural domination over the minority. On the one hand, this tilt is what has been termed 'appeasement of minorities' by the ideologues of Hindu cultural dominance and on the other upheld as proof of its 'secular' stance by the state leaders of the Indian National Congress. This is how Shashi Joshi has formulated the conflictual trajectory of Political developments in India in 1994:

The battle between revisionist and dogmatic Hinduisms, to define a culturally Hindu India is in full swing under the banner of a confrontation between 'secularism' and 'communalism' whether all its implications are comprehend or not. However, a sizeable segment of Indians is implicated in the cultural hegemony of the West-through colonialism to post-colonial global influences. This segment may not be involved-at least actively or consciously in the old cultural contests of the past that hark back to ancient or medieval history. However, the desire to assert their own cultural significance vis-à-vis the 'west' grips increasing sections of affluent Indians (Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, etc.) even as they adjust to and emulate Western lifestyles. In this context, a throwback to pre-colonial cultural contests becomes a natural corollary to efforts at defining a cultural 'we' apropos the Western world. The power struggles of today may be between the 'West' and 'India' but the defining of India revives power struggles of the past. The process of so defining becomes an act of power in itself- a strategy for forging the future. It is thus that the past continually intervenes in the present. (Joshi and Josh 1994: vol. 3/360)

For the Sangh Parivar, the 2002 post- Godhra riots marked the apotheosis of the campaign to establish Hindu Rashtra, a time of cultural war when dominance was violently imposed over the 'Muslim other'. But many signs indicate that the twenty years of BJP rule in Gujarat has made the Muslims, ten percent of Gujarati society, completely invisible as the Congress, a party which has ruled over India in the name of 'secularism' was not campaigning in the Muslim areas for the fear of being dubbed as the Party of the minorities/Muslims. Neither has it put up Muslim candidates even as tokenism, an evidence of its 'secular' credentials. The leaders of the Congress Party have come to the conclusion that their Party lost the 2014 parliamentary elections because the BJP was able to convince the liberal Hindus, who have been supporting the Congress all along, that Congress was, in actuality, a Party of the Muslims. Thus the BJP has successfully forced the Congress leadership to abandon its earlier terrain of 'secular politics' and come to BJP's own terrain within Hindu cultural internality. This time the Congress too was fighting to get a bigger chunk of the Hindu votes. Thus, willy-nilly, the Congress has accepted the BJP assumption, the central plank of its project of Hindu hegemony, that it is only



the Hindu communities that should matter to decide the nature of political rule in this country. It has agreed with the BJP in openly proclaiming: from now onwards we, both the parties, have agreed to disenfranchise the Muslim population. As a result of this, the Congress has been quick to take a “strategic Hindu turn.” Rahul Gandhi was on a temple-hopping spree and has visited twenty-eight big and small Hindu temples. He offers *pooja* in an ostentatious way which Congress leaders never did before. By questioning Rahul’s identity — “he must say who he actually is” — the BJP has challenged him to openly declare his religious affiliation. The implicit message is that Rahul does not deserve to ask for the votes of the Hindus in Gujarat because his Hindu credentials are questionable. Congress, on the other hand, released Rahul’s photograph with a *janeu*-(sacred thread that is worn by Brahmins) to establish that he is a ‘*janeu-dhari Hindu*’.

This debate has disturbed many people who had come to believe that 70 years after independence, one’s Indian identity matters less than one’s religious identity in an election. The Congress Party, some feel, that keeping in view its claim to being a Secular Party, “should have loudly proclaimed that Rahul Gandhi is a true representative of multi-faith, diverse India. Look at his pedigree. His paternal grandfather was Parsi. His father, thus half-Hindu (Brahmin) and half Parsi, married Sonia, who is Italian and Catholic. Thus Rahul is a Hindu and a Parsi and a Christian Catholic...Has the Congress forgotten the meaning of secularism in its haste to adopt Hindutva line?” (Desai 2017). The Congress Party managers’ argument was that Rahul would only play into the BJP’s hands if he mentions 2002 Godhara riots or secularism. Wooing the Patidar community is a recognition that the Congress is coming around the view that only caste and not secularism can break the stranglehold of religion and defeat Hindutva. In this new experiment Congress is opposing BJP’s Hindutva with its own brand of soft-Hindutva.

Today, Gujarat’s religious partition is complete. Every city has a “border”, an extension of the ‘Radcliffe line’ drawn in 1947, an invisible line dividing Hindu and Muslim areas. The BJP has reigned supreme in this urban ‘apartheid’ for the last two decades. It would be a futile exercise to blame the parties and their leaders to openly display their religious identity. The long-term consequences of the Partition have been constantly at work to create religious polarization in Indian society. In democracies, politicians often mirror the society and times in which they live.

There was another event which pushed the Congress to openly locate itself within the Hindu cultural internality. And that was the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in Delhi after the murder of Indira Gandhi in November 1984. The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi did nothing to stop these killings by the organized Hindu mobs. The wave of sympathy which had given him a massive victory was very deceptive. He was able to win 411 seats out of 542, the largest Lok Sabha majority to date. This wave was also responsible for the BJP’s massive defeat when it could muster only 2 seats in 1984. Looking from another point of view, this temporary defeat was in actuality its finest victory as it showed, for the first time, the potential power and aggressiveness of the organised Hindu sentiment. All that was now needed, was its further consolidation and to yoke it to the agenda of Hindu Rashtra. Rajiv Gandhi had miserably failed to keep the Congress Party on its secular track and



permanently tainted its ideology. He has done for the BJP which BJP could never have achieved through its own efforts. Let it be emphasized that political parties do not capture power of their own. They are always helped by their opponents and contestants in many ways.

### III. PARTITION AND DILEMMAS OF INDIAN SECULARISM

From the days of its foundation the leaders of the Indian National Congress had posited an *a priori* separation between 'Hindu cultural nationalism' and 'political nationalism' in order to build a composite anti-imperialist opposition — a nation in its embryonic form— of all the religious communities in the subcontinent. During the period of mass movements (1920-42) and even after independence and Partition the Congress continued to declare its commitment to this *a priori* separation. It seems, given the cultural diversity, it was difficult for the early nationalist intellectuals to imagine the shaping up of an all-encompassing Indian nation without upholding this assumption. But the kind of cultural issues that emerged and coincided with the establishment of the independent nation-state clearly showed that the relationship between Hindu cultural nationalism, political nationalism and the sphere of state politics was a complex one and the their professed separation could not always be maintained. Some of these issues were the construction of the temple at Somnath, ban on cow slaughter, Hindi as the national language and the Hindu Code Bill which, inadvertently, further underlined the idea of Hindus being a separate community despite their internal differentiation.

Secular historiography has failed to note the important fact that for considerable sections of Indians and the Indian National Congress, '1947' meant not only a moment of political independence but also, to put it in the words of Vivekananda, the foremost cultural ideologue of Hindu nationalism, the end of 'a thousand years of slavery' (Embree 160). For them, it was also a moment of celebrating the cultural pride and glory of the Hindus. But there were others in the Congress, especially Jawaharlal Nehru and his followers, who were in serious disagreement with such attitudes, and considered it a manifestation of medievalism and 'communalism'.

The Government of free India adopted an approach which was not in opposition to religion but sought the removal of religion from public affairs, the separation of state from all faiths, the insistence on religion as a private matter for the individual with no bearing on civil rights and duties. This approach was not only a part of the 'modern outlook' but also 'the most practical approach' (Gopal 1992: 13). But it was easy to proclaim a theory which posited the *a priori* separation between 'religion' and 'state politics' than to effect it. A cursory survey of the contentious cultural issues raised immediately after August 1947 leads us to the conclusion that when it came to the crunch Nehru could not implement these theoretical principles and there was retreat from what he had considered to be desirable action on the part of the state. Between theory and practice, we are told, fell the shadow of 'hesitancy' (Gopal 1992: 15). But slowly the sphere of this 'hesitancy' began to expand and from a set



of principles, actively guiding state policies and interventions, these principles of secularism retreated into ideals. But wherein lay the social roots of this 'hesitancy'?

Hindu sentiment was, and continues to be, a very complex one. If one end of the spectrum of this sentiment was articulated by political organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, the other end, more subtle and less sharply etched out, penetrated extensively into the Congress ranks and its mass following. It is in this sense that Patel's above quoted remark about Gandhi's assassin ("one of us") and the RSS (our brethren) needs to be understood (qtd. In R. Gandhi 1990: 496). In this context, we must point out that organisations like the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and the Indian National Congress operated within the same cultural internality which generated a spectrum of common cultural sentiment. Even when individuals and groups shared the same cultural sentiment they could differ widely in their strategic responses and political goals. Though he seldom spoke of secularism, Patel was no proponent of Hindu rule. In February 1949, he spoke of 'Hindu Raj' as that 'mad idea' (Gandhi 1990: 497). Nehru was not emotionally in tune with the Hindu cultural sentiment and as a result could not establish communication with considerable sections of the Hindu population. Though Sardar Patel could be located within the Hindu cultural spectrum nevertheless he opposed the notion of the Hindu state. All the same, unlike Nehru, for him it was very important to understand the depth of this sentiment, disentangling its various shades and devising an adequate response to placate, diffuse and contain it. For people like Patel, Prasad and Munshi and many others in the Congress leadership it was not to be denounced and frontally attacked as 'backwardness' and lack of 'modern outlook'. An unmitigated opposition to this sentiment without comprehending the meanings of its various shades, apart from being unwise, could also prove to be costly to the Congress in terms of political power. Thus the necessity to stay in power and the commitment to the principles of secularism were not to be counterposed but to be reconciled with the hope that the forces of modernisation would work towards the eradication of this 'narrow communalism.'

Meanwhile, against the backdrop of partition the newly emerging India was to be saved from becoming a Hindu state by neutralising as well as accommodating some of the Hindu cultural practices into the state's rituals of power, state policies and decisions. Though put on the defensive from the very beginning, the principles of secularism and the ultimate goal of creating a secular society were not to be abandoned. In fact, the state-sponsored project of secular pedagogy of the nation was to be elaborated systematically in the domain of education and mass media involving the intelligentsia in this project in a big way. If not completely eradicated, at least, the tide of 'communalism' was expected to recede and be marginalised with the forging ahead of the combined onslaught of secular ideological indoctrination and industrialisation.

The campaign to renovate the temple of Somnath had started immediately after the country attained freedom on 15 August 1947 thereby underlining the fact that for a section of the national Congress movement the cultural impulse for temple renovation was umbilically linked with the political project of India's independence. On Diwali day, on 12 November 1947, Sardar Patel accompanied by Jam Saheb and



Kaka Saheb, Gadgil, went to Junagarh. When was the idea of the reconstruction of the temple precisely mooted? K.M. Munshi records for us the ‘birth’ of this idea:

We saw the temple, while Sardar and I (Kaka Saheb) were having a little walk on the beach, I said to Sardar: ‘I think the Government of India ought to rebuild this temple’. He said ‘Well, go ahead’. Then we two and the Jam Saheb came to the temple and there in the presence of about 500 people, I announced: ‘Government of India has decided to rebuild this temple and instal the deity. This Government has come to fulfil and not to destroy. The age of reconstruction is now on’. Immediately —after this, the Jam Saheb announced a donation of one lakh of rupees. Fifteen minutes later, a huge public meeting was held in Ahalya Bai temple where Sardar in his speech, said: ‘On this auspicious day of the new year, we have decided that Somanath should be reconstructed. You, people of Saurashtra, should do your best. This is a holy task in which all should participate’. Jam Saheb gave the first donation of one-lakh rupees for the construction. Samaldas Gandhi representing the Junagarh administration followed with rupees 51,000. (Munshi 61)

According to Munshi, though the Government of India sponsored the scheme, Patel decided that the government should not make any contribution in the form of money for the reconstruction of the temple.<sup>3</sup> In 1949, Patel appealed for public contributions to rebuild the temple of Somnath (Das xxii).

Sardar Patel, K.M. Munshi and their other friends were fully aware of the meanings of the emotion associated with the reconstruction of the temple. “In the beginning’, writes Munshi, *some persons*, more fond of dead stones than live values, pressed the point of view that the ruins of the old temple should be maintained as an ancient monument. *We* were, however firm in our view, that the temple of Somanatha was not an ancient monument; *it lived in the sentiment of the whole nation and its reconstruction was a national pledge*” (Munshi 64. My emphasis).

Clearly, there was a tussle between ‘some persons’ and the ‘we’ before the decision for reconstruction was actually taken. When the proposal for the preservation of the ruins was pressed by the Archaeological Department, Patel expressed his views:” the Hindu sentiment in regard to this temple is both strong and widespread. In the present conditions, it is unlikely that, that sentiment will be satisfied by mere restoration of the temple or by prolonging its life. *The restoration of the idol would be a point of honour of sentiment with the Hindu public*” (Munshi 64. My emphasis).

Apart from the construction of the Somnath temple, the other important cultural issue which agitated the minds of the Congress leadership was the issue of cow slaughter. In a lengthy letter to Nehru on 7 August 1947, Rajendra Prasad informed him that the agitation demanding a ban on cow slaughter was spreading ‘with tremendous speed’ and had reached ‘practically all provinces and very large number of people’ (Chodudhary 1987: 7/91-92). ‘The Hindu sentiment in favour of cow protection is old, widespread and deep-seated... It was almost impossible to

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<sup>3</sup> This suggestion was first mooted by Gandhi at a prayer meeting on 28 November 1947.



now ignore it.' 'I think', he suggested 'that the matter does require consideration and, we must take a decision whatever it is after due consideration'. The Hindu feeling on account of 'recent happenings' was very much agitated, he clarified, and this movement, like the movement in favour of Hindi, was 'bound to gain strength more rapidly than we can imagine.'

Nehru did not oppose the listing of the banning of cow slaughter as one of the directive principles of state policy in the constitution. All he did was to ensure that nothing came of it in practice (Gopaland and Parthasarthy 24). Holding out the threat of resignation was one of Nehru's ways to resist the inner party pressures. His and Savarkar's way of posing the question about the historically evolved reality —called India— was the same, though they gave contradictory answers: Was India a Hindu country? Or was it a composite country? For a large number of Congressmen and their followers it was difficult to answer the above questions in terms of a simple 'yes' or 'no.' For them the 'composite' character of the country was not irreconcilable to its 'Hindu' character. But this third choice or possibility was denied to them by Nehru and he insisted that they must face the 'logic' of their choice squarely: "we must not function as a Hindu state but as a composite state in which Hindus, no doubt predominate" (qtd in Gopaland and Parthasarthy 190-191).

But what was meant by 'composite country' and 'composite state'? Nehru never felt the need to clarify it. Not only that, he labelled it as secularism and thereby generated a discourse of ambiguity. Now multiple interpretations of secularism could contend with each other, and, over time, one of them tended to become a truism: any act or policy of the state which did not conform to the articulate opinion of the Muslim community did not qualify for being characterised as 'secular'. In practice, Nehru implemented the notion of 'composite culture' in a way which went against the very idea of common citizenship and maintained the pre-partition conception of communities being fundamentally different from each other.

The third important issue, and this was a clear blow to Nehru's notion of 'composite culture', was the issue of the language of the republic. As suggested by Mahatma Gandhi, the Committee of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha, Bombay, at its meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1947, considered the resolution regarding Hindi with Devnagri script being adopted as the national language of India. This meeting of the Sabha adopted a memorandum which was sent to the President: 'We are very much surprised', declared the memorandum, 'to learn that the Congress Party members of the Constituent Assembly have decided that Hindi, written in Devanagri script, should be the national language of India' (Chodudhary). It noted that Mahatma Gandhi had definitely stated that Hindustani in both the scripts was the only medium through which millions of Indians could be brought together. The Sabha felt that it would be 'a disastrous blow to the cause of national unity and harmony if leading Congressmen take a narrow and communal point of view.' It warned the Congress that the decision to make Hindi as the national language would be an act of 'violation of the Congress Constitution and 'suicidal to the national spirit and tradition of the Congress.'

On the question of Hindi-Hindustani, in his letters to concerned friends, Nehru said frankly that the move to oust Hindustani was unfortunate and unde-



sirable. 'I have been trying to combat it, not with great success I am sorry to say. *Unfortunately this partition business has roused passions among the Hindus and they are acting in a narrow short-sighted way in many respects.*' (Nehru 1987: 3/186).

The Congress Party, under the psychological pressures generated by the partition, was reflecting trends which were very unpalatable to Nehru. 'All of us', he told Mohanlal Saxena in September 1949, 'seem to be getting infected with the refugee mentality or worse still, the RSS mentality. This is a curious finale to our careers.' If, on the one hand, both Bidhan Roy and Patel were suggesting the expulsion of 'equal number of Muslims from Bengal' as a retaliatory measure against the East Bengal Government's policy of forcing the Hindus to migrate, on the other, P.D. Tandon in Uttar Pradesh was calling upon the Muslims to adopt 'Hindu culture' (Gopal 2: 92). 'Communalism has invaded the minds and hearts of those', Nehru wrote to G.B. Pant in April 1950. 'who were pillars of the Congress in the past. It is a creeping paralysis and the patient does not even realise it' (Gopal 2: 92). Even after Partition, Nehru as an individual continued to uphold the original separation between 'culture' and 'politics' as propounded by the discourse of nineteenth century Congress liberals.

Was the Congress turning into a communal organisation as asserted by Nehru? No. What was happening was that large number of Congressmen were finding it difficult to maintain the strict division between 'culture' and 'politics' as required by the Nehruvian discourse of secularism. Because, in their heart of hearts, many were equally convinced that the Congress now could and should legitimately reflect the cultural pride of the Hindus without having pangs of guilty conscience. In their eyes, having a legitimate pride in one's own cultural traditions was very much a part of nationalism, i.e., 'cultural nationalism', and 'political nationalism' went hand-in-hand with it. But once the cultural aspirations were driven underground in the name of 'communalism' the Congress could not possibly be an adequate vehicle for their expression. Before the Partition many of these Congressmen could understand the rationale of keeping the discourse of 'culture' underground as the pragmatic need of the Congress policy of uniting with the Muslims demanded this. But now they could not but have perceived such attitudes as self-imposed censorship.

Under Nehru, Congress as an organisation ceased to become a vehicle of Hindu cultural identity. People like Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, the erstwhile President of the Hindu Mahasabha, realised that for people like him, there was no place in the Congress. This was the background which gave birth to an organisation such as the Jana Sangh (Baxter 1971; Graham 1990). But the problem with such a party was, and continues to be even today in its form as the Bharatiya Janata Party, that it could not evolve a more radical social programme of national development as compared to the Congress. Beyond a particular point, as we know, the cultural issues of identity begin to be intertwined with caste and class issues and power relations between those who are mobilised in the movement. Therefore the birth of Jana Sangh, purely on a programme of cultural identity, further deepened, though unwittingly, the party division in the spectrum of Hindu cultural nationalism. The moderate complex of Hindu identity continued to stay underground within the Congress while the strong voices came to be articulated through the Jana Sangh.



The very logic of formation of a new political party dictated that if it was to acquire a position of power then it must claim to be the 'sole spokesman' of Hindu identity. It should make use of the Congress's inability to compete with it by accusing it as a party of the cultural minorities.

In fact, at moments, even for Nehru it was difficult to not mix cultural mythologies with secular politics. After the war with China Nehru was to assert that India's frontier was traditional and was associated with 'India's culture and tradition' (Embree 67). A White Paper prepared by the Historical Division of the Ministry of External Affairs quoted from the Vishnu Purana to support the argument that the country south of the Himalayas and north of the Ocean is called Bharat and 'all born in it are called Bharatiyas or Indians'. Similar references were given from *Rig Veda*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and other Sanskrit texts pointing to the cultural and political unity of India.

Against the backdrop of the partition and the formation of Pakistan as a separate state demanded in the name of Indian Muslims, the newly independent Indian state was faced with a dilemma. Was it to continue with the imperial model of secularism and act as an arbiter between various cultural and religious communities of India? Obviously, the question was to be decided by the newly unleashed ideological tendencies within the country, especially within the Indian National Congress, which had taken over the state and formed the new government. As the later history of ideological/political struggle within the Congress was to show, none of the two contending currents was in a position to completely defeat and marginalise the other. Through their struggle, they came to circumscribe and limit the influence of each other on administration and the policies of the state. Therefore, the on-going battle for imparting a cultural complexion to the nation-State turned out to be a long drawn and complicated one. After the death of Patel and the political withdrawal staged by Tandon, Nehru had succeeded in establishing an ideological equilibrium within the country which was to be favourable to the forces led by him under the banner of secularism. This did not mean that the problem of cultural issues had been resolved. But he did succeed in removing what he called communal issues from the national agenda, and replaced them with a developmental agenda of economic progress, industrialisation and modernisation.

The censorship on the articulation of Hindu cultural sentiment imposed by Nehru created a split between the 'emotional make-up' and 'intellectual make-up' in the lives of a large number of Congressmen. Therefore, the 1950 Presidential election of the Indian National Congress, between P.D. Tandon and Acharya Kripalani, was primarily a struggle which embodied the logic of this 'split'. The alliance between Patel and Tandon should be looked upon as an attempt to seek recognition and respectability for the Hindu cultural identity within the official Congress discourse by underlining the fact that the Nehruvian view of agnostic spirituality was not acceptable to a large number of Congressmen. Paul Brass sums up the complex nature of this 'split':

Most Congressmen in Uttar Pradesh accepted both Nehru and Tandon as their leaders and saw no incompatibility between them. Congress in Uttar Pradesh intel-





lectually recognised and accepted most of Nehru's political ideas as necessary for the development of the country, but it was Tandon who appealed to the emotional identification of Congressmen in Uttar Pradesh with their language, their culture, and their religion. (Brass 87; cfr. Weiner ch 4).

Nehru and many of his followers were embarrassed and mortified by the mention of a thing called 'Hindu sentiment'. Actually this "split" was not and is not a simple one. Its complex composition embodies within it the impact of westernisation on the educated classes, especially, among the Hindus. In fact an unself-conscious maintenance of this 'split' is held by the westernised intellectuals to be central to the very definition of a modernized liberal individual. For many of them to uphold secularism and modernity is to uphold the psychological frame which denies the cultural needs of the 'emotional make-up'.

In the aftermath of the Emergency, when the cultural ideologues of Hinduism sought to turn this psychological 'split' into a 'sharp ideological contradiction by focusing the mass attention on the Congress' practice of secularism, Mrs. Gandhi began to vacillate between the two poles. On the one hand, she added the words 'secular' and 'socialist' to the Preamble of the constitution by the 42nd Amendment Act, 1976<sup>4</sup>, while, on the other, she tried to win over the Hindu opinion by going to temples and sometimes even incorporating into her speeches and gestures parts of their discourse. This policy of vacillation was continued by Rajiv Gandhi, thereby, sending a public message that the Congress was being assailed by doubts and no longer confident when faced with the challenge to its professed ideology of secularism.

Historically speaking, the Congress has remained in power by adjusting and representing three sociological codes of mass consciousness, i.e., caste, class and community. Its encompassing vision of developmental nationalism cut across these sectional codes in order to bind them together into a unity. Unlike the Congress, the opposition groups/parties have derived their strength from more or less one of these single codes while simultaneously flirting with other codes, especially the code of nationalism and regionalism. This has split the opposition into three rivulets: Communist parties (class code), groups based on Lohia brand of ideology (caste code) and Jana Sangh or BJP (community code). But these codes, however important characteristics they might be of Indian social reality, in themselves cannot offer national level alternatives. Not only that, these codes cannot even unite without a political group which brings to bear upon these sectarian codes the overarching code of nationalism. This leads us to the conclusion that without the presence of the BJP-type party, which inherited the Hindu nationalism of Savarkar and S.P. Mukerjee, no alternative governments to the Congress could have come into being. Despite their best intentions anti-Congress tendencies cannot but lead the 'caste' and 'class' codes towards an open or tacit alliance with the ideologues of

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<sup>4</sup> The fateful word 'Secularism' did not exist in the Constitution of India before 1976. The Indian Constitution is imbued with the spirit of non sectarianisms but to call it 'Secular' would be misnomer. In order to paper over this ambiguity many began to call "Indian Secularism."



sectarian Hindu nationalism. The 'caste' and 'class' codes of mass consciousness are faced with a permanent dilemma. They are forced to incline towards the BJP in their search for an alternative to the Congress while their desire to uphold developmental and egalitarian perspectives pulls them towards the Congress.

If this is accepted as a realistic appraisal of contemporary Indian politics then the real struggle is, and continues to be, between organisations engaged in defining and redefining the nature of Indian nationalism through the actual mobilisation of the people on 'national issues' and not on 'caste' or 'class' issues. As this struggle sharpens the codes of 'caste' and 'class' would be under pressure to align with one side or the other. The politics of 'caste' and 'class' are forms of politics in this country that can be adjusted but they remain limited within the overarching umbrella of nationalism. Indian nationalism has always overlapped with Hindu cultural sentiment though the forms of its articulation have varied from time to time. Today, the struggle to convert Gandhian nationalism into a Savarkarite nationalism and its search for mass articulation is going to define the nature of the nation-state in the years to come.

The imposition of Emergency proved to be a golden opportunity for the forces representing Savarkarite nationalism. For the first time, this helped them to champion the cause of democracy, get rid of their status of being political untouchables, and to a considerable extent erase the stigma of sharing the ideology which had inspired the killer of the Mahatma. From a position of political marginality, their secular allies (caste and class codes) helped them to place themselves in mainstream politics. Moreover, the Emergency had robbed the main secular party of its moral legitimacy thereby reducing it to the status of 'one of the many political parties'. Ironically, it was the opportunity provided by Mrs. Gandhi and the help rendered by the anti-Congress opposition which placed the votaries of *Hindutva* in the centre stage.

Mrs. Gandhi's debacle in 1977 owed a great deal to the alienation of both Muslims and Harijans from the Congress who, however, rallied to her support again in 1980. What happened during the Emergency, and the Hindu-Muslim killings in the early months of 1980 which had once again erupted in full fury, strained the relationship between her and considerable sections of the Muslim community. The communal strife at Moradabad lasted a whole month, taking a toll of 144 lives. Many of her critics have noted that for the first time in her political career, Indira Gandhi departed from the normal style of rushing to the scene of every major communal conflagration to condole with the bereaved. Though Moradabad was only a few minutes away from Delhi by helicopter, she just would not go there despite appeals by secular parties and groups. Was Mrs. Gandhi no longer interested in continuing the Congress's special relationship with the Muslim community? It is possible, that in the contest for cultural hegemony between the communities she may have wanted to be perceived as neutral. But her attempt to acquire a position of neutrality by correcting the 'historic tilt' could not but have been perceived by interested quarters as an attempt, however belated, to move in the direction of recognising and taking note of the rising wave of Hindu sentiment. Many had begun to read into her 'words' and 'departures' an effort at pandering to Hindu critics who



had long grumbled that she, like her father, tended to 'pamper' Muslims and other minorities at the cost of the Hindu majority.

Rajiv Gandhi's case was simple. Being a naive modernist free from the burden of accumulated national experience he saw nothing wrong in doing contradictory things so long as his moves helped him to buy peace. He seemed to be totally unaware of the fact that developments in Kashmir and Punjab had stirred up deeper anxieties and memories of partition in large sections of the Hindu population. The Hindu community had begun to look upon these developments as a serious challenge to 'its' state. Caught in the cleft of cultural contest between the communities to influence the political complexion of the nation-state he first thought of pleasing the dominant Muslim opinion by staging a retreat on the Shah Bano Case. Once the other side reacted to this move very sharply, he now thought of unlocking the Babri Masjid thereby recognising and legitimising what had been considered till date as something disputable. Was it a conscious strategic move to recognise and incorporate the Hindu sentiment within the Congress discourse in order to outmanoeuvre the BJP combine? Or, was it just a thoughtless surrender? From the outset, the emergence of an aggressive Hindu cultural sentiment in the 1970s was considered by the BJP combine as its political monopoly.

Narasimha Rao's declaration from the Red Fort that the Congress was in favour of constructing a grand temple at Ayodhya, brought home the idea that the Congress, notwithstanding the constraints of its secular ideology, was actually competing with them to articulate the newly emerged and fast consolidating Hindu sentiment. Would they allow the Congress to outmaneuver them at this advanced stage? The question began to slowly sink into the minds of the BJP leadership and of its cadre. This led many amongst them to a different conclusion: the rules of the 'game' were heavily loaded against them and the Congress would not allow them to occupy the seat of power so long the 'game' was played within the rules. Hence the rules of the 'game' must be changed. And this they did on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992 by demolishing the Babri mosque.

India can never be the same again.

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# SONG, PROTEST, THE UNIVERSITY, AND THE NATION: DELHI, 2016

Rosinka Chaudhuri  
Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

## ABSTRACT

In the wake of the suicide of Dalit postgraduate student Rohith Vermula in Hyderabad, protests swept educational centres all over India. It was JNU, however, that became ground zero for dissent, especially after the arrest of student leader K. Kumar. His release from prison put into motion the resistance to curb division of powers in India, and sparked a national dispute on being an anti-national (read terrorist) Indian subject. Among the tools to make their plea visible, JNU students and faculty alike resorted to common denominators of Indian popular culture like Bollywood soundtracks.

KEYWORDS: Anti-national Indian, Kanhaiya Kumar, JNU student protests, *Upkaa*, Rohit Vermula.

## RESUMEN

Las protestas por el suicidio del estudiante intocable Rohith Vermula en Hyderabad se extendieron por muchas universidades indias. De todas ellas, la Universidad Nehru en Delhi se convirtió en el epicentro, sobre todo tras el arresto del líder estudiantil Kanhaiya Kumar. La suspensión de su arresto puso en marcha un movimiento en defensa de la división de poderes en India y desencadenó una controversia en torno a la identidad anti-patriótica (léase terrorista). Entre otros instrumentos para hacer visibles su causa, los estudiantes recurrieron a elementos de la cultura popular, como las canciones de Bollywood.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Anti-patriotismo, JNU, Kanhaiya Kumar, Protestas estudiantiles, Rohit Vermula, *Upkaa*.



If you look up the name Kanhaiya Kumar on the internet, Wikipedia will supply you with a long entry, with sections titled ‘Early Life and Political Career’ [‘early life’?], ‘2016 Sedition Controversy’, etc. on this young Ph.D. student who is now arguably the most famous student leader post-Independence India has ever produced—I doubt the entry existed prior to 2016. “Protests to continue at Indian university after student leader’s arrest” was the headline of a *Guardian* article on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2016, as it went on to report: ‘Thousands rally across India as students at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) strike over Kanhaiya Kumar’s arrest on sedition charge.’<sup>1</sup> Kanhaiya Kumar’s arrest soon snowballed into a major political controversy and has drawn sharp reactions from opposition parties, teachers, students and academics. Students at JNU went on strike over Kumar’s arrest, effectively paralysing the University. His parents stated that their son was being victimized for his opposition to rightwing *Hindutva* politics; a charge that took visual form on TV screens across the country after Kumar was attacked by a group of lawyers led by a BJP (Bhatatiya Janata Party) parliamentarian at the Delhi court to which he had been brought for his hearing on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016. On 2<sup>nd</sup> March, Kumar was granted interim bail by the Delhi High Court, conditional on a 10,000 rupee bail bond and an undertaking that he would not “participate in any anti-national activity.”

The 23-page judgment of the Delhi High Court Order began with Justice Pratibha Rani invoking a popular and undoubtedly cheesy patriotic song from the 1967 Hindi film *Upkaar*, to say, in ungrammatical English:

This patriotic song from *Upkaar* by lyricist Indeevar symbolizes individual characteristics representing by different colours and love for motherland. Spring season is a time when nature becomes green and flower blooms in all colours. This spring, why the colour of peace is eluding the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) situated in the heart of Delhi, needs to be answered by its students, faculty members and those managing the affairs of this national university. (High Court of Delhi 2016)

Grammar has never been essential to the use of English in India, and indeed today it may be deemed politically incorrect to demand it, even of a judge. So rather than that, it was the manner in which the nation had been figured in terms of a film song that puzzled the few who were interested in following the words of the judgement. Songs and singing, either when invoked by the judge or when sung in protest by the students later, came to inform the notion of the nation-state in a curious way in the first six months of 2016. Definitions of nationalism had already created turmoil in the national sphere preceding this, as a swathe of intellectuals, writers and activists had returned awards and prizes to protest ‘intolerance’ and came to be vilified as ‘anti-national’ by the governing dispensation.

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<sup>1</sup> The Supreme Court’s latest order on the issue of sedition should be noted in a caveat: the court decided that sedition charges could not just be levelled against anyone critical of the nation.



The film song the judge mentioned had compared the country to a garden of peace made by the Buddha and Nanak on which bloomed the flowers Gandhi, Subhash, Tagore and Tilak (*Ye baag hain Gautam Nanak ka / Khilte hain aman ke phool yahaan / Gandhi, Subhash, Tagore, Tilak / Aise hain chaman ke phool yahaan*). The famous refrain spoke of ‘the soil of my country that spews gold, spews diamonds and pearls, the soil of my country. *Mere desh ki dharti*’. After being released on bail, Kumar went on to make a speech and conclude it by singing a rather different song, which came to be known then as the *azadi* song. This then went viral on the internet, producing a rap version by someone called Dub Sharma, described as a Chandigarh-based composer and producer, which is advertised on the net with the words: ‘This Kanhaiya dub step will make every anti-national proud’. Meanwhile another version was composed and sung by Pushpavathy at Trichur, Kerala, The song was first presented at the “Manushya Sangamam” held at Thrissur and was well received, prompting her to record it. Kanhaiya himself has sung the song at many venues, most recently of all in Calcutta at the Mahajati Sadan on September 8<sup>th</sup>, accompanied this time with the beat of a traditional ‘dafli’ he brought with him, which resulted, according to news reports, in the entire hall standing up to sing the song with him.

## I

At the time the judgement was delivered, the ticker tape on NDTV 24x7 ran: ‘Kanhaiya gets bail’, ‘Judge speaks of infection, antibiotics and Bollywood’. Shivam Vij, in an article titled ‘Kanhaiya’s Bail Judgement Begins With “Mere Desh Ki Dharti”’, commented in the *Huffington Post* on 2<sup>nd</sup> March: ‘Metaphors abound in the Delhi High Court judgement that gave bail to JNU students’ union president Kanhaiya Kumar —metaphors that seek to emphasise the value of nationalism’ (Vij 2016). More metaphors and more nationalism followed the invocation of the song in the judgement, which also saw the use of anti-national slogans in JNU as a bodily infection. “The thoughts reflected in the slogans raised by some of the students of JNU who organized and participated in that programme cannot be claimed to be protected as fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. I consider this as a kind of infection from which such students are suffering which needs to be controlled /cured before it becomes an epidemic,” it said. “Whenever some infection is spread in a limb, effort is made to cure the same by giving antibiotics orally and if that does not work, by following a second line of treatment. Sometimes it may require surgical intervention also. However, if the infection results in infecting the limb to the extent that it becomes gangrene, amputation is the only treatment,” it adds. Concluding the judgement, Justice Rani hoped that Kanhaiya Kumar had had time in jail to introspect on the events that took place in JNU on 9<sup>th</sup> February. Therefore, “to enable him to remain in the mainstream, at present I am inclined to provide conservative method of treatment,” she said, staying with the medical metaphor while granting him bail.





Time to introspect he had, indeed, had a lot of it in jail, and upon his release on 3 March 2016, Kanhaiya Kumar gave a speech to a huge crowd in an open air amphitheatre in the JNU campus during which he said, most famously, that he was seeking not freedom *from* India but freedom *within* India. A journalist in the *Indian Express* a couple of days later called it ‘pure protest-poetry’. ‘One doesn’t have to share his politics to find pleasure in his language’, it went on to say, adding:

I certainly don’t want “freedom from capitalism” —in fact, I want much more of it; and yet I found his revolutionary fervour endearing. Here is a young man with a serious rhetorical gift, and a mastery over the Hindi language that is a joy... This is Hindi as it should be declaimed —Hindi as a political rasmalai. One needs to hear the speech, not read it, to appreciate fully the theatre of Kanhaiya’s delivery; his sawaal-jawaab with the avid and idealistic crowd; the pregnant pauses, so essential in feats of rhetoric; the cutting humour of the occasion; and the verbal up-yours he delivered to those who would jail him for his views. All the while, another young man waved the Indian flag behind him. This was not sedition. This was the heaven of college life. (Varadarajan 2016).

The point of quoting this particular report, of course, is to underline how even those desiring ‘much more’ capitalism responded to a young man most avowedly from the Left; I will also take up the category of the ‘pure’, used here before ‘protest poetry’, later in the paper. Yet this was certainly not the heaven of college life as that is ordinarily understood; it was undoubtedly an exceptional moment in the political experience of Indians born post-Independence. The speech, delivered close to midnight on a cool March night in Delhi, was more than an hour long, yet for those of us who witnessed it live on our TV screens as it was being broadcast by almost every news channel in India, it was absolutely mesmerising. But before we go to the speech, we need to revisit the context.

## II. WHO IS AN ‘ANTI NATIONAL’ AND WHO SAYS SO?

If you typed ‘anti-national’ into Google Maps in March 2016, you were taken straightaway to the site of the JNU Campus in Delhi; Google blamed it on a bug and said it would try and fix the problem. Writing in *The Hindu* on 17<sup>th</sup> February after the arrests of the JNU students, respected columnist for *The Hindu*, G. Sampath, wrote an article titled ‘Who Is An Anti-National?’ whose subheading summed up: *For both Rohith Vemula and Kanhaiya Kumar, nationalism was about the welfare of the Indian people over that of the Indian state- This political vision made them threats in the eyes of goonda nationalists* (my italics). The article began:

Can a bunch of hysterical TV anchors really fool a nation into believing that the brightest students of one of its best universities are “anti-nationals” and their thuggish persecutors, “nationalists”? Can India’s famed diversity —of intelligence levels, if nothing else— save it from falling for the tired old game of witch-hunting anti-nationals? Well, the ruling dispensation seems to be betting against it. (Sampath 2016)



To understand the context of Kanhaiya Kumar's speech, and the issue of anti-nationals and nationalism that dominated the news then, we need to understand the case of Hyderabad University Dalit student, Rohith Vemula, which preceded the disturbances at JNU, as well as the nationalism debate that dominated the news for much of 2015. Let me quote the well-known lines he wrote in his suicide note, reprinted in many newspapers, where he spoke of stardust and disenchantment, blaming nobody, saying:

The value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a vote. To a number. To a thing. Never was a man treated as a mind. As a glorious thing made up of stardust. In every field, in studies, in streets, in politics, and in dying and living.

[...] I am writing this kind of letter for the first time. My first time of a final letter. Forgive me if I fail to make sense. Maybe I was wrong, all the while, in understanding the world. In understanding love, pain, life, death. There was no urgency. But I always was rushing. Desperate to start a life. All the while, some people, for them, life itself is curse. My birth is my fatal accident. (Vermula 2016)

That fatal accident was to have been born a Dalit, whatever the caste of his father may be, and to have suffered the continuation of a long history of discrimination which continues to this day. 'Justice for Rohith' —the slogan raised in the aftermath of the suicide— was therefore not only justice demanded for Rohith, but for the Dalits as a whole. The issue was brought up at the UN in its 31st session of the Human Rights Council, and of course at universities across India and the world. The crisis at Hyderabad University had been sparked off by the *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (ABVP) spearheading the persecution of the Ambedkar Students' Association by branding them "anti-national". Its case was taken up by a BJP Member of Parliament, Bandaru Dattatreya, who sent a complaint to the Centre.

Sampath invoked the German historian Arthur Rosenberg's *Fascism as a Mass Movement* (1934) whose first-ever English translation had been published as *Fascism: Essays on Europe and India* in January 2016 in India by the Three Essays Collective. The book traces the emergence of Fascism in Europe in a short introduction, and then extends the framework to India in four essays. (We know that Kanhaiya's speech had made the connection of Modi with Fascism explicit, and that he recently responded to Prakash Karat's attempt to reconfigure Modi as 'authoritarian' rather than fascist with an invitation to the academic to head to New York if he was unwilling to fight.) Sampath found the pattern in the events unfolding first in Hyderabad and then in Delhi 'too striking to miss'. In Hyderabad, in his words, 'a pliant vice-chancellor and a pliable police acted against the students targeted by the ABVP, and the story hit the national headlines with the suicide of Rohith Vemula, a vocal critic of the ABVP and its violent majoritarianism'. He continued:

In JNU [too], the crisis was sparked by a group of students organising a protest meeting in support of Afzal Guru, whose execution has been questioned by several legal luminaries. The ABVP spearheaded the persecution of the students involved



by branding them as “anti-national”. Its case was taken up by a BJP MP, Maheish Girri, whose complaint led to an FIR being lodged. The outcome: a pliant vice-chancellor and a pliable police acted against the students targeted by the ABVP, and the story hit the national headlines with the arrest of JNU students’ union president Kanhaiya Kumar, a vocal critic of the ABVP and its violent majoritarianism. (Sampath 2016)

What he doesn’t point out, however, is that this system of punitive action against offending individuals by such storm troopers has been operational in India for a very long time. Taking upon itself time and again the right to label and then persecute anybody who displeases it, violence has been used by vigilante groups for some time now. Governments have been reluctant to act against offended parties, thus a Congress government in power doesn’t necessarily have a better track record in such cases. The charge of being ‘anti-national’ is proven by *simply being stated* by the offended party, who are always Indians acting in the name of either Hinduism or the nation, which seem to be synonymous to them, as Wendy Doniger found out in relation to her book, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. In the context of the University, ‘the battle is already lost if one seeks to answer the charge by trying to prove that one is not an anti-national’ *The Hindu* went on to say, concluding: ‘The correct response, as Mr. Kumar showed in a brilliant speech that went viral on social media, is to go on the offensive, and ask what qualifies *goonda* nationalists to issue certificates of nationalism, and to question the motives of a government that allows them to do so.’

### III. WHO SINGS THE NATION-STATE?

In a 2007 conversation between Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak brought out by the Calcutta-based Seagull publishers titled *who sings the nation-state?* Butler ruminates, at the start of the discussion, on what it means to be ‘at once contained and dispossessed by the state’. Reflecting primarily upon refugees/ political prisoners/ asylum seekers, she outlines a conundrum that seems basically also to underlie the conflicted position occupied by many of the protesting students on the Left or of Dalit dispensation at Hyderabad and JNU, in that these are citizens of the nation who have been bound —just as the hyphen binds nation to state— by the state as well as unbound. For the state binds, she says, in the name of the nation, ‘conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully’, but if ‘the state is what “binds,” it is also clearly what can and does unbind’. This unbinding is figured in terms of expulsion and banishment for the dispossessed that are expelled

... precisely through an exercise of power that depends upon barriers and prisons and, so, in the mode of a certain containment. We are not outside of politics when we are dispossessed in such ways. Rather, we are deposited in a dense situation of military power in which juridical functions become the prerogative of the military. This is not bare life, but a particular formation of power and coercion that



is designed to produce and maintain the condition, the state, of the dispossessed. (Butler and Spivak 4-5)

Butler turns to Arendt rather than Agamben —a move that has been questioned, but that we will not discuss here— for ‘thinking through statelessness in the present time’. The strong case Arendt makes for performative speech, ‘speech that founds or “enstates” a new possibility for social and political life’ in an essay in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is prescient in referring to statelessness: the nation becomes homogenous to comply with the force of the state.

In the case of the current student unrest in India, juridical functions became the prerogative of the government rather than the military, but the exercise of power that produces statelessness was achieved by the same means —barriers and prisons. The state acted so as to produce the students as the stateless, and containment was attempted through ‘a particular formation of power and coercion’. The immense irony of the scene in Delhi in March 2016 compared to the situation Butler outlines is that this is the state acting against its own rights-bearing citizens in the name of the nation. Punning on ‘state’, Butler reflects on ‘the state we’re in (which could, after all, be a state of mind)’ when we ask about the hyphen linking nation to state. The refugee ‘passes through a border and... arrives in another state’ —what characterises the state arrived at? ‘But this is where we do not know whether the state at which one arrives is defined by its juridical and military power and its stipulated modes of national belonging under the rubric of the citizen, or by a certain set of dispositions that characterize the mode of non-belonging as such.’ (6)

In the University contexts of the protesting students, it would be the latter. Both Rohith and Kanhaiya and their groups seem to fit this other mode of non-belonging that is defined by ‘a certain set of dispositions that characterize the mode of non-belonging as such’ vis-a-vis the juridical and military power of the state and its stipulated modes of national belonging. Butler mentions Guantanamo and Gaza in this context, but in addition, she is also concerned with internally-dispossessed populations, those who are “stateless within the state, as seems clear for those who are incarcerated, enslaved, or residing and laboring illegally” (16). In India this year, students like Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid, Anirban Bhattacharya and others saw themselves terrorized by an exercise of power that depended heavily on state intervention, the police, barriers, and prisons, modes of ‘a certain containment’ that worked against its own citizens, turning them into a version of dispossessed populations. This was not self-appointed military power, but a democratically elected government exercising power against young students of the country through methods usually deployed against the dispossessed other —the Palestinian, the terrorist, the refugee.

What are the acts of sovereignty by which constitutional protections are withdrawn and suspended? Butler asks the question in relation to refugees, to the stateless, but how may we re-ask it in the context of student movements in India today? Student populations are always under the control of state power, and that power has been used, in these two instances, to displace and dispossess certain student groups branded ‘anti-national’ by a regime in power. Expulsions, incarcerations, and



finances have been used to reduce and strip the agitating students to a state of powerlessness that has been 'actively produced, maintained, reiterated, and monitored by a complex and forcible domain of power' (10-11). The students are then produced as the stateless, even as they try and wrest the constitution from the machinations of state power toward a symbolization of guaranteed rights, their rights. While the state tries to contain and exclude those students to be produced 'as a stateless person [is] contained and restricted by the juridical and military operations of state power', the students, on the other hand, avail of legal representation and claim their rights through sheer rhetoric, the conspicuous waving of the national flag, and affirmations of their belief in the constitution. These important gestures make a paradoxical claim on belonging alongside the mode of non-belonging that needs to be understood as acts of declaration, performative acts, important rhetorical movements, of a call to freedom. Two paradoxes seem evident here: first, the state produces its own children as the stateless; and second, the protestors who are branded anti-national then claim the nation through symbolic appropriation and legal representation.

The first paradox of the state producing its own children as the stateless has parallels in other spheres of politics worldwide. Etienne Balibar, in an essay titled 'Europe at the Limits', speaks of how the 'old conflicts, the old resistances, the old commitments have become obsolete'. He says:

Rather, I submit that they have become supplemented by others which make for a much more complex and politically uncertain pattern, adding at the same time new resources of intelligibility and civic innovation (what I would like to call 'insurrection', in the broad sense) and formidable obstacles to any simple programme of emancipation, in which the positions of oppressors and oppressed could be assigned to antithetic separated groups formed by history. (Balibar 171)

'Internal aliens' is the term Balibar uses here to refer to the 'excluded categories' within post-national societies such as exist in Europe today, wherein he means the 'increasingly divided and heterogeneous non-European other' found within those settled in Europe from former colonies. But in a unique twist, the Indian government seems to have become the prototype of 'the sort of demagogic governments who advocate the return to an ideal nation and its "dominant culture"' as a recourse against the destabilizing effects of protests by its own student populations who speak in a voice different from their own. As in Europe, so the Indian government's discriminations against those opposed to them ideologically seem to 'bring to the fore symbolic dimensions which have a far longer history and another source of mutual exclusion (such as religious antagonism)' (170).

Song enters Butler and Spivak's discourse in *who sings the nation state* through the question: 'who sings the national anthem' in the context of an incident that Butler recounts:

In the spring of 2006, street demonstrations on the part of illegal residents broke out in various California cities, but very dramatically in the Los Angeles area. The US national anthem was sung in Spanish as was the Mexican anthem. The emergence of "*nuestro himno*" introduced the interesting problem of the plurality



of the nation, of the “we” and the “our”: to whom does this anthem belong? If we were to ask the question: what makes for a non-nationalist or counter-nationalist mode of belonging? ( 27)

(Gayatri, unusually, barely gets a chance to speak in this text, mostly interjecting with—I quote—: ‘carry on’ or ‘but you have more, no?’ or ‘go on for as long as you like’ when invited by Butler to say anything.) The question Butler asks is relevant for us if we were to relate it to Kanhaiya’s speech and *azadi* song and the politics of protest among Dalit and Left students in the country today: ‘what makes for a non-nationalist or counter-nationalist mode of belonging?’ In JNU, it was not the national anthem that was being sung in a different language, of course, but a song that called for freedom in which we witness the same two things Butler finds in the Spanish anthem, ‘the assertion of equality’ and ‘the exercise of freedom’. She says:

I want to suggest to you that neither Agamben nor Arendt can quite theorize this particular act of singing, and that we have yet to develop the language we need to do so. It would also involve rethinking certain ideas of sensate democracy, of aesthetic articulation within the political sphere, and the relationship between song and what is called the “public.”...

At this point, the song can be understood not only as the expression of freedom or the longing for enfranchisement—though it is, clearly, both those things— but also as restaging the street, enacting freedom of assembly precisely when and where it is explicitly prohibited by law. This is a certain performative politics, to be sure, in which to make the claim... is made nonetheless and precisely in defiance of the law by which recognition is demanded. (62)

#### IV. THE UTOPIA OF PURE POLITICS

Following the events on the JNU campus, the TSR Subramanian panel’s report on the new education policy took up several pages to recommend restrictions on campus activism. Reading these recommendations in the light of recent events, Kavita Krishnan, politburo member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) and a former joint secretary of the JNU Students’ Union said:

The government of the day had chosen to brand Ambedkar Student Association—of which Rohith Vemula was a part— and Ambedkar-Periyar Study Circle as “casteist”, while the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, which violently imposes casteism, patriarchy and Hindu fundamentalism on students, is deemed “nationalist”. The Bharatiya Janata Party government has made no secret of its hostility to free speech and dissent, even as it has nurtured hate speech. The Subramanian panel report, then, sits well with its agenda of delegitimising dissent on campuses by branding such student movements as a “distraction” while a fictitious “silent majority” is projected, with no basis in fact, as victims of the movements. (Krishnan 2016)



University activism has been on the increase in India in the last few years. Krishnan lists some of the recent developments in campuses across India. In Delhi University, students made their voice heard in referendums against the politically imposed Four Year Undergraduate Programme and Choice Based Credit System that were destroying the quality of education. In Jawaharlal Nehru University, agitations over the years have secured and safeguarded socially just admission policies, measures against casteism and sexual harassment as well as hostel and library facilities. They have also helped implement labour laws for campus workers. In the University of Hyderabad, students are protesting against deeply entrenched casteism. Further, the Hok Kolorob protests of 2014 in Jadavpur University and the recent movement against the crackdown in JNU have seen thousands of students from other colleges and universities joining in the demonstrations spontaneously. On what basis then, she asks, has the Subramanian panel said that a “majority of students” are against such agitations for equitable education and for democratic rights? She ends on a Utopian note:

Campus activism is not a “distraction” from “studies”, as the Subramanian panel report claims. The world over, it is a sign of hope — of a younger generation committed to fighting for a better world. And the world over, rulers are afraid of public-spirited, thoughtful young people who refuse to do what they are told by those in power. They are afraid of teachers and students who refuse to see education as a tool wielded by those in power. Education policy should be shaped by youthful hope, not by the rulers’ fear. (Krishnan 2016)

Without in any sense retreating from the real gains that protests such as those listed by Krishnan may result in, or dismissing in any way the actual advancement that can only result from activism such as this, I am interested here in focusing on the Utopian notion of a better world projected by this well-known left activist in the context of Indian student protests in recent times. Krishnan’s Utopian vision that sees a beacon of hope in student protests is similar, in a sense, to the classic definition of Utopia as the dream of a perfect world, a world free of conflict, hunger and unhappiness.

The *Azaadi* chant was assumed by some to be a gift from Kashmir separatists, but its genealogical origins are as a feminist number against patriarchy. The *Hindustan Times* reported on 5<sup>th</sup> March that it was evolved and popularised by well-known feminist Kamla Bhasin in the women’s movement all over south Asia:

The “Azaadi” chant by Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student leader Kanhaiya Kumar, which has become the heartbeat of a section of the youth today, is not a gift from Kashmir separatists, as is being assumed.

Interestingly, the chant originated as a feminist number against patriarchy. It was evolved and popularised by well-known feminist Kamla Bhasin in the women’s movement all over south Asia.

An early memory of dancing and chanting to the catchy beat of the “Azaadi” number dates back to 1991, at the Women’s Studies Conference in Kolkata’s Jadavpur University. A vibrant and charismatic Bhasin, in her early forties, chanted it with



a little drum in hand and women surrounded her, throwing their fists in the air. My five-year-old daughter, who had accompanied me there once, caught on the song and chanted it throughout her childhood.

The original words coined by Bhasin were “*Meri behane maange Azaadi, meri bachhi maange Azaadi, naari ka naara Azaadi...* (My sisters want freedom, my daughter wants freedom, every woman’s slogan is freedom)”.<sup>2</sup> (Dutt 2016)

Recalling the roots of the poem, Bhasin said she had learnt it from Pakistani feminists and later improvised the words. The chant became so popular that it reached the Left and other groups wanting freedom from injustice of any kind. Feminist activist Urvashi Butalia, founder-publisher of Zubaan, recalls, “It was one of the most popular poems of the feminist movement. Later, it became an inspiration for other groups too” (Dutt 2016).

Listening to the speech and song in real time, Jyoti Malhotra, writing in the Daily O on 4<sup>th</sup> March, just a day later, asked, ‘How many times can you demand “azadi” in the space of 51 or so minutes?’ and answered:

If you’re Kanhaiya Kumar and you have recently returned to Jawaharlal Nehru University after spending 20 days in Tihar jail, you can transform that single, allegedly seditious word, first into an invocation, then a chorus, soon a litany, until, finally, it is exhaled from your mouth on a wing, perhaps even a prayer. (Malhotra 2016)

She concluded: ‘Last night, JNU must have gone to sleep much later than the rest of the India... Actually, India was watching, live, Kanhaiya Kumar’s speech on TV, knowing that *something has shifted*. We are changed, hearing Kanhaiya Kumar, back home in JNU. For a few hours more, we can dare to believe that we have dared to participate in that change.’ It is this language and this feeling - not uncommon either in the reportage (the adjective most frequently used of it in the following days was ‘electrifying’; other descriptions included ‘fiery’, ‘impassioned’, and ‘blistering’) or in the responses of the viewing public at that time - a feeling of belief, of hope, of *something having shifted*, a feeling almost unbelievable in today’s society and everyday experience. It doesn’t need saying that the feeling is obviously not one common to everybody; I’m sure the ABVP activists and the ruling dispensation had other feelings on the matter.

The phrase that came to repeatedly mind to describe this moment of the speech and the song was ‘pure politics’: this was politics untainted by personal motive, politics in its purest and most unadulterated form, politics free of self interest or electioneering, politics that was the articulation of an ideal, that embodied a utopia of longing. Although the words *lal salaam* resonated in the air, and a repetition of

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<sup>2</sup> Nirupama Dutt “‘Hum kya chahte? Azaadi!’ Story of slogan raised by JNU’s Kanhaiya’ *The Hindustan Times*, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016. See: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/kanhaiya-kumar-s-azadi-chant-not-a-gift-from-kashmir-separatists-but-from-feminists/story-K7GQNzhzE1Z8UFB-DGVYh6J.html>.





*inquilab* was a part of the refrain, the moment strangely transcended party lines; as *Indian Express* correspondent Tunku Varadarajan said, for him it was ‘pure protest poetry’, and he vows he is no Marxist. This was not politics in its everyday form, the moment somehow seemed to transcend the ordinary or the routine, it was, in a sense, *above* politics. Which then leads us to the realisation that the phrase ‘pure politics’ is normally used to denigrate, to imply that something is a result of pure politics is to indicate corruption in the system. Sunil Khilnani discusses the concept of politics in the Indian context in his *Idea of India* when he articulates how politics was conceived of in the time of Nehru and Gandhi as ‘a necessarily undeterminable field of human agency, a space of constantly competitive, strategic and practical action’, a field that by the end of Indira Gandhi’s life had fallen into ‘corruption and degeneration. Politics and the state, once seen as the prophylactic that would invigorate the country, were now seen as the disease (3).

The sense in which the term ‘pure politics’ is being used here, then, is the inverse of the common understanding of it as ‘a space of constantly competitive, strategic and practical action’, indicating exactly the opposite, of being in some way above politics. Searching for a similar moment to this in the history of independent India, the only instance that came to mind was Nehru’s famous ‘Tryst with destiny’ speech. That speech too, made at the founding moment of India’s freedom, was above politics in a similar way. It transcended party lines, it transcended electioneering, it was untainted by personal investment—in all these ways it was similar, although the comparison is almost embarrassing to make. What both speeches also share is that both were broadcast live—one on the radio, and later on film newsreels and documentaries, repeated endlessly and familiar to all; and the other broadcast live on tv and available on YouTube to be accessed at any time as it has been already a staggering number of times.

I want to conclude by bringing Spivak back into the conversation she seemed to have been left out of earlier. In a lecture titled *Nationalism and the Imagination* published three years after the conversation with Butler in 2007, Spivak, for no reason that she outlines self-consciously, chooses to begin by invoking her memories of ‘the extraordinary songs of the IPTA [= Indian People’s Theatre Association], the songs of the patriotic D.L. Roy drama *Mebar Patan* sung ‘every Independence day’, and the street rhyme about the Japanese popular in Calcutta in the 1940s. The ingredients of nationalism, she realises from these instances, are ‘to be found in the assumptions of what I later learned to call reproductive heteronormativity’ ‘as a source of legitimacy’ (Spivak12-13). Song returns in her discussion in the songs of the tribal Sabar men and women, inventive ‘oral-formulaic presentations’ of ‘thinking without nation’. She returns here to Arendt’s perceptiveness with regard to what she christens the ‘nation thing’ in suggesting that ‘the putting together of nationalism with the abstract structure of the state was an experiment or a happening that has a limited history and a limited future. We are living, as Jurgen Habermas says, in post-national situations.’ (14)

Further, what the nation thing conjures is ‘a rock-bottom comfort in one’s language and one’s home [which is] not a positive affect’. ‘In whatever nationalist colours they are dressed, whether chronological or logical, the impulse to nation-



alism is “we must control the workings of our own public sphere” (p. 18) Ending ‘by speaking of the reinvention of the state’ rather than the easy ‘nation-state’ that rolls off our tongues, she imagines a ‘so-called Global South’ ‘free of the baggage of nationalist identitarianism, and inclining towards a critical regionalism, beyond the national boundaries’. ‘As for me,’ she concludes, ‘I am altogether utopian. I look towards a re-imagined world that is a cluster in the Global South, a cluster of regions... Imagine this, please, for a new world around the corner. Thank you.’ (49, 58) Which is precisely what the azadi song sung by Kanhaiya and thousands of others seems to say to us: ‘Imagine this, please, for a new world around the corner.’

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# HINDUTVA AGENDA AND HISTORY WRITING: IMAGININGS OF NATION

Sucheta Mahajan  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the ideological and political ramifications of historical interpretation. It examines the communal perspective on the writing of history to show how it is a distorted representation of reality, so institutions propagate the communal point of view and suppress alternative perspectives. The suppression of the textbooks written from a secular scientific standpoint and the distortions in the textbooks for schools sponsored by the communal groups wielding state power are analysed. This need for legitimacy on the part of the communal forces prompts them to appropriate the icons of the secular nationalist movement—clearly a farcical exercise.

**KEYWORDS:** Communalism, Distortion and appropriation, History writing in India, State power.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo reflexiona sobre las ramificaciones ideológicas y políticas de la interpretación histórica india. Examina los prejuicios sectario-religiosos en la historiografía, que las instituciones utilizan para arrojar una representación distorsionada de la realidad, sin dar cabida a otros puntos de vista. Así, estudiamos cómo se promueven determinados libros de texto y suprimen otros en beneficio de posiciones sectarias. A su vez, estos grupos se apropian de las figuras representativas del nacionalismo laico.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Comunalismo, Distorsión y apropiación, Historiografía en India, Poder del Estado.



Hindutva is not a word but a history. Not only the spiritual or religious history of our people as at times it is mistaken to be by being confounded with the other cognate term, Hinduism. Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of Hindutva... Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole being of our Hindu race.

(Savarkar 3-4)

Rewriting of history is to gain legitimation from the past for the political requirements of the present.

(Thapar 2000)

## I

When we speak of the contested imaginings of the nation, history writing is what generally comes to mind. This is the body over which the battle for the minds of the people is fought. The spread of communal ideology is predicated on a certain distorted representation of history.

The two perspectives, communal and secular, espouse narrow, exclusivist conceptions of the nation and broad, inclusive ones respectively. The contest is not only about history, its practice, professional or otherwise. It is on the terrain of the idea of the nation and it is waged by citizens with a stake in the kind of country they want their children to grow up in.

In this article, I propose to discuss the communal interpretation of history, its popularization in textbooks written for *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) schools and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the undermining of secular and scientific history and the use of state power to control educational and research bodies and suppress alternative points of view.

The glorification of India's ancient Hindu past goes back to the nineteenth century. The communal interpretation of history is, at its very basis, colonial. Communal historiography followed colonial writers in its division of Indian history into a glorious ancient Hindu past, a decadent Muslim period and a beneficial British period. In this worldview, India's ancient civilization was deemed to be as old as the ancient Greeks and Romans, superior to them and even its progenitor.

V.D. Savarkar's *Hindutva* —or *Who is a Hindu?* ([1923] 1989) defined *Pitribhumi* (land of ancestors) and *punyabhumi* (sacred land) in such a way that it has no place for Muslims and Christians (Bhatt 99). Savarkar highlighted the foreign invasions in Indian history, especially by Muslims. British rule was seen as benign, in comparison with Mughal rule, a period of ruthless oppression of Hindus (Bhatt 53). Savarkar's *Hindutva* ([1923] 1989) and Swami Shradhdhanand's *Hindu Sangathan – Saviour of a Dying Race* (1926), both written during a mass anti-colonial movement, were silent on the movement and on colonialism (Bhatt 41).

This perception continued with Golwalkar, the head of the RSS. In *Bunch of Thoughts* (1966), he wrote: "Their [Muslims'] history of the past one thousand two hundred years, full of incidents of destruction, depredation, all sorts of barbaric atrocities, is there before our eyes. The present day large Muslim population in our



country is one of the results of the fatal devastation that they wrought all over the land... What has our good behaviour towards the Muslim faith and the Muslim people brought us? Nothing but desecration of our holy places and enslavement of our people” (Golwalkar 1966: 294-295).

## II

Let us look at the Hindutva history and its popularization in RSS schools, such as Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati schools.

In this view, ‘Aryans’ were the true Indians, whose origin is in India. Hence, Golwalkar came up with the startling theory that “the Arctic Home in the Vedas was verily in Hindusthan itself and that it was not the Hindus who migrated to that land but the Arctic which emigrated and left the Hindus in Hindusthan” (Golwalkar 1939: 11-13). Buddhism, rather than Islam, is the first target. In particular, the propagation of non violence by the Mauryan king, Ashoka, is alleged to have spread cowardice in the land. Later, Muslims became the target. They were described as “hissing Yavana snakes,” who had to be destroyed (Bhishikar 41).

The BJP’s forming the government at the Centre in 1999 and in 2014, encouraged the RSS and the *Akshil Bhartiya Itihās Sankalan Samiti* (All India History Compilation Committee) in their attempts to communalize the writing of history. The aim of the *Samiti* is to rewrite the history of India from a “national” perspective. It claimed that places like the Vatican, Westminster Abbey, and similarly iconic structures around the world, including the Taj Mahal, were actually temples of Shiva and that Christianity and Islam are derivatives of Hinduism (“Allow” 2017)

The Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal was set up in 1969 to promote the RSS’ aim of introducing ‘eternal Bharatiya values’ in the education system, rewriting school and university textbooks to provide a ‘history of the Indian Freedom Struggle’ against ‘foreign invaders [over] the last 2,500 years’, and making Sanskrit teaching compulsory (Bharatiya 2017)

The rapidly growing influence of the RSS institutions spreading such hatred and poison is a matter of concern (Sundar 2004). The Saraswati Shishu Mandirs go back to 1952. By 1977, there were already about 500 RSS schools and 20,000 students. Vidya Bharati was formed that year, in line with RSS Hindutva ideology and in opposition to Christian-run schools (Bhatt 114). Vidya Bharati schools were encouraged during periods of BJP rule in the states and given licence to frame their syllabi. By 1993-94 the total number of schools run by Vidya Bharati was 6,000 with 40,000 teachers and 1,200,000 students. With BJP in power at the centre in 1998, the RSS influence in schools spread rapidly. In 1999 there were 14,000 Vidya Bharati schools with 80,000 teachers and 1,800,000 students! (Kanungo 2002; Goyal 2000).

A National Steering Committee on Textbook Evaluation (1993-94), consisting of historians Bipan Chandra, Ravinder Kumar and Arjun Dev, among others, examined the textbooks used in the schools run by the RSS and published by the Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan and Vidya Bharati Publications. The Com-



mittee concluded that the textbooks in question claimed to instil patriotism but instead ended up promoting a virulent communal view of Indian history, bigotry and fanaticism. The books are dismissive of historical facts, which they tailor to suit their point of view.

The Committee advised that publications of Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan and those in use in Vidya Bharati schools not be allowed to be used in schools. This was because of their pernicious content. On Ashoka, the *Gaurav Gatha* said that “Ahimsa began to be ... advocated. Every kind of violence began to be considered a crime. Even hunting, sacrifices in yajnas and use of arms began to be considered bad... Cowardice slowly spread throughout the kingdom. [...] Soldiers guarding the borders were demoralized... The preaching of Ahimsa had weakened north India.” On Islam it was said that “Wherever they went, they had a sword in their hand. Their army went like a storm in all the four directions. Any country that came their way was destroyed. Houses of prayers and universities were destroyed. [...] Religious books were destroyed. Mothers and sisters were humiliated. Mercy and justice were unknown to them.” We are told that “Delhi’s Qutb Minar... was actually built by emperor Samudragupta. Its real name was Vishnu Stambha... This Sultan actually got some parts of it demolished and its name was changed” (“Gaurav” 30-31, 51-52). A textbook for Class V added the Quran to the sword as a weapon in the armoury of the invaders. Forcible conversion was decried, and it was lamented that reconversion to Hinduism could not be achieved (“Itihas” 3).

The tenor of the booklet on other religions and their founders was dismissive. In the case of Christians, they were dubbed as anti-national. The responsibility for the partition of India was laid squarely at their door. The mischief did not end there; missionaries, it was alleged, continued to work in sensitive areas such as the North East, spreading anti-national sentiments among the people they worked with. In a question-answer format that students were expected to memorise, the answer given to the question, how did Prophet Mohammad spread Islam, was, “rivers of blood” (Mahajan et al. 27). The *raison d’être* of the RSS is couched in divine origins. We are told that, just as Bhagwan Krishna emerged for the preservation of Indian culture, the RSS has arisen to defend the greatness of *Bharatiya Sanskriti*, Indian culture (Mahajan et al. 28).

In Gujarat the state-sponsored textbooks came in for sharp criticism for their praise of fascism. The Gujarat State Social Studies’ textbook for Std. X approvingly cited Hitler’s description of Germans as the only pure Aryans in the entire world... who were born to rule the world’. Under the head, “Internal Achievements of Nazism”, was written, “Hitler lent dignity and prestige to the German government within a short time by establishing a strong administrative set up... He adopted the policy of opposition towards the Jewish people and advocated the supremacy of the German race” (“Demonising” 1999; “On Fascism” 1999).



In this section let us take a look at the determined effort by communal forces to undermine scientific and secular history, in order to create the ground for the rewriting of history. State power was used to attack history and historians espousing a left, liberal standpoint and to prevent the publication of history books which do not conform to Hindutva ideology.

The influence of RSS increased when the Jan Sangh became a part of the Janata Party and the government in 1977. A ban was proposed on school textbooks written for NCERT by historians Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma, Satish Chandra, Bipan Chandra and Arjun Dev. The National Integration Council had charged these authors with the task of writing history books which were free from communal prejudice and colonial distortion. This proposed ban sparked widespread protest. As young students of the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, we joined the protest against this gagging of the secular NCERT history textbooks. I recall going for a big meeting at the Delhi School of Economics, reported in the press as busloads being brought in from Jawaharlal Nehru University.

A second attempt at a ban was when the BJP came to power at the centre in the late 1990s. The government carefully selected men who would do its bidding as heads the NCERT, University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR) and the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR). Murli Manohar Joshi, a trusted RSS man, was made the Minister for Education, so that the government agenda in the key area of education could be implemented on a priority basis. M.M. Joshi lost no time in ushering in a new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in 2000. The lack of consultation, particularly with the states—who were equally responsible as the Centre for education, it being a concurrent subject—was in violation of norms (Mahajan et al. 32-33).

On the bidding of the RSS, passages were deleted from the NCERT history books. Dina Nath Batra, the General Secretary of Vidya Bharati and head of the Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas (Trust for the Uplift of Education and Culture) and the Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti (Committee for the Save Education Movement), published *The Enemies of Indianisation: The Children of Marx, Macaulay and Madarsa*, on 15 August 2001. The book listed 41 distortions in the existing NCERT books (Mahajan et al. 2008: 33-34).

A wide section of the Indian intelligentsia protested (Mukherjee and Mukherjee 2002) Giving a veto over what goes into textbooks to religious leaders effectively means that no research can be done in a scientific way. One dreads to think of the impact on young minds if the content of their courses is altered by religious leaders.

Hindu communal forces were quick to brand those who did not agree with their interpretations as anti-national. The RSS Sarvasanghachalak, K.S. Sudershan,





called them ‘anti-Hindu Euro-Indians’, who hated ‘Vedic maths’ and did not believe that in ancient India we knew about nuclear energy and aeroplanes.<sup>1</sup>

Calls were made for the arrests of historians Romila Thapar, R.S. Sharma and Arjun Dev. Murlī Manohar Joshi defended the deletions from their books and called for a war for the country’s cultural freedom.

Despite nationwide protests, this ‘Talibanisation’ of education continued. A new syllabus based on the NCF 2000 was adopted, again without proper procedures being followed. The existing NCERT history books were withdrawn and replaced by books written not by experts but by authors close to the Sangh ideology.<sup>2</sup> As Thapar reminds us, “There is no recognition of the technical training required of historians and archaeologists” (Thapar 2000).

The Indian History Congress volume, *History in the New NCERT Text Books: A Report and an Index of Errors* pointed out that the errors stem from an anxiety to present history with a communal bias. The textbooks drew heavily on the propaganda by the Sangh, as the following statements of the new NCERT Text Books show. India was deemed to be the original home of the Aryans. The ‘Vedic Civilization’ was placed further back in time than professional historians have. The Vedic civilization was declared to cover the Indus Civilization, now to be called ‘Indus Saraswati’ civilization. It is claimed that all scientific discoveries from zero to decimal placement of numerals to heliocentric astronomy were made in the ‘Vedic Civilization’. The Hindu religion was superior to other religions. The Upanishads were declared as ‘the most profound works of philosophy in any religion’. Hindus, moreover, were true patriots. In the freedom struggle against the British, they alone were sincere, while the Muslims dreamt of an empire or a separate nation. Practices such as sati or jauhar were approved of as were abductions of women, which were even described as a legitimate form of marriage. Coming to the modern period, *Hindu Mahasabha* (HM) leaders are depicted as great patriots whereas the villain of the piece is Muslim separatism. The Hindu social reformers, Ram Mohan Roy, Keshav Chandra Sen, Jotiba Phule, and B.R. Ambedkar are ignored. The reason perhaps is the belief that Hindu society did not need reform. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Left, and the Communists were ignored, for other reasons.

The History Congress report concluded that no degree of modification could make the RSS —inspired textbooks passable. The only option was withdrawal. Of course, this had to wait till the regime was voted out of power.

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<sup>1</sup> Sage Bharadwaja and Raja Bhoj not only ‘described the construction of Aeroplanes’ but discussed ‘details like what types of aeroplanes would fly at what height, what kind of problems they might encounter, how to overcome those problems, etc’.

<sup>2</sup> These included textbooks by Makkhan Lal, Meenakshi Jain and Hari Om.



Increasingly, members of the RSS have been appointed to head premier research and academic bodies, and RSS-minded organizations have come to control education and determine the contours of academic space. The Indian Council of Historical Research was reconstituted in 2015 with members distinguished by little except their ideological affinity with the RSS. The agenda adopted included establishing the historicity of the epics and proving the existence of the Ram temple at Ayodhya at the contested site of the Babri Masjid, which was destroyed by members of Hindu communal organizations in 1992.

The ICHR Foundation Day lecture in 2015 was given by David Frawley on ‘Textual Evidence in Vedas — Cultural and Historical Implications’. Frawley, whose Indian name is Vamdev Shastri, is an American-Hindu spiritual teacher and a strong proponent of yoga, Vedic astrology and ayurveda. As Thapar puts it, “Engineers, computer experts, journalists-turned-politicians, foreign journalists posing as scholars of Indology, and what have you, assume infallibility, and pronounce on archaeology and history” (2000). Historicity of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* is the special interest of the Council, as is the Ram Setu, for which marine archaeology is commandeered to the cause (Pandey 2017).

The “Towards Freedom” series of the ICHR attracted the ire of the Hindu communalists who were not part of the tryst with freedom. In December 1999, the volumes on 1940 and 1946, edited by K.N. Panikkar and Sumit Sarkar, approved by the general editor and already in press, were called back during the tenure of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime between 1999 and 2004. Allegations of large expenditure and delays were levelled at the “Towards Freedom” project by the Bharatiya Janata Party ideologues Murli Manohar Joshi and Arun Shourie. An “expert committee,” whose members singularly lacked expertise in modern Indian history, was formed to review the books. K.N. Panikkar, editor of the 1940 volume, hinted that behind the cancellation was BJP anxiety that the volumes would expose its predecessors, the RSS and the HM, as having collaborated with the British. (Interview with K.N. Panikkar in *Frontline*, 17/5, March, 04, 2000. Nd). “Towards Freedom” was shut down, violating academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Media Statement by Professor S. Gopal in “Fascist” 2000).

Some recent incidents of censorship have been aimed to discredit liberal and progressive historiography, in order to prepare the ground for the Hindu communalist project of rewriting of history.

The first episode concerns *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2009), a much celebrated book by Wendy Doniger. Dina Nath Batra, head of various RSS education outfits, demanded that it be banned. The publisher, Penguin Books, a multinational giant, chose to pulp the book rather than take on Batra (“Penguin” 2014).

The second pertained to a two —pronged attack, in Parliament and in the media, on *India’s Struggle for Independence*, published in 1988. Bipan Chandra was charged with denigrating Bhagat Singh by describing him as a ‘terrorist’. In fact the first time the term ‘revolutionary terrorism’ is used in the book, Bipan Chandra clearly said that it is “a term we use without any pejorative meaning and for want



of a different term.” In his later writings, Bipan Chandra dropped this term as the word terrorism had acquired a very negative meaning. The authors removed the term revolutionary terrorists, as Bipan Chandra intended to do, yet a case was filed at a Kanpur court charging authors with ‘criminal defamation’, ‘criminal intimidation’, ‘intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace’ and ‘criminal conspiracy’.

In a third episode, in September 2016, National Book Trust revoked the reprint order for the Hindi edition of Bipan Chandra’s book, *Communalism - a Primer*. The book had been the rallying point around which an ideological campaign against communalization of education was launched. The attack was not surprising given that Bipan Chandra was not only an eminent historian, but one who upheld the core values of the freedom struggle and the secular polity that followed it. The new Chairman of National Book Trust is, not coincidentally, a former editor of *Panchjanya*, a mouthpiece of the RSS (“Former” 2015).

## V

The communal rewriting of our history results in a complete inversion. In the NCERT textbooks sponsored by the RSS, the role of the Mahatma is underplayed and the role of the Hindu communal groups in his assassination glossed over. Hari Om’s *Contemporary India* for Class X quietly sidestepped Gandhiji’s assassination. When there was a nationwide controversy on this question, the relevant sentence was modified thus:

Gandhiji’s efforts to bring peace and harmony in society came to a sudden and tragic end due to his assassination by Nathuram Godse on January 30 1948, in Delhi while Gandhiji was on his way to attend a prayer meeting. (57)

No mention was still made of who Godse was, and of his strong links with the RSS and the HM, particularly with its leader Savarkar. This was done, despite Sardar Patel, the then Home Minister’s conclusion that it was a fanatical wing of HM directly under Savarkar that (hatched) the conspiracy and saw it through (Das 56). Also, while Savarkar was let off at the Gandhi Murder Trial for lack of corroborative evidence, he was severely indicted by the Kapur Commission set up in 1965 (Kapur Commission Report 303, par. 25.106).

While the Communist slogan of *yeh azaadi jhooti hai* (this freedom is false) is a fact well advertised, especially by Hindu communalists, a veil seems to have been drawn over the fact that the HM had declared 15<sup>th</sup> August a day of mourning. Clearly, those who were on the other side of the barricades when the struggle against imperialism was enjoined do not want to be reminded of their past.

Today the communal regime in power pursues a strategy of *selective appropriation of nationalist icons*, this being particularly important to a political formation that espoused loyalism and did not stand on the side of the nation during the national movement. Along with Gandhi, to whom lip service is being paid, the Congress leader Vallabhbhai Patel is set up as a counterpoise to the much-maligned



Nehru. Patel's birthday is observed on 31<sup>st</sup> October as National Unity Day, while the late Prime Minister and Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi's birthday on the same day is ignored.

Gandhi has been reduced to a mascot for the present government's *swachh abhiyaan* (cleanliness campaign), his iconic glasses the logo, splashed across all billboards. Appropriating Gandhi is a travesty by a party distinguished by its absence from the annals of the national movement, whose earlier avatars, the HM, were directly involved in his assassination, which they tellingly termed *asuravadh*, slaying of a demon, rather than *shahadat*.

The three leaders, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel, with their different political styles, were united in their sturdy fight against imperialism and communalism. Dividing their legacy and selectively appropriating them is clearly part of a political agenda, unsupported by the historical record. It exposes the hollow or pseudo nationalism of the wannabe nationalists.

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# WHO RULES INDIA? A FEW NOTES ON THE HINDU RIGHT

Tanika Sarkar  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

## ABSTRACT

Hindu extremism captured state power in India in 2014, and, at present, it controls a large number of regional states as well as leading the ruling coalition at the Centre. This has led to significant and wide ranging changes in Indian polity and in political norms and values, and the first part of my article will briefly indicate their range, immediate consequences and long term implications. I will outline the historical evolution, and unpack the structural distinctiveness, of the Hindu Far Right to explore its mobilisational strategies and its ideological agenda over nine decades. In the final part, I will focus on two specific sites of violent hate crimes against religious minorities and against freedom of individual and collective thought and choice. I will finally try and explain their relevance to the larger agenda of the Hindu Right and their broad direction.

KEYWORDS: BJP, Dalits, Extremism, Hindutva, Love Jihad, RSS.

## RESUMEN

La extrema derecha hindú llegó al poder en India en 2014 y en la actualidad controla un buen número de estados de la Unión, además de ostentar el gobierno federal. Esto ha constraído una serie de cambios en las reglas del juego político en el país. La primera parte de mi artículo indica el alcance de este poder, sus consecuencias inmediatas y aquellas otras a largo plazo. Haré una semblanza histórica del extremismo hindú, así como del desarrollo de su estructura a lo largo de nueve décadas. Finalmente me centraré en dos casos instigados contra las minorías religiosas y la libertad de pensamiento y elección, explicaré su relevancia en los planes de la derecha hindú y el lugar que ocupan en su estrategia.

PALABRAS CLAVE: BJP, Dalits, Extremismo, Hindutva, Jihad matrimonial, RSS.





Something strange and momentous is now unfolding in India. Built on deep historical roots, it became overwhelming from 2014, when the Bharatiya Janata Party, (BJP) representing “Hindutva”<sup>1</sup> or Hindu extremism, captured state power, winning an absolute majority of Parliamentary seats.<sup>2</sup> The unique hallmark of the BJP —that which sets it apart from other parties— is their long and single-minded history of activating antagonism towards non Hindus (especially Muslims), and a proclaimed ideology of redefining secular, multicultural India as *Hindu Rashtra* or Hindu nation.<sup>3</sup> In the process, a significant restructuring of the Hindu faith also happens as some of Hindutva’s imperatives enter the religious world view of a large number of Hindus.

## I

I will begin with a brief discussion of their discursive strategies, organizational structure and ideological apparatus. The first two are as intricate, innovative and deft as their ideology is thin and one-dimensional. The former clearly substantiates and empowers the latter and allows it wide dissemination. I will then shift to current events, focusing, especially, on two critical sites: violence over the cow, and violence against love between Hindus and Muslims.

A few words about the present context, to begin with. Colonial India was partitioned in 1947 when large numbers of Muslims migrated to Pakistan. Consequently, Muslims in India were reduced to a small numerical minority —as, indeed, were non Muslims in Pakistan: without strong political clout or national —level parties of their own.<sup>4</sup> In social, economic, educational and professional terms, too, they have lagged far behind rich segments of upper and dominant caste Hindus.<sup>5</sup> Conflicts between religious communities changed radically as a result, turning erstwhile riots into virtual pogroms by the 1980s. (Vanayak 2007).

Given the staggering numerical preponderance of Hindus, Hindutva appropriates the mantle of representing India, since it claims to represent Hindus. It

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<sup>1</sup> Hindutva is their self designation, a term coined by V.D Savarkar in 1923 which claimed that it referred to the cultural essence of Indian nationhood. We will discuss this later. It is different from Hinduism as religious faith and embodies an authoritarian nationalism which claims to represent the community of Hindus as the only authentic Indians.

<sup>2</sup> There has earlier been another BJP-led coalition government at the Centre between 1998 and 2004. The BJP has ruled over several regional states as well and their numbers are steadily growing. The scale of victory in 2014 has however been staggering, giving Prime Minister Modi almost unlimited power. About 30% Hindus voted for Modi as a large bloc.

<sup>3</sup> In practice, secularism has often been compromised, and not always by the BJP. But it is a constitutionally enshrined pledge which is now being mocked and subverted openly.

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2011 Census, Hindus constitute an overwhelming 79.80% of the total Indian population, Muslims are 14.23% and Christians are 2.3%.

<sup>5</sup> This is abundantly demonstrated by the 2011 Sachar Committee Report on the Status of the Minorities.



flaunts itself as the nationalist force *par excellence*, closing down the necessary gap between religious community and nation, between majoritarianism and nationalism.

Partition, moreover, was achieved amidst horrific violence between Hindus and Muslims: killing thousands and displacing millions from their homes and country, and leaving a legacy of bitter, hate-filled memories, lasting fear and suspicion. Though casualties were precisely equal on both sides, Hindutva forces have always maintained that Hindus were the sole victims (Sumit Sarkar 1983: 434).<sup>6</sup> Instead of trying to overcome hostility with peace, they determinedly foment anger and manufacture memories and histories of Muslim atrocities. Several wars with Pakistan, conflicts over the possession of the erstwhile independent kingdom of Kashmir, and, more recently, terror attacks,<sup>7</sup> are inserted into a seamless narrative of Islamophobia: wherein Indian Muslims are made to stand in for Partition rioters, contemporary terrorists, and even for medieval Muslim imperial dynasties: as wreckers of temples, abductors of Hindu women and killers of the sacred cow.

The difference between history and myths is being painstakingly erased—with media products, takeover of research institutions and universities, and with new textbooks and journals. In their “history,” mythological demons are equated with Muslims, locked in mortal combat with Hindu deities and heroes.<sup>8</sup> Leftists, despite their rich record of anti imperialism and of colonial repression, are branded as traitors to the nation because of their international solidarities. The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) calls them anti-national and “foreign,” along with Muslims, Christians and cosmopolitan liberals (Basu *et al.* ch 2) Muslims, however, remain the primary targets.

Having constructed an awesome enemy figure, Hindutva then demands perpetual vengeance on present-day Muslims. Hindus are told, moreover, to refashion themselves in the image of the enemy—to be infinitely fanatical, cruel, lustful—so as to worst the imagined Muslim at his own game. The first step, therefore, is to construct a serviceable image of the Other, and then recast the Self in that mould. Inaugural offence is always ascribed to the enemy, and, thereby, everlasting legitimation and benediction are bestowed upon all subsequent offences inflicted by the Hindutva self, no matter how ruthless or unilateral.

What gives the discourse its persuasiveness is a judicious and extremely skillful blending of a few carefully-edited truths, half-truths and blatant misinforma-

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<sup>6</sup> In Punjab, in the north, for instance, by March 1948, six million Muslims and four and a half million Hindus and Sikhs had become refugees, the Muslims outnumbering others considerably.

<sup>7</sup> The last large scale attack was in 2008, at Mumbai. Interestingly, Pakistan faces far more numerous and continuous terror attacks by “Islamicist” forces.

<sup>8</sup> The medieval emperor Babur was accused—without any foundation—of destroying the supposed birthplace of Lord Ram, a mythological warrior and a sacred figure, and building a mosque in its place. A bloody campaign, accompanied with numerous riots, was undertaken by the VHP, ably assisted by the BJP-Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), between 1986 and 1992. The historic mosque was demolished in 1992. In the process, present-day Indian Muslims were characterized in Sangh propaganda as “children of Babur,” hence inveterate temple destroyers, who must choose between Pakistan and the graveyard.



tion. Since there are just a few nuggets of valid information in what they say, that suffices to validate the entire mosaic and lend it credibility. For instance, like all emperors, including ancient Hindu ones, some Mughal emperors too were despotic and sometimes tyrannical. Or, many Muslims did kill and rape Hindus during partition riots, even though many Hindus killed and raped Muslims as well. By excising those uncomfortable parts, and stitching up the residue with manufactured “histories,” a toxic mixture is produced which convinces people about the need for violence here and now. History therefore is Hindutva’s critical weapon, a veritable battlefield of contested meanings, since present-day Indian Muslims —suffering from multiple vulnerabilities— hardly offer convincing grounds for violent attacks.

## II

The BJP Founded in 1980<sup>9</sup> is the electoral wing of a much larger and older institutional complex, calibrated by the apex body, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS, founded in 1925). The religious front or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (formed in 1964) aspires to unify all major Indian and global Hindu sects, establishments, temples and priests under the Hindutva rubric. They have, indeed, gone a long way in that direction. They control the Sanatan Dharm Mandir complex of temples —the largest temple chain in North India—, conduct annual conclaves of leading religious heads and ascetics, and train domestic priests who have enormous influence within households (Tanika Sarkar 2012). Their global reach among non-resident Hindus is immense. Mass fronts have their own affiliates and sub-affiliates which are truly legion, their full scope and numbers being as yet unknown. All important mass fronts have been founded by the RSS. (Jaffrelot 2005).

The RSS trains leaders for all these fronts at *shakhas* or daily meetings which provide combat and ideological training, and members can simultaneously belong to several fronts. It oversees the general policies of the mammoth, multifaceted combine (Vanayal 1990).<sup>10</sup> The structure has overlapping parts and the system of simultaneous and multiple front-membership bestows coherence and integration on the complex organism, despite some factional differences from time to time, within and between different fronts (Jaffrelot 2005). Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always been an RSS member —indeed, he was, for a long time, a *Pracharak*, committed to celibacy and to fulltime teaching of the RSS message. So have been a past BJP prime minister and almost all its present top ranking leaders.

The Sangh has been working for ninety-two years, since 1925. Shakhas, set up first by K.B. Hedgewar, expanded significantly when M.S. Golwalkar became the supreme leader of the Sangh in 1940. From the beginning, they adopted a “catch

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<sup>9</sup> Its predecessor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh was formed in 1951.

<sup>10</sup> On the structure of this most complex combine, see the excellent collection of essays in C. Jaffrelot, ed, 2005; T. Basu *et al.*, 1993.



them young” perspective. Very young boys who came to them —mostly upper caste, middle class, urban and, initially, only brahmans or the “purest” caste— were attracted by a combination of open air games and physical cum combat training, a peer group to play with. Parents were attracted by the *shakha* discipline.

Once into the fold, boys learn three lessons on a daily basis. First, Hindu pride: Hinduism as the greatest religion of all, source of world civilization and knowledge, and Hindus as a community of virtuous heroes. Second, hatred against Muslims who are presented as conquering, exploiting and trying to destroy Hindus throughout history. Antagonism, apparently, is an ingrained Muslim characteristic, and nothing can ever change it.

Above all else, they are taught that India is the land of Hindus because their places of worship alone are contained within Indian territories. At one stroke, Muslims and Christians —a part of the country for many centuries— are rendered alien, and, hence, dangerous, to the nation (T. Basu *et al.* ch. 1). V.D. Savarkar, ideological guru of the Sangh, laid it down very clearly in his seminal tract of 1923 *Hindutva: Who Is A Hindu ?* He also said that Indian history consists solely of Muslim invasions and of Hindu struggles to retain their rightful territories. This iconic text was written at a time when southern and western India were rocked by “lower” caste protests and challenges to brahmanical power. Savarkar had to reckon with them and refer to caste divisions among Hindus. He claimed that divisions have long been superseded by miscegenation and mixing of blood among castes. All Hindus, he said —gross inequalities notwithstanding— share primeval family ties, based on common blood.

But even the metaphor of blood was not enough to procure Hindu unity. So he invoked the Muslim. “Nothing makes Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self. Nothing can weld people into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites” (Jaffrelot 2007: 91-92). A Hindu nation that wants to mask power lines internal to Hindu society, needs an external threat to actualize unity. Hatred is foundational to the nation.

In 1938, Golwalkar, second supremo of the Sangh, spelt out the implications with admirable clarity:

To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races... Race pride at its highest has been manifested here... all the constituents of the Nation idea have been boldly vindicated in modern Germany and that, too, in the actual present, when we can for ourselves see and study them... a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by... The Nazi lesson for India was ‘they (non-Hindus) may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges... not even citizen’s rights. (Golwalkar ch 3)

No Sangh constituent has ever retracted this profusely reprinted and much used statement.

But a new danger threatened to undermine the pursuit of unity- with-hierarchy. In his early life, Savarkar had participated in violent attacks on British officials. From his exile at the Andaman Cellular Jail, however, he appealed piteously



to British authorities to give him a second chance since he realized his error. Now that Gandhi had begun a mass movement against the British, hand in hand with anti colonial Muslim Khilafatists, he could see how necessary the Empire was. He promised that, if released, he would oppose Hindu-Muslim unity as best as he could, and devoutly serve the “Aryan Empire” of the British which stretches from Ireland to India. He was released and he kept his word (Jaffrelot 2007: 91-92).

British imperialism is rarely criticized by the Sangh with anything like the fervor that is reserved for the Mughal Empire —except as an enabler of Christian missionaries who are the butt of very angry attacks. British rulers appreciated this. Otherwise extremely wary of armed training among political groups, they never exercised repression against the RSS. The RSS alone has the dubious distinction of never coming under a ban under the British, even at peak moments of colonial repression.

Members were meant to undergo a full scale physical and ideological reshaping in *shakhas*. This was RSS “man making” —a step by step, person by person advance, a molecular expansion agenda. Only after that can “nation making” happen effectively. Growth was impressive, in quantitative as well as in geographical terms. But the social spread, for quite some time, was largely restricted to upper and dominant caste, urban middle classes, which even now remain their most assured support base. In 1939, there were 40,000 RSS members and 500 *shakhas*. In 1948, they grew to 600,000 volunteers or *swayamsevaks* as partition had inflamed Hindu anger. *Shakhas* jumped from 10,000 in 1977 to 13,000 in 1979, and *swayamsevaks* crossed the 1 million mark. By 1989, there were 25,000 *shakhas* and 1.5 million volunteers. By 2004, there were 33,758 *shakhas* and 48,329 *upshakhas* or sub branches (Jaffrelot 2005: 3-5).

The RSS is an all-male organization, but in 1936 a women’s branch (Rashtrasevika Samiti) was formed to provide identical training to like —minded women, drawn largely from RSS families. Coming from extremely orthodox and patriarchal social backgrounds, they found a release in the *shakha*, a public role, and a political mission that gave them some self-esteem and respect in their homes. But the new identity, however empowering to themselves, never challenged the broader values of domesticity, obedience to male guardians and a subordinate role, at home and in the RSS world. In 1999, a member told me that their preeminent task is to discuss and “interpret” current news in informal circles of family, kin-group, neighbours and at workplaces. Above all, their pre-school infants have to be firmly oriented to Sangh values and messages (T. Sarkar and Butalia 1995; Bachhetta 1996; T. Sarkar 1999; Tyagi 2017). At home, they practice a conservative domesticity which is hostile to divorce, and to love that is not sanctioned by parents. They advise women that domestic peace is their responsibility and they avoid counselling or legal help for battered women on that ground.

At the same time, they do create a new woman at *shakhas*: physically strong and trained, politically motivated and confident (T. Sarkar 1995: 181-215). It is somewhat difficult to identify their precise location within the Sangh structure. Like women of the Ku Klux Klan in post-bellum US, they run whisper campaigns in homes, alerting women to the dangerous enemy and preparing them to assist



their men in reprisals. (Blee 1991). On the other hand, among women's branches of the VHP, the training is markedly more militaristic and combative. Nisha Pahuja documentary *The World Before Her* (2013) shows very young VHP girls picking up guns and asking when they can use them against Muslims: and saying how scrupulously they avoid Muslim schoolmates. Prachi, who trains them, has huge anger against Muslims. Her VHP father proudly recalls how he had physically tortured her —branded her with red hot iron— when she was only seven for telling a minor lie. She is not angry with her father since he was “only doing his duty.” Rather, she adores him because he did not kill her at birth even though she is a daughter and not a son. The social values and expectations within a milieu that breeds Hindutva women like her are, thus, already brutalized.

The Sangh combine has sent down roots into all spheres of social, political and cultural lives, into the everyday world of Hindus: founding fronts and cells among religious establishments, leisure and cultural activities, trade unions, students and teachers, peasants and tribals, urban slums, education (they run the largest chain of non-governmental schools in the country), Army, media and lawyers —to name just a few activities. With a chain of Vanvasi Vikas Ashrams, they pay special attention to tribals or indigenous people —extremely marginalized, often evicted and pauperized through corporate land grabs, and lacking the means to any upward mobility, apart from Christian mission schools which have done much to spread education among them. To counter Christian influence, RSS schools for tribals —Ekal Vidyalays which meet weekly with one teacher— have been set up among them in very large numbers. Significantly, they mostly teach the worship of Hindu gods and myths, and the full educational apparatus of other schools is withheld. Schools, trade unions, *shakhas* and other institutions preach a single social message: that order must be maintained, social harmony, and not class or caste conflicts, should be promoted, and the concept of subaltern rights must be eschewed in the interest of their duties towards the nation and the community.<sup>11</sup>

The Sangh combine has, therefore, achieved what no other party has come even close to. The very capillaries and pores of civil society, their spaces and times, have been penetrated over a long period of time, by an enormous cadre base that works tirelessly, selflessly, with total commitment, mostly with meager rewards, often in remote and difficult areas: only to propagate hatred and cultural arrogance.

### III

Modi's victory unleashed dramatic and sweeping changes in economy and polity, in ethical and cultural values, across a country hitherto known as the world's largest democracy. Democracy, however, is conditional on equal citizenship rights,

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<sup>11</sup> For the various branches of the Sangh combine, see articles by Jaffrelot, Manjari Katju, Tanika Sarkar, Thomas Blom Hansen, and Kiran Saxena in Jaffrelot 2005.



whereas Hindutva insists that India belongs to Hindus alone. Self-immolation and inviolate chastity are emphatically valorized as supreme markers of a good woman, historical facts are made to bow before Hindu legend, and a cruel dismissal of pain as well as of medical science becomes possible in the name of *Karma*.

These facts give the lie to a persistent global myth: that even if Hindutva had embodied violent intolerance in the past,<sup>12</sup> now, under Modi, it represents economic reforms and development, an eager embrace of global investment, and a growing global credit-worthiness. Hindutva-archaic has, apparently, given way to Hindutva-modern. Global corporate investors are happy to endorse this view as Modi has substantially undermined existing social and environmental safeguards for the land and livelihood of the poor in order to help multinational capital. Our three examples, relatively “mild” as they are, show that the split is an imagined one.

#### IV

I call these events innocuous because our daily news fare usually consists of ferocious violence and sinister intimidation. I will leave out the “states of emergency” which have obtained for decades in Kashmir and in the North East altogether, or the “encounter killings” by police, paramilitary and armed forces.<sup>13</sup> I will also not discuss the frequent imprisonments of innocent Muslims on unfounded charges of terrorist conspiracy —only to be released decades later when they could not be substantiated (Khan and Haksar, 2016).

Nor will I go into church burnings, rapes of nuns, eviction of thousands of Christians who were forced to live in makeshift camps for years in Orissa in a state of siege (Mathur 2008; Chatterjee 2009). Four distinguished critical journalists, rationalists and atheists, men and a woman, young and very old, have been assassinated since 2013, for attacking popular superstition, or distortions of history: Narendra Dabholkar, killed in August, 2013, Govind Pansare, in February, 2015, M.M. Kalburgi, in August, 2015, and Gauri Lankesh, in September, 2017. The BJP disclaims responsibility, but it is significant that all were highly critical of Hindutva ideology and their own rationalism and atheism would be profoundly repugnant to

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<sup>12</sup> From 1986, a nationwide campaign to demolish a 16<sup>th</sup> century mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya and build a temple to Ram, an epic hero and Hindu sacred figure, was undertaken amid huge anti Muslim pogroms all over the country. The mission was bloodily accomplished in 1992. The 1990s saw a heightening of majoritarian violence against Indian Muslims and Christians: the most tragic ones being the burning alive in 1998 of an Australian social worker, Graham Staines and his small sons in Orissa, as he was suspected of converting local tribal groups, and genocidal aggression in Modi-ruled Gujarat in 2002 that finished off about 2000 Muslims in a few days and led to many rapes and mutilations.

<sup>13</sup> On the recent extra judicial killings of Muslim youths in “encounters” with the police and on custodial killings see Harsh Mander 2007.



Hindutva ideas.<sup>14</sup> Young people who campaign for social and environmental justice, for civil liberties, are branded as “anti national,” and charged with sedition.<sup>15</sup> At the University of Hyderabad, a young, poor and extremely promising Dalit student, Rohith Vemula, had his fellowship stopped for engaging in protests in defence of civil liberties. In despair, he committed suicide on 17 January, 2016. The government made offensive statements about his family and his real intentions.<sup>16</sup> I will discuss ordinary, banal, and everyday happenings instead, focusing on two particular sites of recent Hindutva activism: cow vigilantism and so called Love or Romeo Jihads.

Between 2015 and September 2017, there have been 24 recorded hate attacks, almost all against Muslims, leading to thirty four murders and two rapes and many floggings, on the pretext of cow killing or beef eating; mostly in the BJP-ruled states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand. But these are now spreading into eastern parts as well: in Assam —now ruled by the BJP— and in West Bengal. Numbers have gone up since September.

About 94% of the killings are attributed to groups directly affiliated to the Sangh: the Bajrang Dal which is the youth wing of the VHP, the VHP, or other affiliates. Marauding mobs call themselves cow protectors or *Gau rakshaks*. Untouchable caste people or Dalits (they call themselves by this name which means “oppressed”) are publicly flogged and humiliated. At Una in the western state of Gujarat, ruled by the BJP for three successive terms, seven Dalit youths were beaten up with iron rods in July 2016 for skinning a dead cow. They were then paraded half naked in public and beaten all the way to the police station (“Citizens” 2017). Lynchings such as this one have sometimes been filmed live and circulated widely in the social media. But that did not deter the killers, sure as they were, of public and state approval. Nor did visual evidence produce noticeable state reprisals.

Beef eating is prohibited in several Indian states because it is offensive to upper caste Hindus who regard the cow as holy: as a mother figure. Large segments of “lower castes” have imitated them over the years to gain social respectability. For Muslims, on the other hand, cow sacrifice is a sacred annual ritual and neither Muslims nor Christians are under religious restrictions against beef eating. The one sided restrictions —as piggery products, offensive to Muslims, are not prohibited— have always qualified full secularism which India formally espouses.

Many Muslims are farmers, cattle traders or breeders, while segments of Dalits are poor leatherworkers, engaged in skinning dead cows for hide. Layers of subaltern livelihood depend on cattle trade, disposal of sick or dead cattle, skinning cattle for hide. All have become pretexts for lynching. Panic is now so great that

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<sup>14</sup> On Gauri Lankesh’s writings on Hindutva, see Khalid 2017.

<sup>15</sup> This happened to students of Jawaharlal Nehru University, a premier Central university on 9 February, 2016 with the help of clearly doctored videos to prove that they were shouting anti-national slogans. The Delhi High Court found the evidence inadequate and they are now out on bail. One student was flogged by lawyers and a BJP Member of Parliament before TV cameras. See *The Indian Express*, 10 February to 30 March issues, 2016. Also Lawrence Liang 2016.

<sup>16</sup> “Rohith” 2017.







Muslims fear to dispose of dead or sick cows, to drive out stray cattle from their fields when they eat up the crop, or transport cattle for commercial purposes - lest they be accused of intending cow slaughter. A Muslim found with any kind of meat product is often accused of beef eating and then lynched before the facts can be established.<sup>17</sup> So-called cow protectors make a good picking out of raids and extortion, and unchecked lynching of helpless victims becomes an intoxicating pastime. At the same time, bloodlust is cloaked under a religious mission: in their own eyes, and in the eyes of many Hindus, they are saving the holy cow. The ruling party —when under pressure from global media reportage or from protests in India— dismisses this as the work of anonymous, unaccountable criminal gangs or mobs.

The fig leaf of cow protection sometimes collapses when Muslims —not even accused of carrying/trafficking/ consuming beef— are killed, just because they are Muslims, going about their own business, without any possible offence to anybody. In June this year, Junaid Khan, a 15 year old Muslim boy, was abused and then knifed to death by middle-class, professional Hindus on a train, simply because he was a Muslim. His relative was also brutally flogged. When the bereaved family demanded that the Central Bureau of Investigation investigate the murder, the Punjab and Haryana High Court dismissed the plea, saying it has no national or international importance whatever.

The tolerance threshold for communalized<sup>18</sup> criminality has obviously gone up enormously, creating what may be called a “new normal.” New areas of violence open up endlessly, blocking any considered response or even a full understanding, of the total picture. What seemed an intolerable violation of democratic-human norms yesterday, is surpassed by far greater ones today, and the past infringement gets normalized as yet another “new normal” keeps forming daily. This is what Naomi Klein (2008) calls “shock doctrine” —used when a new regime introduces seismic systemic transformation and wants to keep the nature of changes opaque.

Significantly, these happen in broad daylight, on crowded highways and roads, and are made known to everybody by the media. Junaid Khan was killed on a crowded train. No one came to his help. Pehlu Khan was killed on a highway in May 2017, and Alimuddin Ansari on a busy street in July 2017 (“Citizens”). Lynch mobs clearly operate on a very wide consensus.

There is terrifying police silence, even active complicity, in BJP-ruled states. First Information Reports by survivors or their families are sometimes not accepted at police stations or are wrongly drafted there, allowing assailants release on bail on easy terms: as happened after the murder of Akhlaq Khan in June 2015. Witnesses and survivors are threatened and silenced openly, as happened in the lynching of Hazloom Ansari and others in May 2016. The police drags its feet about submit-

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<sup>17</sup> New laws, however, are changing the situation. A wave of new rules appeared in 2015, against beef consumption. See Radha and Amar Sarkar 2016.

<sup>18</sup> From colonial times, the term “communalism” in India has indicated ethnic strife and hatred between religious communities.

ting charge sheets to magistrates within the stipulated time frame, as happened in the cases of Mustam Abbas in March 2016 and Ibrahim and others in August 2016. The delay undermines the cases. If ever there is a trial, it drags on indefinitely, and in two years, only one verdict has appeared so far. For victims, dead or alive, compensation is a distant and unrealistic dream. In cases of murder, they receive a nominal *ex gratia* relief, if at all: as happened with the family of Mazloom Ansari or Alimuddin Ansari in March 2016 and July 2017 (“Citizens”). The media soon gets engrossed in assessing if the slain Muslims ate or carried beef. They point the finger of suspicion at the victim, not at perpetrators.

A few things stand out from this bald summary. First, violence is partly legitimized by a horizon of religious values where the cow is supremely sacred. Given that, the fact that Muslims consume beef – which involves cow killing – immediately makes them the Other of Hindus. In Hindutva propaganda, it is the religious mission of Muslims to destroy Hindu holy beings: *ergo*, Islam has to destroy Hinduism – a conviction much fattened by rumours and legends of past Muslim rulers forcing the Hindu to eat beef and the good Hindu choosing death to that. So, in Hindutva logic mob lynching of Muslims gets translated as a struggle for Hindu survival.

Since the destruction of Muslim lives happens in the name of the holy cow, it blocks a sufficiently strong horror about lynching among many Hindus. They may not themselves join the lynch-mob but neither would they do anything to stop it. Cow-communalism has, moreover, old roots. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hindus and Muslims had clashed over cow slaughter in several parts of northern India (Pandey 1990). Shortly after the birth of the VHP, a band of ascetics came out on Delhi streets in 1966, rioting to demand a total ban on beef and cow killing (Basu and Sarkar ch. 1).

Hate attacks involve a visible defiance of democratic political values and norms. These have, of course, been violated earlier, too, by the powerful and the privileged. But then the acts were covert and insidious, rather than open and demonstrative. Without an explicit overturning of the established constitutional framework based on a secular democracy, we have now reached a stage where state institutions as well as large sections of the Hindu public have accepted majoritarian authoritarianism, however much violence that involves.

#### IV

At a recent VHP-organized apex meeting of Hindu sectarian heads and ascetics, religious leaders demanded that all regulations against cow vigilantism be done away with. Their authority is immense and no doubt their call will be heeded soon.

They demanded something else as well. They asked the VHP to train Bajrang Dal youths in the art of seduction so that they can attract and annex Muslim girls to the Hindu community. They call this “save the daughter and bring in the bride”: that is, keep the Hindu daughter within the Hindu fold, and bring in a Muslim daughter —in-law from outside. The rationale? A conviction, produced by the RSS propaganda machinery, that Muslims are politically motivated to abduct Hindu



women by pretending love for them: to destroy their precious purity and honour, to contaminate their wombs with Muslim progeny, and add to the Muslim population, so that Muslims overtake Hindus in numbers and turn India into a Muslim land. Love of a Muslim man for a Hindu woman is a mere mask to achieve through sexual conquest what terrorists and Pakistan aim to do. It is war by other means. Hindus, therefore, are obliged to retaliate in kind.

Hence the name anti “Love Jihad” or “Romeo Jihad” (the latter coined by Mohunt Adityanath a monk, recently made Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh) for campaigns opposing cross community love. Shanthakaka, leader of Rashtrasevika Samiti, alleges that Muslim boys are paid handsomely if they elope with Hindu girls. Payment, apparently, varies according to her caste. For a Rajput girl, they get Rs.1 lakh (about Euro 1,245) while the amount doubles for a brahman girl, from the “purest” caste. The Muslim lover is, above all, bent on blackening “pure caste” pride and honour (Dixit 2014; Bhatnagar 2015).

Rumours of Muslim abduction of Hindu women had fuelled communal violence since at least the 1920s. Savarkar wrote tomes on medieval history, arguing that Muslims invaded India in the past to enjoy Hindu queens whom they conquered and raped. Hindu kings, being chivalrous by nature, avoided that strategy—a mistake, Savarkar said, because this encouraged Muslims to indulge in rapes undeterred. (Agarwal 1995).

Usually, such a couple elopes and her parents then approach the VHP and a highly accommodating police force. They arrest the man, force the woman back to her parents who, in turn, force her to issue a public statement, saying that she was coerced to elope, marry and convert. Grisly tales of Muslim lust then go viral on the media. Surprisingly, in court, the woman almost always retracts her statement, saying that she was made to lie by family and police. Since 2014, attacks on intercommunity love have proliferated rapidly (Dixit 2013; Dixit 2014).

In a recent case, a twenty-four year old girl, who was born a Hindu (Akhila, now renamed Hadiya ) converted to Islam and then married a Muslim man. The Kerala High Court annulled the marriage arbitrarily when her parents opposed it, even though she has consistently and repeatedly asserted that conversion and marriage were her own free decision. The court alleges, instead, that such acts are often achieved by Muslim brainwashing. So far the Supreme Court, which is still pondering on the validity of her conversion and marriage, has put her under a number of restrictions, even though she is an adult who has expressed her will in the strongest possible terms. If she has been removed from the custody of her parents who systematically intimidated her, it still does not allow her to live with her husband (Krishnan 2017). A teen-aged couple, a Hindu girl and a Muslim youth, were murdered in Bihar, in a recent case of honour killing by the girl’s family.

Indeed romance itself, when unsanctioned by family, is altogether under a dense cloud. There are highly organized roadside attacks on courting couples by Hindu extremist outfits, travelling on motorcycles, and calling themselves anti-Love Brigades: inflicting terror on non marital love which may not even be intercommunity. Self-styled Anti Romeo Squads, composed mostly of women, and aided by the police, harass and humiliate courting couples in public, especially in small



towns. A BJP woman Member of Parliament, Sangeeta Varshney, slapped a Dalit woman in public for going out with a Muslim man. Filmed, this was splashed on the social media and, three days later, the police were forced to enter a complaint that her father lodged. Such a supportive father is extremely uncommon. The BJP is the only Indian political party which opposes the legalization of non-heterosexual relationships.

On the other hand, a BJP Government affidavit opposed petitions asking for criminalization of marital rape which were submitted to the Delhi High Court by rape victims. Unless the woman is below 15 years of age, these rapes are not criminal offences under Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code. The government argued that what “may appear as marital rape to a wife may not appear so to others ... would disturb the institution of marriage apart from being an easy tool for harassing the husbands” (Nair 2017). Force is thus legitimized whereas love is not, and the wife’s wishes are expendable if “others” sanction conjugal violence. Harassment of the husband is clearly a more serious offence than the wife’s rape.

Hindutva claims that Hindus and Muslims do not share a common humanity. Love between them, therefore, is unnatural. A Delhi VHP leader told us in 1990 that their men routinely scour registry offices to scan marriage notices that have to be put up in advance. If they find an announcement of an intercommunity marriage, they ask the parents whether they know and approve of it. If they are not agreeable, they try to block such marriages and, if they are, they try to dissuade them.<sup>19</sup> He went into a long and grisly account of Muslim lust from which Hindu female purity must be saved at all costs. A Rashtrasevika Samiti leader told me 1999: ‘They [Muslims] have always raped us, now we must rape them’ (Sarkar 2005). In the same sentence she became the raped and the rapist: occupying a doubled sexual identity and easily changing gender, so intense is her wrath against the Muslim. If all Muslim men are genetically coded as rapists —as indeed they are alleged to be, with great force and visceral content in Hindutva narratives, old and new— then love for a Hindu girl must be, in this logical conundrum, the prelude to force. But there is more to it.

Mohunt Adityanath said that such love is actually an ‘international conspiracy’. A VHP woman from Bhopal unpacked the notion to a research scholar who interviewed her in 2016.<sup>20</sup> The conspiracy, she said, originates in Pakistan, which sends terrorist emissaries to India to train Muslim youths in seduction. They pretend to love innocent Hindu girls and elope with them. They are then converted to Islam. There is also a parallel narrative with a difference, wherein the girl is abducted and forced to marry and convert. Either way, after marriage she is forced to bear Muslim children, to provide slave labour to the entire family as well

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<sup>19</sup> Between 1990 and 1993, I, along with Sumit Sarkar, Sambudha Sen, Tapan Basu and P.K. Datta, were collecting material for what was later published as *Khaki Shorts*.

<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Anshu Saluja, a PhD student at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for sharing her interview experience with me.



as sexual services to male relatives of her husband. She is then supposedly trafficked to Muslim countries. So we have a dual beginning, in either fake love or in force. Both are projected as typical elements of the Muslim male personality since older historical times.

Significantly, prohibitions are lowered when a Muslim girl marries a Hindu man since demographic calculations get reversed in such cases. Demographic anxieties are, moreover, constantly stoked by a strange Hindutva arithmetic which is widely believed. Each Muslim man apparently marries four wives, as polygamy is allowed under Muslim Personal laws—even though Censuses show that Hindus also practice polygamy. Each Muslim man then breeds at least twenty children at a time, whereas, Hindus, condemned to monogamy by their Personal Law reforms after Independence, produce far fewer numbers. The arithmetic overlooks the fact that no matter whether four women are impregnated by four different men or by one man, each will bear only one child at a time: so, neither monogamy nor polygamy makes the least bit of difference to the number of children that a woman can have.

Love Jihad is a neologism which subverts the meaning of love. Romeo Jihad is a stranger neologism since Romeo is, for the whole world, the iconic figure of doomed, tragic love. Why, then, use his name to castigate inter-community love? It seems that in both cases, lovers defied parental decisions. That becomes a crime and a sin, punishable by violence. If the words are new, the idea, however, has old and tenacious roots in sacred texts. Hindu marriage is normatively endogamous, and inter-caste marriages are as much an offence to social morality as inter community marriages are. In practice, marriages between dalit and non-dalit castes fetch as harsh penalties as Hindu-Muslim marriages do. But, interestingly, they are not publicly ostracized nor stigmatized by a negative naming since, in Hindutva rhetoric, all Hindus share an organic indivisible unity. Cross caste marriages, therefore, cannot generate political campaigns which inter-community marriages do.

Inter-caste and inter-community civil marriages were legalized in India only after a long and protracted struggle. Though a very limited form of civil marriages—wherein couples could marry across caste and communities only by publicly abjuring their faith—was allowed from 1872, Hindus, staying within their religious fold, were allowed to marry across caste and community only after Independence. B.R. Ambedkar, great Dalit leader and the first Law Minister of India, eradicated all restrictions in his reform of Hindu Personal Laws, producing a most intense backlash from the Hindu Mahasabha, RSS, from even some Congress politicians, and from public opinion in general. Love Jihad thus builds on entrenched social values. It melds family with community and state regulations to construct a monolith of absolute power.

The discourse on Love Jihad has larger political functions within the community. It represents the Hindu woman as innocent and rather foolish, unable to differentiate between love and seduction. She, therefore, is not capable of making her own choices but needs perpetual surveillance. With a dense and visceral narrative of Muslim lust, cruelty and oppression, a tissue of lies propagated by the VHP propaganda machinery and large sections of the media, this belief sinks deep into the consciousness of Hindu women. At the same time, as I mentioned before, a



surprisingly large number of women still assert their love in court even after they have mentioned abduction earlier: this requires stronger measures. In the Hadiya case, therefore, the Kerala High Court, as advised by the National Investigation Agency, denied the possibility of her free will altogether on the ground that Muslim organizations have “brainwashed” her so thoroughly that nothing now remains of her true will. This is a dangerous ploy that can be used against all women who may defy the state or family in any way.

And it is not women alone who are rendered subjects of family discipline. Forbidding intercommunity love is a very important first step in preserving family controls and constraints over marriages and over the autonomy of young people in general, men as well as women. In its broadest sense, therefore, anti Love Jihad campaigns are a mode of production and reproduction of ideal citizens of Hindu Rashtra: docile, unquestioning, obedient to all commands, whether emanating from religious majoritarianism, or social hierarchies and injustice —or political authoritarianism.

The deeper agenda of Hindutva is not, perhaps, simply the disinheritance of Indian Muslim or Christian citizens alone, though that too is extremely crucial. But it is to renovate and reinforce hierarchical values of caste, gender and class for Hindus, on a new basis. For a community, riven by asymmetries, power and marginalization, the figure of an alien enemy is essential to keep the internal power lines intact and preserve the semblance of an organic, seamless community. Savarkar had realized it nearly a century back.

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## MISCELLANY



UN-BELONGING AND DEATH VANISHED  
BY STORYTELLING: ISHIGURO'S KATHY H.  
AS A DYSTOPIAN SCHEHERAZADE

Manuel Botero Camacho & Miguel Rodríguez Pérez  
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

ABSTRACT

Throughout this article the figure of Kathy H., protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, is going to be presented as a replication of Scheherazade, adapting the trope of the storyteller to her dystopian and postcolonial context in a narration that explores the diverse roles of narratives in our lives. They serve to create a sense of individual and communal identity; constructing and shaping our past, our dreams and hopes; enabling us to recover all that we have lost and, especially, to communicate our experiences and survive in the memories of others.

KEYWORDS: Gendered Myth, Ishiguro, Scheherezade, Storytelling, Un-belonging.

RESUMEN

A través de este artículo la figura de Kathy H., protagonista de *Never Let Me Go* de Kazuo Ishiguro, será presentada como una réplica de Sherezade, adaptando la idea del cuentacuentos a su contexto poscolonial y distópico en una narración que explora las diversas funciones de nuestras narrativas cotidianas. Estas sirven para crear un sentido de identidad individual y colectiva, construyendo y modelando nuestro pasado, nuestros sueños y esperanzas; permitiéndonos recuperar todo lo perdido y, especialmente, comunicar nuestras experiencias y sobrevivir en la memoria de otros.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ishiguro, Sherezade, Narrativas, Desarraigo, Mito de género.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *One Thousand and One Nights* constitutes a literary construction that incorporates and synthesizes the myriad of myths, legends, creeds, literary works and folktales that belong to the different regions of the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia —some transmitted in the oral tradition while others translated and collected afterwards<sup>1</sup>— from prehistoric times up to the sixteenth century (Khan 2012: 38), blending fantasy and history into a common mythological domain.<sup>2</sup> Although in Arabic literature traditionally the *Nights* have not enjoyed the favour of academics or intellectuals (Irwin 1994: 4), their influence on Western literature has been monumental (Khan 2012: 39; Irwin 1994: 237, 290-91). This has not been merely on terms of narrative form and content but by shaping the Western collective image of the East, as the fantasy of a mysterious and exotic land, up until our current context of a postcolonial and globalised world. This image constitutes a “purely imaginative geography,” as Coleman affirms using Edward Said’s term, through which “the West seeks to expel or disavow.” all the stereotyped values associated to the East (2005: 247). Such construct has also enabled Western authors to find a location from which to criticise Western society (Coleman 2005: 247). In that sense the East has been turned into a faery land, a place whose reality is that of the myth, becoming a source for comfort and of romantic longing when compared to the mundane character of everyday life.

Scheherazade, protagonist of the *Nights*’ main narrative thread, incarnates the learned heroine who has become in the minds of the audience a proto-feminist figure (Blythe 2015) that overcomes the objectification that transforms women into expendable possessions. Scheherazade, as a cultivated woman, attains her status by rising above the stereotyped image of women when she decides to put an end to the slaughter suffered by the sultan’s mistresses with her own sacrifice, prevailing over this oppression in the end thanks to the strategy of telling stories to survive. In addition to her own example, her tales offer a varied depiction of women and gendered roles that, though entrenched in the vision of patriarchy, at least gave them the agency that female characters from other narratives lacked (Blythe 2015).

Narration as a strategy to enchant, survive or save others finds its analogy in some of the first tales<sup>3</sup> as in the “Story of the Trader and the Jinni.” a connection also highlighted by Ferial J. Ghazoul (1996: 84), in which each of the three shaykhs

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<sup>1</sup> According to Irwin, the stories were translated from Persian and Hindi in the early eight century, forming “The Thousand Nights.” (1994: 48). Although Khan defends the element of oral transmission, Irwin sheds some doubts on this, claiming that such assumption is only partially true (1994: 103, 113).

<sup>2</sup> Mythical character understood in the sense described by contemporary anthropologists and historians. (Mair 1963, Leach 1970: 58 qtd. Moblo 1997: 696; Eliade 1968: 1-2).

<sup>3</sup> This unified thematic has also been identified by Irwin concerning Mahdi’s thesis about the common origin of the first 280 nights that eventually composed the core of Galland’s translation. (Irwin 1994: 56).



that the merchant encounters narrates a story to the Jinni so that he would spare the merchant's life (*Nights* 1: 24-37). Similarly, the tales of the three Kalandars are narrated to escape death at the hands of the Three Ladies of Baghdad (*Nights* 1: 82-185) —an inversion of the main narrative frame's gender design. Simultaneously, each of the old men's narrations and the Kalandars' tales serve Scheherazade to deter her execution for one day more. Narration as a form surmounting difficulties is inherent to human beings; it facilitates our understanding of reality, and as such, it has served survivors of situations of systematic oppression to survive and, especially, to overcome traumatic experiences (Jacobi 4-7). Examples of this process are at the core of the literature (both fictional and biographical) of ethnic minorities, of marginalised individuals, the accounts of a group's diaspora and, of course, in the literature of the holocaust. In women's writing this mechanism is also used as a part of the strategies to break the silence. These forms of narratives, regardless of being factual or fictional, represent a medium through which some of the author's —or narrator's— inner demons can find an outlet in a fictional form that facilitates expression by avoiding the direct confrontation of the traumatic experience thanks to metaphoric imagery and language.

## 2. THE DYSTOPIAN SCHEHEREZADE

Even though Scheherazade could very well be analysed through the aforementioned perspective as part of an oppressed group, the figure and archetype she has become to represent in the literature of diasporic communities, like the Arab-American (Braga and Gonçalves 81), makes her more suited to be read as a precursor of numerous characters developed in the context of postcolonial and contemporary literature, where she can be explored in her mythical dimension and where the themes of identity and belonging can be fully articulated. Even though Scheherazade was a member of the sultan's court and is helped by her sister Dunyazad (*Nights* 1: 23-24), her un-belonging stems from the alienation suffered by an individual waiting for death, condition that separates her, even from those close to her; just as the dying characters in Ishiguro's novel will feel separated from their carers' reality (Ishiguro 276). As a result, storytelling does not only offer both Scheherazade and Kathy the means to survive, but to be reunited with their loved ones in the sharing of tales that are part of the cultural background to which they belong.

As such, throughout this essay the figure of Kathy H., protagonist of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, is going to be presented as a replication of Scheherazade, adapting the trope of the storyteller to her dystopian and postcolonial context in a narration that explores the diverse roles of narratives in our lives. They serve to create a sense of community and to express one's individuality as separated; constructing and shaping our past, our dreams and hopes, blended in our identity; they are the way in which we might grasp and attempt to recover all that we have lost and, most of all, the manner in which we can communicate our experiences and survive in the memories of others. In addition, her character also incorporates another literary figure: Ulysses, the lost seafarer endeavouring to return home.



The relationship between these three characters and their respective literary works may at first seem arbitrary. Far from it, the connections that joins them can be perceived both within the text, in its structure, themes and motifs; as much as outside of it, in the intertextual network of the *Nights* and *Never Let Me Go*. In Ishiguro's novel there is a blatant reference that would support at least a reverential attitude towards the *One Thousand and One Nights* and *The Odyssey* since these two works are mentioned in Kathy's account when she reads them to Tommy (Ishiguro 233). Concerning the intertextual connections proposed, in addition to the similarities that the *Nights* and *The Odyssey* have —especially in stories like those of Sinbad the Sailor as indicated by Irwing (71)— the *Nights* and *Never Let Me Go* can be related through another reference: George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, recurrently mentioned in the latter (Ishiguro 120-121, 124). The link between Eliot's work and the *Nights* has been explored by Alicia Carroll in her analysis embedded in the context of the search for an identity and the postcolonial reading of the novel (219).

In *Never Let Me Go* the oppression of women is nowhere to be found as female characters are diversely portrayed, exploring and performing different gender roles outside the traditional pattern of femininity (Ishiguro 170-71). In addition, there is a remarkable contrast between the proactive behaviour and resoluteness of female characters like Kathy or Ruth to the passivity of their male counterpart, Tommy (Ishiguro 240). This absence of gender or sexual oppression on the surface, we believe, would resemble the novel's apparent treatment of race as Josie Gill points out (846). As Gill continues this "postracial" reality is in fact "saturated in racialized forms of discrimination" which on the surface are barely articulated rather than hidden (2014: 846). In that sense we might say that the subjugation of women is transferred to the dimension of race and their difference (contradictorily enough) as clones. From the brief list and summary that Gill offers in the same page concerning other author's standpoints about the novel —relationship between human and animal, class struggles and the holocaust to name a few— one can see their common domain, the oppression of an objectified Other. Thus, according to these authors the novel may well be included within the group of postcolonial narratives, vision that has led Robbie B.H. Goh to term it as a "postclone-nial." (50).

Besides their upbringing, the only apparent difference that clones have with humans is a biological modification related to sexuality. Students wonder why guardians show a contradictory attitude towards sex; one of them asserts that for guardians "sex was for when you wanted babies." (Ishiguro 94). Their concern with sex puzzles the students since they are unable to have children. This connection between sexuality, reproduction and their identity as clones is reinforced by one of Kathy's classmates who believes that it is the guardians' duty to encourage sex so that their organs could function properly and they could become "good donors." (Ishiguro 94).



### 3. KATHY'S NIGHTS

As previously stated the connection between the works mentioned is not limited to the discussed dimensions but resounds throughout Kathy's narrative, structurally and thematically. In the novel Kathy recounts the fond memories of her upbringing in Hailsham, an apparently idyllic English boarding school, alongside her dearest friends Ruth and Tommy, and the flow of their relationship from childhood to the period of donations. Beneath this seemingly candid narrative Ishiguro's novel presents a dystopian world where humans prolong their life-span thanks to the organs donated by clones who, like the three principal characters, are raised and harvested for that purpose. Around the age of eighteen clones are trained to become carers, taking care of donors until they start donating themselves and, eventually, "complete," that is, they die. What differentiates Kathy and her schoolmates from the rest of the clones is the place and the form in which they were raised, as Hailsham constitutes a project to shelter these children from the horrors and the truth of their lives (Ishiguro 263). This exploitative situation is partially moved to the periphery of the protagonist's account as Kathy, after having lost Tommy and Ruth, focuses on the reconstruction of everyday experiences significant for her, in the fantasies created and believed in the midst of such a bleak context so as to entertain, distract and comfort herself or her audience, her donors.

As pointed out by some of Kathy's remarks, the narrative is an oral narration —perhaps a recording— as suggested by the verb "talk." (Ishiguro 2005: 45), in which Kathy addresses an interlocutor that she identifies as one of her own kind, a clone (Ishiguro 3, 13). Although she does not specify who this clone might be, or if said clone is a donor or a carer, it might be fairly reasonable to think that she is presenting herself to her donor, telling him/her who she is, her story. This, in addition, serves the narrative to create an identification between the reader and clones, as Eluned Summers-Bremner argues (158), which subtly facilitates a sympathetic attitude towards them. This relationship between carer and donor gains weight when she recounts her experience with one of her donors who wanted "not just to hear about Hailsham, but to *remember* Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood" (Ishiguro 5). This appropriation and reconstruction reflects one of the motivations of human narratives: the desire to merge in another's life, to belong even for a brief moment to a community.

Perhaps as a result of her appealing vital experiences, Kathy boasts that her donors tend to perform better, that is, they recover faster and also remain calm and composed even in their fourth (and final) donation (Ishiguro 3). In other words, they become more profitable to the system. Kathy is aware of and acknowledges the fact that the people in charge are pleased with her work to the point that her almost twelve years of experience as a carer might result from that (Ishiguro 3). Thus, Kathy, like the reader, might have established a connection between her excellent work and the postponement of becoming a donor (which entails her death), incurring in a *post hoc* fallacy.

Although as a narrator Kathy can be seen as conceited and unreliable (Ishiguro 43, 57, 129), there might be some veracity in her proud claims concerning





her donors' performance. Their better results can be easily attributed to Kathy's artful narrative skills, weaving a story in which her memories encases other memories, avoiding a chronological structure to opt instead for an associative narration that goes back and forth; creating expectations by shifting the topic (Ishiguro 45) or by introducing elements that are left untold until much later. Examples of such design are, for instance, the narration of the Norfolk trip, interrupted in page 136 to address the issue of "*possibles*" and not continued until page 144 (mirroring the inclusion of metanarratives in the *Nights*), or how she briefly mentions the Sales in page 16 and does not explain what they are until page 42. As Scheherazade baited the sultan by leaving her stories unfinished, so Kathy finds a way to leave her audience expectant for more.

However, this line of thought finds an obstacle when taking into account the fact that Kathy knows right from the beginning that in a couple of months she is going to become a donor. Although *Never Let Me Go's* characters can be identified by a fierce belief in rumours, fantasies and stories to the point of delusion, perhaps it would be too much to claim that Kathy really believes that she can survive her destiny by telling her story. In truth, this finds its analogy on one of the most recurrent and pervasive fantasies of the novel: the deferrals for Hailsham couples who can prove that they are "properly in love." (Ishiguro 151). Kathy and Ruth, and eventually Tommy, in spite of its initial realist attitude, cling to this hope even when they all have grown up in Hailsham and never heard of such arrangement, but also even after one of her teachers, Miss Lucy, tells them the whole truth of their lives to stop the students' delusions about their futures (Ishiguro 80-81). Thus, even when her experiences prove the contrary Kathy might still hold on to the last hope offered by storytelling. In that sense the certitude of the outcome is not what matters but the attempt, as similarly Scheherazade is never sure if her sentence would be finally carried out in spite of her artistry.

Concerning the narration's purpose two possibilities open up depending on how it is regarded. If we consider the narrative as a recording addressed to a clone (imagine, for instance, a carer who finds in the car's glove-compartment the cassette in which his/her predecessor recorded her story), then this would enable Kathy to live in another's consciousness, overcoming the short life-span and the meaninglessness of a clone's existence each time that somebody listens this recording. In addition, as she might have found respite in storytelling from the alienation and the un-belongingness that the life of a carer entails —driving through England's deserted byroads from recovery centre to recovery centre, from donor to donor— her audience might also find comfort and entertainment during their journeys. It would also serve for didactic purposes, offering answers to their existential questions, teaching them through exemplars; just as Scheherazade did with the sultan (Karahasan 64 qtd. Enderwitz 195-196). Such scenario, however, would increase the bleakness of the dystopian setting as a death sentence would also pend upon Kathy's listener, extinguishing her final hope and victory. The second possibility results from the interpretation of Kathy's account as part of her job, telling her experiences as a Hailsham student to comfort and allow her donors to partake in the life of that mythical utopia that Hailsham represents to clones. This view would be intimately



connected with and would endow even greater significance to the structure and style that Kathy adopts to create her narrative, as the already mentioned shifts, digressions and other interruptions would be part of a conscious narrative strategy. Thanks to them she would be able to prolong the story, making her listener curious and expectant to hear it completely. This would give them something to live by, instilling in him/her the desire to live at least for another day and to recuperate from the donations faster so as to be able to receive visits; thus explaining her proud claims concerning her job. Similarly, they would remain calmer thanks to the enjoyment of the fantasies offered and to the acceptance of their fate as clones, even after learning the truth about Hailsham and other illusions, by following Kathy's example.

Moreover, Kathy is aware that as soon as her story ends, her time to become a donor will come, which links silence to death, as in Scheherazade's case. Storytelling becomes life while their silence will incarnate the acceptance of abuse. The narration not only offers her the means to denounce or solace from the hopelessness of her present, but it enables her to re-experience her life, revaluating and reconstructing the bonds that united her to her former friends and schoolmates, her only family; recovering all that she has lost in the reconnection with her home: Hailsham.

Kathy's school was a project initiated by people who, like Miss Emily, wanted to prove that "if students were reared in humane, cultivated environments." they could become "as sensitive and intelligent as human beings.." (Ishiguro 2005: 256); thus questioning to an extent the dehumanization that society imposed upon clones as part of the donation program. It is not a surprise then that for clones raised in the deplorable conditions of other centres (Ishiguro 260), Hailsham would represent a sort of utopia, a paradise, a place of infinite possibilities —like that depicted in *the Nights*— where all rumours and fantasies are a reality (Ishiguro 143). But for the students raised at Hailsham this mythical quality is at work as well, judging from the amount of delusional inventions that they create in relation to the school. Stories from their childhood like the Gallery, which eventually is connected by the protagonists to the rumour of deferrals, Norfolk as England's "lost corner," where one can recover all the things s/he has lost (Ishiguro 65-66); and Hailsham's bounds and nearby forest have shaped the collective mind of the students as much as their individual understanding concerning their past, present and their future. In other words these have become archetypal in the sense that the narrative they create out of their experiences, their memory and sense of existence, is founded upon and built from them. Although the first two have a greater resonance throughout the story, the briefness and apparent simplicity of the latter offer an interesting insight on the student's collective mind. The constant haunting presence of the forest over the minds of students, especially young ones, represents to them the dangers of the outside world, binding the community together in dread. This fear is exploited in an exemplary manner, whether as a direct punishment for those who break the rules of the community (Ishiguro 50-68) or as a didactic and deterrent admonishment through the creation of ghost stories. In the latter's case Kathy recalls one in which a girl student decided to trespass the school's bounds and when she tried to return she was not allowed in by the guardians, wandering for a time outside the fences



until she died in the outer world, resuming her vagrancy as a spirit “gazing over Hailsham, pinning to be let back in.” (Ishiguro 2005: 50).

#### 4. MYTH AS THE LITERARY EXIT

All these stories represent Hailsham’s community politics of belonging, the strategies adopted to create a communal identity and delimit it in opposition to the identity of other groups (Yuval-Davis 204). As part of this set of strategies, narratives do not only constitute our sense of both individual and communal identity but also they give us safety and comfort in the reassurance of our belonging to a group. Even when individuals are isolated, stories enable them to be reintegrated —albeit artificially and momentarily— in that community. Clones not only endure unbelonging towards humans, within their community there is also an additional cause for that feeling: those who attended Hailsham and those who want to “remember” through narrative experience. In that sense, Scheherazade’s stories are not different than Kathy’s since they were the means not just to save her life but also to feel safe. Moreover, they also served to fend off the fear and pain of alienation and loneliness by partaking from one’s cultural tradition, a reassurance for the individual that s/he belongs to a community.

The mythologisation of Hailsham, though part of these politics of belonging, is the consequence of an essential event in Kathy’s narrative, its loss. After the eventual disintegration of Kathy’s group, as part of the cycle carer-donor, she learns from one of her schoolmates that Hailsham is closing (Ishiguro 207). The impact of this news is of great significance; as she reflects it was a bond that united all the students together in spite of their physical and emotional separation (Ishiguro 208). For a story that can already be understood as a narrative of exile, after this event Kathy’s account acquires one of the basic themes of this type, the idea of the return; in that sense one could say that Kathy becomes the spirit of the forest’s ghost story. Although she at first does not admit she actively seeks Hailsham (Ishiguro 280), she finally accept this (Ishiguro 281). In that case during her journeys throughout England she is hoping to find any landscape feature (Ishiguro 6) that would lead her, if not her old school, at least the location of its ruins. Though in a more bleak form, this personal odyssey recalls Ulysses’ journey to Ithaca, his birthplace where his family awaited him. Kathy, of course, has nothing of the sort; her only family is disseminated across England, whether as solitary carers or as donors waiting for completion, while the place that she feels to belong has disappeared completely, not leaving even a last trace. Moreover, even when Kathy and Tommy finally managed to locate Miss Emily, the motherly headmaster, their meeting rather than comforting them confirms their deepest fears: that there are no deferrals for couples, that to enjoy a sheltered childhood truth was hidden from them and that Hailsham is no more (Ishiguro 260), as even its last remnant, Miss Emily’s bedside cabinet, is being sold (Ishiguro 252).

Failing to physically find and return to Hailsham, Kathy eventually finds the means to get back, this time, through a narrative journey. Just as she allows



her donors to partake of her memories and feel like a Hailsham student, so the narration of those remembrances would allow her to come back with every new retelling. As she claims after having lost Tommy and Ruth, once she becomes a donor by the end of the year she will “have Hailsham with me, safely in my head, and that’ll be something no one can take away.” (Ishiguro 281). In the end, being unable to become the returning hero of her personal odyssey she instead accepts the limits imposed upon her as part of her reality, embracing the powers offered by remembrance and storytelling. If not to be saved, these powers at least would allow her to be reconnected to her past; offering her a sense of belonging not just to her birthplace or social group but also to the cultural heritage that Hailsham provided for its students, perhaps the only gift left by Hailsham that does not mark them as different but reunites them with the rest of humankind. In that sense she is not different than her precursor, as Scheherazade took advantage of the stories and lore available in her cultural context, with its usual narrative patterns and cultural tropes, as the crucial element in her scheme. From these she was able to appease the anger of the sultan, healing him (Enderwitz 191) by changing his views of women from her first tales about adulterous women to her late ones in which her depiction of women becomes more positive and diverse (Blythe 2015). As Kathy’s message is not likely to reach humans, her attempt is restricted to her community, reconstructing her own sense of existence by resorting to the narrative formulas offered in works like *The Odyssey* or the *Arabian Nights* in a narration that allows clones to reassert a common tradition that can be traced back to an ancient and mythical cultural heritage to which they wish to belong.

In spite of her efforts and accomplishments, Kathy ultimately fails to fulfil her role as Scheherazade since for her there is no final salvation. Despite her profitability as a good carer, she has to complete the role imposed by society. In fact this impossibility springs from her very difference as a clone: the incapability of having children. What is usually forgotten about the *Arabian Nights*—probably due to its numerous versions (Ballaster 49)—is that the final pardon and the sultan’s repentance is not only brought about by storytelling but by the three children that Scheherazade has with him (*Nights* 10: 54-55). Based on Heinz and Grotzfeld’s conclusions Susanne Enderwitz argues that motherhood as the motivation of the pardon may be closer to the original sources of the *Nights*, underlining the relationship between “the telling of stories and giving birth (as two parallel acts of procreation).” (190-191). That Kathy would finally die as a consequence of her imposed barrenness would underline the significance of one scene in particular. Kathy narrates that, as a child, when she was hearing her Judy Bridgewater<sup>4</sup> tape alone in her room she was being observed by Madame (Ishiguro 70-73). As she comments though the song does not talk about a mother and a baby, she was imagining herself to be holding

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<sup>4</sup> That Judy Bridgewater’s tape is titled *Songs After Dark* may be an indirect reference to the *Arabian Nights* and the time of the day when Scheherazade told her stories: from night until the first lights of the morning.



her baby, singing to him/her to never let her go, a scene that made Madame cried much to the perplexity of Kathy.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although at the end the dystopian setting prevails over all the fantasies and hopes created throughout the novel, both by characters and readers alike, *Never Let Me Go* still leaves open a space for resistance. In it memory and storytelling represent the tools through which oppressed and dehumanized individuals can reassert their own value, overcoming rootlessness in the realization that they belong to a community joined not merely by common experiences or origin but by the narratives embroidered within the group's identity. In the narratives created by them the characteristics of their social context coexist with a tradition that precedes them, influencing them by offering narrative patterns that relates them with a mythical past and through which they encode and understand both fiction and their reality. Just as Scheherazade before her, ancient stories like *The Odyssey* or the *One Thousand and One Nights* offer Kathy a device through which to understand her existence and articulate the narrative of her life and of her community, a mechanism that helps her to cope with her reality as well that allows her to teach and comfort those in her care. That in the end these narratives amount to nothing is inconsequential, what matters is the attempt to overcome the silence and alienation imposed over them as a result of society's dehumanization and objectification. In that attempt Kathy confronts her only biological difference as clone, her barrenness, by offering a depiction of her existence surprisingly human. She moves readers to sympathise with her, to see her as one of us, or rather to see us as one of them; in truth clones are the products of our social values, ideologies and cultures, they belong to us. As a protagonist, Kathy perfectly mirrors the role that Scheherazade had in her narrative: an empowered woman that though knows and, to an extent, accepts the limitations of her social context is still able to reassert her own ideas, criticising and transforming the values and views of society through a narrative creation aided by the stories legated to her. Both texts enable us to reflect on the power of narratives as a mechanism to shape both personal and communal identity, offering as part of their delight the last comfort of knowing that in the meaninglessness and finitude of existence we still belong to something beyond ourselves.

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# LAY PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORICAL ENGLISH AS PORTRAYED IN ROLAND JOFFÉ'S SCREEN ADAPTATION OF *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Adrian Pablé  
The University of Hong Kong

## ABSTRACT

This paper takes as its object of analysis a cinematic adaptation of an American literary classic, i.e. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), from the point of view of language. The film under scrutiny is Roland Joffé's free adaptation of Hawthorne's novel (Joffé 1995). The present contribution suggests a different approach to the analysis of the language of period movies than one would typically adopt within the framework of dialectology. This perspective involves a paradigm shift from *representation* (objective) to *perception* (subjective): in particular I propose to focus on the metalinguistic discourse of film reviewers, both professionals and lay writers (writing for newspapers and blogs), with particular reference to their commentaries regarding *linguistic* phenomena in Joffé's *The Scarlet Letter*, namely accent, socio-pragmatic features and verbal morphology.

**KEYWORDS:** Lay perceptions of the linguistic past, English in colonial America, screen adaptations of historical fiction, lay metalinguistic discourse.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo toma como objeto de análisis una adaptación cinematográfica de un clásico literario estadounidense, *La Letra Escarlata* (1850) de Nathaniel Hawthorne, desde el punto de vista del lenguaje. La película examinada es la adaptación libre de Roland Joffé de la novela de Hawthorne (Joffé 1995). La presente contribución sugiere un enfoque diferente para el análisis del lenguaje de las películas de época al que normalmente se adoptaría en el marco de la dialectología. Esta perspectiva implica un cambio de paradigma de *representación* (objetiva) a *percepción* (subjctiva): en particular, propongo centrarme en el discurso metalingüístico de los críticos de cine, tanto en el de los escritores profesionales como en el de los no profesionales (que colaboran en periódicos y blogs), con especial referencia a sus comentarios sobre los fenómenos lingüísticos en *La Letra Escarlata* de Joffé, a saber: acento, características sociopragmáticas y morfología verbal.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Percepciones laicas del pasado lingüístico, el inglés en la América colonial, adaptaciones cinematográficas de la ficción histórica, discurso laico metalingüístico.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper I propose to examine a cinematic adaptation of an American literary classic, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), from the point of view of language. The film under scrutiny is Roland Joffé's *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), a "free" adaptation of Hawthorne's novel, starring Demi Moore (as Hester Prynne), Gary Oldman (as Reverend Dimmesdale) and Robert Duvall (as Roger Prynne), and based on a script written by Douglas Day Stewart. The reason why I think this particular period movie deserves attention, in any strictly 'linguistic' sense, is simply that there was what I consider a clear attempt on the part of those involved in the making of the film (in particular dialect coach Tim Monich and screenwriter Douglas Day Stewart) at 'historicizing' the English of the dialogues on several levels (accent, vocabulary, grammar, forms of address). I also believe that they did a very good job, which is not to say that viewers of the film would necessarily agree with my judgement, as should become clear in the present paper. The film already was the object of analysis of a previous article of mine (Pablé 2004), in which I compared the representation of seventeenth-century English in two thematically related and contemporary adaptations of literary classics, namely Joffé's *The Scarlet Letter* (1995) and Nicholas Hytner's *The Crucible* (1996). However, the present contribution suggests a different approach to the analysis of the language of period movies, which also has implications on the materials studied and on the kinds of results that ensue from adopting this new perspective. The latter involves a paradigm shift from *representation* (objective) to *perception* (subjective), however with the latter being presented here in a systematized way according to my analysis.

Historical English as it occurs in film cannot be compared directly to anything 'real' —at least not in the sense that there exist contemporary speakers who would say of themselves that they are native speakers of such-and-such historical variety. When it comes to the more distant past, there are no people who experienced—or remember—the kind of English spoken back then; in this respect, there is a fundamental difference between the early twentieth century and, say, the eighteenth-century linguistic past. The former is still remembered by contemporaries, whose grandparents were born at the turn of the century. The distant linguistic past, in other words, we can know from extant documents only, some of which, according to historical linguists, are 'speech-based' (Kytö 2004), i.e. they reflect oral English. The approach known as 'speech realism' (Kirk 1997) has no obvious place in the academic linguists' discourse on how spoken English is represented within the period film genre, unless one wishes to compare the film dialogues to extant, historically relevant, 'close-to-speech' materials. In the case of Joffé's *Scarlet Letter*, which is set in the Boston of 1666, an obvious resource would be the Salem Witchcraft Papers (Rosenthal *et al.* 2009), dating from the early 1690s, which are said to come closest to the ordinary speech ways of early colonial subjects (Rissanen 2003; Grund, Kytö & Rissanen 2004). The literary scholar will approach a screen adaptation of a literary classic by looking into such questions as the extent to which the language of the original text has been preserved and how the linguistic adaptation has been constrained by the communication format chosen—including how the language of



the original has been rendered in this new format. The academic linguist, in turn, will naturally want to explore a different set of questions, such as why certain features of historical English as portrayed in the film occur (while others don't). Either line of inquiry, however, must not neglect an obvious fact, namely that those involved in creating a historical variety of English (e.g. screenwriters, dialect coaches, film directors) do so with a contemporary audience in mind, while also facing another task, namely how to do linguistic justice to the literary text, which involves having to decide where faithfulness to the language of the original is feasible and desirable. Thus, in approaching modern representations of the linguistic past, we might as well cease thinking of the past as a 'thing' with an 'objective' existence separated from the present and start thinking of it as the *product* of the present, as suggested by the linguist Roy Harris (Harris 2004). A reified view of the past has also been critiqued by historical linguists, who dismiss the idea of a disinterested philology that recovers the linguistic 'facts' of the past (Fleischmann 2000). An altogether different case presents itself in dialect movies set in contemporary times (or in the more immediate past), where the availability of both native speakers of a vernacular and professional dialectologists seems to call for an assessment in terms of how 'realistic' or 'authentic' the dialect representations are. This is not to say that academic linguists cannot make critical comments on the historical English in a fictionalized account, for example regarding its 'credibility': however, the expertise upon which such comments are based is, surely, a qualitatively different one. In a lay-oriented linguistics as advocated here, however, the focus will be on understanding laypeople's linguistic awareness of and their linguistic beliefs about the past.

## 2. LAY-ORIENTED APPROACHES TO FILM LANGUAGE

Given the epistemological constraints briefly outlined in the previous section, I have decided to treat the linguistic features occurring in Joffé's *Scarlet Letter* not simply as objectively given (and those not occurring as objectively not-given); instead I have opted for reporting on the lay perspectives of others, and what they regard as given or not-given, including the many cases where they are not sure about the ontological reality of the linguistic sign. This limits my discussion to those features that non-linguists have commented on because they found them, for one reason or another, to be worthy of comment for the purposes at hand. One obvious source to draw on in such a lay-oriented linguistic approach would involve collecting the statements and opinions of viewers: for example, this could be done experimentally, such as showing informants (selected according to various sociological variables) a number of scenes and asking them beforehand to pay attention to the language of the dialogues in terms of what strikes them as 'different' (e.g. with respect to Standard American English, their own native variety, Northeastern dialects, etc.) and if they recognize any regularities or patterns emerging from viewing comparable scenes from different movies. This kind of 'ethnographic' qualitative approach would be the one preferred by most sociolinguists, folklinguists in particular. Another possibility would be to engage with those directly involved in the language-making process (dialect coaches,



screenwriters, film directors, actors) as well as to consult guidelines for screenwriting (in particular instructions how to write period pieces) and manuals teaching accent and dialect imitations. Here I do not propose to follow either approach, however. Instead I would like to focus my attention on a different kind of lay metalinguistic discourse, namely that of film reviewers, both professionals and lay writers (writing both in newspapers and in blogs), with particular reference to their —often brief—commentaries regarding specifically *linguistic* phenomena. By doing so, it is possible for the researcher to infer some of the attitudes, expectations and assumptions characterizing (a particular group of) contemporary speakers of English, both as regards the language of early colonial America (what it was like, what it surely wasn't like, etc.) and the linguistic conventions of nineteenth-century historical fiction (e.g. what elements of the language of the original text are no longer deemed viable in a contemporary screen adaptation). Film reviewers do not form a homogeneous community—for one because there are both professional and non-professional writers—nor do they, simply by virtue of being film critics, 'share' the same language beliefs. On the other hand, reviewing a movie means writing a particular type of text possibly involving a high degree of awareness of who else has written a review about the same film. However, I am anticipating at this point that no significant differences were found regarding the linguistic features highlighted by professional film critics and bloggers. In other words, the linguistic commentaries made by professional critics writing for established newspapers were not somehow qualitatively different from the lay reviewers'. The explanation for this is plausible: while the professional critic may know more about the language of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, neither group speaks with authority on the subject of seventeenth-century ordinary English.

In the present contribution I am thus approaching film language as a linguist interested in the lay views of language rather than as one concerned with establishing the linguistic credentials of certain *post hoc* portrayals of historical English. The fact that reviewers single out linguistic issues in their commentaries, however, does not warrant the conclusion that this is how we *experience* film language. We only exceptionally focus on the *language forms* in movie dialogues, i.e. we will do so when we have a particular task in mind (say, writing a review of a movie set in the distant past adapted from a literary classic written in archaic language), or if we are historical linguists by profession. In fact, *the language* (e.g. 'historical English') is only one element shaping the viewers' judgments of, say, the historical credibility of a film. Setting, buildings, costumes, cultural artefacts, the characters' facial expressions and body language in their communication also contribute to the overall impression, even though in our discourse we may choose to treat (i.e. to speak of) each of these elements responsible for a film's local and temporal colour as separated domains. Moreover, which linguistic features, and how many, are singled out in film reviews is also constrained by genre-specific conventions. It is unlikely that a reviewer, in commenting about the language of a film, will produce a comprehensive list of features deemed worthy of mention. In other words, if at all, a few comments on language, usually of a more general nature, will have to do: there are exceptions, of course, such as review articles fully devoted to discussions of accent (as in 'the worst fake accents in movie history'), but they seldom focus on one film only.



### 3. METALINGUISTIC COMMENTS ON JOFFÉ'S *THE SCARLET LETTER*

Looking through the vast amount of film reviews of *The Scarlet Letter* available online (spanning the time period between 1995 and the present), one notes that the metalinguistic comments on the kind of English found in Joffé's adaptation are of two kinds: they concern *actual linguistic usage*, i.e. features that occur in the speech of a particular character, or several characters in the movie (sometimes mentioned in the form of a direct quotation); or they refer to 'archaic' linguistic usage that does not occur as such in the movie, the aim of which is to make a critical (and humorous) point on the quality of the film in general (or on the contents of a particular scene), by tacitly assuming a common educational (and linguistic) background with the readership, upon which the rhetorical effect rests. The latter phenomenon was already described in an earlier study by David Minugh regarding a different genre, i.e. contemporary newspapers, in which archaic language was found to be used for stylistic effects and serving metalinguistic discursive practices (Minugh 1999).

#### 3.1. ACCENT

The comments made on 'accent' as part of the lay metadiscourse are mostly negative. Reviewers tend to single out the accent adopted by one particular actor/actress without usually considering that particular accent in relation to the Puritan community and its accent(s) as portrayed in the film. I have found only two reviewers who refer to 'accents' (in the plural). One of them speaks of an 'array of dodgy accents' (example 21) marking the speech of Joffé's characters. The second reviewer views them as 'cod accents' (example 1), thus stressing the lack of genuineness and seriousness (as reenforced by the term 'jiggery-pokery'), and perhaps alluding to the cliché dialects associated with stock characters of popular drama (e.g. the Yankee country bumpkin, the English gentleman, the Irish):

- (1) Despite the cast taking themselves very seriously indeed, *The Scarlet Letter* is a great comic turn, complete with cod-accents and other period jiggery-pokery. (anonymous, *Film4*, August 2009)

Other reviewers specifically target Demi Moore's accent in impersonating Mrs Hester Prynne, a married woman who has just arrived to the shores of the Massachusetts Bay Colony from London; Hester was commissioned by her husband, Roger Prynne, to sail forth and prepare a home for them in the new world. The comments on Moore's accent I have found are almost entirely of a negative sort, labelling it with such epithets as 'rotten' (2), 'affected' (3), 'vague' (6), 'fake' (7). None of these comments actually discuss the historical credibility of the accent itself that Moore tries to reproduce, focussing instead on the quality of her imitation of an English accent:



- (2) Moore is simply awful as Hester, strutting around like Queen Elizabeth on a parade day, mouthing platitudes in an equally rotten English accent. (John Petrakis, *Chicago Tribune*, October 1995)
- (3) Moore's sullen and bovine interpretation of Hester Prynne —not to mention her primly affected accent, which she seems to have learnt from old Hollywood costume dramas— is both misguided and risible (Maitland McDonagh, *TV Guide's Movie Guide*, August 2009)
- (4) ...it also features Demi Moore as the “fallen woman,” painfully working her way through what sounds to be a British accent. (anonymous, *ONTD!*, February 2011)
- (5) At the end of the day, Demi Moore was not only wrong for Hester, but her accent was questionable. (anonymous, *writergurlny.com*, April 2015)

In one instance, the reviewer admits that Demi Moore had to have an accent different than her native one, most likely because Moore's American accent would have been even more misplaced within a movie set in seventeenth-century New England:

- (6) On hand are several native Americans and pilgrims straight out of a well-funded Thanksgiving pageant, lending to the “are they SERIOUS?” feeling that plagues the whole thing. This is not helped by Demi Moore trying a vaguely European accent, which jars every time she opens her mouth. I know, it would be worse if she had no accent, so what should they do? What they should do is not make the movie. (anonymous, *Cinema de Merde*, March 2012)

Moore's accent as Hester Prynne even received a mention in the 2010 movie *Easy A*, which is partly inspired by Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, where the protagonist is reported as saying:

- (7) At one point in the film, talking about *The Scarlet Letter*, she deadpans, “Make sure you watch the original, not the Demi Moore movie where she talks in a fake British accent and takes a lot of baths.” (anonymous, *Sir Critic's Cinema*, September 2010)

Moore's accent was in the newspaper headlines again after the actress played the part of an Oxford-educated American in the movie *Flawless* (2007), co-starring Michael Caine. The professional writers seem to have condemned it unanimously; one reviewer stated:

- (8) (*subtitle*) Demi Moore's strangulated vowels in *Flawless* provide the latest example in a grand tradition of crimes against accents in the cinema. (Simon Masterton, *The Guardian*, November 2008)

Some writers mention Moore's English accent in *Flawless* in conjunction with her earlier performance as Hester Prynne. The following comment, taken from the blogosphere, is one of the rare positive judgements I have found regarding Moore's accent:



- (9) Demi Moore tries on a British accent again, which worked out for her so well in “The Scarlet Letter.” Now she’s a back executive who wants revenge for being passed over for promotions. (anonymous, *Super Blinky*, February 2008)

One reviewer credits all white characters in Joffé’s movie with having a British accent except Hester. He criticizes the fact that Hester’s lack of such an accent is left unexplained in the film:

- (10) Rather like Kevin Costner’s Robin [Hood], Demi Moore’s Hester is, inexplicably, the only white person in Colonial Massachusetts without a British accent. (Ben Steelman, *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 1995).

Some reviewers also mention actors Gary Oldman and Robert Duvall in relation to their respective accents in the film. As regards Oldman’s Rev. Dimmesdale, the most recurrent label used to describe his accent is ‘Scottish’ (12-14), though ‘Irish’ also occurs once (11). Some reviewers, in turn, seem unable to identify it (15). Oldman’s accent is referred to as ‘random’ (11), ‘wavering’ (13), ‘inconsistent’ (16), and is mostly judged unsuccessful or not convincing enough (12-16). However, it is not always clear whether the ‘inconsistency’ actually consists in Oldman’s performance of the accent itself, or whether it is ‘inconsistent’ in relation to some homogeneous accent characterizing the other members of the Puritan community in the film:

- (11) ...and showed me a young Gary Oldman [...] with a lovely if random Irish accent. (Michelle, *Letterboxd*, undated)
- (12) The acting ranges from the clueless to the atrocious. Gary Oldman is apparently trying to do a Scottish accent, Demi Moore is just plain terrible, and Robert Duvall is nuts. (Lukas-5, *IMDb reviews and ratings*, April 1999)
- (13) Gary Oldman plays the reverend Arthur Dimmesdale with ink in his face, lust in his loins, and a wavering Scottish accent. (Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*, October 1995)
- (14) Oldman tries like mad to instill this Harlequin romance interpretation of Dimmesdale with some dignity, though the combination of a rotten script and a Scottish accent that pops up whenever it feels like it don’t make this an easy task. (A.J. Hakari, *Cineslice*, January 2014)
- (15) Gary Oldman was superb although I’m not quite sure what accent he was trying to master (Nixholl, *IMDb reviews and ratings*, November 2007)
- (16) ...despite the inconsistent accent and a slight need to over-compensate Gary Oldman is surprisingly credible as Dimmesdale. (TheLittleSongbird, *IMDb reviews and ratings*, June 2011)

Robert Duvall’s accent has got mixed responses: one reviewer (17) regards his attempts at sounding English as unsuccessful (identifying the problem as a problem of vowels). Another (18) views his performance less negatively (Duvall gives the impression of enjoying ‘putting on’ a British accent):

- (17) Robert Duvall’s Chillingworth has vocal problems of his own as he struggles to wrap his tongue around English vowels. (Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*, October 1995)



- (18) Robert Duvall, as the psychopathic bigot Dr. Roger Prynne, seems to be having a ball affecting a British accent and chewing up the scenery; (Ben Burgraff, *IMDb reviews and ratings*, November 2003)

In connection with Duvall's performance (even though not within the context of a film review), it is interesting to note that the literary scholar Parley A. Boswell admits to not being able to identify Duvall's accent (19), i.e. it could be various things:

- (19) The film fails not because the screenplay deviates from Hawthorne's text. The movie has other cinematic problems: the craftsmanship falters. Robert Duvall's accent, for example, is baffling and distracting: English? Irish? What? (Boswell 2014: 158)

One reviewer, finally, mentions Joan Plowright, who plays the heretic Mrs. Harriet Hibbons, saying that her accent is the only 'right' one (20), thus implying that the Puritans of mid-seventeenth-century Boston should all speak with a British accent:

- (20) Joan Ploughright was charming as usual, and the only one who got the accent right —being a Brit, of course. (DeeDee-10, *IMBd reviews and ratings*, February 2000)

An important parameter when it comes to the lay perception of accents that I have left unmentioned so far concerns dialectal differences, i.e. the country of origin of the critics themselves. Reviewers may be writing for a British audience, or if British themselves, they may be adopting a 'British view' of how Hollywood portrays seventeenth-century English:

- (21) An additional amusement for British viewers is the array of dodgy accents. Gary Oldman's Scottish brogue passes muster (although he's an odd choice for romantic lead). But Duvall speaks with the fake plumminess of an Essex Man who has taken elocution lessons, and Moore seems to have a frog in her throat (unless there is something wrong with the sound recording). (Sheila Johnston, *The Independent*, November 1995)

What is missing almost entirely from the lay metalinguistic discourse regarding accent in Joffé's movie are examples *justifying* the accent labels used ('British,' 'English,' 'European,' 'Scottish,' 'Irish'), i.e. what marks a certain accent as successful or unsuccessful. One such (exceptional) example would be the following transliteration intended to give the reader a flavour of Moore's British accent (i.e. how she pronounces the vowels):

- (22) When [Demi Moore] declines a cup of cider with a prim, "Thank you, noh, I never imbibe," the first giggles of the evening ripple around the auditorium. (Sheila Johnston, *The Independent*, November 1995)

None of the reviewers, moreover, conceive of the possibility that the actors might be attempting, say, an 'Early Modern English' accent, i.e. they do not seem



to question their own modern language-labels; for instance, comments such as this one are never found: ‘what might naturally sound like a ‘Scottish’/‘Irish’ accent to us (i.e. lay viewers) is actually an attempt at sounding like English folks in the 1600s’. What is more, no reviewer makes suggestions as to what the ‘correct’ (or ‘appropriate’) accent would be for a movie set in mid-seventeenth century New England, or what pronunciations must (not) occur; again, comments such as the following one never occur among the lay commentators: ‘no-one in the 1600s pronounced their *a*’s open, or dropped their *r*’s, as prescribed by modern Standard British English’. Only one reviewer (23) mentions a ‘British accent’ that the English-speaking community at that time supposedly shared:

- (23) Especially the English phrasing is brought well by all actors, although Demi Moore failed to imitate the known British “accent” of that time. (Robert Soer, *IMDb reviews and ratings*, November 2004)

### 3.2. WORDS AND THEIR USE

A frequent feature mentioned in the film reviews is the second person singular pronoun ‘thou’ (and its derivatives ‘thee’ and ‘thy’). This is hardly surprising considering that the *thou* form is a stereotypical feature of period idioms of nineteenth-century historical fiction and drama, equally present in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. The *thou* pronoun is never mentioned as a linguistically credible feature of historical English by the reviewers. It is a highly marked feature, and thus simply treated as a stereotype. The impression is that as a reviewer one can hardly mention ‘thee and thou’ (a frequent collocation) approvingly, e.g. as the film-makers’ attempt to render the English dialogues more nuanced and thus more ‘authentic,’ or respectively as a sign of their commitment to Hawthorne’s period diction. Reading through the reviews mentioning *thee* and *thou*, one has the feeling that the reviewers regard the use of this pronominal form as the film-makers’ attempt at compensating for an otherwise too modern language, as the following quote suggests:

- (24) This is not a historical movie; at heart it’s a Harlequin romance peopled by 20<sup>th</sup> century characters, with 20<sup>th</sup> century mindsets, assumptions and vocabulary (expect for a few “thees” and “thys” thrown in), playing dress-up (Ben Steelman, *Wilmington Morning Star*, October 1995)

Some reviewers comment on the density or frequency with which the movie’s characters use the *thou* form of address, which they deem too high. At the same time, the *thou* and *thee* pronouns are also mentioned in the context of particular encounters—what might be termed ‘types of situation’—between particular characters (26, 28), or in relation to a specific character (27), or in the context of religious speech (29). Direct citations featuring the *thou* pronoun also occur (28-29); they fulfill a metalinguistic function, while at the same time illustrating the actual uses of *thou* in the film, without, however, specifying why it is that the *thou* form is used in that particular instance (or type of situation):





- (25) Though larded with “thees”, “thous”, and other linguistic antiquities, this “Letter” has been readdressed to meet idiotic modern expectations. (Rita Kempley, *Washington Post*, October 1995)
- (26) ...the flirty dialogue full of “thees” and “thous”... (Liam Lacy, *The Globe and Mail*, October 1995)
- (27) [Duvall] certainly has it in him to play a part this insidious and conniving, but between his stiff delivery of the “thee”- and “thou”-tinged dialogue and awful pilgrim outfit, Roger’s evil doesn’t have a chance of leaving you quaking in your buckled shoes. (A.J. Hakari, *Cineslice*, January 2014)
- (28) The Reverend Dimmesdale, not surprisingly, is very fond of invoking the Deity when necessary. He even does so with his beloved, exclaiming with most annoying frequency, “God help me, Hester, I do love thee.” (Carrie Gorringer, *Nitrate Online*, 1999)
- (29) Packed into a wasp-waisted ball gown that looks as if it might have been designed by the Puritan Bob Mackie, Hester heaves her bosom and spouts Biblical references. “Thou canst quote the scripture!” exclaims a town elder played by Robert Prosky, no less astonished than any member of the audience. (David Kehr, *New York Daily News*, October 1995)

Another stereotyped feature that reviewers like to emphasize is the phrase ‘good morrow,’ also mentioned in conjunction with other cliché period words or phrases (e.g. ‘yea’ and ‘I must take my leave now’):

- (30) The film makers kept the “good morrow” and the use of “thee”... (Peter Stack, *Chronicle Staff Critic*, October 1995)
- (31) DEMI MOORE miscast as Puritan Mistress Prynne in Hawthorne travesty. The yeasaying “good morrow” dialogue is deadly enough to defeat actors more talented than her (anonymous, *The Free Library*, March 1999)
- (32) Neither [Gary Oldman] nor Demi Moore is credible among a populace with names like Faith and Prudence, and they almost writhe under lines like, “Good-morrow. I must take my leave now.” (Joan Ellis, *Joan Ellis Movie Reviews*, undated)

Occasionally the reviewers refer to another type of words occurring in Joffé’s film, i.e. words regarded as not befitting Puritan speech (vulgarisms, slang) and hence somewhat anachronistic:

- (33) I think I even heard this from a soldier/rapist: “You priceless morsel, I want to poke you.” (Joan Ellis, *Joan Ellis Movie Reviews*, undated)
- (34) Instead of sewing, [Hester] runs the farm and calls the town elders “bastards” and “hypocrites”... (Liam Lacey, *The Globe and Mail*, October 1999)

### 3.3. ARCHAIC LANGUAGE USED RHETORICALLY

A number of reviewers use (mock-)archaic language as a metalinguistic device for criticizing and ridiculing not primarily the historicized language of the film but its plot, certain scenes, the fact that a good director would even consider making such a film, or that a number of acclaimed actors (usually the ones mentioned are



Oldman, Duvall, Plowright, but *not* Moore) would agree to play in it. The archaisms resorted to for achieving a rhetorical effect are mock-historical orthography —e.g. adding *-e* to the word, whether appropriate or not— (39), stereotypical words, phrases and grammatical forms, i.e. *methinks*, *spake*, and the *a*-prefixing (35-36, 40); concerning morphology, a special mention is called for as regards the *-(e)th* third person singular verbal inflection and the *thou* pronoun with the concomitant *-(e)st* verbal suffix (36-39, 41). What is striking is that the two verb endings are also used with other person-number combinations (36), or even attached to words that are not verbs at all (36), thus further increasing the mocking tone. In some cases (38-39), the reviewers adopt the *thou* pronoun to (pretend to) speak to a character (Dimmesdale) or to the director, i.e. addressing them in the same stereotypical language as they use (or created). Having recourse to archaic forms of English in reviewing *The Scarlet Letter* is, of course, also an indirect comment on the language of the film, i.e. it is implied that such forms, or analogous ones, do really occur as part of the dialogues. If Joffé had had his characters interact in contemporary modern English during the entire film, it is unlikely that reviewers would see a point in using (pseudo-)archaic English for their meta-commentaries:

- (35) New England, the 17th century, when everyone spake in ‘thees’ and ‘thous’. (Derek Adam, *Time Out*, June 2006)
- (36) The sight of [Rev. Dimmesdale] taketh her breath awayth [...] and his preaching sets her bosom a-heaving [...] Roger Prynne turns up alive but insane. He had been captured by the Algonquins, who sent him home because he insisted on wearing a dead deer on his head. We kiddeth not. (Rita Kempley, *Washington Post*, October 1995)
- (37) There is more suspense, more dramatic torque, in one page of Hawthorne’s heart-racked ruminations on the Christian conscience than in all Demi Moore’s woodland gallops and horizontal barn dancing. Thou hast to be kidding (Anthony Lane, *The New Yorker*, October 1995)
- (38) Oh, Roland Joffé, thy free adaptation of the Hawthorne classic didst produce abundant derisive laughter. Didst thou once direct ‘The Killing Fields’? (Dan Lybarger, *Nitrate Online*, May 2005)
- (39) The Reverend Dimmesdale, not surprisingly, is very fond of invoking the Deity when necessary. He even does so with his beloved, exclaiming with most annoying frequency, “God help me, Hester, I do love thee.” Aside from the obvious question of whether or not the Reverend is heading for perdition on the grounds of violating yet another commandment, the invocation is in vain: God cannot help thee, for thou hast placed thyself in a very pretentious and badde filmme. (Carrie Gorringer, *Nitrate Online*, 1999)
- (40) Yeah, well, I guess the American viewing public isn’t as stupid as Hollywood thinks it is. Or wasn’t. Methinks the times they are a-changin’. (The Willow, *The Willow does Gary Oldman Movies*, October 2007)
- (41) After about an hour of *The Scarlet Letter*, I asked myself for whom the bell tolls, and hearing “for thee”, I left the theater immediately... (anonymous, *New York Magazine*, October 1995)



#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: LINGUISTS *VERSUS* NON-LINGUISTS

It is tempting for historical linguists interested in film dialogue as depicted in Hollywood period movies to assume the roles of experts in assessing whether and to what extent the fictional language agrees with the latest research in their discipline. The language issue in movies like *The Scarlet Letter*, however, is hard to pin down precisely because ‘dialectological’ questions may not have been in the forefront of the film-makers’ efforts in crafting the dialogues. In other words, it often does not make sense, if one adopts the film-makers’ perspective, to discuss certain linguistic features as features of ‘Early Modern English’ rather than features of a literary dialect. Even consulting the screenwriter or dialect coach might not clarify the issue. Suppose I had discussed Joffé’s adaptation in the present contribution by proposing an analysis based on the features that (I think) characterize the film’s ‘historical English,’ commenting on their linguistic and sociolinguistic contexts (both in the movie and according to what is known in the professional literature). The first difficulty involved in such an approach is the fact that many metalinguistic labels, especially those borrowed from ordinary language, are themselves semantically indeterminate, i.e. they do not mean the same among the members of the academic linguistic community. Thus it could be asked: when is an accent sufficiently ‘British’ or ‘Scottish’ in order to ‘really’ qualify as such? From whose perspective? Would American linguists and British linguists agree? What phonetic features have to be present in order for a certain way of speaking to qualify as manifestations of such-and-such accent? Are there features that mustn’t occur? Moreover, is there an ‘objective’ way of establishing which features mark a variety as sufficiently ‘historical’ (both quantitatively and qualitatively speaking)? Again, lexicography heavily relies on ordinary language terms: lexicographical classifications of word usage and word meanings are not based on comprehensive empirical searches —and understandably so: ‘when did this word, used with this specific meaning, occur for the first time in the history of English, and by when was it extinct, i.e. no speaker of English was using it any longer?’. How does one establish whether a word, in contemporary English, is to be considered ‘archaic,’ ‘obsolete,’ ‘old-fashioned’ —rather than, say, ‘poetic,’ ‘dialectal,’ ‘rustic,’ ‘colloquial,’ ‘slang,’ ‘vulgar,’ ‘rare’? Whose point of view is one adopting when applying these metalinguistic labels? An example will have to suffice here: if Demi Moore’s Hester calls the Boston elders ‘bastards,’ does the latter word contribute towards rendering the English in the film ‘historical’ (or the opposite)? If the historian of language were to assure us that the word was used in colonial contexts —even by ordinary members of the community when contemptuously addressing members of the clergy or those holding a high political office, then arguably the word as used in the movie mirrors early colonial English ‘as it was,’ even though from a contemporary lay perspective the word does not, strictly speaking, qualify as ‘historical’. In other words, what is deemed (too) ‘modern’ (by lay people) could be viewed as precisely lending historical credibility to the linguistic portrayal of the past in the film— from a purely philological point of view. *It all is a matter of perspective.* Perhaps screenwriter Douglas Day Stewart put the



words ‘hypocrite’ and ‘bastard’ in the mouth of Hester to achieve a certain *stylistic* effect. Perhaps this kind of straightforward language suited his portrayal of Hester Prynne as an aristocratic woman with an inclination towards non-conformism. ‘Speech realism’ may thus not have been the primary issue here. Just as it will not suffice for the historian to judge the costumes, the weapons and the settlement as depicted in the film solely on the grounds of their degree of ‘authenticity,’ it will not do for the linguist to pass judgment on the period language on the grounds of its degree of ‘authenticity,’ either. Film language is ‘constructed’ and serves many purposes. Linguists are not the ‘better’ judges when it comes to the historicisation of film language. In fact, the academic linguist could be facing the charge of merely listing an idiosyncratic selection of features *giving the impression* that the dialogues in a film are realistic depictions of Early Modern English (e.g. by focusing entirely on those features labelled ‘archaic,’ ‘obsolete,’ etc. in the recognized historical grammars and historical dictionaries). Thus the reviewers of Joffé’s *Scarlet Letter* could reject the thesis advanced in my earlier publication (Pablé 2004), i.e. that the filmmakers succeeded in crafting a form of English reasonably close to Early Modern English for this movie, by proposing a counterthesis (which some reviewers seem to endorse), namely that Joffé’s characters simply speak modern English interspersed with archaisms. And they would be right in doing so given that their perceptions are based on ‘evidence’ just as much as mine is.

Lay people’s commentaries regarding the language of period movies, e.g. as they manifest themselves in the film reviews analysed here, do not seem to relate to aesthetic or literary concerns. Like the historical linguist, they assume that there is a linguistic ‘reality’ (both past and present) against which phenomena such as accent, vocabulary and pronouns of address are to be judged. The reviewers lay no claim to being language experts, but at the same time their statements are made with linguistic confidence since they do not expect to be challenged on that particular topic by their peers. Thus they can afford to mention ‘dialogues full of thees and thous’ without having to know anything about the second person singular pronouns *you* and *thou* in the Early Modern English period, i.e. their respective variable uses. The limits of lay linguistic awareness cannot be clearly determined —*anything* can catch our attention: inconsistencies in accent performance, a certain way of pronouncing certain words, particular words that sound ‘wrong’ in certain contexts, repetitions of a particular expression or form, etc. However, most reviewers only mention a very limited number of linguistic phenomena, which is not to say that they didn’t notice many others. Some of their discourses are metalinguistically rich, which manifests itself, as we have seen, in the reviewers’ creative uses of archaic English.

Whether or not the makers of *The Scarlet Letter* ‘succeeded’ in representing the language of early colonial America is not a question that can be settled objectively. The answer very much depends on one’s personal linguistic experience, one’s educational background, and the context in which such a question is raised, i.e. how one contextualizes the question.

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## REVIEWS

*Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India.* By Deepti Misri. (University of Illinois Press, 2014, 241 pp. ISBN 978-0-252-09681-5).

The way in which India after Partition has come to be thought of and discussed in Western academic circles has been largely dependent on three concepts: its record of communal violence, the caste system and the dismal condition of women. Gender Studies has been an important lens through which Indian postcolonial cultural production may be analysed, mainly due to the influence of theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, and it is precisely this idea of gender that Deepti Misri uses as an encompassing element of analysis. This book is inscribed into a wider effort to understand how Partition and other landmarks in Indian history have been lived by women and other vulnerable gendered communities, an effort that is seen in the proliferation of anthologies of essays and stories on the topic. The central thesis of this book, then, revolves precisely around the idea of India and how gender and violence (in all their different forms) have been crucial in the development of the nation both before and after Partition, successfully examining how different acts of violence that have been understood from the historical point of view actually interplay with some forms of gender ideology.

Misri's use of an interdisciplinary approach, including source material from literature, film, photography and even forms of public protest in her analysis, provides the reader with a more complete understanding of the way in which gender and violence interact with each other in India, as well as the role of history/stories and state power in this. Then, although this book tackles issues that seem to be familiar in

Postcolonial Studies, the way it relates gendered violence to other forms of conflict - ie. communal violence, the Naxalite guerrillas, the ongoing conflict in Kashmir - distinguish it from other studies in this field, albeit in a reader-friendly manner.

This study is insightful and original in its exploration of men and their vulnerability to gendered violence through its emphasis on the body. This is particularly evident in the first and fifth chapters, where the author analyses the representation of the vulnerability of male bodies in times of conflict, using literature (Manto's *Black Marginalia*) and the "spectacle" of public mourning in Kashmir carried out by the Association of Parents of Disappeared People. In both cases, Misri argues that in a context of conflict, individual bodies are perceived as communal bodies, and that this "transformation" has gendered connotations. Then, a woman's body, in her chastity bears the honour of a community, and a male body is a marker of religion due to its physical appearance (for example, long hair and turbans in Sikh men). Therefore, an attack on a female or male body is an attack on the honour or the beliefs of a community, showing this how the long-term consequences of Partition violence might come to be seen as gendered, and this of course includes men.

In the case of the APDP protests in Kashmir, examined in chapter five, Misri muses on the gendered ideology that seems to be at work in this type of public mourning. She focuses on the representation in the media of the images of wailing women, embodying the loss of their sons, and bases her analysis of this phenomenon on the idea that the symbol of these protests is the image of the *mater dolorosa*, the helpless woman left behind after the disappearance of her male relatives, and on the fact that male grievers are re-



peatedly ignored by the press, although they are also the parents of the missing men. However, the question of how the gendered organization already present in these protests interacts with the male gaze of the camera is something that would deserve further analysis in future research, taking into account the book's emphasis on representation.

Another element of Misri's analysis that is interesting for the study of the consequences of Partition is her interest in stories (as opposed to history) and their gendered implications. Misri's application of the idea of "patriarchal remembering" in chapter two may have been used in a wide range of situations, but she convincingly continued to elaborate on the idea that bodies have a communal and gendered significance in India and relates the mechanisms through which narrations of Partition stories have been mainly male-dominated to wider concepts such as women's historical silence and the discourse of shame. Then, using Krishna Mehta's novel *Kashmir 1947* as an example she points out how the conception of the female body as the bearer of family and community honour has created an Indian cultural imagery of "women martyrs" that prefer death over being raped by members of another community, not because of the shame imposed on them, but on their male relatives. This cultural imagery has placed an aura of "willingness" over the tellings of such violence in Partition stories, which is further explained when taking into account that the power of storytelling has been placed in the hands of men.

Postcolonial feminist studies have thoroughly studied women in relation to their struggles as doubly colonized subjects, but it is only recently that the need to study and represent

them as strong and resistant individuals has been acknowledged. This book, then, not only explores the consequences of violence against women, but also concentrates on alternative, dissident narrations in which women take control. An example of this could be the analysis of how the afore mentioned discourse of shame can be appropriated and turned into one of empowerment and resistance, as seen in the short story "Draupadi", included in chapter five, and the exploration of "naked protests", where the use of nudity as a form of protest is explained. These two instances demonstrate how this form of breaking femininity, modesty rules and gender performativity (in Judith Butler's words) can deconstruct the violence caused by the gender and caste-based ideology of the state.

*Beyond Partition* will offer little insight to those interested in studying the representation of the third gender (the *hijras*) or homosexuality in India, as both issues have been left out of the picture; it will, however, be welcomed by researchers seeking to find new ways of approaching the problematic representation of Indian women and disrupt the ever-present tendency of seeing them as victims.

In conclusion, *Beyond Partition* makes a good addition to the wider discussion of representation, postcolonialism, feminism and violence in India. These concepts are neatly weaved together, demonstrating how gender violence, caste violence and state power are better understood in a postcolonial context when they are grouped together.

José Ramón LLARENA RODRÍGUEZ  
Universidad de La Laguna

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*Bollywood and Postmodernism: Popular Indian Cinema in the 21st Century.* By Neelam Sidhar Wright. (Edinburgh: University Press, 2015. 229 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7486-9634-5).

Indian cinema has never been able to fit completely in the West, mainly due to its particular style, with songs, and dances and the unusual length of its feature films, often making them unbearable for the average Western cinemagoer. These conditions have not done anything but reinforce Indian culture's marginalisation and disregard, which in turn nurtures India's otherness and subalternity. The situation is even more noticeable in the academic field, in the opinion of the author, independent academic researcher and filmmaker Neelam Sidhar Wright.

The main topic discussed in *Bollywood and Postmodernism* seems evident at first glance. The author presents an analysis of the Mumbai-based Hindi language film industry from a postmodernist perspective, including concepts such as identity, frame-breaking, blurring of binaries, cross-cultural mixture, intertextuality, self-reflexive narratives, and a visually spectacular and nostalgic style—all these features that began to appear in Bollywood cinema after the industry's economic liberalisation at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But as soon as we read the first pages of this work, a second intention is made clear, which is to raise an awareness over the artistic value of Bollywood films, especially within the international academic field, by bringing Bollywood closer to Western cultural standards—i.e. postmodernism.

This main idea is developed throughout eight different chapters. In the introduction, the author briefly discusses bits of history and preliminary questions about Bollywood and postmodernist theories. Chapters 2 and 3 address the traditional reception of Indian cinema in the West through the analysis of academic literature and pedagogic practices regarding Indian Film Studies, demonstrating “a widespread devaluation and marginalisation of Bollywood.” After that, the rest of the book constitutes a response to this disregarding Western approach to Bollywood by demonstrating its postmodern features.

Chapter 4 addresses the changes that Bollywood underwent after its commercial liberalisation. Chapter 5 analyses typical postmodern elements in three Indian feature films: *Om Shanti Om*, *Koi... Mil Gaya*, and *Abhay*. Chapters 6 and 7 are for me the most interesting ones from an academic point of view. In them, the author analyses the Bollywood remakes, considering they are not simply imitation or a result of a lack of original ideas, but constitute a unique form of expression that Bollywood has developed from pastiche and parody, and “a platform for innovation and creative translation.” Throughout these chapters, as well as in the rest of the book, the word ‘mimicry’ is repeated plenty of times, which raises an interesting debate on remakes from a postcolonial perspective. Chapter 6 also includes a very interesting note on what the author calls “Celebrity and Genetic Intertextuality,” i.e. the use of ‘cameo’ appearances as an intertextual device. Chapter 7 constitutes a more detailed analysis of the particular postmodernist characteristics of the Bollywood remake.

The subjects discussed throughout the book open the debate about the place that Bollywood films have in global culture, as well as their particular position in Western and, of course, Indian cultures. Bollywood's relation to Western cinema is another interesting debate introduced by this work. In further investigations, such analyses might be carried out from the point of view of the cultural polysystems theory, developed by Itamar Even-Zohar. A postcolonial perspective is welcomed as well, to consider Hollywood's position as a referent in world cinemas including Bollywood. Wright's analysis of remakes in Bollywood, expounded in Chapter 7, would indeed be a good starting point—without disregard, of course, for the rest of the monograph.

As much as Hollywood's influence over Bollywood seems evident, as it is highlighted by its very name, Mumbai films have indeed developed a characteristic style of their own. In most of its analysis, however, *Bollywood and Postmodernism* does not embrace the inherent particularities of Mumbai's film industry, which in fact show evident differences as compared to the US cinema, and actually constitute Bollywood's virtue, not its curse. Postmodernism is





a strictly Western wave of thought, which can indeed be applied to every culture, but will always maintain the dominant view of the Western canon. India has its own culture, and it would be more interesting to keep and acknowledge its difference and to develop academic studies on its own, and not forcing it into the global movement that is postmodernism. Wright's analysis on extracting postmodern features from Indian films is nevertheless interesting on its own, since it Bollywood in a previously unexplored way. But I think that trying to make of these postmodern features the main aspect from which Bollywood should be analysed is possibly reducing the movement's actual potential.

Now, having said that, the truth is that the global academy is almost entirely Western, and even in postcolonial topics like this, the point of view of the analysis is still attached to a Western and often orientalist thought. And it is also true that for variations of literary and artistic expressions to be considered important

or even worth of attention, postmodernism is indeed a good entrance door into the academy. Wright's position in this sense seems now logical, insomuch as Bollywood, albeit quantitatively the biggest film industry in the world, still finds it difficult to demonstrate its cultural and artistic value, let alone the rest of 'invisible' regional Indian cinema industries, such as Telugu cinema (Tollywood) or Tamil cinema (Kollywood), among others, all of them blurred out from the Western interest in the East under Bollywood's shadow.

In conclusion, I think that Wright's intention with this work was successfully achieved, and *Bollywood and Postmodernism* will hopefully be an important contribution to the prestige of Indian film production and will fuel future analyses on its artistic and literary value.

Gastón BERMÚDEZ ROCHIETTI  
Universidad de La Laguna

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*Caste, Class and Capital: The Social and Political Origins of Economic Policy in India.* By Kanta Murali. (Cambridge: University Press, 2017, 297 pp., £75, ISBN 978-1-107-15450-6).

India is one of the fastest-growing emerging economies in the world, with its anticipated growth expected to surpass that of one of its peers, China, in the following years, something made possible by the government's reform policies aimed at attracting private investment. However, despite this positive economic outlook, a great part of the Indian population remains overwhelmingly poor. How can these two realities coexist? In *Caste, Class, and Capital*, Kanta Murali aims to answer this question by analysing the political and social conditions that may lead to growth-oriented policies in democracies made up of largely poor electorates. Murali argues that since the economic reforms in 1991, Indian states have been in open competition with each other to procure private capital investment in order to generate growth, with each of them applying their own economic policies to achieve this goal despite being subject to similar legal, electoral and fiscal rules. Through the study of these variations in policy, the author manages to offer a novel approach to the politics of growth in India by examining the social origin of economic policies.

Murali presents two main claims as the basis of her argument: first, that policies vary according to the social base of voters (termed electoral coalitions by the author) that supports governments and that certain socioeconomic configurations, even those unrepresentative of the whole electorate (especially the more wealthy and business-friendly electoral coalitions) are more conducive to foster growth-oriented policies. Secondly, that such narrow coalitions can emerge within a poor electorate when symbolic or non-economic factors, that is, identity, ethnicity or nationalism, and in the case of India, caste rules electoral politics, favouring the fragmentation of the vote of the poor, thus preventing the formation of lower-class coalitions and, on the contrary leading to exclusionary politics. To contextualise her analysis, Murali provides an in-depth look at four case studies

that showcase this sort of political behaviour, evaluating the electoral coalitions and resulting policies in four states: Gujarat, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. Furthermore, the author also expands the scope of her argument by then applying it to a sample of 14 Indian states between 1992 and 2010.

The approach Murali takes to the relation between growth and economic policies in India is uncommon in the sense that it does not connect class directly with policy outcomes as one may expect, but rather places social identity, and particularly caste, as a starting point from which electoral support according to certain class configurations emerges and then leads to the application of economic policies based on that support. An in-depth study about the reasons why identity politics continue to play a determining role in India would have been an interesting addition to this approach, but understandably Murali chooses to focus on policy variation, as addressing such a broad and much-discussed question would ultimately distract from the main topic.

Even though India's identity politics is based on caste, religion and nationalism, and its patterns of growth are unique enough, comparisons with policies applied in other emerging countries in similar conditions could offer greater insights into the factors that favour growth-oriented politics. Murali does offer comparisons with other countries, especially Asian countries and former colonies, and examines the existing literature on developing economies. However, establishing a correlation with other members of the BRICS group, especially with China (whose economic status is similar to that of India) would have provided a more exhaustive comparison, given that nowadays India resembles the BRICS economies more than those previously mentioned, despite them possibly having similar origins.

These minor observations do not take from the fact that Murali's analysis is thorough, well-researched and very detailed. Although the extensive data presented can be overwhelming for some, the text still proves to be a worthy contribution to the existing literature on the politics of economic growth and policy making. Both



experts in political science and/or economics and the general reader will find in the author's clear and objective analysis a resource to study India's political economy. It remains to be seen if Murali's analysis will still hold true if India continues to climb the ranks among the devel-

oping countries to become a world economic power in its own right.

Elena PACHECO PADRÓN  
Universidad de La Laguna

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*Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*. By Jyotirmaya Sharma. (Noida: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2015. 240 pp. ISBN 978-93-5177-397-9).

In 2003 Jyotirmaya Sharma first published *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*. He intended to trace a genealogy of Hindu identity and to analyse the idea that Hindu nationalism and Hindu identity in India can become indistinguishable. *Hindutva* is predicated on an assumed consensus about what constitutes Hindu identity and differentiates it from the ways of life and values of “others,” especially Muslims. The reviews on Sharma’s book coincided in pointing out his shortened but rigorous exploration of Hindu nationalism in the recent past, but also the fact that the book had obvious flaws. These Sharma acknowledged and tried to offset in this second edition. The book has now a new and clearer introduction where he outlines the main ideas that formed the right-wing ideological basis of this nationalist movement. Then, in his attempt to discover the roots of *Hindutva*, he studies the works of four major figures of the late 19th- and early 20th century of Hindu revivalist movement: Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

Despite his different approaches to these four personalities, Sharma selects them for a common agenda. They managed to have Hinduism interpreted and morphed into a rigid, codified, monochromatic all-encompassing ideology; definitely its masculinist, aggressive discourse was crucial to establishing its supremacy over other religions.

His essay begins with an analysis of Dayananda Saraswati’s interpretation of the Vedas. Sharma traces back to the early 19th century an attempt to culturally homogenise India, which was corrupted by divergence. Accordingly, all other religions practiced in India, and particularly, Islam, must be considered inferior compared to the Vedic faith. With the British involvement in India from the 18th century and the later direct rule by the British Crown, the Hindu-Muslim conflict was deferred in the presence of a common enemy. This idea is further explored by Sri Aurobindo who, taking part of the Indian movement for independence, supported the union of Indians

regardless of their faith to regain freedom from the British. Brotherhood was necessary—but they should keep in mind that the nation will always have the Hindu spirit, despite Muslims fighting along. Here, Sharma ascertains that the relationship between politics and spirituality begins to merge. With regard to the third chapter on Swami Vivekananda, the author points out that the former lived during a period when India needed a spiritual and nationalist awakening as seen in the Bengali Renaissance. Vivekananda’s aim to regenerate Hinduism was complemented with an agenda for social transformation that eventually would guide his people into achieving freedom. The last essay in the book focuses, finally, on the militant Hindu nationalist who coined the term *Hindutva*, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. For him, the only effective way to obtain and keep political freedom is bound to a common, articulated, and assertive nationalist banner. That is the central tenet of his foundational book, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (1923). His postulates hold a central role in the vote bank loyal to BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and RSS, (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), quest of supremacist Bharat.

There is definitely exploration but no discussion, unfortunately. I assume that, in an attempt to stick to an objective analysis, the author refrained from giving an opinion of his own to inform the prospective readers. Far from encouraging a debate, this could make them feel disoriented. The book does not provide enough socio-cultural background of 19th century India; nor does it even mention how *Hindutva* foundational texts were received—which would have further clarified the motivation and their arguments. I do agree that this book is based on deep reading, research and academic experience, but the reader not familiarised with the topic should seek previous background readings before approaching Sharma’s. This notwithstanding, it still may be a required further reading for students of Indian history, culture and politics, especially in these times of emerging right-wing populism, nationalism and Islamophobia in India and elsewhere.

Tibisay GARCÍA  
Universidad de La Laguna

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*Living Class in Urban India*. By Sara Dickey. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2016. 282 pp., \$29.95, ISBN 978-0-8135-8391-4).

India is a country well-known for her inequalities, which are commonly assumed to be the consequences of the traditional caste system. However, since the beginning of liberalization in 1991 and the nation's partaking into globalization new forms of inequality have forged their way, so social class has become a more prominent fact. The Indian middle class have recently brought the attention of many scholars, including Sara Dickey. A professor of anthropology at Bowdoin College, Dickey has focused most of her research on South India. This is also the case of *Living Class in Urban India*, where she updates part of her previous publications. Her research on the middle class in Madurai (Tamil Nadu) was carried out in over fifteen years, and it is primarily based on the life experiences of interviewees, thus analyzing how class is performed and reproduced at a local level.

In the first two chapters, the author explains the nature of her work and offers a concise account of the changes in society that the period of liberalization supposed. Next, Dickey introduces the reader to the stories of Kannan, an auto rickshaw driver who put one of his daughter's health ahead of the other's dowry; Anjali, a girl whose determination (together with her family's support) to get a university degree provided her the possibility to start her own business; Jeyamani, a domestic worker whose hopes for a better life seemed to vanish despite her efforts to ascend in the social scale; and Usha, a woman who had to give up her studies in order to marry and adopt her designed role as a wife. These four people go through different experiences based not only on their social class but also on their caste; and because the former is not static, they are involved in a continuous struggle for upward social mobility.

Henceforth, these interviewees' stories reveal the complexity of belonging to the middle class via the caste system in India. Educa-

tion plays a fundamental role in shaping their prospects, although only those with enough economic capital can afford to study. Marriage here is a unique element when it comes to reproduce class: parents seek someone to match (or even surpass) their own status, so marriages reassure the safety net between two families—and weddings are an occasion to display symbolic power. The semantics of lending has changed with liberalization: loans and debts are considered either dishonorable or a trait of social success, depending on who is the borrower and who is the lender. Bank loans are given to economically viable people whereas local moneylenders are resorted to by the poor. Besides, Dickey says social connections facilitate further success for the “haves” by providing fast-track access to information and advantages. Quite like Mark Liechty's Nepal's middle class in *Suitably Modern* (2003), Madurai's middle groups aspire to be safely placed between the two social poles, and that explains why they face a constant need to prove their status by any means, either by purchasing the right consumer goods or by adopting a behavior based on moderation. They therefore deal with class anxiety to keep their position and be recognized by others.

In addition to the four interviewees, the research is completed by two more stories that focus on different kinds of gift-giving as well as on the uncomfortable coexistence of modernity and tradition.

It cannot go unnoticed that one of the distinctive features of Dickey's book is the extensive use of Tamil words. As she incorporates more native terms to her analysis, it becomes harder for the non-initiated to sometimes follow the text—and the reading might be hampered. This notwithstanding *Living Class in Urban India* compiles an exhaustive research on Madurai's middle class and leaves little room to understand how liberalization is currently shaping social structure in India.

Celia Indhira GARCÍA BELDA  
Universidad de La Laguna

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*Muhammad Iqbal: Essays on the Reconstruction of Modern Muslim Thought*. Edited by H.C. Hillier and Basit Bilal Koshul. (Edinburgh: University Press, 2015, 244 pp. HB ISBN 978-0-7486-9541-6).

Muslims have been going through hard times in those last twenty years. The First World appreciation of Islam and Muslims has been very negative due to the fundamentalists' acts of terrorism. At the right moment in 2015, H.C. Hillier and Basit Koshul edited this nine-chapters book by different scholars about the life-activity of the philosopher, poet, and political and public influencer Mohammad Iqbal, the "Spiritual Father of Pakistan". After their preface describing each chapter, Riffat Hassan presents Iqbal and his philosophical theories and new postulations of Islam, highlighting the uniqueness of Iqbal's philosophical vision.

In chapter two, "The Human Person in Iqbal's Thought," Ebrahim Moosa brings forward in detail the concepts of *Tawhid*, *Wahi*, *Afaq*, *nafs/lanfus*, *Mi'raj*, *Ishq*, *Yaqin*, *Iman*, and *al-insan al-kamil*, and Iqbal's cornerstone, *Khudi*, the basis for his reconstruction of the Islamic understanding and thinking. Iqbal's goal is to achieve perfection, where a human being has to depart from the postulations of equality, solidarity and freedom and be actively and intentionally engaged through dialectical, intuitional reasoning and inspiration in order to progress and become the complete and fulfilled human being in spite of the restraints of meta-physical/ unconditioned and epistemological/ conditioned realities.

In chapter three, "Achieving Humanity: Convergence between Henri Bergson and Muhammad Iqbal," Souleymane Bachir Diagne examines the similarities that emerge from his close study of Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932) and Iqbal's *Six Lectures on The Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam* (1930). Diagne argumentation is addressed to readers instructed in European Philosophy and Islamic Studies. Reconstruction of Islamic thought starts with the aspiration of becoming the *homo perfectus* (*insan Kamil*) and renovating the Islamic society. Each human being acquires

the qualities of God through active and creative evolution and the effort to struggle with oneself and produce independent reasoning (*ijtihad*), away from the ego-activity, approaching the self (*khudi*), grasping wholeness, freedom and unity, to serve God through the active humanisation of society. He affirms that although Iqbal rejected nationalism, he played an important political role in Partition.

In chapter four, "The Contemporary Relevance of Muhammad Iqbal," Basit Bilal Koshul demonstrates the relevance of Iqbal's philosophy of *Khudi*. Iqbal reasoning trajectory, leaves behind the cosmological, teleological and ontological irreconcilable argumentation of opposites and proposes to combine knowledge (product of modern scientific examination of experience) with wisdom derived from revelation. Koshul contrasts Iqbal's use of science to modernize Islam, with Charles Peirce's science of religious ideas—so new scientific discoveries reinforce the belief in the existence of the First (the Alpha) and the Last (the Omega).

Richard Gilmore starts from the sacred lines: "By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots." Gilmore, far from being a religious person finds Iqbal's wisdom too valuable to leave it only in the scope of religion. In his "Pragmatism and Islam in Peirce and Iqbal: The Metaphysics of Emergent Mind," Gilmore brings together Peirce's pragmatism and Iqbal's Reconstruction of Islam to answer metaphysical questions about change and reconstruction in modern times. He highlights parallelisms between Pierce's and Iqbal's ideas regarding the way the mind works and the creativity process. Gilmore compares the main notions of both philosophers such as "personality," "ego," "law of mind," "nature of thought," "God," "evolution," "reparation," "creation," "efficient causality" and "final causality," as well as "*Tawhid*."

In chapter six, "Between Hegel and Rumi: Iqbal's Contrapuntal Encounters with the Islamic Philosophical Traditions," Sajjad Rizvi reveals Iqbal's fountains of inspiration and study for his reconstruction through a new mode of approach to Islam. As he unfolds how Iqbal embraced different mystic and philosophical ways of thinking from India, Europe



and the World of Islam, he underlines that Iqbal could be classified as a Muslim existentialist. To understand Iqbal's main input about his theories of *Khudi*, freedom, intentionality and creative power, a reader has to read both his poetry and his prose.

In "Reconstructing Islam in a Post-metaphysical Age: Muhammad Iqbal's Interpretation of Immortality," Christopher Scott McClure explores Iqbal's approach to the Islamic dogma of the afterlife. Iqbal values poetry's ability to represent infinity. As metaphysics no longer holds to explain immortality and Islam is no longer immutable, he divides the evolution of Muslims in human history into three stages: Faith, Thought and Discovery.

H.C. Hillier clarifies in chapter eight, "Iqbal, Bergson and the Reconstruction of the Divine Nexus in Political Thought," Iqbal's worries to cover all the issues related to his thoughts on the reconstruction of modern Islam. Hillier discusses the closeness of Iqbal's and Bergson's ideas about firstly, the need to overcome the epistemological crisis that the propagation of secularism provoked;

and secondly, to reconstruct the divine nexus in socio-political thought and action. Western, secular liberal societies have triggered the evolution of nationalisms, racism, classism, colonization, war and extermination.

Dayne E. Nix, from Naval War College, US, studies Iqbal's philosophical poetry, which he asserts is the perfect vehicle in Iqbal's culture to redress the damage and the wrongs done to the Muslims in India. In chapter nine, "Mohammad Iqbal: Restoring Muslim Dignity through Poetry, Philosophy and Religious Political Action," Nix affirms Iqbal had observed that the British colonization and the Muslim's own intellectual laziness had led them to the loss of their integrity. Iqbal proposed his pan-Islamic doctrine of the self-empowerment (*Khudi*) of the Perfect Man to restore the Muslim dignity. Not only was Iqbal the "Spiritual Father of Pakistan, but also the "Poet of Muslim Dignity."

Violetta JOJO VERGE

Universidad de La Laguna

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*Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia.* By Ananya Jahanara Kabir. (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013. 255 pp. ISBN: 978-81-88965-77-9).

Academically approached and discussed has been the reterritorialization and secession of the South Asian subcontinent. Orientalists have, from multidisciplinary arenas, debated the motivation and resulting consequences of Partition. In the same vein, Ananya Jahanara Kabir provides the reader an analysis that is not only postcolonial and transreligious but also bio-cartographic and psychosomatic. Memory and trauma studies have been recently considered at the vanguard of cultural studies thanks to the remarkable work of scholars such as Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Nayanika Mookherje's "Aesthetics, Affect, and the Bangladesh War Crimes Tribunal" or Monica J. Casper's *Critical Trauma Studies* among others. Needless to say, this innovative territory offers postcolonial studies new readings that claim consideration. Thus, and owing mainly to Kabir's interocular narration, *Partition's Post-Amnesias* takes the reader to an ekphrastic journey through the [hi]story of the Indo-Pak territory and its resulting nostalgic narratives.

This manual is deftly grouped into a precursory introduction, followed by two theoretically condensed main chapters and its succeeding conclusions. The first section entitled "Between 1947 and 1971," recounts the intergenerational memories and collective traumas of a pre-liberalised and post-regionalised India. These consequent traumas, the author indicates, will eventually culminate into the categorical mutilation of a community's cohesive identity and, by extension, prompt new ways of understanding Pakistani oneness. In the following subchapter "The Phantom Map", Kabir explores the decolonisation of Pakistan along with the neo-colonisation of a cartographically trapped West Pakistan over its eastern faction. The [hi] story of former East Pakistan, Bangladesh, was 'palimpsestally' memorialised and, most importantly, deliberately translated through the eyes of its domineering neighbours. This being the case,

we might conclude that the Bengali narrative is permeated by this amnesic and peripheralised disposition. This 1971 post-amnesic generation has consequently found itself facing the necessity of rescuing these post-memory narratives vitiated by silences and forgetfulness.

Unlike East Pakistan noiseless and hermetic enlightenment, argues Kabir in "Terracota Memories," West Pakistan is singularised by its continental openness. This pre-Islamic nation has worked as transitional meeting-point for a varied number of cultures: ranging from pre-Aryans to Buddhist including Greek. Through the symbol of the Terracota, the author laconically draws two converging lines between this multiculturally primitive and 'mythified' archeology and reinterpreted artisanal capitalism. It is nevertheless during this section when I find Jahanara Kabir's auxiliary contributions to be periphrastically redundant, if not too personal. Just to raise an objection, some of the literary examples provided by the author are so extensively illustrated that she accidentally blurs the storyline. I however sympathise with some of the postulated representations for they exquisitely support the author's final hypothesis when she sheds some light on the syncretic and jeopardising contiguity between these two yet irreconcilable generations.

In the second part, "Deep Topographies," I personally find captivating how Kabir's archaeological analysis introduces both ancient and contemporary arts as an articulating mechanism in the formation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi identities. This superb revision aims, in this first "Terracota Memories" section, to diagnose the preeminent intergenerational and geopolitical reasons for this pre-Islamic inheritance sepulture. On the one hand, the resulting loopholes of Zia-ul-Haq's Islamist, autocratic regime and, on the other the orientalist post-9/11 vision of the Western over Muslim countries —when not a constant, improper comparison with a Talibanised neighbouring Afghanistan. Kabir indeed demands significant attention towards this cocooned Pakistani *deiknyomenian* geo-body. It becomes clear from this chapter that post-1947/1971 amnesias are not merely interpreted in line with archaeogeographic evidences. On





the contrary, these traumas are, as previously stated, very much connected with a visual and sometimes fetishised artistic past that, in terms of identity appropriation, becomes anachronic and voyeuristically colonial. As a matter of fact, it is in the last chapter, “The Enchanted Delta,” when the author concludes that these un-/shared cultural signifiers, along with domestic and personal segregation (religion, politics, marriages...), catalysed the unhomely state of South-Asian people confined between either literal or metaphorical trenches. The unhomed has therefore taken advantage of these archaeogeographical inconsistencies to deliberately recreate new intercultural identities based on this fluctuating and in-between condition.

All in all and as far I am concerned, Jahanara Kabir’s attempt to compile innovative narratives on the post-Partition debate succeeds in numerous ways. As previously said, I do not

commune—although it might be easily mended by restructuring the preceding ideas— with some of the literary examples she presents before the readers’ eyes. This text however offers new harvested territories on Trauma Studies with multiple compelling hypotheses. As evidenced in this review, I am fascinated by the role of arts – and its consequent conglomerates – in the broken cartography of the subcontinent and its resulting execution on identity configuration. Finally, I personally, as both reader and scholar, appreciate these personal aromas one might directly smell from her private narration. This book, needless to say, is not only academically designed but aims to heal the post-1947/1971 yet bleeding past.

Jairo ADRIÁN-HERNÁNDEZ  
University of La Laguna

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*Reading Together, Reading Apart: Identity, Belonging, and South Asian American Community*, by Tamara Bhalla (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016, pp. 224. ISBN 978-0252040481).

Tamara Bhalla is the author of *Reading Together, Reading Apart: Identity, Belonging, and South Asian American Community* (2016) which unravels the practice of reading as a community and how this can determine identity formation. Bhalla studies the sense of identity and belonging of the South Asian diaspora in the United States and describes the needs of the South Asian American community to align with a constructed idea of otherness that is authentic. For this, the author uses the NetSAP book club as an example of a reading group that shares class and race patterns and uses the body of literature to forge and discuss South Asian American identity.

The members of this book club belong to the American middle class and as Bhalla clearly explains, show a strong sense of kinship with hegemonic ideologies of authenticity of Indian cultural tradition, ethnic homogeneity, masculinity, Hinduism, class and caste taboos. At the same time, they show a disidentification with images of affluence in transnational South Asian literary culture which demonstrates a concern on how cosmopolitan privilege affects South Asian narratives and its effects when they become globally popular and accessible. They manifest a longing to be part of a community and identify with each other discussing about the different versions of South Asian identity among fellow South Asians' experiences. They use the book club to debate which versions of South Asian identity are truly authentic, and which versions are not. This, says Bhalla, can be considered an effect of neoliberal multiculturalist ideology within this coethnic group.

In her second chapter, Bhalla explores how NetSAP's reading practice shows neoliberal multiculturalism among South Asian Americans which is manifested in their ambivalence towards the model minority paradigm, what some South Asian Americans consider a myth based in stereotypical concepts of accommodation, obedience, and sacrifice of their community. This model does not only concern NetSAP's members and their community but also other racial minorities, as South Asians in America become an unrealistic and distant example to follow. In addition to this, NetSAP book club members emphasize the need to portray other models of South Asian identity, attributed to lower classes, which seem almost invisible by the upper class that NetSAP readers belong to. They show great interest in narratives that are far from the dominant, cosmopolitan construction of South Asian culture.

Bhalla also discusses members of the community's opinions on what the model minority represents to them and whether it portrays their own vision or how white Americans really see them as a minority. Raj explains that the model minority status can only be achieved through assimilation to norms of whiteness, especially after 9/11 and thus making reference to the stigmatization of Muslim South Asian Americans.

The author cleverly draws the reader closer to understanding ethnic identity formation using an insightful first person perspective and discussing the opinions of members of the community who are able to reflect on the matter and in doing so, she shows the complexity of reading and writing as a collective activity that is still mostly catered by and for the elite.

María Cristina REVILLA EXPÓSITO  
Universidad de La Laguna

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