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EDITORIAL

The name on every Indian's lips these days is Chandrayaan, as we celebrate this incredible scientific feat in the 21st century and the men and women behind it.

But the moon has fascinated every culture and country for centuries and continues to be a powerful symbol in literature, music, art and religion.

I began writing this editorial on 31 August, the night of the blue moon. The blue moon is not blue, as we know, but refers to the third full moon in a season, a phenomenon that occurs infrequently. The moon here is used metaphorically, and that is the origin of the phrase 'once in a blue moon'.

From as early as the 14th century, the moon has featured in the works of poets like Shelley, Dickenson, Plath, Tagore, Kabir and many, many more. Gulzar once said that he had 'copyright on the moon'! And who can forget the timeless melody and lyrics of *Chaudhvin ka Chand*.

But the moon has a dual personality and depending on its waxing and waning it can be both benign and not so benign. Chandamama is nurturing and caring, but looking up at the moon during a lunar eclipse and on Ganesh Chaturthi are considered harmful.

Many myths also abound, but the fascination with the moon will never wane, and why it fascinates us so much remains a mystery. Later this year, London's Museum of the Moon's India Tour will be held at the Global Science Festival in Kerala, for a dialogue between scientists, artistes, designers, architects and musicians to link science and the public. But as science gears up for more moon missions, let us remember that planet Moon belongs to no one.

The other name that is at the forefront of our minds is Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa, chess Grandmaster at the age of 12 and FIDE World Cup 2023 runner-up Grandmaster at age 18. With his proud mother by his side, he said with a winning smile in an interview, 'I have the potential to become world champion.'

We don't doubt that! Twenty-nine Indian Grandmasters are from Tamil Nadu, according to a feature in the *Indian Express*, including the first female Grandmaster, Subbaraman Vijayalakshmi. Chennai has come to be known as India's 'mecca of chess', largely because it always had dedicated volunteers who used to run chess clubs. Even more impressive is that Tamil Nadu has supported the sport consistently and will no doubt continue to draw many more to the sport.

This issue is not thematic, but it consciously leans toward the arts, history and literature. Shubha Mudgal's article was specially commissioned to mark the birth centenary of Pandit Kumar Gandharva, one of the most famous Hindustani classical singers in India, known for his unique singing style. From there we move on to pioneers in dance; the role of play and art in childhood education; the use of theatre in mental health practice; and an examination of the political language dynamics within the specific context of Pakistani literary discourse in Urdu. Three articles look at lesser known colonial history: the making of a print culture; the Coloured People of South Africa; and the Nizam of Hyderabad's Railway. Moving to the contemporary are reflections on religion; on women breaching male bastions; and on the nightmare of COVID-19. Chitvan Gill's photo essay is titled 'Life in the Shadows'. Through portraits and images of women's lives, she gives us the all too real story of women's lives at the margins.

This issue will be in your hands at the conclusion of the 2023 edition of the *IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts*, which we hope you will have enjoyed as much as any other. It will also be at the conclusion of the G20 Summit. It has seen its share of critics, even denouncers, but the words of International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva sound hopeful: 'India's G20 presidency is a powerful reminder that when the international community comes together to solve global problems, much can be accomplished.'



OMITA GOYAL

THE IMMORTAL ART OF KUMAR GANDHARVA

SHUBHA
MUDGAL

Born in 1924, pathbreaking maverick Hindustani classical vocalist Kumar Gandharva would have turned a hundred on 8 April 2024. A child prodigy, his performance career spanned an astonishing half-century or more, starting with his appearance initially as a child star from Karnataka who left both music lovers and wise men astounded by his incredible talent. Those who heard him sing as a child were convinced that only a divine gift could make a child sing with such skill, poise and acumen at so tender an age, and it is for this reason that the title of Kumar Gandharva was bestowed on him, almost erasing from public memory his name at birth—Shivputra Siddaramayya Komkalimath. For his countless followers and admirers, he remained Kumar Gandharva, the celestial singer all through his life, even when he moved from childhood to youth, middle age and to the end of his life at age 68.

With his centenary celebrations taking place in different parts of the country through a variety of events, performances, panel discussions, books, features and articles, it is also an appropriate time to reflect on the musical proclivities, aesthetics, influences and creative urges that made him Kumar Gandharva, a one-of-a-kind artiste who defies cloning. There have been many scholars, commentators and analysts who have already done this in the past with consummate skill and articulation, but great art and artistes invariably invite repeated study and analysis. Centuries have gone past since the times of Tulsi, Meera, Soor, Kabir and yet scholars and researchers continue to dig into the treasures they left as legacies, finding new perspectives and possibilities in the process. The genius of Kumar Gandharva offers students of music similar possibilities

and is a source of inspiration to study with due reverence and respect the tradition of Hindustani classical music as a living, dynamic entity that encourages the seeker to question, interpret and find one's own voice.

Fortunately for students of music, the life and times of Kumar Gandharva coincided with the period when recording and film technologies in India were making considerable strides. We, therefore, have a rich resource of audio-visual material to help us study the music of this master musician. From these sources, let us begin by looking at a film made in 1938 by J. B. H. Wadia of Wadia Movietones. The film, launched as No. 7 in a series titled 'Varieties Programme', features a very young Kumar Gandharva rendering 'Govardhan Giridhari', a Mirabai bhajan recorded earlier and popularised by the eminent Kirana gharana vocalist Hirabai Barodekar. The film¹ claims Kumar Gandharva was 10 years old at the time, although in 1938 he would have been 14. The announcement for his performance in the film describes the young artiste as a *khaas chelaa* or favoured/pet disciple of Professor B. R. Deodhar's School of Indian Music in Bombay.

Biographical sources suggest that he was sent to Bombay to learn from Deodhar at the age of 11, and, therefore, in all probability, he was older than 10 years when he shot for the film. Nevertheless, the challenges that the young Kumar Gandharva faced at the time would have been enough to intimidate far more experienced artistes. Singing for the film format, surrounded by unfamiliar crew members and strangers in the studio or shooting floor, with equipment and lights that he might not have seen earlier could easily have unnerved a lesser mortal. But for a quick glance at possibly his guru or a guardian or someone familiar before he breaks into song, Kumar ji appears undaunted and completely at ease throughout the performance. The accompanying harmonium and tabla artistes are not visible, but the performance starts with the harmonium playing the melody of the opening line of the bhajan. He joins in at the *sam* or first unit of the *taal*, beginning with an incomplete word *dhaari* instead of Giridhari, but from then on he is in his element. Seated cross-legged in a kurta pyjama and jacket, he renders the bhajan impeccably, unfazed, completely self-assured, confident and uninhibited, gesticulating now and again, smiling occasionally, but never afraid or unsure. The agility of his voice, and the sheer ease

of his singing in a language and dialect quite unlike Kannada, his mother tongue, is quite breathtaking. Singing a composition made famous by an older, established and popular singer could possibly have drawn unfavourable comparisons for a junior artiste, but not one endowed with the prodigious brilliance of Kumar Gandharva.

Accounts and anecdotes often mention that his brilliance and musical talent were discovered because of his ability to mimic and imitate with startling ease the *gayaki* or singing styles of great maestros of the time. Without any formal sustained training in music, it is said that he was able to replicate the *gayaki* of reigning greats and masters merely by listening to their 78 RPM records. The process of oral transmission of knowledge in Hindustani classical music relies initially on imitative replication of phrases, exercises, compositions and elaboration techniques handed down by the mentor. To some extent, then, every student of Hindustani music leans on this imitative process to start learning. What separates the chaff from the grain is the ability of the protege to start moving away from being a mere replica to becoming an independent interpreter of the vocabulary and grammar of raags, taals, musical forms and compositions. Even for fairly exceptional and talented students, this involves a long process that spreads over years of learning, practice and internalisation. The marathon process usually involves the long-term study of only a single *gayaki* or vocal style. In contrast, Kumar Gandharva as a mere child was able to not only refer to and switch between several styles, each quite distinct from the other, but did so with an ease that is difficult to comprehend. That is largely accepted as the first sign of his indubitable genius. And yet, even in his initial recordings of the Mirabai bhajan, Raags Durga, Bageshree, Ramkali, among others, his music is no carbon copy of any great master. In the Wadia Movietone film too, his singing of the Mirabai bhajan does not remind the listener of Hirabai Barodekar's style, and it is only the acknowledgement at the start of the film that reveals Barodekar's rendition as the borrowed source. His independent identity, albeit precocious and prodigious, emerges very clearly with the promise of impending greatness in the not-too-distant future.

In the Hindustani classical music ecosystem, students who follow gharana traits unquestioningly are often rewarded with wholesome approval from those with an orthodox approach. Deviations, however slight, do not find encouragement, and those

who adopt an independent approach often face criticism and are chastised. Learning and borrowing from multiple gharanas almost always meets with disapproval, and the pursuit of cross-gharana learning, leading to a hybrid gayaki, almost always comes under fire. While this is not an attempt to deprecate the gharana system or those who have upheld it for generations by nurturing the wisdom of their respective gharanas and passing it on to generations of students, it is equally true that conformists have often studied tradition and the gharana system with so narrow a lens as to turn it into an unchanging rigid monolith. For those subscribing to the gharana-obsessed orthodox view, the fact that Kumar Gandharva initially picked up compositions and singing styles from records and not from *gurumukh* or through a guru, accompanied by his natural propensity for eclecticism, was enough cause for raised eyebrows and sundry dismissal. Had he sought formal training from anyone other than a guru like Professor B. R. Deodhar in Bombay, his curiosity about different styles, forms and perspectives could possibly have been extinguished eventually. Deodhar's own eclectic approach had led him to learn not only from masters of different gharanas, but also to interact with other systems of music such as Western classical music. It is fortunate, therefore, that the young Kumar Gandharva came to be guided by a great teacher like Deodhar who anchored his training in traditional repertoire, providing him with a depth of knowledge that enabled him to analyse and reach his unique perspective and aesthetic.

Kumar Gandharva was a prolific composer, but he was equally a repository and interpreter of traditional compositions in many raags. Possibly it is through the study and performance experience of old compositions that he came to craft his own unique compositions in traditional raags. His compositions in traditional raags were not composed on the scaffolding of an older *bandish*, with a mere overlay of different lyrics to give some phonetic novelty to an old structure, but would be tangibly different from existing classics. This aspect of his musical genius can be experienced by listening to a recording of one of his many theme concerts titled 'Bageshree Darshan'. In this recording, he is heard presenting six compositions in Raag Bageshree, including traditional compositions as well as those he had composed. Each composition has been selected and included for the insights it gives into raag and taal. In his interpretation of traditional

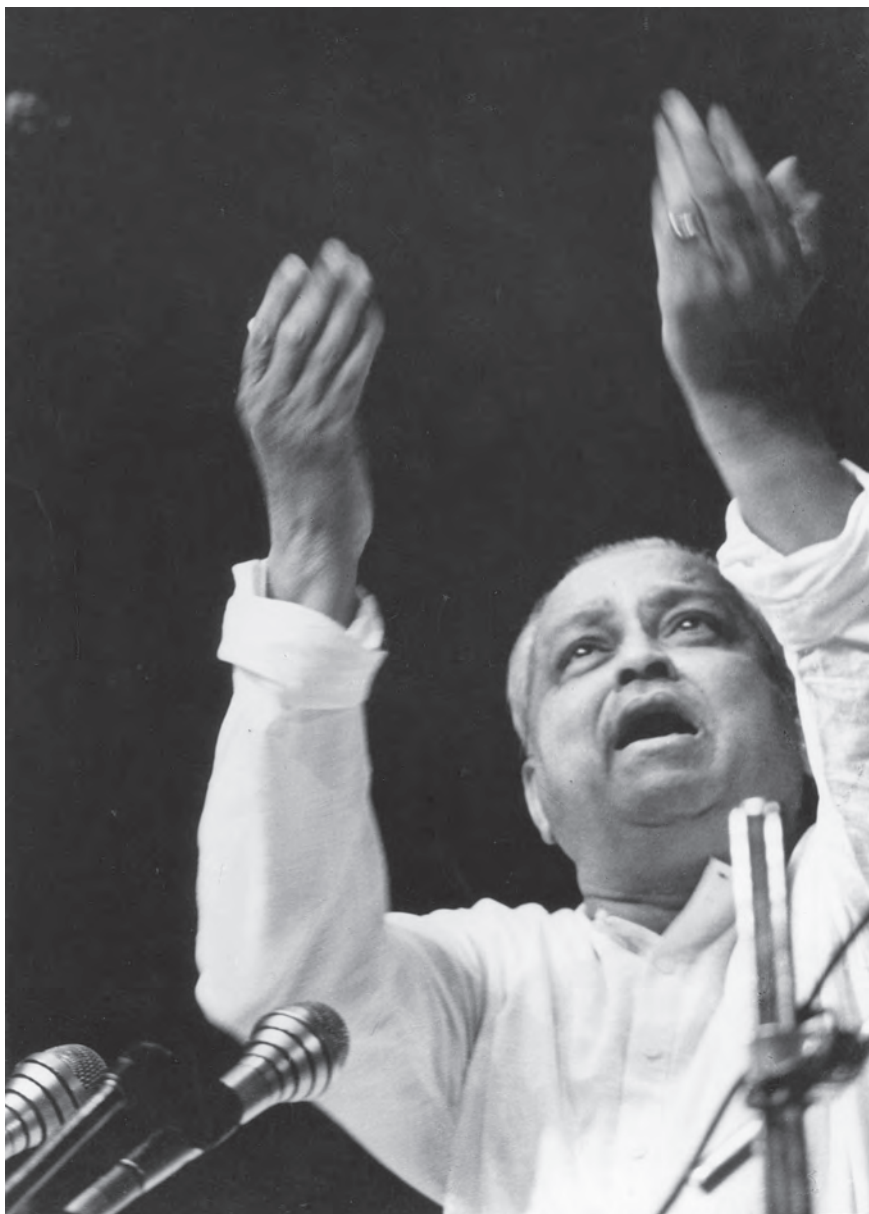


Photo by Avinash Pasricha

compositions like the *vilambit khayal* 'sakhi man laage na' in Ektaal, or the *madhya laya bandish* 'ritu basant tum apni umang son' in Teentaal, Kumar Gandharva's unique utterance, instantly identifiable voice, his use of silences and pauses to punctuate phrases, his play with the song text of the bandish, and his ability to take listeners to the nooks and crannies in the raag structure to show them undiscovered angles and perspectives all give the listener the satisfaction of hearing a familiar, well-loved raag and bandish, but an interpretation that is quintessentially Kumar Gandharva's.

To sing an entire concert showcasing merely a single raag requires several formidable strengths such as a large and varied repertoire of compositions from which to curate a sequence of compositions, a deep understanding of the raag, the imagination to elaborate each bandish avoiding the repetitive use of similar phrases, and the ability to sketch a musical narrative that lets the listener aurally behold Bageshree in as many shades, colours and moods as perceived by the artiste. The world of Hindustani classical music has always been, and is even today, inhabited by artistes and scholar-musicians with virtually inexhaustible collections of the most varied, rare and complex compositions in countless raags and taals. Any one of them could have provided their listeners with a darshan or vision of Bageshree in a similar themed concert. But it is likely that their selection would have considered compositions in a variety of taals or bandishes highlighting the compositional genius of different composers. Perhaps they would have wanted to present different forms in the same raag *khayal*, *tarana*, *chaturang*, *trivat*, *khayalnuma*, and other forms. For his 'Bageshree Darshan', Kumar Gandharva chose to sing one bandish in Ektaal and the remaining five in Teentaal. Other than a tarana, all the other bandishes are khayal compositions. Four of the six place the sam on *dhaivat*, and yet there is no irksome monotony or repetitiveness in the rendering which presents a kaleidoscopic Bageshree for the listener, revealing the raag from different angles and approaches. It must be mentioned here that he would have presented 'Bageshree Darshan' on several occasions, perhaps including more compositions, or dropping some included earlier, but the comments made here refer to the YouTube recording mentioned earlier.

Kumar Gandharva's brilliance as a poet matched his unique perspective as a composer. The lyrics he wrote for his compositions



Photo by Avinash Pasricha

stood out from the conventional and ordinary. Although the theme and subjects he chose did not exclude conventional themes such as nature, seasons, mythological deities, the importance of the guru, the majesty of raag and taal, he also included several themes taken from life experiences and everyday occurrences that had not found a place in traditional lyrics. Irritation with a child constantly demanding attention, the contrary behaviour of a concert organiser, the sight of a farmhand resting under the shade of a tree, raindrops gleaming on leaves—all found mention in his song texts. And when writing on conventional themes, he included unusual words, observations and thoughts. For instance, in 'Bageshree Darshan' he takes delight in the form, shape and colour of the mango: '*ajab golaai banayo rangayo*'.

Each pathbreaking artiste works on developing a gayaki which on ripening and reaching maturity is inextricably linked with the artiste's identity. Characteristic ways of handling raag and taal, typical usage of voice, utterance/*kehen*, musical preferences, expression all go into the making of a singing style that becomes so closely associated with an artiste that the mere mention of the artiste's name conjures up stylistic traits. Despite his organic, dynamic and sometimes completely unpredictable approach in presenting raags, there are stylistic traits and strands that appear repeatedly in Kumar Gandharva's gayaki. One of these can be noticed in the manner in which he would introduce a raag or bandish. He often opened his narrative for a raag by tossing or placing small fragments of sound punctuated by very significantly positioned pauses that gradually revealed the larger picture in all its profound majesty. To illustrate this point, readers are urged to listen to the opening segment of his 'Gaud Malhar Darshan Pt 1' on YouTube, where he introduces an exhaustive exposition of the raag by singing the *sthayi* and *antara* of the well-known and often sung bandish '*kaahe ho hum son ...*' without taal accompaniment to replace the prefatory *alaap* that most expositions begin with. The very first word '*kaahe*' is presented initially in fragments, torn into little bits with the first syllable '*kaa*' presented bit by bit before being fitted into a complete word, and then phrase. The complete *sthayi* is revealed in a similar fragmented and unpredictable manner, where single words are sometimes sliced into small pieces, groups of words repeated with variations, pace fluctuated to build a delectable and riveting tension that resolves only momentarily when the *antara* is also similarly delivered. Just when

the tension resolves, he goes headlong into a *madhya laya bandish* in Teentaal. The splicing of words and phrases could be considered blasphemous by many, although there are innumerable instances of such poetic license being taken by even the most celebrated vocalists in certain segments of a vocal recital such as *bol taans*, *bol baant*, etc. However, in the case of Kumar ji, he went a step further to use syllables of the words as sonic forms going beyond their existence as segments of meaningful words in a poetic narrative.

While still in his youth, and well on his way to becoming an iconic vocalist, Kumar Gandharva contracted tuberculosis, which at the time was considered untreatable and therefore terminal. This battle brought him to the brink of death and compromised his lungs and lung capacity adversely. Bedridden for several years and unable to sing, his main caregiver was his first wife Bhanumati, who arranged for his treatment and moved him from Mumbai to Dewas in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. Under her tireless care, he recovered miraculously. His acknowledgement of her companionship, support and role as a soulmate in the dedication of his book, *Anupragvilas*, is eloquent and intensely moving (2015).

Followers and admirers are prone to creating fables and myths about the great artistes they revere, and an often-shared story about Kumar Gandharva was that he sang with only one lung. The other, it was said, had been surgically removed after it was destroyed by his illness. In time, most people came to believe that he was left with a single lung. But during his 60th birthday celebrations in New Delhi, Kumar Gandharva shattered this myth and informed a journalist speaking to him about the challenges of singing with one lung, disclosing that both his lungs were indeed intact, and only a part of one of his lungs had been surgically removed. That said, the protracted illness that left him bedridden in his youth and unable to sing for years, the sceptre of impending death looming over his head, would have been traumatic and life altering. But the silence he was forced to undergo during his protracted illness drew his attention to the profound mysteries of life and death, and beauty in its many forms and manifestations. Advised strictly to not sing or give voice to his music, Kumar Gandharva was forced to listen to the sound of life and music around him. Once he recovered and was able to sing again, the music he created and gifted to his listeners was intensely cerebral and profoundly expressive.

Kumar Gandharva's unique voice quality, often described as high pitched, was remarkably agile and flexible. Critics in the past have held that his voice was weak in the *mandra saptak* or lower register, nor did it have an enormous range in the upper register. But in the range of a little over one saptak that he usually sang in, his voice was remarkably incisive, accurate, swift, expressive and always drenched in tunefulness. He was also criticised for his handling of vilambit compositions, which some reviewers found repetitive and patchy. Still others questioned his belief and conviction in the significance of folk music. His classic response to criticism quoted in the documentary *Hans Akela* (2006), directed by Jabbar Patel, is one that ought to be flagged:

I have nothing to say about my music. It is others who have to say something. The onus is on them to prove whether they understood or not. I have nothing to prove! (Translated from the Hindi.)

Perhaps this is too idealistic a statement in today's world where the success of art and artistes is often assessed not by the art they create or how they create it, but by the number of followers on their social media accounts. It is only the deep conviction, strength and courage to follow one's artistic impulses fearlessly that creates immortal art and artistes like Kumar Gandharva.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The copyright to this article rests with the author.

NOTE

1. See <https://youtu.be/X5cNPaLBK9c>.

REFERENCE

Gandharva, Kumar. 2015 [1965]. *Anupragvilas*. Mumbai: Mouj Prakashan Gruh.



PIONEERS OF INDIAN DANCE: 1901–1950

ASHISH
KHOKAR

The dictionary defines a pioneer as a person or group that originates or helps open up a new line of thought, or activity, or method in the area of human knowledge, culture, etc.

Who were the pioneers in the context of Indian dance? Who first saw a vision for Indian dance and made the art their mission? Who lit the spark to light the way for others to follow, thus creating an ecosystem that led to where Indian dance is today, globally? While there are many, this brief article features only 10 dancers—the *Dashavataras*—who stand out in the pantheon of Indian dance.

The internationally celebrated dance couple Victor Dandre and his wife Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova visited India in 1922 and marked the absence of schools of dance—almost as if it was an art in which nobody was interested. ‘There is also no evidence of the famed temple dances of India. All we saw on this trip was some Nautch...’, they lamented.

This is where Indian classical dance stood 100 years ago, neglected by, or submerged under, long years of colonial rule. Star visitors to India like Dandre and Pavlova, or the American modern dance icons Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Denis took inspiration and learnt nuances to create short items that were exotic or oriental: cobra or Marwari dance; Holi or a Hindoo wedding. These visitors were the initial catalysts who opened our eyes to the treasures that lay hidden within our own dance culture. Once inspired, Indian dancers opened up the field and these pioneers form part of that period and history. Their example also made it easy for others to emulate and follow.



Uday Shankar (1900–1977) was born in Udaipur—hence the name. He had nothing to do with dance by way of inheritance or education. The son of a ‘prime minister’ of a small state in Rajasthan called Jhalawar, Uday trained to be a painter under William Rothenstein of the prestigious Royal College of Art in England, but dance took possession of his body. It was Pavlova who ‘discovered’ him (via his cousin Coomalata Banerjee) and partnered him in initial small pieces like ‘Rhada’ [sic] and ‘Krishna’. This was in London, then Paris, in the 1930s. Uday Shankar soon tasted success and returned to India to form a proper dance company of about 35 to 50 people, including his brothers Ravi Shankar and Rajendra. As there was no recorded music in those days, he took with him a live music team headed by Ustad Allaiddin Khan, whose students Timir Baran and Nikhil Banerjee too regaled audiences.

Dada, as Uday Shankar soon came to be known, toured Europe, Asia and America and established a place for Indian dance. There was no particular form, just an assembly of all. Perhaps this was rooted in the fact that he hailed from Bengal which was culturally rich but had no classical dance form to call its own. Rabindranath Tagore, the iconic poet, freshly minted with a Nobel Prize, had also created a mixture of styles at his experimental educational–cultural space Santiniketan, or the abode of peace.

With a leg in Kathak and an eye in Kathakali, with the stance of Manipuri and the structure of Bharatanatyam—by the time Dada emerged on the dance scene, the stage had been set for his dazzling success. He attracted many young girls to his group, including Simkie, Zohra Segal and Amala, whom he married in Almora in the foothills of the Himalayas where he set up his dance studio. This is also where Ravi Shankar married Annapurna Devi. The next generation of Indian ballet dance performers like his cousin Sachin Shankar, Narendra Sharma and Kameshwar were trained here and later charted their own courses. The Almora studio was disbanded because of poor management (proving once again that artistes are often not made for business).

Dada’s seminal work was *Kalpana*, India’s first full-length dance film (not film on dance as others did, but dance alone used in the film to convey a story), with music by Vishnudas Shirali. It was shot over a seven-year period in Gemini Studios in Madras, but coming as it did at Independence, it ran for only seven weeks. Dada’s last big work was

Shankarscope, an amalgamation of cinema with dance, theatre and music on stage. He died in 1977, leaving no real inheritors (except his daughter Mamata) but many followers and admirers.



Ram Gopal (1912–2003), born Bissano Ram Gopal in Bangalore, was instrumental in putting Indian classical forms on the world stage. While Uday Shankar made a place for Indian ballet or big productions, Ram was a soloist whose foundation in Bharatanatyam under Vidwan Kattumunarkoil Muthukumaran Pillai of Chidambaram, and later under Pandanallur Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, vested him with a form he helped popularise. He learnt Kathak from Pandit Sohan Lal and Kathakali from Guru Kunjukurup. A working knowledge of three principal forms gave him the advantage to project exotic temple dances worldwide. A Rajput father and a Burmese mother gave him an exotic look, like a temple sculpture come alive. He partnered with Mrinalini Sarabhai, M. K. Saroja (both Bharatanatyam stars of the time and disciples of the same gurus) and Kumudini Lakhia and showcased the beauty of Indian classical forms. When India became independent, Ram settled in the United Kingdom as he felt he was denied his due in India, but continued to mentor and reach out to the Indian diaspora till the end. His active dancing years were short but he left a huge mark. He truly put Bharatanatyam on the world map pre-1947.



Vallathol Narayanan Menon (1878–1958), Kerala's poet, literally went door-to-door selling lottery tickets to collect money for his pet cause—reinstating Mohiniattam and institutionalising Kathakali. There was no central place or institution where one could learn these major dance forms of Kerala in the 1930s. With the lottery ticket sales, he collected a fair amount to create Kerala Kalamandalam (KKK), but fell short of just ₹10,000. On a visit to the state, Prime Minister Nehru came to his rescue by giving him the balance from the PM's fund. The KKM created a standardised course for training in Kathakali and Mohiniattam. Those days, each guru taught as they deemed fit, with a rivalry between Cochin and Travancore royalties.

If this was the situation within one state, what was being taught as far away as Santiniketan or Almora? Thus, Vallathol's initiative helped streamline a course and structure for the dance-drama art form. Mohiniattam was then associated with devadasis and was not popular outside this arena. By institutionalising it, it was sanctified and many more girls started learning the form. The KKM still stands tall and has added Bharatanatyam to its curriculum. Menon did for Kerala's two classical forms what our next pioneer did in Madras for Bharatanatyam.



Madame Menaka (1899–1947), nee Leila Roy or Lady Sokhey, pioneered the Kathak ballet dance in the Bombay region, based in Khandala. She was influenced by Harcourt Algeranoff, Pavlova's trainer, who visited India a second time in 1928–1929. Madame Menaka choreographed (this was the first time this word was used in Kathak; prior to this it was just 'composition') two items, 'Naginritya' and 'Hindu'. The other significant new dance dramas that she choreographed and staged were 'Deva Vijaya Nritya' (1935), 'Menaka Lasyam' (1938), 'Kaliamardan' and 'Malavikagnimitram' (1939).

She discarded traditional Kathak lyrics, creating orchestral ensembles with trained musicians, a break from the traditional way Indian music was played. Thus, her productions were a clever merger of traditionalism and innovation.

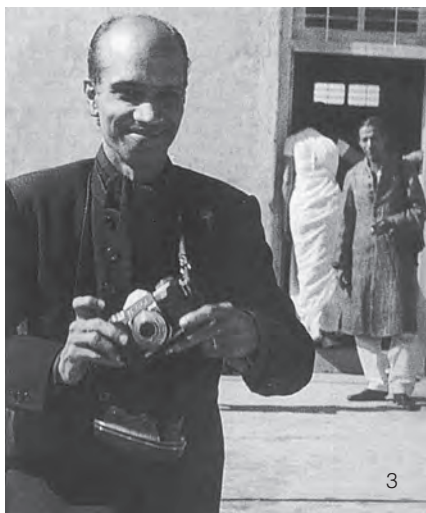
It was her work at the Berlin Dance Olympiad in conjunction with the Summer Olympics in Berlin in 1936 that brought her centre stage internationally. She also featured in two European films in the late 1930s. Madame Menaka is credited with helping Bombay films get acquainted with Kathak and was instrumental in making Bombay a region for ballets in Kathak. Her husband was a renowned scientist heading the Haffkine Institute, and the couple adopted the dancer Damayanti Joshi.



Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904–1986) helped institutionalise Bharatanatyam, a form Ram Gopal and others like Balasaraswati had helped pedestalise. She was born in Madurai, daughter of an



1. Tanjore Nautch Party. Photo Credit: MKDC@IGNCA 2. Uday Shankar. Photo Credit: MKDC@IGNCA



3. Mohan Khokar. Photo by Dhiru Mistry
4. Madame Menaka. Photo Credit: MKDC@IGNCA
5. Vallathol Narayanan Menon. Photo by Mohan Khokar
6. T. Balasaraswati. Photo by Mohan Khokar
7. Birju Maharaj. Photo by Mohan Khokar
8. Mrinalini Sarabhai. Photo by Mohan Khokar





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9. Rukmini Devi Arundale. Photo Credit: MKDC@IGNCA
10. Ram Gopal. Photo Credit: MKDC@IGNCA
11. Indrani Rahman. Photo by Mohan Khokar

eminent Sanskrit scholar Neelakantha Sastry, who migrated to the Madras of yore for a livelihood at the Theosophical Society. It was her exposure and subsequent marriage to an important functionary of the Theosophical Society, an Australian, George Arundale, that set her on a honeymoon trip on a ship to Adelaide. In the adjacent cabin was Cleo Nordi, Pavlova's trainer. To alleviate the boredom of the long journey, Rukmini requested Cleo to teach her Western ballet. Cleo tried and gave up, but not without reprimanding the young bride that instead of trying to learn Western ballet she ought to learn her own classical forms, like Bharatanatyam. That greatly inspired Rukmini and she took to not only learning the form but teaching it to others with the initial help of the Theosophical Society. In 1936, she set up the renowned institution of Indian arts—Kalakshetra. She also helped revive dance-drama traditions, getting the best gurus employed in both south Indian music and dance. She was passionate about social causes, including vegetarianism and animal rights, for which she was nominated to Parliament. She was even offered the post of President of India, which she declined citing divisive politics. She remains a benchmark in Bharatanatyam. Although her institution created hundreds of dancers, it produced very few complete artistes like her.



T. Balasaraswati (1918–1984) was to the manner born. T stands for Tanjore and B for Bravo. Wherever she went that is what she heard by way of appreciation. She not only represented a lineage of music, but also of seven generations of hereditary temple artistes. Although Bala, as she was popularly known, was not the figure of the quintessential slim, fair and lovely Brahminised Bharatanatyam dancer, her emotive face launched a thousand ships with one look, one fleeting glance of chance to dance. Artist E. Krishna Iyer and Sanskritist Dr. V. Raghavan helped establish her credentials in south Indian sabhas, and scholars Mohan Khokar and Kapila Vatsyayan in the north. The family of Samuel H. Scripps in the United States made her career in that country. She was born to dance and is among the few truly musically tuned dancers. Most dancers often have no ear for music, just a skill. Some have no real sense of tempo or rhythm. Bala was equally gifted in music and dance—not many

were then or are even now. Kathak's Birju Maharaj, too, was an exception, as is Swapnasundari today. Bala was first celebrated in the West and once she won approval there, she was celebrated in India. Her lineage caused her much suffering though, as the word *devadasi* had connotations of ill-repute on account of colonial culture. Her art was the answer to it all and her *abhinaya* showed why she was called the queen of emotive dance. Like all greats, her art died with her. Mere clones are left now, but her grandson Aniruddha Bala Knight shows some potential.



Mrinalini Sarabhai (1918–2016) brought class and content to Indian dance. Until her arrival, mostly mythological or historical themes were shown on stage, especially in dance dramas. Hailing from a distinguished family, she joined Ram Gopal in early tours, but her stint at Santiniketan vested in her a dream to start her own institution in the wilderness of a then dusty town, Ahmedabad, which she had made her home after her marriage to renowned atomic scientist Vikram Sarabhai. Darpana was a mirror to the arts in the desert city that blossomed into a capital city for museums and crafts of India. She brought modernity to Indian arts and the first feminist ideas in dance. Her equally gifted daughter Mallika took this forward. Mrinalini made Gujarat 'happen' much before anyone else did and others followed in her steps. As her guru (Muthukumaran Pillai of Kattumunarkoil) hailed from Chidambaram, that is what she named her residence. She was also a most gracious lady, backed with an academic mind and a flair for innovation. Her institution has outlasted her—and that is her real success.



Mohan Khokar (1924–1999)—documenter, photographer, archivist, scholar—is universally hailed as a pioneer of Indian dance. He learnt the Uday Shankar style from Zohra Segal, Kathak from Pt. Sohanlal and the tabla from Pt. Pyarelal. Well versed in practice and theory, Khokar was the first pan-Indian writer of Indian dance. South India was familiar with its own specific forms and wrote only on those, and that too in the vernacular. Eastern India did the same. There was

no one qualified in the north or west in the 1940s who could write in English and connect the dots. Khokar filled that gap. Born a Sikh, he knew five languages and took his own photographs. Those days few had a camera and film rolls were unaffordable as they were imported. Thanks to his vision, over 100,000 photos taken by him from the 1930s to 1990s show how costumes evolved, musicians were seated or dance was treated in society. As the first male student of Kalakshetra from north India in 1945, he never returned home as Partition rendered him homeless. At the age of 24, in an independent India, the first university offering dance at the graduate level—Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU) Baroda—hired him as founder–head of the dance department. The curriculum he set in the 1950s is still in use today. From Baroda, the union government sought him as Officer on Special Duty in the education ministry in Delhi. He was then placed at the Sangeet Natak Akademi for a two-decade stint, during which he also briefly headed the National School of Drama and Kathak Kendra. His definitive books are reference works, including the first few issues of *Marg* which he steered. UNESCO entrusted him with the Asia portions for its encyclopaedia and the first postage stamps on Indian dance used his photos. Over 5,000 books, 50,000 photos, 100,000 press clips, hundreds of artefacts, masks, costumes, taped recordings with Masters no more, make his Dance Collection, named after him, much sought after by such world-renowned bodies as the NYPL Lincoln Center, USA, and Stockholm Dance museum. After him, his equally illustrious wife, guru M. K. Saroja donated his collection to the nation, which is now housed at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Delhi. Mohan Khokar pioneered dance history writing and documentation in India.



Indrani Rahman (1930–1999) was the complete package. Tall, stately, nimble, with a pleasant smile, she was also the first Miss India. Equipped with poise and elan, Indrani started the trend of learning more than one form of dance and performing each with flair, be it Kuchipudi or Bharatanatyam, much as Ram Gopal had done amongst male dancers two decades before her. However, it was her role in helping establish Orissi that makes her a pioneer.

There was no real acceptance, leave alone recognition, of this form until she, with critics Charles Fabri and Mohan Khokar, made a concerted effort to bring Orissi centre stage. Thanks to her guru Deba Prasad Das, this style was firmly established. Married to the famous architect Habib Rahman, and daughter of maverick American dancer Ragini Devi, Indrani was a most giving dancer who encouraged youngsters like Raja Radha Reddy, and Alok and K. Shekharan Paniker with performance tours abroad. She was a star and diva rolled into one and remains celebrated for her beauty and brains. In later years, she made New York her base, teaching at the Julliard and helping Indians get a foothold in the highly competitive and professional world there. She remained a cultural ambassador of India till the very end.



Birju Maharaj (1938–2022) proved that youth, let alone an ancient form, could sit well on slim shoulders. The eternal Krishna, he was also the true nawab of Lucknow. Inheriting a lineage is one matter; taking it forward is another. He did—and how. He made the essentially solo form into a group art, and refined and revived many historical productions like ‘Indrasabha’, ‘Shan-e-Oudh’ and ‘Krishnayan’. He was not only a king of Kathak, but of music and make-up too. He played many instruments and roles, including those of a dancer, choreographer and guru. In each he distinguished himself. His students are legion and no region has remained untouched by his mastery. Films like Satyajit Ray’s *Shatranj ke Khiladi* (The Chess Players) and Sanjay L. Bhansali’s *Devdas*, too, benefitted from his expert inputs, and stars were anxious to be blessed by him. He was gracious and gifted, and used his station in life to further the cause of the art to which he was born.



THE CURATIVE IN THE CREATIVE

Theatre in Mental Health Practice

MAITRI
GOPALAKRISHNA
SHEKHAR
SESHADRI

Many of us tend to think of the arts as either entertainment or an escape. A luxury of some kind. But...they can be used to fundamentally change your day-to-day life. They can help address serious physical and mental health issues, with remarkable results. And they can both help you learn and flourish (Magsamen and Ross, 2023).

There is growing evidence which asserts that both viewing and participating in the arts have significant mental, physical and social health benefits. In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a scoping review, gathering the evidence across 3,500 studies from across the globe on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being (Fancourt and Finn, 2019). The review concluded that the arts can play a powerful role in both the promotion–prevention and management–treatment realms of health care in areas of child development, caregiving and addressing inequalities as well as treatment for neurological conditions, mental illness and end of life care.

The evidence indicates that to derive health benefits from the arts one does not have to master artistic skill. It is available to us when engaging even in simple ‘acts of art’ or creative processes. For instance, doodling, humming, tracing a pattern, playing a theatre game, watching a performance, moving one’s body to a rhythm all have potential health benefits. In other words, as far as health is concerned it is quite clear that the process is far more important than the product. The quest to understand those aspects of arts processes which are powerful, the various ways that they are so, and the manner in which these elements can be harnessed has given rise to a few disciplines at

the intersection of arts and health. The field of Creative Arts Therapy is concerned with the intentional and specific use of process and elements of artistic/creative practices towards specific mental health therapy goals. The field of Neuroaesthetics uses a neuroscience approach to understand how the brain responds to aesthetic and artistic elements. Community Arts has for decades been concerned with arts processes that increase democratisation and participation in the context of social justice and community well-being.

In this article, we focus on the arts, specifically theatre, in mental health practice. Shekhar Seshadri's work over the last four decades has been in the area of child and adolescent mental health, and in community-based interventions for child protection. As a musician and theatre practitioner, in addition to being a psychiatrist, Seshadri uses the arts as a bridge—between inner and outer worlds, individuals in a group, clinician and patient. Maitri Gopalakrishna's work over the last 15 years has been in drama therapy¹ in the context of counselling and community mental health work with both children and adults. Her particular interest lies in the area of sexual trauma, where the arts offer a language in which one can speak the unspeakable. Both have over the years used theatre and arts work in their practices to effect evocative and powerful healing transformations.

Stress, trauma and human challenges are often not internalised as language. The traditional psychotherapeutic process of language-based discourse, thus, has limitations in many contexts. These contexts include work with children, with complex trauma; with communities, where the forms/languages of mental health are inaccessible; and in situations where deep conflicts are suppressed and repressed. Thus, in contexts that have these limitations, experiential and arts-based methodology offer a safe and powerful method not only to elicit narratives, but also to effect healing.

Our intention, in the next few pages, is to offer you a glimpse into some elements of theatre/drama that contribute to its therapeutic potential, thereby making it particularly powerful in our mental health practice.

ELEMENTS OF THEATRE PROCESSES AND THEIR THERAPEUTIC VALUE

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

—Oscar Wilde

DISTANCE AND AESTHETIC FRAMING

There are many ways in which theatre processes and methods lend themselves to mental health care. Two of these are indicated by the earlier quote from Oscar Wilde—distance and aesthetic framing. Masks, puppets, stories, images, characters, etc., offer a possibility for the revealing of ‘truths’ with some protective distance. The individual is speaking not as self, but through the mask. With the distance thus provided, the individual feels safe enough to share. In some cases, these ‘truths’ are known to the individual, but there are barriers to sharing, including the fear of being judged, misunderstood or blamed. There may also be the concern that the act of sharing may be overwhelming because something distressing has surfaced. However, in other cases, the ‘truths’ are hidden even from the individual. They are subconscious or repressed material. Thus, the protective element of distance is even more important.

The mask, like a story or a character, offers an aesthetic frame. Augusto Boal, the community theatre practitioner, says, ‘The aesthetic space liberates memory and imagination’ (1995: 21). When memory is liberated, reprocessed material emerges. When imagination is liberated, the aesthetic frame can be used to share their ‘truth’ in a symbolic, non-linear way that could contain more complexity than language alone. The mask is not a single object, but one comprised of various elements—the structure, shape and size of the mask, the style, colours, the patterns/symbols on it, the materials it is made of, and so on. Each of these elements can contain significance and meaning relating to the ‘truth’ that the individual wishes to reveal.

Boal says, ‘Observing itself, the human being perceives what is, discovers what is not and imagines what it could become’ (ibid.: 13). Observation is key to mental health and thus almost all therapeutic modalities emphasise the development of an ability to observe and describe one’s experience in context. Theatre offers many opportunities to develop observation, largely owing to the various devices that can be used to create distance. It is only with some distance that we can observe.

Both theatre and mental health practitioners have been occupied with the concept of distance. Bertolt Brecht emphasised emotionally distancing the audience in order to enable critical deconstruction. Drama therapist Robert Landy drew from this to

suggest that the therapist should titrate the emotional distance for the client/patient, so that they are neither too emotionally close (i.e., flooded/overwhelmed), nor too emotionally far (i.e., numb/disconnected), suggesting that it is in this place of ‘aesthetic distance’ that therapeutic work can occur (2009). Thus, not only is it important to be able to observe one’s experience, but it is important to be able to find that sweet spot from where you can both experience and observe the experience. If I am holding the mask, looking at it and speaking about it, it is more distanced than if I wear the mask and move with it as I speak.

EMBODIMENT

This brings us to a third element—implied, though not stated, in the Wilde quote—embodiment and the explicit engagement of the body in the therapeutic process. Embodiment refers to the process of giving physical form to abstract thoughts, feelings and memories. It is possible through embodiment to give physical form to a feeling by creating a shape with our bodies that contains that feeling. In other words, when we ask an individual to ‘show’ us what they feel in their bodies, we are inviting them into a process of embodiment. Embodiment allows for concretisation—to do—rather than simply talk about doing. Embodiment moves us from knowledge/insight through revelation and observation towards action. Boal has offered rigorous theoretical and methodological innovations for the use of theatre in community and therapeutic work. In one of Boal’s methods, internalised inhibiting messages are conceptualised as ‘cops in the head’. In working with this technique, participants are invited to embody through a physical position each message or ‘cop’ in the head of the protagonist. Through animating and dialoguing, the group develops a sense of agency over these ‘cops’ that creates the bridge towards change in real life.

Not only can our thoughts and feelings be expressed on/with our bodies (inside → out), but the physical position of our bodies influences our emotions and thoughts as well (outside → in). The inside → out approach is used in the theatre approaches of Konstantin Stanislavski, Boal and others, and has extensive application in mental health practice. Traditional Indian theatre forms that draw on the *Natyashastra* prescribe body postures, movements and even breath patterns in the articulation

of emotion. Actors are not meant to feel what they perform, but rather perform the prescribed code so that the audience (i.e., non-trained performers) ‘taste the rasa’ and feels the emotion. This indicates something closer to an outside → in dynamic. In mental health practice, asking a client to transition to a position that is diametrically different from what their bodies want to do can help move someone away from a stuck position. Women, because of the ubiquity of sexual harassment, often develop a guarded physical posture that includes hunching, closing the upper body with arms and keeping eyes low. When there has been sexual abuse or assault this physical guarding can become more pronounced. Within the safety of the therapeutic space, it becomes possible to explore various embodiment prompts to open up the body. Over time, this can become a playful and joyous process in the group.

GROUP FOCUS

In our work, one of the most potent therapeutic elements of theatre lies in the group nature of the work. Theatre is in essence a group activity and most processes within theatre are well suited to group work. In a supportive and safe group, participants see themselves and their experiences reflected in others. The group becomes a space to share, to try new behaviours, to receive feedback and to be held. In the group, participants are witnessed by their peers and learn to witness and support others as well. Through the group, the participants can see that they are not alone in their predicaments. The dialectical processes of universalisation and personalisation is a principle in group work. Participants are encouraged to see that while there are shared themes in many of the stories, the contextual specifics make each experience unique. In the alienating and isolating experience of mental ill health/distress, the group can offer community, belonging and solidarity.

Theatre-based mental health work in a group often develops in phases. Drama therapist Renee Emunah has developed the Integrative Five Phase Model of Drama Therapy, which offers an intuitive and systematic developmental model that many practitioners use (Emunah and Johnson, 2009). The first phase is called dramatic play where games and exercises are used to build the ensemble (i.e., the group) as well as explore the topic. In the second phase—scene work—improvisation is used to help participants learn to accept

and make offers. Through improvisation, scenes are developed that can be just fictional and/or fictional while containing real themes from participants' lives. For instance, with a children's group we may create scenes from a story that contains themes similar to the children's experiences. Here, the story provides an aesthetic frame to aid in expression, and sufficient distance for containment and safety.

Slowly, participants bring in more real-life material and the scenes may look more psychodramatic in nature, moving us into the third phase of role-play. Psychodrama is an active and structured psychotherapeutic approach developed in the early 1900s by J. L. Moreno and his wife Zerka Moreno, where participants dramatised real moments from their life in a group (Moreno, 1964). The protagonist of the drama can pick group members to play the roles of different people in their lives. Then, through a series of role plays and other devices, the protagonist can observe and transform disempowering or stuck moments. Psychodramatic enactments can be cathartic, facilitating insight to change an individual's relationship to a problem. Here, too, the iterative process of embodying a role and then stepping out of it to observe it (i.e., lessening and increasing distance iteratively) helps build perspective. The fourth phase is called culminating enactment where participants can move from present-day issues to more fundamental issues in their lives. Here, in addition to psychodrama, we may utilise other devices such as embodied mapping. This could involve creating a tableau with objects in the space in order to externalise where they stand in the moment vis-à-vis an issue. The final closing phase is that of dramatic ritual.

Elements of distance, framing and embodiment are present in all five phases of the group process. The group nature of the work is core. A fifth element of theatre that contributes to its therapeutic power is the centrality of play and spontaneity.

PLAY AND SPONTANEITY

Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together... where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play (Winnicott, 1971: 51).

Play is a critically important part of children's lives. Children make sense of the world, work through dynamics, and rehearse new roles/

behaviours through play. Play and play therapy is widely accepted as a mainstay in mental health practice with children. While play is less central in the lives of adults, the ability to play and be spontaneous is an indicator of mental health and psychological flexibility. It suggests that one can be more responsive to changing circumstances including, for instance, changing subjective needs in relationships. As Moreno writes,

The protagonist is challenged to respond with some degree of adequacy to a new situation or with degree of novelty to an old situation, [in order to do this] they need a transformer and catalyst, a kind of intelligence which operates in the here and now...‘spontaneity’. Mental healing processes require spontaneity in order to be effective (1964: xii).

Play needs a certain transformative energy that we can call spontaneity. There are also explicit or implicit rules in play that offer structure, which contains spontaneous energy so it does not get chaotic. In other words, play and spontaneity go hand in hand. And as both Winnicott and Moreno assert, both these are centrally important to mental health work. Therefore, a method like theatre that includes play and spontaneity centrally makes sense in mental health practice.

CREATIVITY

Another facet of theatre that contributes to its therapeutic potential is that it is a creative pursuit. When we invite an individual to view their current predicament as a story, to pick someone in the group to play the role of their father, to create a fictional scene around the theme of being stuck, we are, in essence, requiring them to undertake a creative task. Participants find this process enjoyable and generative. Besides being able to be more creative in engaging with their life circumstances, participants also experience themselves as creative beings. For individuals who are identified, and identify themselves, as patients—broken, problem saturated or carriers of illness—being able to experience the self as also creative and generative can be rather healing. With play and creativity, it is possible to do the serious work of mental health care with lightness and even fun. Often, the people we work with continue to hold

on to some of these creative endeavours by taking up a hobby like drawing or painting, joining a class, writing, etc., even after our therapeutic work with them is closed. This is a truly wonderful phenomenon because, as the arts and public health researchers from the University of Florida concluded in a 2019 White Paper, ‘Like exercise and good nutrition, being creative is simply good for us’ (Sonke, et al., 2019).

STRUCTURE

While theatre is spontaneous, it is also structured and ritualistic. Like therapy sessions, the structure of a rehearsal or drama session is often fixed, though the content may vary. We always begin with a warm-up, followed by the main activities and close with some way to integrate. Often, a facilitator will craft a ritual drawing on things that are evocative for the group to mark the opening and closing of sessions. For example, coming together in a circle, moving to a rhythm, breathing together, drawing things out of an imaginary well, etc. With a group of children or adults, we often incorporate a quiet time, reading time or drawing/dancing time in the session. Participants find this predictability comforting and grounding. Rituals mark the passage of phases of both the session and the entire therapeutic process. Therefore, ritualising important moments—an opening, a closing, a moment, a revelation, etc.—offer both grounding and punctuation that is of great value in mental health work.

Scripts or other formal elements in theatre also provide structure that can be therapeutically beneficial. For example, a socially anxious child may, with the scaffolding of a script, be able to practise initiating a conversation with a peer. With enough practise, they may be able to go ‘off book’ and even ad-lib a little. One of the most powerful therapeutic elements of theatre is that it offers us the opportunity to practise and rehearse for real life.

Traditional Indian theatre is deeply structured not just in terms of ‘what’ is performed, but also ‘how’ it is performed. The pedagogy of a small, residential school in rural Tamil Nadu was focused around the traditional theatre form of Kattaikkuttu.² The children in the school came from caste and class marginalised backgrounds, and many had also suffered personal losses and traumas. As Hanne de Bruin, one of the team that ran the school

writes, 'For children who have experienced trauma, Kattaikkuttu's structured performances offer a well-defined trajectory to hang onto in times of stress' (2021). With some skilled facilitation, the stories of the Mahabharata that make up the content of Kattaikkuttu performances became the aesthetic frames with which various real-life issues were explored with some distance.

THE CREATIVE AND THE CURATIVE

The coming together of drama and healing is not new. Almost all traditional healing practices the world over contain the ritualistic and the theatrical within them. The arts have traditionally been part of daily life often disguised in religious practice. Even today prayer is often recited in tune, patterns and symbols in particular colours are drawn to protect and sanctify spaces, performances are commissioned as part of weddings or funerals, and there are few community festivals that do not include music and dance. Therefore, it should not be too much of a leap to consider the arts as important for our health and well-being as individuals and communities.

There is enormous potential for the arts in mental health practice in the Indian context for several reasons. First, arts methods can be easily integrated into, or work alongside, existing frames and systems of mental health care. Second, the stigma against accessing medical/psychological mental health services is profound. Care offered in the context of the arts can sidestep this stigma to some extent and create a bridge to accessing more conventional forms. Third, in a country that is so deeply socially segregated, the arts can create experiences and embodied understandings that help create channels of communication across divisions. Fourth, methodologies that include experiential and non-verbal processes are an advantage here where 'talking' about one's emotions is quite alien. Fifth, a modality that is well suited to groups is helpful for community settings and in situations where an issue may be socially situated as well. Sixth, the arts offer the possibility to integrate specific cultural/religious material into the work, like symbols, myths, etc., that would allow it to have greater relevance. Finally, we have a wealth of traditional and contemporary arts and aesthetic practices that we can draw from towards health and well-being (Gopalakrishna, 2021).

Through the glimpses offered in this article, we hope that we have evoked our collective imaginations as to how the arts could find intentional application in mental health practice.



NOTES

1. Drama therapy, along with visual art therapy, dance movement therapy, music therapy and expressive arts therapy make up the broader umbrella of Creative Arts Therapies. These are independent fields of study with academic programmes, peer reviewed journals and professional associations in many parts of the world. In India, the fields are in development with a few diploma programmes and professional associations.
2. See <https://www.kattaikkuttu.org/> for more information on Kattaikkuttu theatre.

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PLAY AND THE ARTS

A Pathway to Early Childhood
Education and Learning

MEERA OKE

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.

—Pablo Picasso

It is too often forgotten, in our brash, practical, modern world, that twilight, shadow and beauty are as important to the growing child as food and air.

—Marjory Allen (1897–1976)

INTRODUCTION

In this article, I make connections between children's play and learning, education and the arts, keeping in view the centrality of play in childhood. Acknowledging how young children learn, I argue that art experiences in early childhood are a wonderful creative medium for expression, at the same time supporting the development of transferable skills. The learning child is viewed as one with emotions, with a developing mind and body. Provided by a competent early childhood educator, the arts potentially offer opportunities to young children whose bodies and minds are in the making to learn, develop and flourish.

Early childhood is a time of rapid growth and change, when the tools of the mind—curiosity, imagination, exploration, creativity, aesthetic appreciation—are developing along with emotional regulation, physical capacities and abilities. Education and care in early childhood is not about academic literacy and numeracy, but about embodied and playful learning in a nurturing and nourishing

environment. Children are getting to know themselves and experiencing the world holistically—its fragrances, its colours, its shades and shapes, discovering relationships, and just being, with a sense of belonging.

Arts experiences, such as painting, singing and sculpting, are embodied in, and integral to, human expression. Young children express their art forms in mark making. These gestural expressions foreground formal language and communication. In addition, participation in art activities also provides a pathway to experience cultural life (Vygotsky, 1978). When we speak of the arts in early childhood, we talk about play experiences which include music, movement, art and drama. Participation in these activities leads to deepening children's understanding about themselves and the world around them.

EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PLAY

A snapshot of children's play reveals an internal motivation, whether they are using their whole bodies to playfully balance on the side of the footpath, building castles in the sand, smearing paint on paper, riding a make-believe horse (stick), or pretending to be teletransported in today's digital world.

If you watch children at play, you will notice that they are completely engrossed, as if there were no other world! While at play, nothing truly matters except what the player is learning in the present moment. In his imagery of childhood, Tagore poetically describes the child's natural disposition of playfulness and capacity to play as illustrated in his poem 'On the Seashore'. He goes on to describe how in play children are unaware as they develop complex skills while playing joyfully with simple materials (1929). In Tagore's words, 'They (children) build their homes with sand, and play with empty shells...do not know how to swim...they know not how to cast nets' (in the context of a seaside village in India). Children playfully construct boats out of withered leaves and float them on the enormous ocean.

Universally, play has a special place in childhood and occupies a central position—it is at the heart of childhood. For children, play is serious business. Vivian Paley explains that play is actually 'a child's work' (2004). David Winnicott, a British paediatrician and psychoanalyst, observes that 'the playing child advances forward to

new stages of mastery', emphasising the platform that play provides for learning (1971). Further, focusing on the crucial role of play in learning, development and evolution, Bruner, et al. (1976) brought together a body of select literature (e.g., Reynolds, 1976; Bruner, 1976; Huzuinga, 1976; Erikson, 1976). A common theme related to these works is that play in childhood is holistic. It stimulates and touches vitality, awakens the mind and body, makes room for flourishing of creativity, intelligence, self-discovery and self regulation, and supports the development of higher order thinking skills.

THE ARTS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

The arts are an expression of human imagination in both the creation, and enjoyment, of the creations of others. They are embodied, multimodal and require the use of all senses: sound, touch, smell and sight, besides a sense of balance, pressure and temperature. They can take many forms such as simple drawing, painting, sculpting, singing, dancing, acrobatics, digital, or a combination of all these, to create further complex forms such as music, theatre, digital art, prose and poetry, the circus, among others.

When we speak of the arts in early childhood, we mean experiences that children take part in through their play that allow them to express their own ideas and share their joy of discovery and creation with others. It is the creative world of music, movement, art and drama which are their natural language for expression.

It is in playing, and only in playing, that the individual child is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.

—Viola Spolin (1969)

VALUE OF THE ARTS

The arts create the means to reach effortless concentration and enjoyment, termed as 'flow' by Csikszentmihalyi (2007). This blissful state of being can also be reached through playful engagement in the arts. Csikszentmihalyi goes on to say that state of flow are moments of mindful, conscious and intense states against the routine of everyday life.

The arts are valued not just for their beauty and joy of creation, but also for their epistemic importance, communicative

nature, the capacity to increase self-knowledge, encouragement of personal growth, as well as their abilities to change our schemas and preconceptions. Sherman and Morrissey, reviewing the value of the arts, indicate neurological connections. Engaging in the arts is seen to facilitate the areas of the brain responsible for sensory, motor, visual systems, memory recognition and higher order thinking, emotion, reward and metacognition (2017). The experiences provide perceptual information and are eudemonic, leading to increased capacities for self-regulation and well-being, and thus to better mental health. The art experience provides knowledge and insight about oneself and society.

In addition to providing opportunities for learning, the arts involve exploration, creation, imagination and communication, and serve as a means to transmit cultural knowledge. Participation in the arts, therefore, provides opportunities for developing an understanding of the cultural world. The arts are both visual and performance oriented, and specifically include music, movement/dance, drama/theatre, puppetry, magic, circus, drawing and painting. In some traditions, as in India, the arts are perceived as part of life—in fact, 64 different *kalaas* (art/talent forms) were documented in ancient Indian systems of knowledge, which not only include the aforementioned, but also cooking, gardening, tailoring, carpentry, design, and even the art of conversation! These arts were categorised in different ways according to their role in creating knowledge (scientific arts), expression (fine arts), occupation (commercial arts) and entertainment (performance arts).

EARLY AND RECENT APPROACHES VALUING PLAY AND CREATIVITY

Pioneers of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) such as Froebel, Montessori, Steiner, and, more recently, Malaguzzi, believed in the creative potential of children, and the need to make provision for creativity through play. The curricula they proposed included the agentic participation of children in their own learning by experiencing objects and materials.

PIONEERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

- Fredrich Froebel's (1792–1852) kindergarten model emphasised play: the very word kindergarten means a garden for children to play in. He believed in creative occupation and play as essential factors.

- Waldorf Steiner's (1861–1925) model viewed artistic activity and the integration of the arts and physical movement as indispensable to learning in early childhood.
- Maria Montessori (1870–1952) believed that children have absorbent minds. Her model is based on the belief in the creative potential of children and their internal drive to learn ('work').
- Loris Malaguzzi (1920–1994), pioneer of the Reggio Emilia model,¹ viewed the arts as being central to children's learning and believed that there is no one method of expression; there are many ways in which children communicate. In his theory of a hundred languages of childhood, Malaguzzi describes, through the role of poetic language, how each child has his/her own way of expression. Children understand the world through experiences, and the representation of those experiences, through the language of the arts.

Although all these approaches use art and cultural activity, it is Malaguzzi's in particular that articulates the role of the arts as integral to curriculum. For all children, at all ability levels, the arts can play a central role in their learning and development (Vecchi, 2010).

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES AND THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

In the postmodern Western world, during the latter part of the 20th century, Piagetian ideas of how young children learn dominated pedagogy and curriculum. Play was seen as a vehicle for learning, for improvisation and combination, the first carrier of rule systems. Consequently, the notion of 'free play' constituted a major part of early childhood curriculum, a shift from traditional directed teaching. The educator's role was viewed more as keeping the child safe and protected, commonly identified as 'care'. However, as Grieshaber contends, with this overemphasis on developmental perspectives, educators waited for children to grow up and learn on their own (2008). As a result, in some instances, practices in early childhood education developed with a dichotomised view of teaching and learning, i.e., a reductionist view of education where the responsibility rested on children's choices, with little clarity on the role of the educator beyond keeping children safe and protected.

Over the last decade or so, education in early childhood has been deeply influenced by the writings of Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), a Russian developmental psychologist, who theorised that children learn and develop within social, interactional and cultural milieus. Learning, in his view, preceded development, and all that is learned is experienced twice by the child, occurring first at a social interactional level, and then internally. In play, as it were, a child invariably behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour—it is as though she were a head taller than herself.

Play, Vygotsky observed, is something that is internally driven; it is what children do, all the time, learning the ways of society. He also viewed play as leading social and cultural activities. This lens on how learning occurs supported the dialogical and relational view of pedagogy, where the educator holds a central participative role by fostering a positive learning environment, extending learning through dialogue and conversation as well as building trust. It is through the practice of guided participation that children learn (Rogoff, 2003). Guided participation is an active engagement of educators (adults) and children in learning. Educators dynamically make use of the opportunities at hand, in the moment. It implies that both educators and children co-construct (for example, conceptual play as described by Marlyn Fler [2011]); educators show children what they can achieve beyond that which was thought possible. Play-based learning and teaching, underpinned with Vygotskian socio-cultural views, have gained currency. This is evident in most national early childhood education policies and frameworks in many WEIRD (Western Educated Industrialised Rich Democratic) nations (e.g., Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand).

The Harvard Graduate School of Education (2023) has recently published a book recognising the pedagogical value of play in childhood.² It draws on cross-cultural empirical research to explore what it means to educate through play, including using the arts as a medium (Mardell, et al., 2023). This research recognises that scaffolded and participatory play, and being playful, are at its very core the medium through which children understand themselves and the world.

INTEGRATING THE ARTS

Since the arts are expressions of imagination and creativity, it is only natural that art activities in early childhood provide a medium

of expression. They afford play, allowing for different ways of representation, communication and expressions of thought in various media and symbol systems. In that sense, the arts are the most natural vehicles of play. Children's art essentially arises from their play. The creative arts in early childhood education curricula is often about gluing, sticking and constructing artefacts.

For children, it begins with mark making. For example, using large brushes or chalk/crayon, children make marks or patterns on paper on vertical easels or touch boards. As they engage in the artistic process, children learn that they can observe, organise and interpret their experiences. They can make decisions, act and monitor the effect of those actions. They can create form and meaning where none existed. The arts experience becomes a source of communication, and interaction, for children.

Looking at the value of the arts, one can see commonalities with those of play. The arts provide a venue, linking them to the world of play. They motivate and engage children in learning, stimulate memory, facilitate understanding, enhance symbolic communication, while promoting relationships and providing avenues for building competence, thereby setting the stage for learning. In fact, when used in groups, the arts and in theatre, in particular, children learn to wait for their turn, to share, to lead, to follow. Experiences in the arts make them sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others.

ROLE OF A PREPARED ENVIRONMENT

Pioneers in early childhood education clearly speak of the importance of a learning physical and emotional environment. Creating a rich play (arts) environment means creating a good learning environment. The features of such an environment include easy access to materials, and flexibility in using creative materials within a space that fosters trust and safety.

In early childhood settings, the arts are to be embedded in the entire educational experience. For instance, in a Reggio-inspired curriculum, the physical environment is seen as the third teacher, besides the educator and the child (Vecchi, 2010). A range of open-ended, naturally occurring, loose and malleable materials such as mud, twigs, pebbles, digital small parts, with a multitude of textures and colours and properties, are made available for creative exploration, experimentation and play. Besides these opportunities

and affordances in materials, an artist in residence supports educators in enriching their practice.

ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

In the context of early childhood education, while play is still seen as an important contributor to learning and development, the role of the educator needs better understanding. It is not to drill or to indoctrinate, but to encourage self-expression. Educators orchestrate children's play in a continuum from indirect to direct involvement by attending to art making, carefully listening to, and joining in, conversations as children create. They are responsive and attuned observers, who support and extend children's learning. Additionally, educators in arts-based curricula share and display children's artwork in order to understand, to derive meaning and to provide visibility of their representations. An educator's approach is aimed to support and co-create with children, so as to develop the latter's confidence in using art materials.

Recent research also supports this perspective: that educators scaffold children's play and art experiences—e.g., in children's pretend play, educators can support the development of scripts initiated by children, extending their skills in thinking, problem solving and use of language (Bodrova, 2008; Fler, 2021). The notion of positive dispositions in play, and teaching and learning are seen as intertwined in early childhood education (Bresler, 2004). Pedagogies which are based on play and art are seen as the medium through which children develop the foundations of later academic literacy and numeracy, and the skills required for lifelong learning. However, interestingly, in practice, early childhood educators are challenged by the alignment between play and learning, finding it difficult to reconceptualise play as a form of pedagogy, and to identify their role in the play experience (Wood, 2014). Perhaps an arts-based curriculum will provide this open-ended connection between play and learning.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING ARTS EXPERIENCES

- Art experiences need to be fundamentally enjoyable for both children and educators.
- Engagement is most important, as are the results and value of the experiences, not so much the product.

- Arts-based experiences are part of play activities that support children's holistic development; in particular, sensorial development.
- Children learn in an integrated way through interactions and extension; educators need to sustain the environment through co-constructing the arts experience.
- Activities ought to have an embedded progression in the experience so as to support the capabilities of the growing child, and the child naturally moves to a higher level of experience.
- Children learn best when they are in safe, respectful, nurturing and nourishing environments.
- Children should have opportunities to engage in a variety of creative mediums freely.
- Art activities should be initiated by both educators and children.
- Children should have choices and opportunities to self-select the arts stations/mediums for the entire duration of the activity.
- Children ought not to be given models of art expressions to copy.
- Display of children's art should be at their eye level.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood is a phase of development where educational approaches, which use traditional transmission didactic modes of intentional subject-based teaching, have less room in early childhood curricula. Children use play and imagination to explore and understand the world. The arts and play are synergistic. The question here is our ability to see the value of arts in pedagogical practice and learn to be comfortable with children being agentic in their learning. Although long recognised by educators, philosophers and developmental psychologists, most practising early childhood educators view play and school-related learning as polar opposites and fundamentally incompatible. Educators tend to view knowledge content and intellectual gain as outcomes of direct academic instruction. In some instances, early childhood education is viewed as a downward extension of formal schooling with compartmentalised subjects—reading, writing and math-related instruction. Therefore,

curricula and pedagogical approaches used in early childhood are often a poor fit with learning and developmental functioning of young children.

The challenge of putting into practice the understanding that the arts through play are beneficial for learning and development has not been fully addressed. The arts, and a resourceful educator, I argue, provide a concrete link to play, reflecting the thought that learning through the arts reinforces critical thinking, provides children with opportunities to develop skills in creatively solving problems, and learning about themselves and the world around them.



NOTES

1. See more about the Reggio Emilia Approach at <https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/> <https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/100-linguaggi-en/>.
2. See *A Pedagogy of Play: Supporting Playful Learning in Classrooms and Schools*, 2023, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Accessed at <https://pz.harvard.edu/resources/pedagogy-of-play-book> <https://pz.harvard.edu/projects/early-childhood-in-the-making>.

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THE MAKING OF A PRINT CULTURE IN COLONIAL INDIA

SACHIDANANDA
MOHANTY

INTRODUCTION

Following the lead of postcolonial critics like Leela Gandhi (2006), Thomas R. Metcalf (2010), Crane, et al. (2013), Eddy Kent (2014), James Alan Jaffee (2015), Shah Mahmoud Hanifi (2019) and Thomas Simpson (2021), the study of colonial encounters has gone beyond domination–subjugation categories held sacrosanct for long. Critics have shown the imperial gaze often functioned in a complex, many-sided and non-reductive manner. At the same time, the upsurge of Raj nostalgia in recent decades has not effaced the nature of the colonial state and the role of mercantile capitalism.

It may, therefore, be argued with some justification that while individuals may be implicated in the colonial matrix, they may not entirely be bereft of agency and volition in shaping their lives and destinies. It is in this sense that the life and work of British scholar–administrators in colonial India merit our attention. While the life narratives of the officers in the Indian Civil Service (ICS) have been part of recorded history and popular folklore, sufficient attention, I suggest, has not been paid to the rich, variegated manner in which many of them contributed to the making of print culture in colonial India.

COLONIAL PUBLIC SPHERE

In his seminal essay, historian Dipesh Chakrabarty links the ‘reification and commodification’ of historical documents in Jurgen Habermas’ concept of the public sphere (2010). The public sphere, he argues cogently, remains a Utopia (because it is a Utopian ideal)

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acting simultaneously both as 'Utopian bourgeois equality' and 'as an ideology of domination'. It can be 'simultaneously democratic and anti-democratic' (ibid.).

Following Chakrabarty, I intend to explore the life and work of a select number of scholar-administrators in colonial Odisha who produced 'history' in the wider sense of the term. They helped create a body of literary, philological, statistical, and other texts—texts of exegesis and texts of governance. Their work was both reified and commodified, as Chakrabarty explains, both in the sense of the archive and that of the market place (ibid.).

RULERS AND GUARDIANS

It is not that the history of the scholar-administrator is entirely unknown. Philip Mason's popular and acclaimed study (1985), for instance, records the 'description of significant incidents and a collection of character sketches which will not fade from the reader's memory' (Preface).

Mason's narration of the lives and events of British rulers in India, objective in intention, is permeated by a tinge of nostalgia. 'The heart of one man,' he reflects with admiration, 'will beat faster—though perhaps against his will to remember how a handful of his countrymen mastered and ruled so many millions by the sword, by diplomacy, above all, by a stubborn tenacity of purpose' (ibid.: xi).

Mason cites three categories of Anglo-Indians: the company's civil servant, the military officer and the independent merchant. The crucial point, according to Mason, was that the rulers were endowed with character and a sense of purpose, those who would 'rule in the height of their own vision of what was right'. Such a system, he concedes, 'aims at producing confidence and certainty, virtues in a ruler which may degenerate with arrogance towards the ruled' (1985: 175). It is true, he says, that 'the ... individual district officers, choleric, eccentric, warm hearted men... did not always pay attention to Government orders' (ibid.). Many like Sir Richard Temple, head of Central Provinces, Bengal, and Bombay, were described by juniors as 'self-seeking and overambitious' (ibid.: 201).

DAILY LIFE: 'A COUNTRY STATION'

While the lives of officers under the Raj clearly changed over a period, the daily life of a young officer in judicial service in East

Bengal may be taken as typical. The sketch by Henry Roberdeau offers excellent vignettes of life in the districts of East Bengal. As Mason narrates:

'I get up between five and six,' writes Roberdeau, 'mount my Horse for a Ride, return about seven, bathe and dress for breakfast, to which I sit down about nine o' clock.' He was in court from eleven till 'four, five or six according to the season of the year. On leaving Court, I take a Ride or drive or walk or lounge until the light begin to fade, when I dress for Dinner. I get into my Tonjon [a kind of palanquin] and go wherever Dinner may be and get to Bed again by eleven o' clock' (ibid.: 64).

THE RULER AS SAVIOUR AND MIRACLE MAN

While there were many versions of rule, an episode Mason cites for effect takes centre stage. Indeed, ICS officer F. B. Simson's case may act as an archetype for much of British rule in India—the ruler as saviour and miracle man. Mason records the episode with a dash of humour:

[Simson] was sitting one day in his court when a villager entered carrying the mangled leg of his son. This he lay before the court. 'What sort of a ruler are you,' he cried. 'What are you doing sitting here arguing with lawyers when a tiger is eating my son?' It was not a view of the magistrate's duty that agreed with Simson's own.

He left the court and shot the tiger. But it was not a view that fitted very well with the plea of the National Congress for the separation of judicial and executive functions (ibid.: 225).

If this anecdote appears to be somewhat melodramatic and apocryphal, then consider the self-reflexive view of Lord Curzon. Mason remarks:

To Lord Curzon nothing was ever right unless he had drafted it himself. 'It is no good,' wrote Curzon, 'trusting a human being to do a thing for you. Do everything for yourself.' It was a principle that if universally applied would have destroyed the Indian Empire (ibid.: 262).

SUPREMACY OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL PRINCIPLES

Mason's monumental pioneering work, fascinating in detail, dealt in passing with the question of ideology and scholarship of the ruling class. This gap was bridged by Metcalf's path-breaking book (2010). The volume unravels not only the intellectual/ideological underpinnings of the Raj, but also, more fundamentally, traces the changing perception of India as viewed by the British. It is not that such views were entirely absent. For instance, arguing in British Parliament towards the middle of the 19th century, Charles Grant had asked rhetorically:

And how are your subjects to be formed to disposition thus favourable to us, to be changed thus in their character, but by new principles, sentiments, and tastes, leading to new views, conduct and manners, all of which, would by one and the same effect, identify their cause and ours, and proportionately separate them from opposite interests (1798; Embree, 1962).

Thus, as Grant argued, it is not through brute power or the superiority of one's polity and governance that one could ensure 'permanent and indissoluble ties with India', but by the 'superior conduct of Britain', based on a set of 'fine religious and moral principles' (Grant, 1798). Metcalf builds upon the narratives advanced by figures like Grant, and suggests that British views of India, largely negative in character, came through a series of lingering stereotypes that included the following: Oriental despotism; effeminate and emasculated manhood; wild female sexuality; impoverished mind and body owing to the tropical climate; polytheism as a sign of primitivism and savagery; all-pervasive temple ritualism and exoticism; cruelty against women; Kali, the goddess of destruction, in service of thugs; Indians as treacherous, vile and unreliable; Hinduism as a degraded and degrading religion; rampant caste hierarchy and caste oppression; and so on.

Indeed, Lord Kitchener, the one-time commander-in-chief of the British Army in India, who addressed his troops in 1905, cautioned them about Indian prostitutes; he wrote ominously about the consequences of wanton sexuality: 'Syphilis contracted by Europeans from Asiatic women is much more severe than that

contracted in England.’ It assumed, he expatiated in pseudo-medical jargon, a ‘horrible, loathsome and often fatal form’. ‘The body,’ he continued with increasing alarm, ‘would rot and be eaten away by slow, cankerous and stinking ulceration’. Thus, for many members of the ruling class, ‘sexuality, disease and degradation in India went together’ (Metcalf, 2010: 104). While such views may have been part of a common narrative, Metcalf argued that what was central to British contemplation of India was ‘an enduring tension between two ideals, one of similarity, the other of difference, which in turn shaped different strategies of governance for the Raj’ (ibid.: x).

AUXILIARY INTELLECTUAL–IDEOLOGICAL POWER

It may thus be seen that the Raj in India relied on auxiliary cultural, ideological and intellectual powers, manifest in many layers—some overt, many in covert forms. A logical corollary of this process was that individuals, agencies and institutions in India were implicated in regimes of power, even as they attempted to overcome ideological barriers and sought the welfare of the nation in benign and benevolent terms. Such individuals included missionaries, evangelists, spiritual seekers, philanthropists, and others, who tried to distance themselves from racial prejudice and discrimination based on colonial practices.

Many of the Irish, British and European cultural and spiritual travellers to India like Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble), Annie Besant, W. W. Pearson, C. F. Andrews, James and Margaret Cousins, and Mirra Alfassa (later, the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram) became members of what Gandhi calls ‘affective communities’, ‘namely, those who transcended East–West political boundaries, and forged alliances for mutual understanding’ (2006). While British scholar–administrators in India would not strictly fall into this category (for they were active members of the colonial state) it must be admitted that their lives and work were marked by a sense of empathy for the land they served.

Odisha’s scholar–administrators excelled in various fields: L.S.S. O’Malley’s colonial gazettes became a remarkable storehouse whose uses would go beyond the necessity for colonial governance: an astonishing compendium of facts, statistics and data of the region’s rivers, mountains, agriculture, education and life style of the inhabitants. These scholar–administrators became trendsetters in

the gathering of knowledge in the Raj. While implicated in a system of colonial power and governance, they became unwitting partners in the creation of a new province that was to take birth on 1 April 1936, much before the formation of linguistic states in 1956, in modern India.

THE RISE OF PRINT CULTURE AND THE COLONIAL MODERNITY PROJECT

The East India Company and the missionaries, directly and indirectly, pioneered the creation of the periodical press in India. It is worth noting that the Cuttack Mission Press was set up in 1837. *Gyanarupa*, edited by C. Lacey, appeared in 1849. *Prabodha Chandrika*, published in 1856 and considered the first news and literary magazine of Odisha, gave a great deal of coverage to the Odia language, literature and culture, besides dealing with missionary activities (Mohanty, 2016). Since most of these periodicals dealt primarily with missionary matters, there was a felt need to bring out an independent news magazine in Odia. In 1861, the Christian Vernacular Literature Society published a monthly named *Arunadaya*.

From roughly the middle of the 19th century till the third decade of the 20th, there was an efflorescence of colonial periodicals in Odisha. Besides other factors, it is primarily and pre-eminently the search for linguistic and cultural identities that drove these colonial periodicals and ensured a modicum of popularity (ibid.). The more successful ones—*Utkal Dipika* and *Utkal Sahitya*—played a pioneering and pivotal role in the dissemination of indigenous literature and culture. In addition, they ushered in the colonial modernity project in the province.¹ The emerging print culture in the hands of native gentry comprising notables like Gourishankar Ray, Biswanath Kar,² Fakir Mohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray, and others, intersected with the work of British scholar-administrators in Odisha. However, as a result of a number of factors, which were socio-cultural and political in nature, the ‘conversations’ between the two groups were not as noteworthy as may be expected.

THE ARCHIVIST AND THE GAZETTEER

The scholar-administrator in British India excelled in many fields of scholarship. Some, like Beames, were well-respected linguists, philologists, grammarians and literary critics; others, like Hunter, compiled and edited several volumes of gazetteers and wrote the

well-cited history of Odisha; yet others, like Sterling, wrote an acclaimed account of Odisha in the comprehensive sense.

I turn now to L.S.S. O'Malley, one of the more interesting figures of this group, whose work intersects print culture in the region. While O'Malley is credited with varied works, he is primarily noted for his contributions to the field of the district gazetteer.

Born on 23 October 1874 at Flitcham, Freebridge Lynn, Norfolk, England, O'Malley was the son of Bryan O'Malley, a minister. He was educated at Norwich and Hertford College, Oxford (B. A.), and joined the ICS in 1898. On 24 November 1900, he married Ida Sewell Prichard at the Cathedral, Calcutta. He worked as magistrate and collector in Bengal, and served in the General and Revenue Department of the province, and as under-secretary to the Government General and Revenue Department in July 1903. He superannuated in 1924 as Knight Commander Companion (CIE).³

O'Malley has a considerable body of academic and critical work to his credit. Although he had distinguished himself in the field of the district gazetteer, he also wrote on education, religion and culture. His books, *Popular Hinduism* (1935) and *Indian Caste Customs* (1974), are important milestones. He also edited *Modern India and the West: A Study of their Interactions of their Civilizations* (1941) and contributed five substantial chapters to this historic volume. In his Foreword to this volume, Lord Meston recognises O'Malley's exemplary contribution and states: 'While this book was in press, Mr. O'Malley passed away. He had given his best to it through much ill-health and it will always be a regret to his many friends that he did not see it completed (O'Malley, 1941: viii). However, it is the district gazetteer that drew O'Malley's attention.

THE DISTRICT GAZETTEER

The district gazetteer may be defined as a compendium that brings together a catalogue of information related to the geography, trade, economy, education and culture of a district in colonial India. The early example of Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* is often cited as the progenitor of this genre. Generally treated as the primary reference source for administrators, scholars and general readers, such gazetteers were primarily authored by colonial regimes for managing district administration in an efficient manner. As the dispatch of

East India Company, dated 1807, observed: 'We are of the opinion that a statistical survey of the country would be attended with much utility; we therefore recommend proper steps to be taken for the execution of the same.'⁴ The Grill Collection mentions three sets. One, *The Imperial Gazetteers of India*, brought out by W. W. Hunter in 1881, in nine volumes; a 14-volume set was produced four years later in 1885. After Hunter's death, the 26-volume *Imperial Gazetteers of India* was published by Sir Herbert Risley, W. S. Meyers, Richard Burn and J. S. Cotton.

The second is the 'Provincial Series', published in Calcutta by the superintendent of government printing, comprising 19 volumes, published between 1908 and 1909. Finally, there were district gazetteers that were meant to be used as manuals by officials. The 'Madras Series' began to appear in 1853; followed by the 'Buchanan Hamilton Series' of Bengal, which began in 1833; and finally, the 'O'Malley Series', authored mostly by O'Malley, from 1903 to 1923.⁵



P. C. Roy Chaudhary offers a general introduction to the topic. He is correct in stating that the gazetteer 'provides an intelligent outline for the future' (1975: 259). He is able to see that British motivation in such compilations was not 'always altruistic', and that early British administration 'was very well served by a large number of industrious scholar-administrators' (ibid.: 261). Indeed, he quotes Lord Curzon favourably:

During my recent tour, I have, over and again in reply to an inquiry, had the district volumes thrust into my hand and found all that I wanted to know excellently told. The volume accompanies the District Officer in camp or lies on his office table and its condition shows how constantly it is referred to (ibid.: 262).

Roy Chaudhary is correct in maintaining that in the administrator's handbook, 'the cultural aspect of the district was not much stressed upon'. There was, he concedes, 'an angularity in the expression and interpretation of matters and features' (ibid: 263). What appeared to be paucity then would now be regarded as a rich source of insights in the context of contemporary research.

I shall argue that the very choice in the lineup and presentation of facts/data, the attitude revealed while presenting data/statistics regarding trade, livelihood, economic and professional lives of people in each district would be revealing to the reader/observer. It throws light upon the attitude of the colonial archivist/administrator to men and matters. Further, each gazetteer has a section each on education and history. These two sections may be expected to provide a set of insights when read with the help of the theoretical/cultural insights available to us today.

As for realising the value of district gazetteers in post-independent India, Roy Chaudhary recalls that the Government of India had organised a conference of state representatives in July 1955 to undertake the revision, and fresh work, of district gazetteers. Regrettably, after a considerable gap in 1971, it was noticed that barring Bihar, most others states had failed to deliver. In a somewhat dismal tone, he concludes: 'It will take another fifty to sixty years to complete the series of the district gazetteers in India.... Has the scholarship available in India failed?' (*ibid.*: 265). Modern India, says Roy Choudhary, seems to have failed in the mission of producing district gazetteers—and we have not noticed evidence to the contrary so far in the public domain!

We may now turn our attention to the manner in which O'Malley handled this genre while compiling and producing several editions of gazetteers. It may be interesting to see the mind of the gazetteer at work, and decode the ideology and politics that underlie the exercise conducted. We have for our purpose a set of district gazetteers prepared by O'Malley, most of which were published by the Bengal Secretariat Book Depot (1906–1908). For sharper focus, I shall concentrate on those dealing with the districts of Cuttack, Puri, Balasore and Angul. In addition, I shall review the gazetteers dealing with the districts of Singhbhum, Saraikela and Kharsawan as well; these were then part of the undivided province of Bengal–Bihar–Orissa. The gazetteers under review display a common structure and deal with a set of features under a common nomenclature, comprising physical aspects: (i) geography; (ii) history; (iii) the people; (iv) agriculture; (v) public health; (vi) rents, wages and prices; (vii) occupation, manufacturing, trade; (viii) means of communication; (ix) land revenue, administration; (x) general administration; (xi) local self-government; and (xii) education.

There are chapter headings like 'Embankments and Canals', 'Natural Calamities', 'Forests', 'the Worship of Jagannath', as in the case of Puri, for instance. Natural calamities were common to the coastal districts of Puri, Cuttack and Balasore and, therefore, these aspects find a place in the districts concerned.

Looking closer, one finds a certain degree of overlap and repetition in terms of information provided/presented. Names of rivers, including their places of origin and discharge, and names of tributaries, distributaries, backwaters and estuaries are mentioned. So, too, are the physical features of each district, such as hills and mountains. Statistics and data of rainfall in subdivisions are dutifully mentioned. Details of diseases, epidemics, names of hospitals, such as the 'Cuttack Medical School' and 'Cuttack Lunatic Asylum', are given. The histories of each district, including invasions, and the nature of habitation and population patterns are provided in a detailed manner. Equally important is the inclusion of years of floods and famines over a period. The last chapter, named 'Gazetteer', gives a synoptic account of major towns of the district in an alphabetical manner. In brief, the district gazetteer, structured and built as an all-purpose compendium of facts and data, is offered in the public domain for the use of administrators, scholars, visitors and members of the larger reading public.

One finds additional information, such as historical accounts about certain districts that are heavily borrowed from established historians like Sterling and Hunter. However, the approach here is not to simply replicate. In three specific chapters—'History', 'People' and 'Education'—one expects to find impressions that are subjective in nature, and one is not disappointed in this regard.

In practically all the gazetteers prepared by O'Malley, a matter of some interest and curiosity is a discussion of the character of the Odia people. O'Malley is at pains to claim that he does not share the prejudice of Sterling and Hunter that Odias as a race are indolent, effeminate and lazy, and are not enterprising in nature.

Despite such disclaimers, O'Malley's observations remain condescending. No facts or justification are provided for whole-scale disparagement and condemnation. Compliments paid are invariably back-handed. He commends native Odias for being 'trustworthy'; they are found worthy of admiration because they 'will follow a kind master to all parts of India'. 'It is true', he says, that they are 'ignorant,

superstitious and priest-ridden, and have less natural acuteness than the Bengalis'. However, there are compensations, too, says O'Malley. For, 'They are not prone to litigiousness or so ready to impose, and they evidence more gratitude for kindnesses.'⁶ The narrative here seems to prevaricate: one step forward, two steps back, as a kind of balancing act in order to suggest an even-handedness in judging a people who had a great historical past, but now find themselves in a dismal condition. Further, communities like the Bengalis, Biharis and Odias are judged in terms of their 'mindset' and 'behaviour pattern', in a historical manner. This judgement appears to be idiosyncratic. In a relevant extract from the Bengal District Gazetteer, Puri, his views are self-explanatory:

Experience has proved that the character of the people given by Sterling was written in ignorance of the Oriya character; he was too honest to misrepresent, too just to be prejudiced against them, but coming up contact with those who under excited passions, were engaged in law suits, he did not know the people.... It is true that the laboring classes and the lower classes of cultivators are somewhat dull-witted, but it is doubtful if the Bihari peasant is mentally the superior of the Oriya.⁷

The same contradictory stance may be seen in the rest of the paragraphs as well. 'The Brahmans are somewhat bigoted,' he remarks, 'but the Sadseni Brahmans are of a refined intellectual type.' Educated Odias, he says, are better than 'domiciled Bengalis'. But the fact remains that 'generally speaking, the [Odia] people are kindly and good humoured, easily controlled and remarkably law-abiding; they are given only to committing petty crimes, and in many ways recall the "old idea of the mild Hindu"'.⁸

This discourse, governed by disrespect bordering on contempt, continues until O'Malley singles out Odias for their (well-earned?) reputation as domestic servants, carpenters, waiters, coolies, etc.

Their readiness to migrate and find employment in different kinds of labour, requiring physical rather than mental capacity is noticeable. Even the literate classes, however, still show a want of enterprise, slowness and a conservatism which are in marked

contrast to the versatility of Bengal cousins; and an inborn love of ease and dislike of hard work appears to permeate all classes.⁹

He ends the passage by offering a defence for this state of affairs. After all, he notes, the Odias have been a conquered nation, historically oppressed by the Afghans, Mughals and Marathas. He eventually quotes Sterling, whom he had refuted earlier, to explain the present plight of Odias as 'feeble' and 'timid' on account of foreign 'misrule'. Similarly, the 'want of spirit of enterprise' among the Odias is notable because they have been a 'priest-ridden race', subject to all 'the influence of religious superstition and caste-prejudice'.¹⁰

When we next turn our attention to O'Malley's Bengal District Gazetteer, Cuttack, we find that his commentary on the Odias continues to remain condescending under the guise of sympathy. It is true, he says, that once suffering from 'low-estimation of intellectual capacities', there has of late been noticeable progress in the province. It must be remembered that 'Orissa was described as the Boeotia of India, and its people as equally ignorant and stupid'.¹¹ They are said to have been slow in acquiring any facility in this method of writing, ignorant of business in general, and especially of the new English method of revenue accounts. He concedes that things appeared to have improved of late, and that he had made his own contribution to that end. 'I always give a preference to Oriyas', he affirms, 'but at this moment, I scarcely know a single Oriya possessing qualifications to fit him for being a common Moharrir'.¹²

In the gazetteer on Angul, O'Malley devotes considerable space to discuss human sacrifice by Khond tribals of the district. Quoting the anthropologist Frazer, he concludes: 'In whatever way, the rite was performed by the most revolting cruelty'.¹³ He cites the roles of Campbell and Macpherson in curbing such evil practices. In fact, he devotes an entirely separate chapter to the life of the Khonds from the sociological and anthropological points of view.

Similarly, in his district gazetteers of Singhbhum, Saraikela and Kharsawan, O'Malley does well to discuss tribal Munda languages along with the life of various tribal communities like the Ho and the Santhal.



Thus, O'Malley compiles data and information of the geography and administrative set up that are for the most part objective. He relies on the social-scientific work carried out by British anthropologists in the tribal communities of Angul, Singhbhum, Saraikela and Kharsawan, and avoids making unfair generalisations about the conduct and behaviour of the tribal. At the same time, his comments and judgements of tribal life are not entirely bereft of the colonial gaze. He expresses, perhaps unwittingly, a perspective that was characteristic of colonial anthropology. It must be stated that in his later works,¹⁴ O'Malley offers a balanced understanding of the caste system from diverse points of view. Here again, he commends the role of district gazetteers in promoting an understanding of the subject.

I have been largely indebted to the Indian Census Reports and District Gazetteers. I have endeavored to give some account of the working of the caste system in the hope of adding to the ordinary man's knowledge of this peculiar form of social organization and of enabling him to form a judgement of its merits and defects (Mason, 1985: ix).

In a later work, O'Malley combines the great variations in the practice of popular Hinduism with a set of core beliefs common to the Hindu view of life (1935). And finally, in *Modern India and the West*, published in the middle of World War II, he explored the impact of Western civilisation upon India (1941). With this, O'Malley, who began as the author of district gazetteers in colonial India, comes full circle and leaves his footprint on the world stage.

What in conclusion, do we finally make of the legacy of L. S. S. O'Malley in the context of the print culture of colonial Odisha? How do we see his role in the making of a provincial identity?

LASTING LEGACY

O'Malley does not appear to have had any significant association with the native gentry of Odisha, at least from what is evident in published writings. His work, primarily archival and documentary in character, was reflected in the gazetteers of the districts of Odisha. Although important and of historical, administrative and cultural value, it did not become part of popular interest and

imagination, given the nature of the exercises carried out largely in a niche domain. Thus, while Beames is remembered with a sense of gratitude by the Odias, and Hunter and Campbell continue to have resonances, O'Malley remains in shadow. Now that attention has returned to the importance of documentation and colonial archives, the gazetteers appear to have returned to centre stage.

Indeed, looking back, it becomes clear that the colonial gazetteers in O'Malley's hands brought to the attention of the native gentry the importance of studying physical and cultural geography, landmass, river basins, topography and lives of the people, the primacy of data in the governance of a subject people, and the nexus between knowledge and power that Edward Said and other postcolonial critics would underline at a later period.

Indeed, the meticulous details in many of the gazetteers would be found remarkable by any account. In the District Gazetteer, Cuttack, for instance, we learn that the district has, '15,000 cow-keepers', '16,000 fishermen and fish dealers', '19,000 rice producers', '14,000 firewood', and 'charcoal sellers'. Similarly, we are told that the district contains '66 post offices', '15 telegraph offices' and '887 miles of postal communication'.¹⁵

Nor do the gazettes carry merely arid statistics, bereft of knowledge of cultural importance, as we often see. Speaking of the great temples of Odisha that are world-famous, O'Malley shows an astute understanding of temple building, cultural travel, religious ritual and movements like the Tantrik and Magadha schools, the 'Jaina influence in the Western Deccan', the 'Mahayana' movement of Buddhism, as well as 'the doctrine taught in the great Nalanda Monastery'. As he writes with erudition:

These stately temples show the hold which Hinduism had obtained in Orissa by this time, but a few centuries earlier Hiuen Tsang found Buddhism flourishing side by side with Hinduism, and his account is corroborated by the presentation of Buddhist scriptures to the Chinese Emperor in the eighth century. The Mahayana type of Buddhism, which the Chinese pilgrim found in Orissa, seems to have been supplanted gradually by the Tantrik forms of the Magadha school, of which traces may be found in the images which are still to be seen in the Assia Hills. The caves at Khandgiri and Udayagiri also bear signs of a Jaina revival,

probably a reflex of the Jaina influence in the Western Deccan. Magnificent as are these monuments, not a single literary work of this period has as yet come to light. Buddhist philosophy, however, was not neglected, as otherwise the monks would not have dared to challenge and decry the doctrines taught in the great Nalanda monastery.¹⁶

It would thus be seen that O'Malley has left behind a mixed legacy in the domain of colonial print culture, viewed essentially through the prism of district gazetteers. Containing a remarkable medley of data and statistics vital to the functioning of the colonial state, along with an impressive body of cultural knowledge, his treatment of men, matters and people comes inevitably with an admixture of sympathy and antipathy; it illuminates our understanding of regimes of power and the nature of the colonial state seeking the welfare of the subject people.



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NOTES

1. For a good review of the history of colonial periodical literature in Odisha, see B. Kar (2013). Also see Mishra (1983); Pattanayak (2011); Pradhan (1973); Samantaray (1964).
2. For much of the information regarding the life of Biswanath Kar, I am indebted to K. Kar (1983). Also see Nepal (1984).
3. See <https://www.nanhishop.com/Bengal-district-gazetteers-sambalpur-by-l-s-s-omalley/>. Accessed on 16 September 2022.
4. Quoted in Grill, *Gazetteers of British India Collection, 1833–1962*.
5. <https://brill.com/view/package/9789004197916>. Accessed on 8 September 2022.
6. *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Puri, 1908, p. 66.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., pp. 66–67.
9. Ibid., p. 67.
10. Ibid., pp. 66–67.
11. *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1906, p. 186.

12. Ibid.
13. *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Balasore, 1907.
14. See O'Malley (1974). Also see *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Cuttack, Puri, Balasore, Angul, Singhbhum, etc., published by the Superintendent of Government Printing, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, between 1903 and 1923.
15. *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Cuttack, 1906.
16. *Bengal District Gazetteer*, Balasore, 1907, p. 22.

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A SEARCH FOR SOLIDARITY

Abdullah Abdurahman, M. K. Gandhi and the Coloured People of South Africa

ANIL NAURIYA

INTRODUCTION

I have always believed there is something subtle, something fine in the ideals of the British Constitution. Tear away those ideals and you tear away my loyalty to that Constitution...¹

It was in 1888 that M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948) had gone to England to qualify for the Bar. In the same year, Abdullah Abdurahman² (1872–1940), whose family had already brought him from South Africa to Great Britain, enrolled to study medicine. Gandhi was called to the Bar in London in 1891, while Abdurahman, who was in Glasgow, completed his medical studies two years thereafter. Returning initially to India, Gandhi reached South Africa in 1893, Abdurahman stayed another two years, this time in London, for further studies and returned to South Africa in 1895.

In South Africa, Gandhi and Abdurahman emerged from different constituencies. The Natal Indian Congress came to be founded with Gandhi's active involvement in 1894. Gandhi, who was based initially in Durban, came to represent Indians, while Abdurahman, who was based in Cape Town, came to represent what were labelled as the Coloured People in a special South African sense. It is to this special category of Coloured People that this article is confined, and it is necessary to explain who these were.

'Coloured' is a term which, apart from its wider meaning, was sometimes used in a special South African sense, meaning a miscellaneous category comprising mainly people who were neither European nor indigenous African, but generally of mixed origin and

living largely in the Cape Province, though present in other areas as well. The category also included Cape Malays or Cape Muslims, usually descended from people brought in as slaves from India and South-East Asia.³ In 1904, the population of Coloured People, so defined, was estimated at slightly over 4,45,000 of a total population of somewhat over 5.17 million, thus forming about 8.16 per cent of the population. As against this, Africans formed 67.4 per cent, Europeans 21.6 per cent, and Asians ('Asiatics') 2.4 per cent. Most of the Coloured population was concentrated in Cape Colony.⁴ When the Indian immigrants started arriving in South Africa in the latter half of the 19th century, they had been treated as yet another racial category and the laws applicable to them were different. Generally, Coloured People were less discriminated against than the Indian. In Cape Province, Coloured People had the franchise. Abdurahman, who had become a well-known doctor in the Cape, and was himself of Indian extraction, was elected to the City and Provincial Councils. He provided leadership to the Coloured People, and espoused the unity of all non-white peoples. A friend of Gandhi from his South Africa days, Abdurahman later also came to India at the head of a deputation in 1925.⁵

By 1903, Gandhi had spent around a decade in Africa and had begun sharing with the Coloured People of Cape Colony, the Indian experience in South Africa. On the franchise, or lack of it, for example, Gandhi had, addressing the Coloured People, emphasised its value for securing justice. By at least 1905, he was closely following the activities of the African People's Organisation (APO). This brought him into contact with Abdurahman, who had by then been elected its President. The APO was a rather unique institution in South Africa as its membership was open to all races. Although the number of Africans and Indians associated with it was not significant, it was in practice an organisation of the Coloured People (Simons and Simons, 1983: 118).

In its observations and commentaries, Gandhi's *Indian Opinion*, founded in 1903, was to leave hardly any part of South African terrain untouched. Gandhi had a close relation with the Coloured People of South Africa and his interaction with them influenced both. During his association with them, he came into contact with a number of personalities associated with various organisations of Coloured People. These organisations went under

various names. The main organisation, with which Abdurahman was associated, was the APO, earlier known as the African Political Organisation, founded in 1902–1903 (van der Ross, 1975). These organisations of Coloured People are also referred to in the journals of the time as African Political Association (APA), Coloured People's Vigilance Committee and Coloured People's Association. The prominent and politically active personalities that Gandhi came into contact with, or of whose activities his journal took note in the course of his association with the Coloured community included, apart from Abdurahman himself, such figures as N. R. Veldsman, Peter John Daniels, W. A. Roberts, Peter Eckstein, F. Z. S. Peregrino, Frederick Daniels, Poggenpoel, D. J. Lenders, Matt. J. Fredericks, Paul van Grenen, Isaac Joshua, J. S. Lakay and C. M. Dantu.

In its opening month in June 1903, *Indian Opinion* carried a long report on a deputation of the British Indian League in Cape Colony that had met the Colonial Secretary. The delegation conveyed its objections, inter alia, to provisions of the Immigration Act (Act 47 of 1902), and to the proposal of the City Council to segregate Asiatics into a 'location'.⁶ The petition was read out by Abdurahman.⁷ In the following month, Gandhi took note of an address from the Cape Coloured People to Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner in South Africa, and took critical note of his reluctance to veto a Municipal election ordinance 'which disfranchises British Indians and others'.⁸ The ordinance sought to confine the franchise to British white subjects in the Transvaal.⁹

A few weeks later, Gandhi criticised the Bloemfontein Municipal Ordinance of Orange River Colony under which 'Natives' and 'Coloured Persons' could be 'removed like criminals or cattle from one place to another at the sweet will of the Corporation'.¹⁰ In the following month, he wrote stressing the value and importance of the vote: 'We, therefore, hope that the coloured gentlemen at the Cape will, by wisely using their power, continue to enjoy the privilege of the franchise which, under the British Constitution, is such a powerful instrument for securing justice'.¹¹

Gandhi spoke up quite sharply for Coloured People in February and July 1904. In the Cape Colony, Coloured Persons generally had better rights than the Africans and the Indians, but the East London restriction was unusual for the Cape in its brazenness and applicability.

In such contexts, Gandhi had become increasingly aware of the reasons for seething African discontent. In February 1904, his journal reproduced, for example, a lengthy report on the attempt by Sir Gordon Sprigg, a four-time Premier of Cape Colony, to address African electors in East London. Sir Gordon's discomfiture at the meeting, which became a kind of cross-examination by Walter Rubusana and (presumably A. K.) Soga, was reported in detail, and even commented upon by Gandhi.¹²

In July 1904, he wrote:

It, however, does seem strange and somewhat painful that influential and important bodies like the Town Councils of the Transvaal should make a mountain out of a mole hill, and take pleasure in the unnecessary heaping of insult upon insult on people who have done no harm to them and who, if anything, have deserved well, for, leaving aside for the present the British Indians out of consideration, it must not be forgotten that hundreds of Cape Coloured people were used by the erstwhile Uitlanders, now gentlemen of the Town Councils, for their own benefit. They were fondled; the British flag was constantly dangled before their eyes; its protective power was eloquently placed before them so that they might rush into their arms, make affidavits regarding the *zulum* of the Boer Authorities, and make common cause with them, so that the hands of the Colonial Office might be forced and pressure put upon Mr. Kruger. Surely, these men have a right at least to walk without molestation on the side-walks of any street in the Transvaal, towards the upkeep of which, like other rate-payers, they contribute their quota.¹³

In May 1905, Gandhi's journal reported in detail on a public meeting of 'coloured citizens' held in Port Elizabeth. The meeting was addressed by Abdurahman, then President of the APO. Abdurahman anticipated that the APO would become 'a very powerful body in the future' and said that though he had 'never been on a political platform', he would 'never cease to agitate' on behalf of the people if the government did not do right by them. Referring to the treatment of Coloured People in the Transvaal, Abdurahman said he could not understand why rights 'they had enjoyed in the Cape should be denied to them in the Transvaal'.¹⁴

The question arose of how Indian and Coloured aims, objectives and attempts at redressal were to be co-ordinated. Sometimes, as Gandhi pointed out in 1906, though 'British Indians and other Coloured People have much in common regarding their grievances', the particular claims of the various communities had to be urged from different points of view. In spite of this 'wise policy', Gandhi felt that 'each can give strength to the other in urging their common rights'.¹⁵ He wrote that 'though the hardships suffered by those people and the Indians are almost of the same kind, the remedies are not identical. It is therefore proper that the two should fight out their cases, each in their own appropriate way'.¹⁶ Gandhi praised a petition prepared by Coloured People in support of their rights in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony:

The petition prepared by the Coloured People is very good. They have stated all the facts necessary and nothing besides. Their facts are so eloquent that it is hardly necessary to adduce any argument in support. They have shown that they have so far enjoyed full rights in the Cape Colony, and ask why they should not have the same rights in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony.¹⁷

Gandhi went on to welcome their proposal to send Abdurahman, President of the APO and member of the Cape Town Municipality, to England, to canvass support as being a 'very desirable and necessary move'.¹⁸

Gandhi wrote at length of the proceedings of a meeting of Coloured People held in Johannesburg on 21 March 1906. The meeting was presided over by 'Mr. Daniel'.¹⁹ It was attended by Gandhi and his associates such as Abdul Gani, Amod Zaveri and H. O. Ally; Gandhi significantly noted that Abdurahman, emphasising in his speech the entitlements of Coloured People, had referred to Abraham Esau, the black artisan who 'sacrificed his life out of loyalty to the British' in 1901, as 'the greatest hero of the South African War'.²⁰ Abdurahman's plans to pursue matters through a deputation to England influenced Gandhi's efforts in a similar direction (Hunt, 1993: 557). Gandhi and Ally would later in the year pay a visit to England to canvass against the Transvaal's Asian Registration Ordinance of August 1906.

The grievances of the Coloured People in Cape Colony were highlighted by Gandhi's journal, which referred in April 1906 to a deputation of the 'Coloured People's Vigilant Committee', including Peregrino, having met the Colony's Premier.²¹ The deputation obtained certain assurances that the Coloured People in the Colony would not lose their existing rights and privileges in the event of the 'impending federation of the States'.²² This was followed by an account, based on a report, published in Peregrino's *South African Spectator*, of a meeting of the same Committee on 3 May in Cape Town. The meeting was presided over by (presumably W. A.) Roberts, resolutions were moved by Peregrino and Eckstein; the second resolution reiterated the principle of no taxation without representation, and both were passed unanimously.²³ Also noted was the presence and participation in the meeting of Rev. F. M. Gow and 'Messrs Jonathan, M. Wilson, Gool, Abdol Cader, James Curry, John and Henry Roberts, of Kenilworth, J. W. Herbert, of Wynberg, and others'.²⁴

It appears that two petitions had been prepared, one on behalf of Coloured People alone, and another seeking to project the interests of the Coloured as well as the Africans. Gandhi's journal commented that 'either petition cannot help but do good, as they will have paved the way for a discussion of the subject'.²⁵ The exertions in London by Abdurahman and Frederick Daniels, who proceeded to England as delegates of the APO, to secure and protect the franchise of the Coloured People in the 'Transvaal and Orangia' were also reported.²⁶

In September 1906, Gandhi's journal reported the return from England of Abdurahman on 21 August and the address of welcome he received from (N. R.) Veldsman of the APO.²⁷ Abdurahman, who had gone to secure franchise rights for the Coloured community in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, replied to Veldsman's address to say that he had 'come back a disappointed man'.²⁸

Later, Gandhi's journal reported closely the proceedings of the Annual Congress of the APO held in January 1907 in Oudtshoorn. The speech by Abdurahman, and the various resolutions discussed, were reproduced sympathetically.²⁹

The racial question was troubling Gandhi, particularly in the backdrop of such recent events as the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906, which had contributed to a churning of Gandhi's own ideas

about South Africa (Nauriya, 2020). Writing in January 1907, he expressed his admiration for the intellectual courage of the American abolitionist, Wendell Phillips (1811–1884), who had been President of the American Anti-Slavery Society during 1865–1870. ‘Sometimes a man defies convention and acts on his own with a view to [doing] absolute good,’ Gandhi wrote, adding that ‘[s]uch a great hero was Wendell Phillips.’³⁰ The same issue of Gandhi’s journal gave prominence to a resolution by the APO, passed at the annual conference at Oudtshoorn, on a motion by delegates from Maclear and Ugie that ‘in the opinion of the conference it was imperative that coloured men should be appointed on juries’.³¹ Meanwhile, the journal reported that the demand for Coloured Juries was repeated by members of the Beaufort West Coloured Political Association. The Association demanded enforcement of ‘that part of the law which states that a man must be tried by his peers in criminal cases, so that a coloured man can only be tried before a jury composed of coloured people’, failing which it demanded the abolition of jury trials.³²

By March 1907, the Transvaal Asiatic Registration Bill was gazetted and enacted soon thereafter by the Transvaal legislature, this time receiving the Royal assent in May 1907.³³ A sense of betrayal took root in Gandhi’s mind when he learnt of the commitment made to Transvaal Crown Colony agents by the British Government (which had originally disallowed the legislation) that the Imperial government would not interfere with its re-enactment once it was done after the conferment of responsible government on the Transvaal. Coming soon after Abdurahman’s sense of disappointment with England, to which he had given vent publicly in August 1906, this was perhaps also the occasion for Gandhi’s first major disillusionment with British law-makers.³⁴

ORIGINS OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE OR SATYAGRAHA

The well-known resolution on Indian passive resistance followed in September 1906. We may pause here to note a possibility of a Coloured connection with the idea of passive resistance. There are materials that suggest that in the early contacts between Gandhi and the Coloured People, the question of passive resistance was discussed between Gandhi and some prominent leaders of the Coloured community (van der Ross, 1986: 19). One prominent Coloured leader, who would go on to be Vice President of the APO, actually claimed

that he had discussed these ideas with Gandhi before organised passive resistance began.³⁵ There is no corroboration of this, but the possibility of a symbiosis of ideas between these groups cannot be ruled out. A veteran Coloured journalist, George Manuel, records a statement by a prominent leader of the APO, Peter John Daniels. According to the latter: 'Gandhi called me to his office [in Johannesburg] one day and wanted to know more about my ideas about organised passive resistance. I believe that it was I who sowed the first seeds of organised passive resistance in Gandhi's mind' (van der Ross, 1986: 20). In an interview with van der Ross, Manuel attributed his information to Christian Ziervogel, a historian of the Coloured People (*ibid.*).

Daniels, a tailor from Stellenbosch, had tried to organise Coloured People in Kimberley, and later in Johannesburg. That Gandhi was acquainted with Daniels is quite certain. Daniels had been referred to in *Indian Opinion* in an early issue in an account of a meeting in Burgersdorp to protect the rights of Coloured People in relation to the new constitution for the Transvaal.³⁶ Daniels had then proposed a delegation to England for the purpose of safeguarding their rights. Also, in early 1906, Gandhi had referred, in the Gujarati edition of his journal, to a meeting of Coloured People addressed by Abdurahman and 'presided over by Mr Daniel' [*sic*].³⁷ The meeting was attended by Gandhi. Again, in the Gujarati edition of the same journal, Gandhi referred to 'Mr Daniel' [*sic*] who 'is trying to get a hearing for his testimony on behalf of the Coloured People's Association' before the Ridgeway Commission of Inquiry on the basis for a Transvaal Constitution.³⁸ Daniels figures once again in the journal in connection with an appeal to the Transvaal Supreme Court in what the journal had been reporting at length as the 'Tram Test-Case'.³⁹ There are references to Daniels in the pages of the *A. P. O.*, the weekly newspaper of the African Political Organisation, as the Vice President of the APO.⁴⁰ Some decades later, in 1943, Daniels would be honoured by being elected Life President of the APO (Raynard, 2002: 91).

CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS IN THE OFFING: DEPUTATIONS TO ENGLAND

Soon after the events of 1906–1907, the constitutional future of the areas now comprising South Africa, and the nature of an emerging South African nation, came to the fore. It is in this context that Gandhi made his May 1908 speech at the YMCA in Johannesburg,

pointing to a future South Africa where ‘all the different races commingle and produce a civilization that perhaps the world has not yet seen’.⁴¹ There were increasing protests against the draft Constitutional proposals preceding the formation of the Union of South Africa. In March 1909, a South African Native Convention was convened in Bloemfontein; Gandhi’s journal reported a meeting of Coloured voters in Claremont on 17 March, where Abdurahman was the principal speaker, and which ‘enthusiastically adopted a resolution regretting that the colour line had been introduced into the draft Constitution’; and another meeting on 25 March in Cape Town where the ladies had demanded ‘that the draft Constitution should be submitted to the people by means of a referendum or special general election’, additional safeguards for the ‘Cape native franchise’ and abolition of the Colour Bar from the Union Parliament.⁴²

On 23 June, the day he left for London along with Hajee Habib, Gandhi gave press interviews on the purpose of his mission. Abdurahman, Lenders and Fredericks formed part of the delegation on behalf of the Coloured People. Gandhi’s journal reproduced a detailed report from *S. A. News* (Cape Town) on the farewells given near the deck-houses in Cape Town to the various delegates before their departure, including those by ‘compatriots and Coloured sympathisers’, and by Olive Schreiner and Mrs. Stakesby-Lewis, the report adding that the African leader John Tengo Jabavu ‘goes to England next week, specially to deal with the draft Act as it affects the aboriginal native’.⁴³

According to one source: ‘Before his departure, Gandhi said that although he was going to London in connection with the treatment of Indians in the Transvaal, he and Habib would interest themselves in the passage of the draft Act in Britain as well’ (Odendaal, 1984: 215, 351). In his talk with the Press, Gandhi shared his forebodings about the proposed Union of South Africa under the Draft Act of Union:

What I am now thinking of is the genesis of a situation which is undoubtedly against the Coloured races of South Africa. I have studied all that has been said about it; I have studied the Parliamentary discussions, and all these undoubtedly go to show that Union spells, perhaps, ruin to the Coloured races, especially the

Asiatics, unless the Imperial Government obtained full guarantees with regard to these matters.⁴⁴

An interview was also given by him to the *Cape Argus* on which an editorial in his journal *Indian Opinion* observed:

Mr Gandhi delivered himself of some noteworthy remarks in his interview at Cape-town with an *Argus* representative, on the subject of the effect of Closer Union upon British Indians in South Africa. He made it quite clear that Indians look with despair upon the consummation of this Union, mainly because it is a union of whites and not of non-whites. There exists a colour bar in the Draft Act of Union, and existing legislation concerning the movements of Indians within the Union is maintained unaltered, until such time as the Union Parliament may choose to interfere, and modify it either for the better or the worse.⁴⁵

...Undoubtedly, the spirit of artificial race segregation is in the air, and at the back of the Indian hostility to most of the South African governments is the firm rooted conviction that, sooner or later, the policy of confinement in latter day ghettos or bazaars will be put into operation against British Indians, together with other Asiatics.⁴⁶

Gandhi and his journal had been critical of the racist approach of the draft Union Act. Underlining his empathy with the African cause, Gandhi wrote:

Dr Abdurahman is going to England entirely in connection with the question of the Union, and that is justified. For, under the Union Act, some of the rights of the black races will be abrogated right now. In such a contingency, an effort must be made [to prevent this]. It is not the same with us. However, no one should suppose that the deputation will not raise the subject at all. It cannot but do so. It is because negotiations for a Union are in progress that the deputation is going.⁴⁷

A. P. Walshe explains:

In 1909 Gandhi went to London to voice the opposition of the Natal Indian Congress to the colour-bar clauses in the draft South

Africa Act. In this, of course, Gandhi was at one with the African and Coloured delegates in London, but his strategy was essentially different since he was able to invoke Government of India's concern with Indians in Africa.... (1986: 554).

Gandhi and his companions arrived in England on 10 July 1909. Reports of the various delegations' meetings in London filtered through back to South Africa, occasionally giving rise to speculation about possible minor alterations in the constitutional arrangements, these too on the basis not of firm assurances actually given, but hints thrown, courtesies extended, or outward receptiveness shown by British functionaries. One report, for instance, about a conference held on 22 July with Lord Crewe by W. P. Schreiner and Abdurahman, referred to a British suggestion that Asians in South Africa might be placed under the Governor General in Council rather than the Provincial Councils, a suggestion which a Reuter report published in Gandhi's journal described 'as merely an administrative arrangement'.⁴⁸ According to the report, 'Rev. Rubusana and Messrs. Mapikela, Lenders and Fredericks also attended the conference.'⁴⁹

1909: DISILLUSIONMENT AND IMPLICATIONS

While few records of direct consultations with the African delegates appear to have surfaced so far, we do know definitely that a few weeks later Gandhi, who had commended passive resistance to the Africans in his Germiston speech in June, pursued the passive resistance theme with Abdurahman as well, when the two were together lobbying support in Britain.

On the way to England, Gandhi and Abdurahman had travelled together by the same ship. Gandhi recorded during the voyage: 'The deputation of the "Coloured People" is also sailing by this very ship. It consists of Dr Abdurrahman, Mr Fredericks, Mr Londors [sic] and Mr Mavela.'⁵⁰ Gandhi is referring here to Matt J. Fredericks and D. J. Lenders, Vice President and General Secretary of the APO, who were accompanying Abdurahman (Odendaal, 1984: 211).

Anxious that the prestige of Coloured People be maintained, Gandhi had continued in the article published on 31 July 1909:

I am sorry to say that Dr Abdurrahman and two of his companions are travelling second-class and Mr Mavela third. This reflects on

the dignity of the deputation. It does not seem proper that they should travel in these conditions as representatives of the Coloured people.... On inquiry I learn that the deputation is travelling thus because it was short of funds. Two more members of the deputation will follow by the next ship.⁵¹

The experience may have been long remembered by Gandhi. Years later in India he would, with further evolution in his notions of dignity, make a regular practice of travelling by railway in the third class.

On the ship, Gandhi and Abdurahman had exchanged notes, discussing men and matters. They talked about the lawyer W. P. Schreiner, who had appeared for Dinuzulu in the case brought against the Zulu ruler, and whose sisters, Olive Schreiner and Helena Stakesby-Lewis, had, as noted earlier, seen both Gandhi and Abdurahman off at Cape Town. Gandhi wrote:

Dr Abdurrahman has told me some remarkable things about Mr Schreiner, who has gone ahead on their behalf. Not only has Mr Schreiner put their case strongly ... but he has also gone to England specially to plead on their behalf.... Besides, he has gone at his own expense. Though he has a lucrative practice at the Bar, he is not a rich man, for he spends a great deal on his large family and on philanthropic activities. He was engaged for over two months in the Dinuzulu case, but he has not received his fee as yet, and he does not care. Here is a lawyer worthy of the name.⁵²

Disillusionment with England was fast setting in and was shared equally by the Africans, the Coloured People and the Indians. On 27 July 1909, Schreiner, Gandhi, Abdurahman and Jabavu, among others, watched the debate on the South Africa Bill in the British House of Lords from the Strangers' Gallery (Odendaal, 2012: 439). The labours in London had not yielded the results hoped for. In a note for his journal, Gandhi wrote around 20 August, expressing dissatisfaction with many of the British statesmen they had encountered:

The Union Bill has been passed. Mr Schreiner, Dr Abdurrahman and others strove very hard [to get it amended], but to no purpose. Their efforts may have made a good impression. Many members

made long speeches. They were not happy with the taint [of racial discrimination] in the Act. They expressed their regret. To what purpose? Why do they not give up their office? They express regret but their actions are just the same!⁵³

Gandhi was to make a still sharper condemnation of British Parliament when he sailed back to South Africa two months later in November.

Towards the end of their respective missions, Gandhi wrote to Abdurahman, a grandson of a freed slave, of the 'inherent justice' of the latter's cause. The racial clause in the law was identified by Gandhi as the issue over which a struggle would have to be undertaken. In later decades, it was this racial foundation laid by the British parliamentary legislation that would provide the basis on which the apparatus of apartheid would be constructed. Gandhi's letter to Abdurahman was a call to passive resistance:

Please accept my sympathy as also congratulations in connection with your mission; my sympathy because you have got nothing substantially; my congratulations because no deputation deserves success as yours did, on account alike of the inherent justice of your cause and the solid work that you put forth. Mr Schreiner has undoubtedly worked sincerely and like a giant.

That no amendment would be made in the Draft Bill was a foregone conclusion. One may derive whatever satisfaction is to be had from the fact of almost every member having regretted the insertion of a racial bar in an Imperial statute-book; neither you nor I can live upon regrets....I can but recall to you the conversation we had on board. You are disappointed (if you are); you expected something from the Parliament or the British public, but why should you expect anything from them, if you expect nothing from yourself.

I promised to send you Thoreau's *Duty of Civil Disobedience*. I have not been able to procure it; I am writing for it today and hope to send it before you are off.

All I can add is a prayer that you may have the strength for it and ability to continue the work in South Africa along internal reform,

and, therefore, passive resistance, even though, in the beginning, you may be only a handful.⁵⁴

A few days later in a despatch sent from London before 4 September to his journal in South Africa, Gandhi would note:

Dr Abdurrahman and his colleagues will leave by the mail-ship which will carry this letter. The gentleman will keep up the struggle. Whether it will be in the nature of satyagraha or something else is not known as yet.⁵⁵

Even as Abdurahman returned home, Gandhi records the arrival in London of 'Mr Morris, who was employed in the Cape Town Colonial Office' and 'has been sent here by a section of the Coloured people'.⁵⁶

Gandhi and Hajee Habib left for South Africa on 13 November 1909 by the *S. S. Kildonan Castle*.⁵⁷ Three days earlier, Gandhi told *The Daily Express* that the passive resistance campaign in South Africa would 'continue with unabated vigour'.⁵⁸

At this time in 1909, Gandhi had lately witnessed the working of the British Parliament in a manner that he had never had occasion to earlier. He had seen it sanction blatantly racist provisions in the South Africa Act and also decline relief to Indians against the colour bar. That this was weighing heavily on his mind is suggested not merely by his letter of 23 August 1909 to Abdurahman, referred to earlier, but also by the original Gujarati language Preface, dated 22 November 1909, to the booklet in which Gandhi wrote: 'I have read much, I have pondered much. Also, during my four months' stay in London in connection with the work of the Transvaal Indian Deputation I discussed things with as many of my countrymen as I could.'⁵⁹

The mutual association and friendship between Gandhi and Abdurahman had definitely deepened further during the visit to England in 1909. Returning from England, Gandhi and Hajee Habib were presented to the Press at Cape Town by Abdurahman.⁶⁰ At the latter's request, Gandhi contributed an article on passive resistance in the Transvaal which was published by the *A. P. O.* on 4 December 1909. A fortnight earlier, on 20 November 1909, the *A. P. O.* had carried in the same context the text of Tolstoy's letter to Gandhi.

As in the speech he had made in Germiston earlier in the year in June, Gandhi, in his article in the *A. P. O.*, commended the method of passive resistance to Africans.

Two thousand five hundred Indians have passed through the Transvaal gaols. They find that they have a new power. If they are in the right the power is irresistible: if they are in the wrong it is not the power that fails, but the wrong cause. And nobody is hurt except themselves—not even they, because they will have learnt from their mistakes.⁶¹

He sought to answer apprehensions that had been voiced in the press:

Some publicists have condemned passive resistance in a land filled with illiterate natives. I think it is the best for them. Let the illiterate men learn that, if they feel a grievance, they are not to break other people's heads, but their own, in order to have it redressed. It will do away with all the fear of native and other unrest, and society will go on much more smoothly than hitherto. It is a superstition to suppose that passive resistance can lead to violence.⁶²

He repeated the same advice to the Coloured People.

Let the readers of the '*A.P.O.*' who would study the subject follow the course of the struggle, and then consider for themselves whether it is not the greatest, and yet the most harmless, force anybody can wield with perfect safety and a clear conscience.⁶³

PROTESTING THE VISIT BY THE PRINCE OF WALES

In the same year the Coloured People in the Cape, who had earlier had the franchise, faced effective disfranchisement by the South Africa Act.⁶⁴ They were effectively excluded from the Parliament of the Union and could only elect whites to represent them. When the leader of the Coloured People, Abdurahman, therefore made a protest on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales to Cape Town in 1910, Gandhi fully supported the protest and defended Abdurahman against the charge of having expressed disloyal sentiments: 'The word "loyalty" is a much-abused term. It would

certainly be inconsistent with the loyalty of a coward or a slave.⁶⁵ Describing Abdurahman as 'an enlightened and independent man', Gandhi maintained that such a free man was entitled to 'refuse to associate himself with rejoicings which involve the degradation of a whole people who have deserved by common consent a better treatment'.⁶⁶ Stressing again the need for passive resistance, Gandhi was enthused by the wide support that the proposal for such resistance received at the recent conference of Coloured People on 16 February 1910:

In courageously expressing his sentiments, we think that Dr Abdurahman has cleared the atmosphere of cant and humbug and has served Truth, the Crown, his people and himself at the same time. Dr Abdurahman's declaration almost coincides in point of time with the emphatic statement of the Coloured people's meeting at Johannesburg where several speakers said, that, if the authorities became unreasonable, they would take up passive resistance. We congratulate Dr Abdurahman on his performance and hope that he will have courage to follow out his programme when the time comes.⁶⁷

The 16 February conference referred to had been organised at Johannesburg by the APO to resolve to present an address to Lord Selborne and also to protest against the Pretoria Town Council for 'driving respectable coloured people out of the town'; at the conference, a 'leading churchman' took an oath that 'he would sooner allow himself to be shot than carry a pass', and all speakers 'urged that the coloured people should go in for passive resistance, and in that way to fight to the bitter end'.⁶⁸ During the proceedings five days later of the Municipal Council of Cape Town, on 21 February 1910, Abdurahman said:

No Coloured man, I hope, will sing 'God Save the King' on that day. I know I won't. No Coloured man will see the Prince of Wales coming through the streets on that day and feel happy; for he will know it is the consummation of the robbing him of something he has had for 50 years.⁶⁹

Specifically complimenting Abdurahman for this speech as well, Gandhi wrote:

These words of Dr Abdurrahman, though bitter, are justified. The proposal was, of course, passed, but his words will be remembered for ever. If the other Coloured people were to follow in his footsteps, they would win redress of their grievances soon enough. We see no disloyalty in the Doctor's remarks. True loyalty may be bitter sometimes. It is not loyalty to say 'yes' to everything. True loyalty consists in expressing only what is in one's mind and acting accordingly.⁷⁰

On the same day, Abdurahman's paper editorially praised the impulse that 'has evoked Mr Gandhi and his people to offer so long and stubborn a resistance to all attempts to goad them to evil by means of legislation which offends their religious convictions, moral conscience and manly spirit' and observed:

If the coloured people will but follow the same line of conduct without flinching, success will come to them. They will save their independence, avoid humiliation and prove their manliness in no other way. The point has been reached when the coloured people must prove that they are human beings; and what is more, must convince the white tyrants and hypocrites that beneath a coloured skin beats a heart that chafes indignantly at all attempts to dishonour, humiliate or degrade the manly spirit.⁷¹

The editorial in Abdurahman's paper was titled 'Persecution in Pretoria: Passive Resistance: Now's the Day and Now's the Hour', and referred to the Pretoria incident concerning an African who was sought to be prevented from sitting in the same examination hall as Europeans. Gandhi had condemned the Pretoria incident in *Indian Opinion* on New Year's Day. And it was barely three months since Gandhi had written his article in the *A. P. O.*, commending the method of passive resistance.

A few days later Gandhi wrote:

Our struggle is producing a profound effect on the Coloured people. Dr Abdurahman has commented on it in his journal at great length and has held up the example of the Indian community to every Coloured person. Some of them have also passed a resolution in Johannesburg to defy the laws of the Government and take to satyagraha.⁷²

Gandhi's journal carried lengthy reports of the commentaries by A. P. O., discussing the need for passive resistance and citing, *inter alia*, the example of Gandhi.⁷³ The Pretoria correspondent of the A. P. O. had written about the increasing defiance by Coloured People, and Gandhi's journal reproduced his report and commentary:

The Native Commissioner has sent for Mr Paul van Grenen, the Chairman of the African Political Organisation, and has informed him that it was he who was preventing the coloured people from taking out passes, and that he had better desist and take out a pass for himself. Another meeting was held and a resolution was passed that no Cape coloured person should take out a pass. The people present seemed determined to carry out the resolution. To my mind the whole Native problem could be solved if Coloured, Natives and Indians would all take to passive resistance. Whether passive resistance will be successful or not on this occasion, we are at any rate thankful to the Indians for having shown us one of the most effective weapons in our possession.⁷⁴

In December 1909, Gandhi had commended the path of passive resistance to the Africans and to the Coloured community in South Africa. The advice to the Coloured, Africans and Indians by the A. P. O.'s Pretoria correspondent was in line with this, and in its call for united action in fact echoed an editorial in Gandhi's journal two years earlier in the context of the segregationist moves by Johannesburg Municipality.⁷⁵

'THE MORE THE BETTER'

By 1910, Gandhi was openly welcoming the rise of an African leadership and even saying 'the more the better'. In his note, dated 11 April 1910, Gandhi referred to certain remarks made by Lord Selborne at a dinner given by mine-owners. Selborne had warned the whites that if 'they persisted in their unjust treatment of the Cape Coloureds', then individuals would arise from among the latter community who would become leaders of the Africans. According to Gandhi, 'Lord Selborne thought that this was the biggest problem facing South Africa.'⁷⁶ In a significant and vivid illustration of a three-way dialectic that had come increasingly to

operate at the time between the Indian struggle led by Gandhi, the Coloured community led by Abdurahman, and the emerging African leadership, Gandhi wrote of Selborne's remarks:

These views call for some comment. It does not appear that in saying this Lord Selborne was actuated by concern for the welfare of the Coloured people; he said it only because he feared the emergence of a leader from among them. Their sincere well-wishers, however, should welcome the rise of such leaders—the more the better—and encourage them.⁷⁷

Indian passive resistance had been continuing. In a sense, reciprocating Indian, and Gandhi's, solidarity with Abdurahman's protest at the time of the Prince of Wales' visit earlier in the year, the A. P. O. would establish an Indian Passive Resistance Fund.⁷⁸ There were several other instances of the Coloured People's expression of solidarity with the Indian struggle (Reddy, 1995: 53).

Many speakers at a conference of Coloured People, held in Johannesburg on 16 December 1909, expressed themselves in favour of resorting to passive resistance (ibid.: 62). To the conference of the APO in Port Elizabeth, in 1910, Abdurahman appears to have suggested that 'Coloureds adopt the Gandhian tactics of passive resistance as another option in the fight for their rights' (Lewis, 1987: 54, 295).

The Coloured People evinced continuing interest in, and expressed their support for, Gandhi. When Gandhi visited Kimberley in April 1911, the vote of thanks to him moved by Dawson, Chairman of the Indian Association, was seconded by (Isaac) Joshua, the ex-Secretary of the African Political Association (APA).⁷⁹ Interactions amongst the Indian, Coloured and African peoples advanced further by July 1911, when Pixley Seme, who played a vital role in the formation of the African National Congress (ANC), figured in *Indian Opinion* the same month when the First Universal Races Congress was held in London. *Indian Opinion* had in its columns been mentioning plans for such a conference on the racial question as early as 1909.⁸⁰ Gandhi, along with Olive Schreiner, Abdurahman and Alfred Mangena, was on the Honorary General Committee of the Universal Races Congress, as were E. W. Blyden, the famous African intellectual from

Sierra Leone, and W. E. B. DuBois, who was later known as the pioneering force behind the Pan-African movement (Spiller, 1911: xxxvii). Gandhi himself did not attend, but sent his associate Henry Polak. Among the other participants were Rubusana, Jabavu and Gandhi's mentor in India, the statesman Gopal Krishna Gokhale. One contribution to the deliberations was from M. Jean Finot of France whose work, *Race Prejudice* (1906), Gandhi recommended to another earlier in the year, in April, and would refer to again in India. The work had been favourably reviewed four years earlier in Gandhi's journal by A. Chessel Piquet; a likely pseudonym for Henry (i.e., H. S. L.) Polak.⁸¹ Gandhi referred to M. Finot's work a few months before the Universal Races Congress held in 1911.⁸² It is this work which was noticed and commended in *Indian Opinion* in September 1907.

GOKHALE'S VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA

W. P. Schreiner and Abdurahman, among others, welcomed Gokhale when he visited South Africa in 1912 at Gandhi's invitation.⁸³ A meeting with Olive Schreiner took place on 25 October en route to Kimberley; Gandhi recorded in a cryptic diary entry for 1912 that has survived: 'Mrs. Olive Schreiner came at De Aar.'⁸⁴ Among those who welcomed Gokhale in Kimberley was Isaac Joshua, Chairman of the local chapter of the APA.⁸⁵ Joshua said that the Coloured People of South Africa laboured under great disabilities, and they sympathised with the Indians. Their fight was common to both, because the Indians laboured under the same obnoxious laws as they (the Coloureds) laboured under, and he only trusted that the Indians might receive better treatment in future through Gokhale's visit, and that following that, the Coloured People in South Africa would also receive fair and just treatment, as they should under British rule.⁸⁶

The banquet at the Town Hall for Gokhale on 26 October 1912 was described as 'unique in the annals of the Diamond Fields', as 'it is the first occasion in local history when Europeans and Indians have met at a common table'.⁸⁷ The presence at the banquet of representatives of the Coloured People like Joshua and J. S. Lakey (Lakay) is recorded.⁸⁸ After the welcome by the Mayor of Kimberley, and after Gandhi and Gokhale had spoken, Francis Oats, a representative of the De Beers Company, which in the initial years

would be helpful to the ANC, said that 'here in Kimberley they were more or less a mixed community'.

STRUGGLES OF 1913

The question of passes required for African and Coloured women in Orange Free State had come to a boil after the formation of the Union of South Africa. Representations were to no avail. The scholar Julia Wells writes:

When these efforts brought no satisfactory result, the topic of passes for women quickly became a rallying point for the newly formed South African Natives National Congress (SANNC). Meeting in Bloemfontein in February 1912, the SANNC called on the Union Government to withdraw all provisions for passes for women. As if foreshadowing events to come, it also stressed the significance of the passive resistance campaign being successfully carried on by Mahatma Gandhi in the nearby Transvaal province. The African Political Organisation, representing the local Coloured population, also took up the issue of passes for women (1982: 130).

Gandhi, in his articles, had been stressing the importance and potential of passive resistance for African and Coloured People's causes. As we have seen, he had done so also in letters to Abdurahman. According to Wells, the African Women's movement in 1913 was influenced by 'Gandhi and the Suffragettes' (Wells, 1983: 70). As Wells explains, Gandhi's campaigns had been 'followed with great interest by Dr. A. Abdurahman' whose weekly newspaper, the *A. P. O.*, 'was popular reading in Bloemfontein and no doubt helped promote the idea in the minds of women there' (ibid.: 57). She notes that the 'concept of passive resistance was also stressed at the inaugural meeting of the SANNC', held in Bloemfontein in January 1912 (ibid.).

At the end of September 1913, Abdurahman, in his presidential address to the annual conference of the APO held at Kimberley, drew attention to the Indian struggle. In remarks that bring to mind the pointed suggestion Gandhi had made to him in August 1909, Abdurahman observed that the method of passive resistance might usefully be emulated by (other) 'coloured races'.

Extracts from Abdurahman's speech were published by *Indian Opinion* around the time Gandhi was in Bloemfontein prison; Gandhi had been arrested successively on 6, 8 and 9 November 1913 at Palmford and Standerton, and finally at Teakworth near Greylingstaad, on various charges, including one upon a warrant from Dundee charging him with inducing a strike. In his speech, Abdurahman had said: 'If a handful of Indians, in a matter of conscience, can so firmly resist what they consider injustice, what could the coloured races not do if they were to adopt this practice of passive resistance?'⁸⁹ *Indian Opinion* also published Abdurahman's remarks applauding the African women's struggle in Orange Free State.⁹⁰

African women had taken to passive resistance in 1913. A year later, all-round tension between the authorities and all sections of Coloured People was still manifest. In March 1914, Gandhi's journal referred to the notice given by the Post Master of Queenstown terminating the services of Coloured and Native Postmen and condemned this, saying that 'we cannot find any justification for the disgraceful step'.⁹¹ In the following week, Gandhi's journal carried a report of Abdurahman's statement as leader of a delegation to the Prime Minister about an incident in February in Potchefstroom when the police raided the 'North Burghers Rights Settlement' and 'arrested all the Coloured people living there'.⁹² The women's struggle in Orange Free State, and even elsewhere, was also still continuing. Gandhi's journal, relying on the *A. P. O.*, published a report of a meeting of the Jagersfontein branch of the Coloured Women's Guild, held in March 1914, in the wake of police repression directed at 'passless women and men'; the women sensed 'fresh trouble approaching' and 'went into committee for the purpose of discussing what steps to take in connection with the Passive Resistance Movement'.⁹³ The African women's protest extended to other issues as well. Later in the month, Gandhi's journal carried a report of 'a large number of respectable Native women' who had 'recently marched in a body to the Magistrate of Germiston, Transvaal, and lodged their protest against the frequency with which the police raided their houses at night in search of liquor'.⁹⁴

When the Indian struggle concluded with the Indian Relief Act and the abolition of the Pound Three Tax in 1914, sections

of white opinion feared 'the possible effect on the natives and the undesirability of having a free Indian population...'⁹⁵ The Coloured People saw it differently; for example, the African Political Organisation and its official organ the *A. P. O.* commented: '(t)he Indian Relief Bill is an act of justice wrung from the unwilling hands of the Government'.⁹⁶ It added:

The thanks of the Coloured races throughout the British Empire are due to Mr Ghandi [*sic*]. He has sacrificed his whole life for his people and he has undoubtedly assisted to force into prominence the greatest problem that ever confronted a people, namely the relationship of Black and White in the British Empire.⁹⁷

BOWING OUT OF SOUTH AFRICA

His last train journey through South Africa, in July 1914, took Gandhi from Durban through various Natal and Transvaal towns before reaching Johannesburg; there were crowds at every stop to wish him and Kasturba Gandhi farewell, and a public reception was held at Johannesburg. Among those present at the reception was Dantu, Chairman of the Coloured People's Association, who also made a speech.⁹⁸

In Cape Town, after Gandhi and his party were taken in a procession to the docks on 18 July 1914, Abdurahman made a speech appreciating Gandhi's services.⁹⁹ In his reply Gandhi defined the terms of his loyalty to the British Constitution: 'I have always believed there is something subtle, something fine in the ideals of the British Constitution. Tear away those ideals and you tear away my loyalty to that Constitution...'¹⁰⁰

In the *A. P. O.*, Abdurahman also referred to Gandhi's departure from South Africa: 'His name will be handed down to posterity as one of the greatest and truest sons of India that ever came to the shores of South Africa' (Simons and Simons, 1983: 162). Significantly, many Africans, apart from Coloured People, were also members of the APO. For example, Sol T. Plaatje, who had in January 1912 been chosen as the General Secretary of the ANC, was also a member of the APO (Rall, 2003: 119).

Gandhi's evolution on racial questions during his South African years is largely overlooked in contemporary scholarship, which places his transformation essentially in his post-South Africa phase.

Yet if we were to make a mid-term review of Gandhi's political career at the point when he left Africa, he may be said to have left something permanent behind in South Africa—as his search for inter-racial solidarity and methods of protest had started, what he left behind was for all South Africans.¹⁰¹

Both Gandhi and Abdurahman encountered a South Africa in which racism was on the rise. Both devised strategies to deal with the phenomenon. Both came to prominence within their respective organisations, and both ran journals in South Africa. Both moved beyond their initial constituencies, and gave support to one another.

The relation between them and the issues they came to address problematises the compartmentalised manner in which racial questions are sometimes discussed in current scholarship, especially in relation to Gandhi. It is evident that both these figures were functioning at several levels, both resisted *reduction* in the rights of their constituencies and communities, and both sought the *expansion* of rights of their own constituencies and communities. More importantly, both *supported* the *expansion* of the legal and civic rights of other non-white communities.

There was a mutuality and a symbiosis between Abdurahman and Gandhi, in the sense that both learnt from each other. Both were disillusioned with petition politics, and both considered passive resistance.

Having left South Africa in July 1914, Gandhi spent a few months in England before returning to India. His ship arrived in England on 4 August. That was the day of the outbreak of the First World War, of which he received news while still on the English Channel.¹⁰² He got busy in organising an Indian Ambulance Corps for serving the wounded.¹⁰³

Gandhi's trajectory during the First World War, and in its aftermath, had significant contemporary parallels. His experience was being corroborated by Coloured People in more than one clime and context at that historical juncture. In South Africa, Abdurahman's APO had 'helped to recruit volunteers for the Cape Corps, an infantry regiment instituted to allow coloureds to serve in an auxiliary capacity during the war' (Adhikari, 1997: 297). The mood in South Africa, despite the War, appeared to remain heavily embroiled with race. Even during the War, Indian army officers

visiting South Africa were reportedly humiliated on Durban trams (Pirie, 1992: 248).

ABDURAHMAN'S VISIT TO INDIA

Another 11 years passed before Gandhi and Abdurahman met again. The General Election in South Africa in 1924 was followed by a spate of racially discriminatory legislation (Joshi, 1942). In the wake of this, a delegation from South Africa, led by Abdurahman, visited India in 1925. A couple of days before its arrival, Gandhi wrote a welcoming note in his journal, providing his readers with information about Abdurahman's distinguished background and high education in spite of which the doctor had faced racist prejudice in South Africa: 'He received his medical training in Scotland and is a successful practitioner in Cape Town. He was a member of the old Cape Legislative Council and also a prominent Corporator. But even he has not been unexposed to the colour prejudice.'¹⁰⁴ Despairing of a positive intervention in South African affairs by the government in London, Gandhi commented that imperialism was driven by competitive anxieties which 'degraded imperial politics to the formula of exploitation of African and Asiatic races, to the exclusion, if possible, of other European powers from the spoils of exploitation'.¹⁰⁵ He returned to the theme in the next issue of the journal, this time looking within India, and observing that 'it is an error to suppose that Hindus can thrive upon the degradation of a fifth of themselves or that peoples of the West can rise or live upon the exploitation and degradation of the Eastern and African nations'.¹⁰⁶

There would be continual suggestions and invitations to Gandhi to visit other continents and countries. One correspondent wrote to Gandhi, suggesting he undertake a tour of America, Europe and Africa. Publishing the letter in his Gujarati journal, Gandhi turned down the suggestion saying that he saw 'no good reason at present' which could induce him to visit Europe or America.¹⁰⁷ And Africa? 'Even in Africa, I can do nothing now,' Gandhi wrote, adding: 'A soldier distinguishes himself in a fight which comes to him unsought. One who goes out in search of a fight would be a gambler.'¹⁰⁸ Yet Africa would lay claim on him before the week was over. The delegation from South Africa was present at the Kanpur session of the Indian National Congress

(INC), which was also addressed by Abdurahman. Sarojini Naidu, who had visited South Africa in 1924, had been chosen as President of the INC in 1925. In a speech on the opening day of the Congress, Abdurahman said Gandhi 'belongs to us' and claimed Sarojini Naidu likewise. He told the Congress: 'You will have to give us at least one of the two to go to South Africa and fight our battle.'¹⁰⁹ The suggestion appears to have been more than merely rhetorical, for Abdurahman repeated it after a resolution on South Africa was passed at the session.¹¹⁰ Abdurahman was one of a select few persons who had themselves seen Gandhi work in *each* of the three countries that formed the scene of his political activities—South Africa, England and India. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Pranjivan Mehta, C. F. Andrews, Henry Polak and his sister Maud Cheesman were among the handful of others who could perhaps be included in this list.¹¹¹

South Africa now once again beckoned strongly to Gandhi. And Abdurahman's words must have had an impact, because a few weeks later we find Gandhi contemplating the possibility of a visit to South Africa. Meeting some members of the delegation from South Africa, he was understood to have mulled over the possibility while being uncertain about the occasion for a visit. According to a press report: 'Mr. Gandhi expressed his willingness to go to South Africa if a necessity arose, but reserved to himself the right to be the judge of that necessity'.¹¹² Abdurahman's visit gave Gandhi an opportunity to learn about developments in South Africa subsequent to his departure from its shores from an authoritative source different from his usual channels of information. The year 1926 saw a sharpening of Gandhi's criticisms of South African racial discrimination.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF STRUGGLES

Gandhi had seen clearly the interconnectedness of the various struggles against racial discrimination, though he remained for some years cautious about the possibility of an amalgamated struggle. The discriminatory Mines and Works legislation (the Colour Bar Bill), which had been mooted at this time in South Africa, was reportedly proposed to be amended still further to cover the Cape Province. Gandhi noted with concern the suggestion in a section of the South African Press that that 'it is

probably out of spite against Dr Abdur Rahman's doings in India that the S. A. Government seek to include the Cape in the scope of the Bill'.¹¹³ The possibility of such action being directed at the interests represented by his distinguished visitor seems to have cut Gandhi to the quick and to make, in a series of commentaries, some of his severest remarks against racial legislation not only in South Africa, but also elsewhere. Drawing attention to certain racial disabilities in Glasgow in Great Britain, Gandhi made a worldwide projection of his concept of non-violent non-co-operation which he had, six years earlier, introduced in India. The British Home Secretary had on 18 March 1925 issued an order requiring the registration of 'Alien Seamen', based on colour. Known as the Special Restrictions (Coloured Alien Seamen) Order, it was made applicable, *inter alia*, in Glasgow. Gandhi saw this in the context of increased restrictions against Indians in Britain and referred also to a recent incident in which 'Chinese washermen were almost lynched in Liverpool'; citing such racial disabilities and attitudes within Britain and 'the American prejudice against colour', he wrote:

The question therefore that is agitating South Africa is not a local one but it is a tremendous world problem. ...There is however no hope of avoiding the catastrophe unless the spirit of exploitation that at present dominates the nations of the West is transmuted into that of real helpful service, or unless the Asiatic and African races understand that they cannot be exploited without their co-operation, to a large extent voluntary, and thus understanding, withdraw such co-operation.¹¹⁴

Gandhi's attack on South Africa's Mines and Works Amendment Act, 1926, furnished an illustration of this understanding and interconnectedness. This measure, which was one among those popularly identified at the time as the 'Colour Bar Act', provided that certificates of competency in any occupation shall be granted 'only to Europeans, Cape Coloureds or Cape Malays'. He had protested against the Colour Bar legislation, although its primary impact on the ground was on Africans, rather than on Indians. In fact, he opposed those who felt that this might be reason to remain silent on the matter.¹¹⁵

In July 1926, Gandhi wrote emphasising a vital axiom about the struggle against racial discrimination which set limits to how far Indian demands could be expected to be met in South Africa without a forward movement in that country as a whole: 'I do not conceive the possibility of justice being done to Indians if none is rendered to natives of the soil.'¹¹⁶

Returning to the attack on the proposed Colour Bar legislation, Gandhi declared a few weeks later that 'the Colour Bar Bills are violent in purpose, for, they would keep the natives of the soil and the Asiatic settlers forever as unskilled labourers and will not allow them to rise above that status'.¹¹⁷ He went even further: 'The Colour Bar Bills are intended to do, under the name of civilisation and for its protection, perhaps, in a more virulent form, what has been done in the name of Hinduism by Hindus to the so-called untouchables.'¹¹⁸ While untouchability was 'fast dying' and 'is admitted to be an evil', the 'Colour Bar is being raised almost to the status of a religion in South Africa'.¹¹⁹

According to Gandhi, the

Colour Bar Bills are a response to the greed of a handful of Europeans who are, after all, exploiting the resources of a land which belongs not to them, but to the original inhabitants of South Africa. The Colour Bar Bills have, therefore, no moral foundation whatsoever so far as I can see.

Seldom had he spoken out more strongly against a proposed legislation.¹²⁰

Increasingly, a section of political opinion in South Africa came to consider the possibilities of passive resistance. In January 1930, *The Cape Times* quoted Abdurahman as telling the Non-European Conference in Cape Town:

You must have a leader who is prepared to make sacrifices, such as Gandhi is in India....Passive resistance is a weapon that should be properly organised and prepared so that if and when the time comes we shall be ready and could then use it (Johns, 1972: 268).

To the interface between Abdurahman, the leader of the Coloured People in South Africa, and Gandhi, must in part be credited

not only the encouraging of this process in South Africa, but also the further sharpening of Gandhi's own international critiques of race.



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NOTES

1. M. K. Gandhi, 18 July 1914, *Collected Works* (hereafter CW), vol. 12, p. 505.
2. Dr. Abdurahman's name has been spelt in three ways in the literature: Dr. Abdurahman, Dr. Abdurrahman and Dr. Abdur Rahman. We have adopted the first of the three unless a different spelling occurs in a quotation.
3. In 1925, Gandhi had observed of events in 17th-century Cape: 'Some Dutchmen from Java with their Malay slaves entered the country which we now know as Cape Colony. These Malays are Mussalmans. They have Dutch blood in their veins and inherit some of the qualities of the Dutch. They are found scattered throughout South Africa, but Cape Town is their stronghold. Some of them today are in the service of Europeans, while others follow independent avocations. Malay women are very industrious and intelligent. They are generally cleanly in their ways of living. They are experts in laundry work and sewing. The men carry on some petty trade. Many drive hackney carriages. Some have received higher English education. One of them is the well-known Doctor Abdul Rahman of Cape Town. He was a member of the old Colonial legislature at Cape Town. Under the new constitution this right of entering the Parliament has been taken away' (*Young India*, 10 December 1925).
4. Based on the table in Appendix A, in Patterson (1953: 351).
5. The deputation included, apart from Dr. Abdurahman, Sorabji Rustomji, B. S. Pather, G. Mirza, Amod Bhagat, James Godfrey, Haji Ismail and Bhawani Dayal. Referring to this deputation, Gandhi wrote: 'Dr. Abdur Rahman, the head of the deputation, is South African born, as for that matter are some others. The worthy doctor is popularly known as a Malay doctor. But he has Indian blood in him. The Malays are an integral part of the South African community. They are without exception Mussalmans. Malay women freely marry Indian Mussalmans; the unions are happy and the children born of such mixtures are some of them highly educated. Dr. Abdur Rahman belongs to that distinguished category' (*Young India*, 10 December 1925, CW, vol. 29, pp. 304–305).
6. *Indian Opinion*, 18 and 25 June 1903.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Indian Opinion*, 23 July 1903, CW, vol. 3, pp. 378–79.
9. 'On the Position in the Transvaal', 18 July 1903, CW, vol. 3, p. 371.
10. *Indian Opinion*, 6 August 1903, CW, vol. 3, p. 399.

11. *Indian Opinion*, 1 October 1903, CW, vol. 3, p. 464. One may obtain a measure of the larger significance of the question of the municipal regulations in South Africa from this observation made decades later by a leading progressive scholar–activist on South African matters: ‘Restrictive regulations of this sort are sometimes attributed solely to the Boers, but the extremely English Cape provincial town of East London had a municipal regulation forbidding the use of the side-walk by non-Europeans, a law which was still being enforced as recently as 1920’ (Roux, 1964).
12. The African leader Dr. Walter Rubusana was the author of a history of South Africa from the African standpoint. The meeting at the Wesleyan School in the African Location in East London ended with a motion of no-confidence in Sir Gordon Sprigg being moved by Rubusana, and seconded by Soga, which, ‘on being put to the meeting was carried unanimously’ (*Indian Opinion*, 18 February 1904). Rubusana, who would later in 1912 be Vice President of the South African Native National Congress (subsequently re-named the African National Congress), said with reference to Cape Colony that he ‘believed there was no other town in the Colony except Sir Gordon Sprigg’s constituency, which compelled natives to carry passes, and none other had bye-laws compelling natives to walk on the roads. Therefore, he wanted to know whether Sir Gordon Sprigg’s government had consented to the regulations with regard to passes, the footpaths, and the increase of rents in the locations’ (ibid.).

Commenting in his journal, in 1904, on Sir Gordon’s meeting, and specifically on Rubusana’s questions to the former, Gandhi wrote: ‘One of the speakers at the meeting rightly reminded him (Sir Gordon: A. N.) that he had done nothing for the natives, and that East London is the only place in the Cape Colony where the natives have not the right to walk on the footpaths. The speaker rightly blamed Sir Gordon for having sanctioned the municipal regulations referred to, and the only lame reply that he (Sir Gordon) could make was that it was a municipal matter, and that he did not wish to judge the Council’s action’ (*Indian Opinion*, 18 February 1904, CW, vol. 4, pp. 131–32). This appears to have been Gandhi’s first available published endorsement of Rubusana (Nauriya, 2015).

13. *Indian Opinion*, 9 July 1904, CW, vol. 4, pp. 220–21.
14. *Indian Opinion*, 6 May 1905.
15. *Indian Opinion*, 24 March 1906, CW, vol. 5, pp. 242.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., p. 244.
18. Ibid. In its column, ‘Johannesburg Jottings’, *Indian Opinion* published the following comment on these moves: ‘Whilst British Indians do not demand any political rights whatever, nevertheless, they recognise it as a clear gain that any coloured community should be dignified with the vote, and so extend a hearty wish that the aspirations of the African Political Organisation may be fulfilled, and that the coloured population may use their political rights with the wisdom that will be required by the special circumstances that render their position a peculiar and delicate one.’
19. Probably P. J. Daniels. The account of this particular meeting in Gandhi’s *Collected Works* is a translation from the original Gujarati.

20. *Indian Opinion*, 31 March 1906, CW, vol. 5, p. 257.
21. Francis Zaccharius Santiago Peregrino was a 'Gold Coaster', i.e., he was from what is present-day Ghana. Peregrino helped establish organisations for Coloured People in Cape Colony in South Africa, and was the founder–editor of the *South African Spectator*. Earlier, he had spent some years in England and the United States.
22. *Indian Opinion*, 28 April 1906.
23. *Indian Opinion*, 19 May 1906.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Indian Opinion*, 12 May 1906.
26. *Indian Opinion*, 14 July 1906 and 21 July 1906.
27. *Indian Opinion*, 1 September 1906.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Indian Opinion*, 12 January 1907.
30. *Indian Opinion*, 19 January 1907, CW, vol. 6, p. 285.
31. According to the Reuter report published in *Indian Opinion*, 'Mr Poggenpoel created laughter by saying that if coloured men had been on juries there would have been fewer hangings.' That jury composition was no laughing matter would become amply clear through the conduct of a jury in a case concerning an African in the Natal that had come to public attention from the previous month, and would soon elicit some severe comments from Gandhi.
32. *Indian Opinion*, 2 February 1907.
33. CW, vol. 6, pp. 510–11.
34. Twenty years later Gandhi would grimly recall it as a deception: 'The Imperial Government is directly responsible for the legislation of Crown Colonies, and there is no place in its constitution for discrimination on the ground of race or colour. So far so good. One can also understand that the Imperial Government could not all at once disallow measures passed by the legislatures of Colonies enjoying responsible government. But to hold private conferences with Colonial agents and in advance to promise the royal assent to legislation which is in open violation of the Imperial Constitution,—what is this if it is not a breach of faith and an injustice to those whose rights are thus pilfered?' ('Satyagraha in South Africa', Chapter XV, intitled 'Crooked Policy', CW, vol. 29, p. 104). In a stern indictment, Gandhi continued: 'Really speaking, Lord Elgin by his assurance encouraged the Transvaal Europeans in their anti-Indian activities. If he wanted to do this, he ought to have told the Indian deputation so in plain terms. As a matter of fact, the Empire cannot escape responsibility even for the legislation of Colonies enjoying responsible government. Even such Colonies are bound to accept the fundamental principles of the British Constitution. As for example, no such colony can revive the institution of legalized slavery' (*ibid.*).
35. The late E. S. Reddy pointed me to this. See his reference to Peter John Daniels in Reddy (1995: 140).
36. *Indian Opinion*, 11 February 1905.
37. 'Johannesburg Letter', *Indian Opinion*, 31 March 1906, CW, vol. 5, p. 257.

38. *Indian Opinion*, 19 May 1906, CW, vol. 5, p. 316; see also p. 252.
39. *Indian Opinion*, 22 December 1906.
40. See, for example, Daniels' letter, dated 29 September 1910, A. P. O., 8 October 1910.
41. *Indian Opinion*, 6 and 13 June 1908, CW, vol. 8, p. 246.
42. *Indian Opinion*, 27 March 1909.
43. *Indian Opinion*, 3 July 1909.
44. *Cape Times*, 24 June 1909, CW, vol. 9, p. 268. In this passage, as in the one related to Note 97, 'Coloured' is being used in a wider sense than in its specific South African meaning. On 7 June 1909, a few days before his departure for England, Gandhi had spoken at Germiston, commending the path of passive resistance for the Africans (*Indian Opinion*, 12 June 1909, CW, vol. 9, pp. 243–244.)
45. *Indian Opinion*, 3 July 1909.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Indian Opinion*, 31 July 1909, CW, vol. 9, p. 272 (from the Gujarati).
48. 'Lord Crewe and the Coloured People: Diplomatic Replies', *Indian Opinion*, 24 July 1909.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Indian Opinion*, 31 July 1909, CW, vol. 9, p. 273 (from the Gujarati).
51. *Ibid.* In the same issue, Gandhi's journal reported on the formation of a new political organisation in Kimberley 'amongst the objects of which are: To promote equal political rights for all civilised British subjects in United South Africa. To promote free and compulsory education at the expense of the Union Government. To promote the interests of South Africa for South Africans, any British subject who is habitually domiciled for eight months of each year in South Africa, to be regarded as a South African'.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Indian Opinion*, 18 September 1909, CW, vol. 9, p. 364.
54. 23 August 1909, CW, vol. 9, pp. 365–66.
55. *Indian Opinion*, 2 October 1909, CW, vol. 9, p. 388.
56. *Ibid.*
57. CW, vol. 9, p. 628.
58. Interview dated 10 November 1909, *India*, 12 November 1909, CW, vol. 9, p. 531.
59. CW, vol. 10, p. 6 and p. 6n.
60. *Cape Argus*, 30 November 1909, CW, vol. 10, p. 84.
61. A. P. O., 4 December 1909.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Indian Opinion*, 26 February 1910, CW, vol. 10, p. 165.
65. *Ibid.*

66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. 'The Struggle of the Coloured Races: Passive Resistance Urged', *Indian Opinion*, 26 February 1910.
69. *Indian Opinion*, 26 February 1910, CW, vol. 10, p. 167.
70. Ibid.
71. A. P. O., 26 February 1910.
72. *Indian Opinion*, 5 March 1910, CW, vol. 10, p. 173.
73. *Indian Opinion*, 5 March 1910.
74. Ibid.
75. 'A Call to the Coloured People', *Indian Opinion*, 18 April 1908.
76. CW, vol. 10, p. 215.
77. Ibid.
78. cf. A. P. O., 24 December 1910 and 6 December 1913, cited in Adhikari (1997: 283–300, at p. 293n).
79. *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 25 April 1911, CW, vol. 11, p. 41.
80. See, for example, *Indian Opinion*, 12 June 1909 and 16 April 1910.
81. *Indian Opinion*, 7 September 1907. On Polak's use of this pseudonym, see Nauriya (2009).
82. See Gandhi's letters to L. W. Ritch, 12 and 18 April 1911, CW, vol. 11, pp. 22 and 29. The Polish-born Finot had become a French citizen in 1897. In France, he founded and edited *La Revue des Revues* which brought him into contact with writers such as Tolstoy. Finot's work against race prejudice, *Les Prejuge des Races*, was published in Paris in 1905. For the English language translation that appeared the following year, see Finot (1906).
83. '*Indian Opinion Souvenir* of the Hon. Gopal Krishna Gokhale's Tour in South Africa', 22 October–18 November 1912, pp. 3–4.
84. Olive Schreiner had made a deep impact on Gandhi. He would repeatedly refer to her lack of racial prejudice and made a specific reference to it at the session of the Indian National Congress in Kanpur (India), when Abdurahman attended it at the head of a delegation in 1925 (CW, vol. 11, p. 411; see also p. 612).
85. The word used in the news reports is 'Association', rather than 'Organisation'.
86. '*Indian Opinion Souvenir* of the Hon. Gopal Krishna Gokhale's Tour in South Africa', 22 October–18 November 1912, pp. 8–9.
87. Ibid., p. 8.
88. Ibid.
89. *Indian Opinion*, 3 December 1913.
90. Ibid.
91. *Indian Opinion*, 25 March 1914. Reporting the racist speech made by a Col. Furze, an independent candidate from Siemert, who had 'deprecated the introduction by the Labour Party of colour into their ranks', Gandhi's journal added an editorial remark: 'We are glad that Col. Furze did not win his election.'

92. *Indian Opinion*, 1 April 1914.
93. Ibid.
94. *Indian Opinion*, 29 April 1914.
95. *Indian Opinion*, 29 April 1914, relying on a report in the *Natal Mercury*.
96. A. P. O., 13 June 1914.
97. A. P. O., 13 June 1914. To place these comments in a wider context, also see Nauriya (2016: 31–53, at p. 53n).
98. This was presumably C. Dantu. There were apparently some differences among the Coloured Peoples; Dantu's politics would deviate from that of Abdurahman in their comparative assessment of the major white-dominated parties in South Africa. There seems to be no evidence that Gandhi, who remained close to Abdurahman, took an interest in the *inter se* differences among the organisations of the Coloured People. For the report, see *Indian Opinion*, 5 August 1914.
99. CW, vol. 12, p. 503n.
100. *Cape Times*, 20 July 1914, CW, vol. 12, p. 505.
101. A decade after Gandhi's return to India in 1915, Sarojini Naidu, the famous Indian freedom fighter, who later headed the Indian National Congress, visited South Africa. On 29 February 1924, she wrote to Gandhi from Johannesburg: 'I cannot sleep in South Africa and it is all your fault. You haunt the land and its soil is impregnated with the memory of your wonderful struggle, sacrifice and triumph. I am so deeply moved, so deeply aware all the time that here was the cradle of satyagraha—do you wonder that I have been able to move thousands of men and women in the last two days to tears under the influence and stimulus of your inspiration? I have seen your legion of old friends and followers—white, brown and black—the whole gamut of the polychromatic scale of humanity in this land—all send you their love....' See Sarabhai (1998: 37–38).
102. CW, vol. 12, pp. 523 and 669.
103. Just as Gandhi offered help to the British in nursing the wounded at the onset of the World War, offers of help would be made by African and Coloured Peoples in South Africa. But there were blatant racial reasons why such offers were not easily accepted nor always encouraged by the Imperial and Colonial governments. The African leader Rubusana offered to raise 'a levy of 5,000 natives for service in German South-West Africa' (*Indian Opinion*, 2 December 1914). The offer was turned down by the South African Government, saying that '(a)part from other considerations the present war is one which has its origin among the white people of Europe and the Government is anxious to avoid the employment of native citizens in a warfare against whites' (ibid.). A similar offer by the African Political Organisation to establish a 'Coloured Volunteer Corps' also did not receive much encouragement from the South African Government (ibid.).
104. *Young India*, 10 December 1925, CW, vol. 29, p. 305.
105. Ibid.
106. *Young India*, 17 December 1925, CW, vol. 29, p. 326.
107. *Navajivan*, 20 December 1925, CW, vol. 29, pp. 335–36.

108. Ibid.
109. *Indian Annual Register*, 1925, vol. 2, p. 314.
110. Ibid., p. 326. He requested the Congress that 'they should let Mahatma Gandhi go to South Africa just for a few months and all their troubles would be over. Mahatma Gandhi did not look ill. The longer he spoke the stronger his voice grew. Mahatmaji knew their difficulties. Either their shops were stopped, or they had no schools to give education to their children or to learn skilled trade. The law of the land prohibited them from being so employed.... If only Mahatmaji could go with them, all troubles would vanish, just as snow melted before the morning sun'.
111. But there were far too many struggles within India in which Gandhi was already engrossed. A few days before Abdurahman's arrival, Gandhi had, looking inwards, compared the treatment of Indians in South Africa with that of a section of society within India; he would make a similar comparison again in the following month. When Gandhi spoke at the Congress session he criticised South African Europeans for their racist policies, but also referred to his friendships with individuals among them. Gandhi's speech at the Congress session reflected also his admiration for the liberal Islam associated in his mind especially with North Africa. He spoke of an 'Islam that civilised Spain, Islam that took the torchlight to Morocco and preached to the world the Gospel of Brotherhood' (26 December 1925, CW, vol. 29, pp. 360–61). 'The Europeans of South Africa', he continued, 'dread the advent of Islam, for they are afraid of the fact that if the Native races embrace Islam they may claim equality with the white races. If brotherhood is a sin, if it is equality of Coloured races that they dread, then that dread is well founded. For I have seen that any Zulu embracing Christianity does not *ipso facto* come on a level with all Christians, whilst immediately he embraces Islam, he drinks from the same cup and eats from the same dish as a Mussalman' (ibid.). Here Gandhi was echoing views that he had seen expressed as early as 19 and 26 April 1895 in *Inkanyiso*, an African-run journal published from Pietermaritzburg, the relevant clippings of which he had carefully preserved.

Not forgetting to mention the Europeans who had lighted the path in South Africa, Gandhi spoke in particular of 'that great poetess and philanthropist and that most self-effacing woman—Olive Schreiner' (ibid.). In a tribute reminiscent of the one he had given to Doke more than a decade earlier, Gandhi said of Schreiner, who had passed away five years earlier: 'She knew no distinction between white and black races. She loved the Indian, the Zulu and the Bantu as her own children. She would prefer to accept the hospitality of a South African Native in his humble hut' (ibid.).
112. *The Hindu*, 15 February 1926, CW, vol. 30, p. 17.
113. *Young India*, 18 February 1926, CW, vol. 30, p. 24.
114. *Young India*, 18 March 1926, CW, vol. 30, pp. 135–36.
115. Lauding C. F. Andrews for his protest and disagreeing with those who suggested that the matter ought not to be raised in India, Gandhi continued: 'But I am sorry to note that the Hon. Syed Raza Ali considers that there should be no protest in India against the Colour Bar Bill. ... Mr Andrews is bound to object to this inhuman legislation which is principally aimed at Natives of South Africa,

if he may be expected to raise his voice on behalf of us Indians. He has merged himself in us as a citizen of the world, not for any special virtues of our own.... The Colour Bar Bill is not so deadly in its *effect* against us as the Class Areas Reservation Bill. And therefore it was that greater stress was put upon the latter by the Indian deputation and the public. But the opposition to the former cannot be abated because the latter has been postponed' (CW, vol. 30, p. 518). The Bill, he said, was 'like the sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of both the Natives of South Africa and the Indian settlers, for, it can be made applicable to the latter precisely as to the former. The Bill is, therefore, as insulting as it can possibly be made' (*Young India*, 10 June 1926, CW, vol. 30, p. 555).

116. *Young India*, 22 July 1926, CW, vol. 31, p. 182.
117. *Young India*, 1 July 1926, CW, vol. 31, pp. 74–75.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
119. Some years later C. F. Andrews would invoke a similar comparison while contemplating a visit to South Africa which would take him 'quite directly into the very centre of the Untouchability problem of the West' (Letter from C. F. Andrews to Gandhi, 16 March 1932, *Gandhi Papers*, vol. 53, SN 18500, National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi).
120. For racial provisions introduced into law in Britain at this time, see Tabili (1994: 54–98). The Order was specifically extended to Glasgow.

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THE NIZAM'S RAILWAY

How Colonial Interests Forced the Making of a Railway Line

MANOJ PANDE

The Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway (NGSR) was unique. At the time of its integration into Central Railway (CR) on 5 November 1951, it was not only the largest railway system, but also included rail, road and air divisions. The origin of the railway in Hyderabad State ruled by the Nizam is a stark example of colonial interests—primarily military—which were thrust upon native rulers who were forced to build the railways at their own expense.

Lord Cornwallis (1738–1805), who lies buried at Ghazipur near Varanasi, was the Governor General of India from 1786 to 1793. It was during his tenure that the system of posting a British Political Agent or Resident in native states started. The primary role of the Agent was to keep a watch on the native states to ensure that their rulers were aligned with the colonial power, with arm-twisting as necessary. The native princely states were in turn ensured protection by way of deployment of company troops in their territories. Hyderabad was one of the first to have a Resident—Major-General William Kirkpatrick (1795–1797).

The Treaty of Subsidiary Alliance was signed in 1798 between the East India Company and the then ruler of Hyderabad, Nizam Asaf Jah II. Consequently, a force consisting of 5,000 infantry and 2,000 cavalry, with four field batteries of artillery (the Hyderabad Contingent), was placed at Secunderabad, the Company-administered cantonment town. Incidentally, Winston Churchill had lived in Secunderabad Cantonment in the 1880s as a subaltern in the British Army and is known to have played many Polo matches there.

For the British, Hyderabad was an important strategic centre to station their troops to tackle the challenge of Mysore and other

princely states in south India. It may be recalled that Tipu, the Sultan of Mysore, fought several battles with the British, finally ending his life on 4 May 1799 in the Fourth Anglo-Mysore War when the forces of the British East India Company, supported by the Nizam of Hyderabad, were victorious at Srirangapatnam.

THE POOR 'NIZZY' PAYS FOR ALL

The payment for troops in Secunderabad had to be made by Hyderabad State, and since the bills were paid by the Nizam, there was little effort to reduce expenditure. Ray mentions that 'the poor Nizzy pays for all' was an oft-used proverb in those days (1988). As a result, debts for the upkeep of the Hyderabad Contingent mounted to ₹50 lakh. Threats by the then Governor General Lord Dalhousie, conveyed through Colonel Low, the then Resident at Hyderabad, forced the Nizam Asaf Jah IV to sign a treaty in 1853 with the East India Company, assigning Berar and certain other areas to the Company to provide for regular payment.

Berar—the region around Akola and Amravati, roughly the Vidarbha region of present-day Maharashtra—was fertile black cotton soil territory and a potential source of raw cotton for the mills of Lancashire. It was one of the richest parts of the Nizam's dominion. The loss of Berar led to a great deal of heartburn and anger against the East India Company.

Hyderabad was also a potential market and thus formed an important part in plans to bring the railway to the interiors of the country. However, the lines connecting the three main imperial towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras bypassed Hyderabad, one of the reasons being British distrust of the Nizam, who, in their internal communications, was seen virtually as a demi-savage.

There was a divergence of views on a railway line to Hyderabad. While Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of Bombay (1862–1867), had suggested to the Secretary of State in London Sir Charles Wood that the line from Bombay to Madras run through Hyderabad, his idea was opposed by William Thomas Denison (1861–1863; 1864–1866), then Governor of Madras, who believed that the Nizam was hostile to British interests. The Nizam, too, was apprehensive that the railway would lead to many of his subjects fleeing the state.

Thus, the line between Bombay and Madras did not touch Nizam territories at all. In 1871, the line up to Raichur, coming from

Poona and Sholapur, was completed by the Great Indian Peninsular Railway (GIP), meeting the line of Madras Railway which came from Gooty. Madras Railway was rechristened Madras and South Maharatta Railway (MSM) in 1908.

SALAR JUNG I

One of the greatest statesmen of the Hyderabad state was Salar Jung I, Sir Mir Turab Ali Khan (1829–1883). He became dewan or prime minister of Hyderabad (1853–1883) at the young age of 24 upon the death of his uncle, Siraj-ul-Mulk, the then Dewan, who had died of shock on 27 May 1853 after the treaty ceding Berar was signed.

His role in governance became even more important due to the successive deaths of the Nizams—Asaf Jah IV on 17 May 1857 and Asaf Jah V on 26 February 1869, which led to the toddler Mir Mahboob Ali Khan (born 17 August 1866) being recognised as the Nizam (Asaf Jah VI), and the administration was entrusted to Salar Jung. Although he sided with the colonial powers in critical times, he was overruled when colonial interests were involved.

Incidentally, the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad is not based on his collection of paintings, sculptures and artefacts, but of Salar Jung III.

PROPOSAL FOR THE RAILWAY LINE TO HYDERABAD

Driven by the imperatives of troop movement, the British approached the Nizam with a proposal for a railway line to Hyderabad to be built by the GIP, which would be paid a guaranteed interest by Hyderabad. Further arm-twisting by Governor General Lord Minto led to an agreement signed on 19 May 1870. The crafty British made it seem as if the proposal had originated from Hyderabad. They publicly praised Salar Jung, even though much of the agreement was not to his liking.

The key features of the agreement were that:

- (i) The railway would be called the Nizam's State Railway (NSR) and would be the property of his government which would provide the land.
- (ii) All the capital required for the construction, maintenance and working of the railway would be provided by the Nizam's government.

- (iii) The Government of India would construct and maintain the railway through the Resident at Hyderabad.
- (iv) The railway would carry both Hyderabad and British troops.

THE LINE TO SECUNDERABAD AND HYDERABAD

Wadi, an unimportant station on the GIP line, was the location from where the NSR took off for Hyderabad. Gulbarga, a bigger town, was ignored, which could have been more beneficial from the trade point of view. The line did not pass through any of the towns where trade took place, but through mostly uncultivated parts, rocky regions or forest tracts of the Tandur–Vikarabad region.

But then, as stated earlier, the main purpose of the railway line was military. This was also the reason why the metre gauge (MG) line was not preferred, as it would have broken the uninterrupted broad gauge (BG) that ran from Bombay. Incidentally, Lord Mayo was one of the votaries of the MG, especially on cost considerations. Unfortunately, economy is rarely a consideration when someone else is to foot the bill.

The survey of the Wadi–Secunderabad line began on 30 October 1869, and construction started on 25 March 1871 under the supervision of Major Richard Meade, previously of the Bengal Staff Corps. The Wadi–Secunderabad section (119 miles/192 km) opened on 9 October 1874. The line broke off at Begumpet, short of Hyderabad, in two directions—one going to Secunderabad, and the other terminating at Hyderabad.

The inauguration of the Wadi–Secunderabad line took place at Hyderabad station on 9 October 1874. A special train was run from Hyderabad to Trimulgherry with the Nizam, Mir Mahboob Ali Khan (Nizam Asaf Jah VI), members of the royal family, Salar Jung I and select officers on board. A grand state banquet was held in the magnificently illuminated gardens at Chudderghaut.

Surveys for extensions towards Warangal and Singareni commenced in March 1884. The Secunderabad–Warangal section (87 miles/140 km) opened on 8 April 1886 and the Singareni Dornakal (25.83 km) section on 1 January 1888, respectively. Metre gauge lines were laid from Manmad to Secunderabad via Aurangabad, Jalna, Nanded and Nizamabad from 1889 to 1900. The Kacheguda station building, with its distinctive Indo-Saracenic architecture, was built in October 1916.



RAILWAY STATION, HYDERABAD 1892 AD



18371 GOING IN A TROLLEY

LORD AND LADY CURZON GOING IN A TROLLEY DURING THEIR VISIT TO HYDERABAD-DECCAN IN 1902



18367 H.E. LADY CURZON'S SPECIAL
"LADY CURZON'S SPECIAL" TRAIN DURING VISIT OF LORD AND LADY CURZON TO HYDERABAD-DECCAN, 1902



KACHIGUDA RAILWAY STATION IN 1916



ARRIVAL OF THEIR EXCELLENCIES AT HYDERABAD RAILWAY STATION

AWAITING ARRIVAL OF LORD AND LADY LINLITHGOW AT HYDERTABAD RAILWAY STATION DURING THEIR VISIT TO HYDERABAD-DECCAN, 1938



NIZAM VIIth WITH STAFF ON THE NAMPALLY RAILWAY PLATFORM DURING VISIT OF LORD AND LADY WILLINGDON TO HYDERABAD-DECCAN, 1933.



INSPECTING THE GUARD OF HONOUR AT THE STATION.

LORD LINLITHGOW INSPECTING THE GUARD OF HONOUR AT RAILWAY STATION DURING HIS VISIT TO HYDERABAD-DECCAN IN 1930



NSR BUS SERVICE

Ian J. Kerr (1995) points out that labour, usually from villages close to the line under construction, were paid at the end of each working day. This ensured the easy availability of labour. Later, the NSR also hired men from the recently completed portions of the GIP South-East extension.

NIZAM STATE RAILWAY (NSR) AND THE FINANCIALS

Making funds available for the railway was one of Salar Jung's major concerns. As the Nizam's government was to provide all the resources for its construction, maintenance and working, a company named Nizam State Railway was constituted in 1873 by an edict of the Nizam. It was to provide capital for the construction of the railway.

The company was empowered to issue not more than 20,000 shares of ₹250 each, for a total of ₹50 lakh on which the state was bound to pay a dividend of 6 per cent per annum. However, as the share issue met with a lukewarm response, the Nizam's government had to dip into its own coffers for construction. To recover this advance, special efforts were needed.

The deteriorating financial position prompted Salar Jung to seek funds in London. An application was made in March 1874 on behalf of the Nizam's State Railway Company by the firm of Smith, Fleming and Company of London to Lord Salisbury, the then Secretary of State, for permission to offer the company's shares in London, which was allowed. The shares, at 6 per cent interest guaranteed by the Hyderabad government, were immediately issued and subscribed. These events took place between January and June 1875.

Nonetheless, financial problems continued. Subsequent attempts to raise funds in a similar manner in the London market for extending the line to Singareni, where coal had been found, were not approved this time by the Secretary of State on the advice of the British government in India, chiefly prompted by Major Meade, the Resident at Hyderabad.

Ray mentions that while the expenditure on the railway up to 1877–1878 was (in Hyderabad currency or *Halli Sikka*) ₹1.90 crore, receipts amounted to merely ₹26,39,187 (1988). Thus, a net liability of about ₹1.63 crore remained. A part of this (₹1,10,72,977) was obtained from the issue of shares. But an assured dividend had to be given on the shares, irrespective of profit or loss. Therefore, ₹52,87,911 had to be paid from the state treasury.

The cost per mile of construction thus worked out to approximately ₹1,05,000. Funds were pouring out of the coffers of Hyderabad State, and thus it was not prudent for the state to run the railway on its own anymore.

THE NIZAM'S GUARANTEED STATE RAILWAY COMPANY (NGSR)

In another development, a British company, the Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway Company (NGSR), was incorporated in London. This company was to carry out the extension of the railway in profitable regions of the Nizam's dominion, where iron, coal and copper were plentifully available. Its share capital was 2 million pounds, with 2 million pounds in redeemable mortgage debentures.

On 27 December 1883, the NGSR signed an agreement with the Nizam's government with the consent of London and Calcutta (the then Imperial capital), according to which the Nizam's government was to hand over its existing railway lines freed of all encumbrances and claims to the company. This ended the story of the NSR, which was then taken over by the NGSR.

Of the 10 directors of NGSR, only one—Sirdar Diler Jung Bahadur, secretary of the railway department in the Nizam's government—was an Indian. Incidentally, Salar Jung I, who had passed away on 8 February 1883 prior to this agreement, did not witness the agitation at Hyderabad against this takeover of the local railway by a British company.

The NGSR continued to work all the BG and MG sections from January 1885 to 31 March 1930, when all agreements between the Nizam's government and the Company were determined, and on 1 April 1930 the railways were brought under Hyderabad State. Sir Akbar Hydari became the president, Sir Reginald Glancy, the chairman, and C. W. Lloyd Jones, the managing director. The other members of the Board were Sir Robert Highet, Mr. Ralph Freeman and Mr. H. W. Jamieson. The headquarters remained at London.

When the Second World War broke out, it became difficult to manage communications from London, and therefore on 1 November 1941 the Board was shifted from London to Hyderabad. Post independence, on 5 November 1951, the GIP and Nizam's State Railway, along with some others like Scindia State Railway and Dholpur State Railway merged to form Central Railway. At the time of its integration with CR, the Nizam's State Railway system was the

largest such system run by any Indian princely state. It was 2,351 km in length (BG: 1,107 km; MG: 1,244 km).

On 2 October 1966, South Central Railway (SCR) was carved out of CR and the erstwhile NGSR regions came under its jurisdiction—and this is how it stands today. Notably, unlike the early stages of NSR, the SCR is a profit-making zone.

RAIL, ROAD AND AIR

Road transport services were introduced for the first time in 1932–1933 on an experimental basis, with a capital outlay of ₹4.19 lakh. A separate road department was created in 1936–1937 and 151 buses were introduced. One of the objectives was healthy coordination between the railways and roadways. Rail-cum-road tickets were also issued. Rates and timings were fixed; excursion tours were available as well. At points served by road services, train halts had been curtailed or cut, leading to speeding up of train services.

By 1940–1941, the fleet consisted of 256 passenger buses and 27 goods lorries, with a route mileage of 4,057 miles. About 13.5 million passengers as well as 64,582 tonnes of goods were carried during the year. A maintenance workshop was also established at Mettuguda to attend to engines, chasses as well as bearings and fuel injection pumps, the original workshop at Kacheguda being inadequate.

Air services were introduced in January 1938 after a *firman* was issued by the Nizam, creating an air department by dissolving the aviation board. The Begumpet airport was equipped for night flying, and facilities, including hangars, were provided. A seasonal service to Madras via Bangalore was inaugurated in 1940. Airports at Aurangabad and Adilabad also came up in February 1941, while work started at Bidar. Aurangabad also had a railway hotel nearby.

Training facilities were also developed for pilots. These came in good use for training RAF pilots during the Second World War when the airport became the Elementary Flying Training School No. 1. Facilities for civil as well as air force pilots exist even today in the Begumpet area.

The Workforce Composition of NGSR was quite diverse. Rao provides figures for 1935: there were 75 Europeans, 416 Anglo Indians, 703 Indian Christians, 9 Sikhs, 2,446 Muslims and 12,601 Hindus in the workforce (2003).

EPILOGUE

In the history of the establishment of railways in India, the role of the colonial rulers is much eulogised. Yet the introduction of railways in India was not for philanthropy, but to meet their own military requirements, and that of raw cotton, and for providing markets for their produce in the subcontinent. In the words of Thorner:

The key groups whose pressure led to the launching of modern railways in India were the great English and Scottish mercantile houses trading with the East and the smaller British merchant firms in the Indian port towns with which they were in correspondence (1951).

In many cases, native rulers were made to contribute to setting up railways in their areas on terms not always favourable to them. As a result, these fledgling native railways had to struggle financially. Yet, today, these very railways are hugely profitable and play an important role in the nation's economy. The journey of the NSR to NGSR, to CR to SCR, has an administrative parallel in the then Hyderabad State's later trifurcation into Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra, and, now, Telangana.



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UNCOVERING POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN PAKISTAN

Analysing Mohammed Hanif's
A Case of Exploding Mangoes

ATHER
FAROUQUI

JUXTAPOSING POSTCOLONIAL PAKISTANI AND INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

The association between the 'post' in postmodernism and postcolonialism is closely connected to neoliberalism, which has effectively blurred geographical boundaries while encompassing culture and commerce. This blurring has resulted in the popularisation of the idea of a 'global village', and the subsequent growth of what is referred to as 'world literature', leading to the emergence of a cosmopolitan literary figure known as the literary post-national. In today's context, writers living in foreign countries evoke their national homelands and aspire to attain a post-national identity by writing in the language of world literature, viz., English. Among all regions worldwide, South Asia has become the primary source of diasporic literature in English.

In their pursuit of a 'translational transnational', these writers substitute the multilingual with the multicultural and take on the role of what Homi Bhabha describes as 'cultural translators', with Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* being the prime example of cultural translation (Bhabha, 1990: 7). Inspired by Rushdie's statement that 'we are translated men', Bhabha proposes a transfer of not just the written work but also the very writers, who, when transposed into new circumstances, embody their homeland, even if it is a product of imagination.

Muneeza Shamsie emphasises the manner in which contemporary writers re-shape their identities through the creation of new narratives within English literature (2007). This presents

a central paradox in present-day postcolonial writings, where identities are continually shaped and altered, and daily experiences hinge upon these very constructions.

THE FORGING OF NATIONHOOD AND IDENTITY: THE CASE OF PAKISTAN

Throughout the world, there are several examples of literary giants who chose to write in their native languages, even though they were proficient in English. English seldom served as a channel for their innermost thoughts. Consequently, it becomes crucial to engage with the English translations of their works. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali, Premchand initially wrote in Urdu and later in modern Hindi, Gabriel García Márquez wrote in Spanish and Haruki Murakami continues to write in Japanese. Despite achieving fame, receiving critical acclaim, and enjoying widespread commercial success, these writers remained steadfastly connected to their native language, persistently delivering personal portrayals of their homeland.

A recent illustrative instance involves the Indian novelist Geetanjali Shree. Despite her education in the English medium, she developed a greater affinity for the literature of modern Hindi during her PhD studies at the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, renowned for being the most privileged department within the university in the good old days. Subsequently, she adopted modern Hindi as her preferred medium of expression. Paradoxically, it was the English translation of her debut novel *Mai* that propelled her into the limelight. In 2022, she achieved a significant milestone by being awarded the International Booker Prize for the English translation of *Ret Samadhi* (Tomb of Sand, 2022), marking it as the first modern Hindi-language book to attain this prestigious recognition. Unlike the aforementioned writers and numerous others, some authors are exophonic, relinquishing their first or mother tongue to share stories about their community or homeland in a language that has a broader audience. Mohammed Hanif belongs to this category of writers.

But before delving deeper into Hanif's book, it might be useful to briefly examine *Tomb of Sand*, a noteworthy contribution to postcolonial literature delving into the complexities of contemporary India and the enduring impact of its colonial past. Set within the backdrop of a rapidly changing society, the novel deftly navigates

the nuances of postcolonial identities, power dynamics and cultural transformations. The personal narratives of diverse characters coalesce here, illuminating their struggles to reconcile their individual histories with the collective memory of a nation still grappling with its colonial legacy.

A perceptive political satire, Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is set during Pakistani dictator General Muhammad Zia ul-Haq's final days (1924–1988). Interwoven within the narrative is the airplane crash that resulted in Zia's demise as well as the deaths of some of his senior officers and the American ambassador. The novel presents a 'series of darkly comic vignettes', 'is wickedly cynical and reveals layers of outrageous—and plausible—corruption' (Sengoopta, 2020; Redford, 2023).

In crafting this fictional work, Hanif openly acknowledges deriving inspiration from *Feast of the Goat*, a narrative that chronicles the assassination of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo and the consequences of that momentous event (Llosa, 2012). This Central American novel is a seminal work in postcolonial literature that offers a profound exploration of power, politics and the ramifications of authoritarianism. With its incisive critique of power structures and its nuanced portrayal of historical events, it stands as a significant contribution to postcolonial literature, inviting readers to reflect on the enduring legacy of dictatorship and the complexities of political power in the postcolonial context. Remarkable similarities can be observed between the divisive figure of the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo and the Pakistani general. In that sense, Hanif's novel is a literary nod to Llosa's timeless work.

Positioning it within the framework of the dichotomy between the national and transnational, Shamsie states, '*Mangoes* belongs to a group of incisive Pakistani English novels such as [Mohsin] Hamid's [*The Reluctant*] *Fundamentalist*, [Nadeem] Aslam's [*The Wasted*] *Vigil* and [Kamila] Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, which explore Pakistan's and America's involvement in Afghanistan' (2017: 456).

HYBRIDITY AND THE PAKISTANI IDENTITY OF CONTEMPORARY EXOPHONIC WRITERS

The Pakistani identity of present-day exophonic writers has faced considerable scrutiny, prompting discussions regarding their cultural and linguistic affiliations. While some writers have experienced a

transnational upbringing, born to Pakistani parents but raised in foreign environments, others, like Hanif, have been born and bred within the confines of Pakistan. Hanif's educational trajectory in Pakistan, followed by his service in the Pakistan Air Force before transitioning to a career in journalism in *Newsline*, a monthly magazine, reveals a profound connection to his homeland. However, subsequent to his tenure at the BBC and his relocation abroad, he has predominantly engaged with a global landscape.

Despite their intrinsic ties to their native language, these writers consciously elect English as their primary mode of literary expression, potentially driven by the aspiration to engage with a wider international readership. Fluent in Urdu, Hanif cannot feign ignorance of the cultural significance of Urdu literature in Pakistan, which overshadows the recognition of English writings within the country.¹ Paradoxically, Hanif harbours a sense of dissatisfaction with the hegemonic dominance of Urdu literature, as it has subordinated Punjabi, his mother tongue; interestingly Punjabi subordinated Saraiki. Nonetheless, he consciously eschews both Punjabi and the prevailing Urdu in favour of the global currency of the English language.

A notable subplot emerges from Hanif's earlier involvement in the Urdu division of the BBC at Bush House during his time in Karachi. This intriguing anecdote alludes to his exclusion as an English journalist by an English employer—an ironic circumstance. Consequently, Hanif's ascent to acceptance and acclaim as an English novelist represents a remarkable twist of fate.

INTERROGATING THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE: AUTHENTICITY AND OWNERSHIP OF URDU IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

India and Pakistan both share a rich and interconnected heritage in Urdu literature. In contrast, Pakistan has yet to establish a substantially substantive body of English literature to call its own. One could speculate that had Hanif chosen to express his creative endeavours in Urdu, he might have been relegated to the status of an obscure writer in South Asia who would have catered solely to the Urdu-reading public within the subcontinent, with a limited collection of Urdu creative writings to his credit. It is plausible to argue that other Pakistani writers who have achieved recognition and success in the literary sphere, many of whom reside in the West despite holding

Pakistani passports, have made their mark on the global stage precisely by employing English as their medium of expression. Consequently, one could contend that as Urdu writers, they may have experienced relative obscurity in their literary pursuits.

The literary works of progressive writers in Urdu have endured over time and are now assuming renewed significance in the context of prevailing regimes in South Asia. A compelling illustration of this enduring relevance is found in Faiz Ahmad Faiz's poem 'Hum Dekhenge', composed in 1979 as a response to the military dictatorship of Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan. The poem had galvanised protestors in India who were opposing the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in 2019 and 2020. This serves as a testament to the timeless impact of literature produced within the flexible framework of the Progressive Writers' Association. In the absence of proficient creative and writing abilities, the majority of writers who draw inspiration from extraordinary life circumstances tend to produce mundane works.

A similar observation can be made regarding the English-writing cohort in Pakistan when compared to accomplished Urdu novelists and fiction writers. It can be posited that, akin to any creative endeavour, Hanif's fiction within the context of emerging English fiction in Pakistan is presently in its incipient phase, albeit with limited accomplishments. Nonetheless, this nascent commencement warrants recognition amidst the prevailing landscape of English fiction in Pakistan.

The issue of identity assumes heightened complexity within the Pakistani context, given its status as an ideological state characterised by significant contradictions. The juxtaposition of Pakistan's self-proclaimed Islamic state status to its claim of being a democracy, albeit one effectively controlled by the military, introduces further paradoxes. Comparable to the situation in India, the realm of English literature in Pakistan echoes the intricacies surrounding notions of home and homeland. Multiple narratives within this literary sphere strive to transcend the limitations of geography while concurrently maintaining a rooted connection to it (Shamsie, 2017: 256). As Edward Said argues:

[W]hat if the world has changed so drastically as to allow now for almost the first time a new geographical consciousness of a

decentred or multiply centred world, a world no longer sealed within watertight compartments of art or culture or history, but mixed, mixed up, varied, complicated by the new difficult mobility of migrations...? (2002: 471).

In her seminal work, Shamsie employs the concept of hybridity as a framework to delineate the multifaceted identity and literature emerging from individuals inhabiting the liminal space of hyphenated identities (2017). However, a critical quandary emerges within this discourse. Shamsie acknowledges that many contemporary Pakistani-origin writers penning their works in English possess an ambiguous 'relationship with Pakistan', a term akin to the indeterminate expressions found in Urdu literary criticism, where the designation of being Pakistani is contingent upon the writer's place of residence. Shamsie deliberates on the notion of whether an individual laying claim to this identity can be considered a true Pakistani. This raises the question of whether literary merit can be substantiated on the basis of such a loosely defined proposition.

The inherent contradictions prompted Shamsie to employ terminologies such as 'diasporic' writers as a means of elucidating various facets concerning the positioning, literary involvements, writing proficiency and artistic acumen of Pakistani authors writing in English (ibid.: xi). Within an increasingly homogeneous global milieu, it becomes crucial to critically examine the very markers of homogeneity that are enforced upon the world. Amongst these markers, language stands as the most significant, with English having emerged as the lingua franca of globalisation.

UNMASKING TOXIC MASCULINITY AND POWER DYNAMICS IN THE ARMED FORCES

Delving into the realm of taboo subjects while maintaining an unwavering commitment to literary aesthetics, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* offers a revelatory narrative. Through the intricate account of its protagonist, Under Officer Ali Shigri from the Pakistan Air Force Academy, the novel sheds light on the forbidden aspects prevalent within Muslim society, conspicuously the exploration of homosexuality. Notably, Pakistan's legal framework, as defined by Section 377 of the Pakistan Penal Code, designates homosexuality as

an ‘unnatural offence’ punishable under the law. The confluence of 19th-century intolerance and the radical Islamisation of government policies during General Zia ul-Haq’s regime rendered Pakistan a perilous environment for male homosexuals.

The novel examines the portrayal of masculinity and homosexuality within the broader context of the army as an institution that upholds conventional notions of masculinity through the enigmatic character of Shigri. His clandestine physical relationship with his roommate, endearingly known as Baby-O, his cannabis consumption with an American officer, his engagement in drug transactions facilitated by his launderer, and his involvement in plotting the assassination of General Zia ul-Haq disrupt the conventional norms upheld by the military-dominated Pakistani state. At the outset, the readers are introduced to Arnold Raphael, whose ‘shiny bald head and carefully groomed moustache give him the air of a respectable homosexual businessman from small-town America’ (Hanif, 2013: 7). While the novel endeavours to challenge the prevailing notions of masculinity within the context of Pakistan’s military rule, it also paradoxically perpetuates stereotypical observations linking a man’s grooming choices to his sexual orientation.

Shigri orchestrates the assassination of General Zia, not only driven by personal motives but also as a socio-political statement. Intertwined are his sexual ambivalence, Obaid’s borderline femininity and Major Kiyani’s brute masculinity that shed light on the tragedy and paradox faced by homosexual Muslim men in South Asia. General Zia emerges as the embodiment of ultra-religious hyper-masculinity whose demise becomes necessary for any rupture in the prevailing system. This juxtaposition reveals a clear disjunction between sexual orientation and masculinity, challenging the orthodox assumptions of their inherent connection in traditional Third World societies. The writer’s stance on religious diktats, particularly concerning homosexuality, showcases various conflicts, condemning the bigoted practitioner Zia ul-Haq, rather than the practice or belief of religion itself. The symbolic crash of the plane carrying General Zia that leaves the Koran unblemished hints at the novel’s final perspective on homosexuality within Islamic societies. Through a nuanced analysis, the reader can unravel this intricate web of the gender, power and religious ideologies portrayed.

Bhabha observes the emergence of magic realism as the prevailing 'literary language of the postcolonial world', highlighting its significance within the realm of literary genres. He contends that magic realism has come to be recognised as the predominant form of literary expression within the postcolonial world, asserting its significance and influence in the global literary landscape which he calls 'literary language of the postcolonial world' (1990: 7). Mariano Siskind adds to the discourse:

[T]raditional genres are no longer a useful matrix to produce critical discourses on the trans-nature (trans-cultural, trans-historical, trans-generic) of this new world literature and its global imaginaries; that even though, within a world paradigm, we still refer to novels, poems, short stories, essays, and drama, the conventional conception of genre is not the productive meaning-making-machine it once was Of the different world literary genres posited (explicitly or implicitly) in syllabi, anthologies and critical readings, magical realism is one of the most established aesthetic forms (2011).

Hanif skilfully incorporates elements of the magical to achieve his satirical objectives. A notable instance occurs when Zainab passionately curses General Zia, going so far as to desire a crow as the medium for delivering the curse. The presence of a significant character, the lethargic crow, becomes prominent within the narrative. This crow possesses the ability to enact curses, but under a specific condition: 'The only way [curses] can work is if a crow hears a curse from someone who has fed him to a full stomach and then carries it to the person who has been cursed' (2013: 295). Remarkably, the same crow reappears towards the novel's conclusion, coinciding with the explosive disappearance of the plane carrying the dignitaries, engulfing them in a swirling mass of smoke.

The denouement of the novel presents a perplexing occurrence whereby the sole surviving artefact amidst the wreckage is the Holy Koran, discovered open to the very page that General Zia had initially interpreted as an ominous sign. These subplots function as evocative elements that contribute to the novel's portrayal as an Eastern narrative, wherein the enigmatic manifestation of the boundary-defying crow finds its rightful place.

CULTURAL BOUNDARIES OF SATIRE, INTERTEXTUALITY AND WRITING FOR THE WEST

The strategic use of humour and analogies tailored to a Western readership permeates Hanif's novel, signifying a deliberate attempt to elucidate the intricacies of the hedonistic postcolonial milieu to this specific audience. By adopting this approach, the narrative seeks to bridge the cultural divide between the Western reader and the subcontinental context, where the author both belongs to and remains distanced from the Third World society being portrayed. Within this framework, the novel navigates the juxtaposition of Zia ul-Haq's unwavering faith in America during the Cold War era to the desire to share nuanced jokes with a broader readership. This is evident in 'More than a hundred thousand Soviet soldiers are preparing to retreat from Afghanistan after being reduced to eating toast smeared with military-issue boot polish, and these men we see in the TV clip are the undisputed victors' (ibid.: 8).

Again, following the demise of the General, Shigri prognosticates:

Vanity Fair will commission an investigative piece, the *New York Times* will write two editorials, sons of the deceased will file petitions to the court and then settle for lucrative cabinet posts. It would be said that this was the biggest cover-up in aviation history since the last biggest cover-up (ibid.: 9–10).

When the protagonist first experiences a sense of liberation, his thoughts turn to Hollywood films, drawing a parallel to his own circumstances: 'If this was the ending of *Where Eagles Dare* we would be reclining in our seats, lighting up cigars and chuckling over some predictable Nazi joke' (ibid.: 299). This instance exemplifies Hanif's utilisation of a distinctly Western benchmark for comparison, lacking resonance for readers in the subcontinent. Throughout the narrative, whether it is Zia ul-Haq, Hanif himself, or the protagonist, the American figure consistently emerges as an ally, parallel, or even a paradigm. This preference is mirrored in the academic realm, where Lieutenant Bannon, an American, stands as the sole individual whom Shigri regards as friend, ally and confidante, yearning for Bannon's understanding during an inquiry.

While Hanif does not precisely fit into the Pakistani diaspora as he returned to Pakistan in 2008—the year *Mangoes* was

published—it becomes apparent that he writes for an audience that revels in global literature. This is evident in the following excerpt from the novel:

In the historic city of Lahore, the Fort is a very historic place. It was built by the same guy who built the Taj Mahal, the Mughal king Shah Jahan. He was thrown into prison by his own son, a kind of forced premature retirement. I have never been to the Fort, but I have seen it in a shampoo ad (ibid.: 95).

Like Rushdie, who presents his version of the history of India in *Midnight's Children* (2006), Hanif too takes a plunge into the fascist rule of General Zia ul-Haq where he recreates the entire episode leading to the latter's assassination through the Western lens. Hanif highlights the bigotry and hypocrisy in the General's strict adherence to Islam in his daily life where, like Indira Gandhi's belief in astrology in *Midnight's Children*, he seeks guidance each morning from random verses from the Holy Koran. Not surprisingly, he reads these verses in English. Almost as an explanation, the reader is informed:

General Zia had taken to reading the English translation of the Quran before his morning prayers because it helped him prepare for his acceptance speech at the Nobel Prize presentation ceremony. For the first time in the history of the prize, he would insist on a recitation from the Quran before his acceptance speech. The prize hadn't been announced yet, but he was hopeful and he was looking for a suitable passage to quote (2013: 33).

Zia ul-Haq's recurrent reliance on the Koran as a source of guidance can be interpreted as a satirical portrayal that mocks both the sanctity of the religious text and religious practices themselves. By portraying Zia's engagement with the Koran as banal and devoid of genuine spiritual connection, Hanif highlights the superficiality and hollowness of religious devotion when it is applied to the 'Other'.

Notably, the English translation of the Koran that Zia turns to is attributed to Marmaduke Pickthall, an English-Muslim scholar. Hanif's decision to reference this particular translation suggests a deliberate choice aimed at establishing credibility and familiarity with Western readers. By incorporating a translation produced by

an English–Muslim scholar, Hanif taps into the Western readers' preconceived notions and expectations, aligning the text with their cultural and intellectual framework. This strategic move may serve to bridge the gap between the Western audience and the narrative, facilitating a more accessible understanding of the religious and cultural dynamics at play.

Furthermore, Zia ul-Haq frequently associates himself with the biblical figure of Yunus, known as Jonah in English translations. The choice of this parallel between Zia and Jonah serves as a means to explore, and subvert, the notion of self-perception and identity. Zia's identification with Yunus can be seen as an attempt to align his self with a prophetic and transformative figure, perhaps portraying his aspirations for political and personal redemption. However, the intervention of the post-national writer complicates and undermines this identification, suggesting that Zia's self-perception as a righteous leader is misguided and disconnected from reality. The writer's intervention challenges the myth-making surrounding Zia's self-image and exposes the underlying contradictions and incongruities. This is evident from the following excerpt:

The General knew the story of Jonah well. The fact that Jonah was Zun-nus here did not confuse him. He knew Jonah and Zun-nus were one and the same, a frustrated prophet who walked out on his clan, ended up in a whale's belly, then chanted this verse over and over again till the whale spat him back out, alive and well (ibid.: 42).

Hanif's narrative in *Mangoes* appears to traverse a theocratic realm, yet aligns with Bhabha's proposition that blasphemy can be seen as a subversive act of cultural translation. Throughout the novel, Hanif consistently challenges and subverts religious norms and institutions, highlighting the ways in which religion can be manipulated, distorted and wielded as a tool of power. An illustrative instance that substantiates this argument is the portrayal of Zainab, a victim of rape, who is unable to identify her assailants because of her physical blindness, emphasising her literal lack of sight, rather than a metaphorical moral blindness (ibid.: 175).

The pinnacle of religious mockery is reached when General Zia, driven by his confidence in the counsel received from a

Saudi Qazi, subjects the rape victim to harsh imprisonment within the Fort. This act of imprisonment, carried out under the pretext of religious righteousness, exposes the ironic and hypocritical nature of Zia's purported adherence to religious principles. By juxtaposing the severity of the punishment to the victim's helplessness, Hanif challenges the religious authority's ability to deliver justice, and exposes the inherent contradictions and abuses that can occur within theocratic structures.

Hanif's subversion of religious norms serves multiple purposes within the narrative. Firstly, it critiques the weaponisation of religion for political gain and control, exposing the manipulation of religious dogma to serve the interests of the ruling elite. Second, it questions the notion of religious morality by highlighting the gap between professed piety and ethical behaviour. Hanif challenges the notion that religious identity automatically equates to moral superiority, presenting characters that exploit religion for personal gain or perpetrate acts of injustice in its name.

Furthermore, Hanif's subversion of religion underscores the complexities and contradictions inherent in postcolonial societies. As these societies navigate the legacy of colonialism and grapple with cultural and religious hybridity, Hanif's depiction of religious subversion highlights the fluid and evolving nature of religious identities and practices. The act of subversion becomes a means of resistance, allowing marginalised voices to challenge and question dominant religious discourses.

By challenging religious norms and exposing their abuses, Hanif invites readers to critically examine the intersections of religion, power and social dynamics within postcolonial contexts. The novel prompts a nuanced exploration of the ways in which religion can be harnessed or distorted, providing insight into the complex interplay between faith, politics and cultural translation in the postcolonial world. In his 'cold, admonishing, teacher-like voice', the Qadi pronounces:

The law doesn't differentiate between those who can see and those who can't. Let's assume for the sake of legal argument that the rapist was blind in this case, would he be entitled to any special privilege? So the victim, blind or not, is entitled to the same scrutiny, same rights.

[The General questions further:] How will she recognise her rapists and the other people who held her down?

[The Qadi replies:] It can be done in two ways: if she is married, her husband will have to establish in the court that she is of good character and then we'll need four male Muslims of sound character who have witnessed the crime. And since rape is a very serious crime, circumstantial evidence wouldn't do. 'We heard screams and we saw blood and we heard the man hitting her' is not enough evidence; witnesses will be required to have witnessed the actual penetration. And if the woman is not married she'll have to prove that she was a virgin before this horrible crime was committed (ibid.: 175).

Moreover, Hanif's novel delves into the distressing conditions experienced by women and minorities in Pakistan, drawing a parallel to Rushdie's frequent exploration of the plight of religious minorities in India. Hanif sheds light on the systemic challenges faced by marginalised groups, particularly through the character of the secretary general of the All Pakistan Sweepers Union, a communist figure who exposes the state's manipulative tactics by employing religious clerics. In a conversation, the secretary general humorously rebukes the notion that the state can undermine their union by deploying mullahs, highlighting the fact that the sweepers themselves belong to religious minority communities, such as Hindus and Christians (ibid.: 172). However, it is noteworthy that the protagonist fails to grasp the underlying satire in this interaction. This prompts us to contemplate the intended readership of the author and the question of who precisely Hanif aims to engage with through his narrative.

Hanif's portrayal of the deplorable state of women and minorities in Pakistan reveals a critical stance on social inequality and the oppressive structures that perpetuate marginalisation. By highlighting the challenges faced by religious minorities and drawing attention to the plight of women, he encourages readers to confront the deeply rooted issues of discrimination and prejudice that persist within Pakistani society. His satirical approach invites readers to critically examine the power dynamics, social hierarchies and institutional biases that shape the experiences of these marginalised groups.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Shigri's lack of comprehension regarding the secretary general's joke raises intriguing questions about the intended audience of the novel. Hanif's narrative choices and satirical tone indicate a potential target readership that possesses a nuanced understanding of the socio-political context in Pakistan and is attuned to the struggles faced by marginalised communities. He seeks to engage readers who are receptive to critical commentary on social injustice and are willing to challenge their own preconceptions and biases. Through this strategy, Hanif aims to provoke thoughtful reflection and incite discussions surrounding issues of power, identity and social equity within the context of contemporary Pakistan.

In essence, Hanif's exploration of the deplorable state of women and minorities in Pakistan serves as a powerful critique of the systemic inequalities and social barriers that persist within the country. By portraying the struggles faced by these marginalised groups and employing satire to expose the oppressive mechanisms at play, Hanif seeks to engage an audience that is receptive to critical perspectives on social issues and is willing to confront the complexities of power and privilege. Through his narrative, Hanif challenges readers to critically reflect on the existing social order and contemplate ways to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

CONCLUSION

As a quintessentially postmodern South Asian work, *Mangoes* employs the discourse of globalisation to provide cultural translations of the author's native land, effectively situating itself within the realm of 'exotic' world literature. Hanif, the postcolonial–post-national–cosmopolitan writer, utilises satire and magic realism as narrative devices, strategies commonly employed by postcolonial writers to subvert, and respond to, the colonial legacy. While Hanif employs these literary genres to critique specific religious practices, it is pertinent to consider the authenticity of his cynical portrayal of a community that is particularly sensitive to criticism, given that his Western audience is living in an era marked by Islamophobia. It becomes crucial to examine the subtle distinction between satire and provocation, a line that he navigates with a certain uneasiness. In this process, he juxtaposes—and ultimately dismisses—the notion of Pakistani identity to deeply entrenched Western ideals of freedom

and justice. The study of this tension and its implications becomes essential in comprehending the complex dynamics at play within his work and in the broader context of postcolonial literature.

The recurrent trend of exalting the West as the epitome of freedom and liberalism, while portraying the perceived absence of these qualities in Pakistan, permeates the novel. Given its primary focus on Pakistan's socio-political realities, the inherent problematic nature of this portrayal becomes evident because of the notable absence of civilian characters, aside from Zainab, who could have enriched the narrative and facilitated a more nuanced and discerning understanding.

Therefore, it is essential to critically examine and evaluate the ethical dimensions of the post-national cosmopolitanism to which Hanif aspires in this his debut novel. Moving beyond the intricacies and economic imperatives associated with the concept of 'cultural translation', it becomes imperative to question the ethical implications inherent in this endeavour. As capital continually reinvents itself in response to evolving times, it is reasonable to inquire whether the postcolonial canon similarly undergoes transformations. Conversely, does the process of relinquishing national obligations represent an inevitable outcome that both global and literary realms must accept? If so, are we not succumbing to a homogenising force that perpetuates hegemonic power structures, which have thrived through vicious cycles of exploitation and oppression? Furthermore, if cultural translation is a construct originating from the Western perspective, does Hanif's work not betray the cause of post/anti-colonialism by reassuring the Occident of the Orient's manifold shortcomings?

In exploring these questions, it becomes apparent that Hanif's novel calls for a more profound engagement with the ethics of post-national cosmopolitanism. It urges a critical examination of the power dynamics inherent in the processes of cultural translation and the potential consequences of prioritising Western notions of freedom and liberalism. By reflecting on the evolving landscape of capital and its impact on the postcolonial canon, we are prompted to scrutinise the ramifications of shedding national obligations and the potential pitfalls of a homogenising global discourse. Ultimately, Hanif's work serves as a catalyst for thoughtful reflection on the complexities and ethical challenges inherent in navigating

the intricate intersections of culture, power and representation in contemporary literary discourse.



NOTE

1. It is noteworthy that local languages in Pakistan, particularly Saraiki, have long been striving for recognition as independent languages. Saraiki, for example, emphasises its vibrant cultural heritage, which serves as the foundation for its claim to distinct status within the realm of Saraiki literature.

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ON BEING A HINDU (OR NOT)

SONIA SIKKA

According to a very common understanding of religion, there are a variety of faiths in the world, each defined by a distinctive set of scriptures, beliefs and practices. The members of a given religion, described in nominative form as Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, and so on, adhere to one or another of these sets. They trust its scriptures, follow doctrines pronounced by its authorities, and perform its prescribed practices. That is how we know what religion people belong to, on this conception, and how religious they are.

What happens, though, if, rather than starting with the idea of a religion as defined by some traditional content, we look instead at how individuals understand their belonging or not belonging to it? I want to explore this question through the examples of Kancha Ilaiah and Shashi Tharoor, who have written well-known and diametrically opposed accounts of what it means to be a Hindu. Ilaiah and Tharoor are in different ways both political figures, but my topic is not their politics; it is how they navigate the idea of Hinduism, which is for both of them a religion in a sense that cannot be distinguished from culture. I reflect also on whether, given this analysis, I should describe myself as a Hindu, a question I have struggled with over the years.

Let's start with Ilaiah's *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (2007). The subtitle of the book¹ already answers the question posed in the title. Ilaiah is not a Hindu because he is what Hindu social and religious practice has historically designated as a *Sudra*. We see from Ilaiah's Introduction that his consciousness of not being a Hindu has been

produced, or at least sharpened, through being told he is a Hindu, by media insisting he imagine himself as one, if he is not a Muslim, Christian or Sikh (p. x). Against this pressure, Ilaiah writes:

I was not born a Hindu for the simple reason that my parents did not know that they were Hindus....My parents had only one identity and that was their caste: they were Kurumaas. Their festivals were local, their Gods and Goddesses were local, and sometimes these were even specific to one village (1).

Thus, Ilaiah's reasons for judging that he is not, and has never been, a Hindu are in part ones of cultural difference. He was not raised with the major gods of Hinduism, such as Brahma and Vishnu (7). They were as alien to him, he writes, as Allah or Jehova or Jesus. He was raised with local gods—Pochamma, Maisamma, Ellamma—who were not respected by upper castes (8).

But, of course, Ilaiah also places himself outside Hinduism because he does not want to adopt any Hindu gods as his own, and that decision is shaped by the caste hierarchy he has experienced as formative of who he is. He recounts his childhood experiences of caste discrimination and describes where he, as a Dalit, was placed in relation to Hindu texts, gods and rituals. Regarding texts, he writes:

The Bhagavad Gita is said to be a Hindu religious text. But that book was not supposed to enter our homes. Not only that, the Hindu religion and its Brahmin wisdom prohibited literacy to all of us (11).

In fact, all the staples of Hinduism were prohibited to his community, Ilaiah writes, whose members were not treated by the Hindu priest as children of the God in whom he believes, a critical reference to the term *Harijan* (22). At the same time, there was no representation of the culture and social experience of his own community, so that 'our childhoods were mutilated by constant abuse and by silence, and by a stunning silence at that' (14).

Given these factors, Ilaiah's powerful sense of *not* being a Hindu is understandable. As I have argued elsewhere, individuals negotiate their social identities in terms of the narratives with which they are presented (2004). When making decisions about how to

tell their own stories within these narratives, they naturally will not identify with the stories of people who denigrate and exploit the familial and community group of which they are members by birth. They also will not identify with narratives that contain no positive stories reflecting their own life experiences and fostering respect for their communities, for the lives led by their parents and neighbours, their work and struggles, including the gods bound up with these ways of life. All identities are 'imagined', not in the sense that they are fictional but that they are constructed within a context. Social location in relation to other groups naturally conditions what is a socially and psychologically feasible construction and what is not. Of his own case, Ilaiah writes:

All major theoretical positions in the world emerged out of the author's urge for a search of identity, of a search for his/her history... How can Dalit bahujans search for their historical identity in the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita? (152).

Ilaiah's analysis of religion in general is grounded in a Marx-inspired view of the primacy of economic class. Religion reflects the lives and social psychologies of the class producing its myths, symbols, gods and forms of worship. This analysis shapes Ilaiah's selection of what he sees as the defining characteristics of Hinduism, the identity he rejects for himself. He therefore highlights patriarchy, non-productive activity, weapons and killing. For example, in the Gita, based on his interpretation, a person who kills his own relatives is a hero (17), and 'you have the right to work but not to the fruits', a line Ilaiah reads as the ideology of an economic elite that profits from the labour of others. He claims also that Brahmanical patriarchy provides no scope for questioning, debate and discourse (63), and that Hinduism, unlike other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, has a 'an inborn spiritual fascist character' (141).

Ilaiah's account has garnered a great deal of criticism. He notes this himself in an Afterword to the second edition, citing a negative review that speaks of 'the author's total lack of understanding of the religion [his book] seeks to denigrate' (148). One can certainly take issue with some of the book's assertions. For instance, while the Bhagavad Gita does uphold caste, the line about the right to work but not to its fruits is not about Sudras or class-specific labour at all.

It is about cultivating a practice (karma yoga) of doing one's duty without personal attachment to outcomes. I have found personal value in this practice when engaging in activities that have a moral goal, where success is uncertain and there is a risk of failure. It helps to relieve the anxiety of anticipating such failure, remembering that consequences are not entirely within one's control, that one can only try to do what is right and leave the rest to, well, 'the gods'—to fate, chance, circumstance, or however we want to describe it. What interests me about the idea of karma yoga is not a set of metaphysical doctrines, but the recommendation of a possible way of being a moral agent that involves a kind of liberating selflessness.

Would it be possible for a Dalit to practise such a way of being? I am reluctant to commend selflessness to groups such as Dalits and women, whose struggle for justice requires asserting the worth of their own needs and desires against others (upper castes, men) who benefit from their service. The motif of empowerment seems to me more appropriate for such contexts. That said, in principle, a person fighting for equality and dignity could cultivate composure about results, knowing these cannot be guaranteed and the moral task is to persist in the face of (hopefully temporary) defeat and failure.

One could also object to Ilaiah's claim that the Gita recommends killing one's relatives. Arjuna is faced with a moral dilemma, after all. The Pandavas are not morally spotless, but, on balance, they have a fair claim. They fulfilled a contract and the other side reneged. Negotiations for peace have been attempted, including by Krishna himself, within the longer text of the Mahabharata, but they have all failed. The Pandavas are not fighting demons, however; the other side includes family members and friends. It's a pickle, in short, and you might disagree with the choice Arjuna makes or with the advice Krishna gives him in the course of what could be interpreted as an internal moral and metaphysical dialogue. Or you might agree, thinking, *ahimsa* is all very well, but what about when you're facing injustice? And is this the right moment for Arjuna to decide he wants to be an ascetic and run off the battlefield? What will be the consequences of such an act?

In addition, against Ilaiah's claims about the 'spiritual fascist essence' of Hinduism vs. the innate 'spiritual democracy' of other religions, one could point to the history of war, imperialism,

genocide and slavery in other religions. It would certainly be possible to pull out this or that bit of scripture to say that such violent and unjust acts violate the 'essence' of, say, Christianity or Islam or Buddhism (there is violent oppression within the history Buddhism, too), but the same is true of Hinduism. There is the example of Gandhi, who read and constructed Hinduism differently. Gandhi drew on teachings about non-violence that were perhaps first formulated by Jain and Buddhist schools of thought but became part of Hindu traditions, mingling these with inspiration drawn from the Sermon on the Mount and other sources. On this basis, he imagined non-violence as essential to what it meant for him to be a Hindu.

Finally, it is not true that there is no debate within the history of Hinduism. There was plenty of debate within what we now call the orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy, and between these and other schools, primarily Buddhist and Jain. Amartya Sen highlights these currents (2005), and Shashi Tharoor takes them as central to what he understands as being a Hindu, as we shall see.

Do these rejoinders establish that Ilaiah is 'wrong' about Hinduism? I would judge such a question as poorly formulated. Much of what Ilaiah finds and subjects to criticism can be found within Hindu traditions and social practices. The Vedas and Mahabharata are indeed upper-caste texts. They reflect the concerns, perspectives and prejudices of the castes that produced them. The Gita is hardly progressive on the topic of caste. The criticisms I have raised against Ilaiah's account establish, at best, that there are other possible constructions of Hinduism, involving different selections, adaptations and revisions. There is no reason to regard these as any more or less the 'truth' about it as a whole than the negative points Ilaiah locates.

Moreover, these different imaginations will not sketch a possible path for Ilaiah, a story he can tell about himself as a Dalit that both reflects his experience and allows him to form a dignified self-conception for members of his community. Ilaiah knows that some of those members opt for moving up in the caste hierarchy to the extent possible, but for him that means occupying a higher rung in what is essentially an oppressive social structure, rather than dismantling that structure. Ultimately, there is no truth of the matter about whether caste is, or is not, essential to Hinduism, and it is misguided to look for such a truth. The future will decide. Religious

traditions, like other elements of culture, are dynamic, and their 'essence' depends on the choices of those who take them up.

I turn now to the choices made by Shashi Tharoor² in *Why I am a Hindu* (2018). His opening statement on why he is a Hindu is as simple as that of Ilaiah's:

The obvious answer to this question is, of course, that it's because I was born one. Most people have little choice about the faith they grow up with: it was selected for them at birth, by the accident of geography and their parents' cultural moorings (2).

This is the answer I would have to give myself in most contexts, although I would revise Tharoor's explanation. One can be born and remain a member of this or that religious community without ascribing to any particular beliefs. It is sometimes simply a matter of familial and communitarian identity, established in the majority of cases by birth. Tharoor speaks of 'faith', but when a religious identity is not constituted by belief, that term strikes me as a misnomer. When people of Indian origin in Canada discover that I am from Punjab, they often ask me next whether I am Hindu or Sikh. I naturally say I am Hindu, because the question they are asking has to do with community affiliation established by birth, not beliefs or even practice.

Yet, in some important senses, I am also a Hindu in practice. When someone in my family dies, funeral rites and ceremonies are conducted according to Hindu traditions. There are other occasions on which we might visit a mandir or perform a ceremony, such as a *hawan* for a new home, inviting friends to mark the occasion. These practices do not signify anything—honestly *anything*—about my beliefs. Human beings need markers for significant life events, which different communities have evolved. My own participation in Hindu events of this type is not rightly called 'faith,' as it has to do with custom and culture. The same seems to be true of Tharoor, in fact, according to his own account.

When he turns to questions of belief (and most of his book is about belief) regarding the Hinduism with which he was raised, Tharoor writes:

We knew of Hinduism as a religion without fundamentals: no founder or prophet, no organized church, no compulsory beliefs or

rites of worship, no uniform conception of the 'good life', no single sacred book (2).

In stark contrast with Ilaiah's portrayal, Tharoor sees Hinduism as having no core beliefs:

'Hinduism' is... the name that foreigners first applied to what they saw as the indigenous religion of India. It embraces an eclectic range of doctrines and practices, from pantheism to agnosticism and from faith in reincarnation to belief in the caste system. But none of these constitutes an obligatory credo for a Hindu: there are none. We have no compulsory dogmas....There are simply no binding requirements to being a Hindu. Not even a belief in God (3-4).

In that case, *being* a Hindu does not mean, or at least does not require, following a 'faith', in the usual sense of trust in some authoritative set of beliefs, or at the very least trust in God. That is the way Tharoor was raised, and many other Hindus, I think, including myself.

But Tharoor also suggests, more problematically, that 'Hinduism' includes communities of thought and practice that historically defined themselves in opposition to the Vedic foundation usually considered foundational for it:

A *nastika* Hindu...can declare allegiance to one of five schools, including Buddhism and Jainism, which after arising as reform movements against the ritualistic Hinduism of their day, were practically re-absorbed into the parent faith (though their adherents may not see it that way)....Or the *nastika* can attach himself to the materialist Charvaka School, whose followers denounced most religious practices and devoted themselves to wealth and profit (6).

That 'their adherents may not see it that way' is far too quickly brushed aside here. It is also extremely odd to think of ancient Buddhists, Jains, and especially Carvakas, as part of Hinduism, when they were in debate with what are usually called the 'orthodox Hindu' schools.

The latter designation is admittedly a retrospective one. We should also acknowledge that these schools did not conform to a uniform orthodoxy, in spite of formally respecting the authority of the Vedas. There is a great deal of variation and critical debate between the Vedic schools. Nonetheless, what Tharoor describes as 'Hinduism' here is actually the entire gamut of ancient religio-philosophical traditions on the subcontinent, ignoring the sharp contestations between them. Sankaracharya, for example, did not embrace pluralism; he argued for a particular monistic position, against Buddhists and Jains, as well as proponents of a different version of non-dualism than his own (1965). The Carvakas were materialists who rejected Brahminism, God, karma and reincarnation. Tharoor writes: 'An important branch of Hindu philosophy, the Charvaka School, goes so far as to embrace atheism within the Hindu philosophical framework' (9). But I cannot see how a metaphysics of materialism that was opposed by schools of philosophy that respected the authority of the Vedas (most of the information we have about the Carvakas is from the literature of their opponents) could be considered part of the 'Hindu philosophical framework'.

And it matters a great deal if, currently, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh or Adivasi communities and individuals do not wish to describe themselves as Hindu. Tharoor speaks of Hinduism absorbing Buddhism and animist world views without analysing these absorptive processes or considering the factors that make it difficult at present for people to position themselves outside of Hinduism—as Ilaiah tries to do, as some tribal communities, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists have tried to do. Tharoor also makes a typically Vivekanandian move, as we could call it, by offering a philosophical theology according to which God transcends time, space and all literal description but can be worshipped in multiple forms, including personal ones, although ultimately the truth is *neti, neti* (8).

This combination of negative and symbolic theology, as it is called in Western philosophical theology, is present in the Upanishads and is very familiar to me, as I was raised with it. I have since learned that the equation of this position with Hinduism as a whole, however, has some distinctly modern sources. Vivekanand is one, along with Radhakrishnan's strongly Vedantic philosophy,

and, of course, Gandhi's ecumenicism and pluralism. Holding this pluralist position, grounded in a distinct and specific philosophical theology, is a possible way of being a Hindu. Unlike Ilaiah and like Tharoor, it was possible for me to be such a Hindu, because I grew up with no consciousness of caste. 'Yet my obliviousness to caste is itself a confession of privilege,' Tharoor rightly notes, 'no Dalit, my Dalit friends tell me, can afford to be oblivious of caste' (76).

We can see that the contradictions between Tharoor's and Ilaiah's conceptions of Hinduism are sharp enough that often it is a matter of *p* vs. *not p*. Ilaiah says there is no dialogue within Hinduism, for instance, and it is pure blind following and recitation of names. Tharoor says, by contrast, that it enforces no creed, and 'blind belief in dogma is absent in Hinduism' (62). Both speak from personal experience and both can adduce evidence for their claims. In the final analysis, they construct what it means to be a Hindu on the basis of very different experiences linked to their divergent social positions. They are also led by particular socio-political projects, which shape their descriptions of Hinduism.

I have said a little along the way about where I stand among these options, recognising Tharoor's position in my own upbringing, but also raising some critical points about what he includes under 'Hinduism'. And I respect Ilaiah's reasons for establishing himself emphatically outside of the category. Among possible reasons for refusing to identify with a certain community—whether religious, ethnic, or cultural—its having treated you and your ancestors like garbage is surely an excellent one. This leaves me with the conclusion that it is impossible for me to say in any straightforward fashion whether I am or am not a Hindu. There is first of all belonging by birth. I cannot say I am *not* a Hindu, because what else would I be within the South Asian context? But I also cannot say I *am* a Hindu if that means affirming the elements of the religion that Ilaiah sees as defining it, which have undeniably been central elements. There is no truth of the matter about whether caste is, or is not, 'essential' to Hinduism, moreover; that will be decided by whether it actually can survive the social (not merely theoretical) annihilation of caste, which is far from having been accomplished. I also do not know what it could mean to follow a 'faith' that, as Tharoor would have it, includes positions whose contents emphatically

conflict with one another, such as Vedanta, Buddhism and Carvaka materialism.

The broader point to which I want to draw attention with this reflection concerns the idea of religion in general. It has often been pointed out within scholarship on religion that not only Indic but other Asian traditions do not fit the Western idea of religion.³ It has become almost commonplace, moreover, to say that Hinduism is not one religion and even not a religion at all in the Western sense, but was forced to conform to an Abrahamic, predominantly Christian, idea of religion through colonial processes, albeit ones in which Hindus participated (Pennington, 2005). These are fair points, but I want to highlight something else that is true of religion generally, not only of Hinduism and other Asian traditions. It is that if you examine how individuals *live* ‘being’ this or that, being members of a religion, being religious generally, you will find that lived religion does not consist in conformity to a core set of beliefs and practices. There are, rather, multiple and varied imaginations, of identities and of the content of the religious categories in terms of which individuals define who they are. This approach offers a different picture of what religions are than is communicated, and thereby imposed or reinforced, through the ‘world religions’ model that shapes the most common conception of religion, and that forms the basis for education about religion in school curricula in many countries.

A key lesson to be gleaned from this approach is that, instead of defining a religion by an observable content that is simply there, we might ask instead, *who* speaks for it, against it, or about it, considering what they say and why. In the end, what it means to ‘be’ a Hindu—or Buddhist or Christian or Muslim—will be decided by the individuals who follow (or reject) these paths. At a normative level, the task is to ensure that this decision is an inclusive one.



NOTES

1. All citations are from the 2nd Edition.
2. All citations are from the 2018 edition.
3. I have participated myself in the production of this branch of scholarship. See Sikka and Peetush (2020).

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INTRUDERS IN A MALE BASTION OR DISPLACING GENDER BINARIES?

RITA
MANCHANDA

Nari Shakti: woman power is to be on dramatic display at ceremonial functions! The token showcasing is a testament to the government's much-avowed commitment to women's empowerment. Not only will a smartly turned out woman officer lead an all-male contingent on the Republic Day parade, as in 2020, but come Republic Day, 2024, nari shakti is set to shine spectacularly. The defence ministry has decreed that all marching and band contingents as well as tableaux and other performances should comprise women. But where are the rank and file uniformed women to come from in an armed force comprising 3,904 women officers, sans the 6,589 officers in the medical stream? Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) have mahila battalions, but in the Army, Air Force and Navy the gates have only now been prised open for the recruitment of women in all ranks. For the first time, via the Agniveer scheme, 100 women soldiers are joining the Military Police (MP), and 273 sailors, the Navy.

At issue is not the negligible numbers, but the relegation of women in the services to the peripheries and to tokenism. Expected to shine in social events, they are marginalised in gaining laurels in service and their contribution trivialised—making it extraordinary when a Divya Ajith Kumar, aged 21, outshines 244 fellow cadets to get the coveted 'Sword of Honour' as the best all-round cadet. Most women who join the armed forces confront a lack of structured social, psychological and operational planning, which makes the acceptance of women officers as equal professionals in a man's armed forces difficult. Even the long-contested decision to level the gendered playing field and make Short Service Commission (SSC)

women officers eligible for Permanent Commissions (PC) and equal career advancement opportunities, has found the militaries unprepared and unyielding. This is reflected in government appeals against court orders supporting gender equality, obstructive delays,¹ and even the peremptory introduction of discriminatory regulations to thwart the implementation of an announced policy.²

The government's embarrassing display of what the Supreme Court denounced as a gender discriminatory 'stereotypical mindset' of most men who, even after three decades of experiencing the operational effectiveness of women officers in the armed forces, viewed them as the weaker sex and unlikely to meet the challenges and hazards of military service because of their 'psychological limitations and domestic obligations'. Also marshalled as grounds for 'unsuitability' for command was the argument that male troops, who are predominantly drawn from rural backgrounds, would be unwilling to 'accept' a woman commander³ in a hierarchical institution. Habitat and hygiene considerations were foregrounded as inhibiting the posting of women in conflict zones, notwithstanding evidence that 30 per cent of women officers have served successfully in these very conflict zones. The foundational obstruction advanced by the government was the difference in physiological capabilities between men and women. The lowering of physical standards in what was primarily a war-fighting institution, it was argued, could have 'catastrophic results for the nation's security and sovereignty'. Such bald assumptions ignored the diversity of command functions, in some of which the sole criterion was not strength, and the diversity of physiological capabilities to be found among women and men. Reacting sharply to this dismissal of women officers' contribution to the nation's security, the Court deemed it 'an affront not only to their dignity as women but to the dignity of the members of the Indian Army who serve as equal citizens in a common mission'.⁴

This lack of seriousness in viewing the military as a professional career option for women appears to have dogged the 'evolutionary' decision to open up the ultimate male bastion. In 1992, the first women officers were experimentally recruited, and subsequently regularised as SSCs, serving a term of 14 years (six years short of pension eligibility). Women, unlike male colleagues, were denied the option of PC and thereby the possibility of command postings. Writing a decade and a half after the first batch,

Capt. (Rtd.) Deepanjali Bakshi rued the ‘utter lack of seriousness of most men’ regarding women serving as professionals in the armed forces, while ‘a cross section of women themselves are content with their limited service role’. Bakshi states:

Their [male] compatriots relegate them to a minority status by claims of picking up their slack and the privileged position enjoyed by women. Senior leadership, for lack of working with women as peers, coupled with their traditional mindset, most often reflect a patronising and protective attitude. Male officers also tend to believe that given the rural background of our troops and lower levels of education, the men would find it difficult to accept women as leaders. Reality is far from this as men in the ranks show little hesitation in accepting women as leaders. The strict chain of command and the strong values inculcated during training ensure that they measure officers by their rank and not by their gender (2006).

Bakshi’s assessment argues that the integration of women in the forces remains a distant prospect, with institutionalised structures and practices reinforcing separateness and inequality. During training, living areas are segregated, physical standards lowered, service subjects and outdoor exercises modified to accommodate women. The patronising and paternalistic attitude of male seniors underscore women’s lack of fitness in a male world, and their marginalisation. The exclusion of women from combat roles further reifies gender roles, for combat is central to the military–masculinity connection. Bakshi reads women’s exclusion from combat roles as essential to maintain the privileged role held by men (as protectors and defenders) in the existing military hierarchy.

Five years later, Maj. Gen. Mrinal Suman (Rtd.) commented on the frustrating experience of women officers whose competence was not given due recognition (2010). While seniors were overindulgent, women officers were generally marginalised, given desk jobs and not involved in any major decision making. Even two decades after their induction, the mutual comfort level between men and women colleagues was said to be low. Women officers were seen—and, indeed, many saw themselves—as intruders, with the military viewed as an ill fit for female bodies. Transnationally within

military institutions is an entrenched brotherhood culture—and it is no less in the Indian armed forces, as practices of male bonding and a culture of overt hostility to anything remotely feminine is considered a necessity to ‘increase combat effectiveness’ (Chowdhry, 2010).

The profession of arms is all about violence and brutality, Gen. Suman emphasised, and that ‘makes the environment highly non-conducive and rough for women’ (2010). Not only are ‘acceptance’ levels of women officers low, but fundamental questions of their ‘useful employment’ are raised when COs, who have imbibed gendered stereotypes about women’s safety and dignity, are inhibited from assigning them field assignments where they might come to harm, or excuse ‘lady officers’ from performing midnight guard duty. The ‘pampering’ of women officers, who monopolise plum peace postings, was resented as discriminatory against male officers who are denied any reprieve from the hardship field postings. Gen. Suman did not favour expanding the presence or roles of women in India’s armed forces.

Militaries are not created to generate employment and hence have nothing to do with gender equality. They are tasked to ensure national defence and that is the sole reason for their existence. They need only the fittest—men or women (*ibid.*).

It is hard to escape the assessment that the induction of women into the institution of the armed forces has been a ‘knee-jerk reaction’ to accommodate a top down modernising policy decision (Ganesh, 2019). The sample survey of women combatants, undertaken a decade after they were inducted in the Border Security Force (BSF), in 2008, finds difficulties in the integration of female boots into its male-centred culture. Gender-segregated structures of training, lowering of physical standards, gender-differentiated ‘soft’ assignments predicated that there can be no parity in work. Of the 55 women constables interviewed, 21 respondents believed themselves to be as capable as their male counterparts and fit for all assignments; among 23 others, the opinion was evenly divided that, eventually, with training, they could shoulder responsibilities on par with their male colleagues. It was the institutional streaming of male–female combatants into separate silos, Ganesh argued, which made difficult integration and undermined operational effectiveness (*ibid.*).

It is the limitations of India's gender-segregated environment in its domestic security sector that carry over and make ambivalent the country's gender mainstreaming in UN Peacekeeping units. India is not only the largest troop-contributing country to UN Peacekeeping, but also the pioneer in deploying an all-female police unit in Liberia, in 2007. However, Klossek and Johansson-Nogues argue that it is India's contestation of the global norm of gender-integrated police units, and avoidance of placing women in security-sensitive areas and in combat roles, which has compromised its gender mainstreaming (2021). They assert that 'in governmental circles Indian female peacekeepers have been valued more for their symbolism and capabilities to act as goodwill ambassadors, rather than their contribution to eventual pacification or public order management of Liberia' (ibid.). Similarly, in India's more recent deployment of the Female Engagement Team (FET) in UN MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), the gender-differentiated tasks of male and female Indian contingents make it impossible for women to shift gender binaries and move towards gender parity and integration.

Will the new decade of advances in gender mainstreaming in the Indian security sector move the militaries from 'tolerating' women as a peripheral adjunct in a male-dominated establishment, to accepting women as professionals of equal value? Could there be scope for shifting of gender binaries of appropriate norms and values of what are deemed masculine and feminine? At issue is not an institutional culture, where uniformed women imbibe soldierly and so-called masculine values, but one where uniformed men do not have to suppress feelings of uncertainty and fear, which are stigmatised as feminine weakness. Stress rates are cruelly visible in the high rates of suicides and Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) in the security sector, which attests to the incapacity of masculinist military culture to respond to the soldier's distress.

In a bold article, titled 'When a Soldier Cries', Gen. Suman evocatively captures the soldiers' distress (2016). But it is Capt. Bakshi who fires the salvo to displace gender binaries in the institutional culture of the militaries:

If masculinity is not innate to the quality of soldiers and if humanitarianism is not an essentialist feminine value then

perhaps society needs to reconsider its narrow definitions rather than dismiss the choice of service women as mere assimilation (2006: 25).

Permanent Commissions are now available to women; the gate of the exclusive male club—the National Defence Academy (NDA)—has opened up for women cadets, with 38 earmarked vacancies. The Air Force has commissioned 15 fighter pilots and opened up access to all combat roles for its 14 per cent servicewomen. In the Navy, its 6 per cent servicewomen have crossed over from non-sea-going branches to ships; 28 officers have been deputed on board ships, and will be inducted in all streams. The Army, the laggard of the three services, has opened up 10 streams for the less than 4 per cent of servicewomen in the force. Combat corps—infantry and armoured—are denied to women who are deployed only in combat support roles. But to conjecture that the institutional culture of the militaries is on the brink of a social revolution is not only premature, but flies against the troubled experiences of gender mainstreaming in the militaries of the Global North.

Sociological and psychological studies of foreign militaries indicate that the rapidity in the induction of women, and the erosion of entrenched binaries in the masculinist culture of the militaries, has produced major psychological adjustment pressures on male (and female) soldiers (Müller, et al., 2011). Experiences of combat women in the US military have revealed that sexual harassment and assault within the ranks of the militarised security forces has been found to persist relentlessly, exacerbated by an ingrained misogynist culture of training and bonding practices (Nagel, et al., 2021). Generations of women soldiers, from the first wave of mass recruitments⁵ during the Vietnam War, to women who served in Iraq,⁶ have faced relentless hostility from their male comrades in arms. In Britain's armed forces, where women currently comprise about 11 per cent of regular forces and serve in all military roles, a 2021 Parliamentary Defence Committee report detailed

the many challenges women soldiers face at every stage of their military careers—from poorly fitting body-armour and the unavailability of menstrual products to bullying, harassment and sexual assault from their male peers and commanders.⁷

In the Canadian armed forces, researchers identified a dominant 'warrior culture',⁸ especially among those in combat arms, to explain why Canada's women soldiers continue to be resented, marginalised and subjected to harassment and abuse⁹ by their male counterparts 20 years after being permitted to serve in combat roles (Mathers, 2021).

Recent publications on female engagement teams deployed in counter-insurgency operations in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have cruelly exposed the reality that women soldiers in and at war are equally at risk as their male counterparts in combat-intensive branches (Greenburg, 2023; Eager, 2014). They expose the slippery slope for 'liberal' gender equality feminists who advocate the inclusion of women in combat forces. As anti-militarist feminists have argued, adding women to the militaries, where violence is constitutive, raises different issues from adding them to positions of formal political authority. Eager's assessment is chilling:

The sociological and psychological aspects of an organisation that supports the application of state-sanctioned violence and killing will inevitably mean that all too frequently sexual and deadly violence is perpetrated against fellow female soldiers (2014: 17).

Anti-militarism feminists remain adamantly sceptical about the possibility of changing the masculine and violent cultures of the militaries and re-making them to be a comfortable 'fit' for feminised identities and human security. As Peterson and Runyan caution,

The hyper-masculinized climate of militaries is particularly hostile to feminized identities and bodies, so that women and feminized men are not and arguably cannot be treated as equal, no matter how well-intentioned individual agents and policies might be (2010: 252).

Feminists have long argued that militarism and the masculinist hierarchical culture inherent in the institution and values of militaries are antithetical to the goals of gender equality, peace and justice (Duncanson and Woodward, 2015).

Whereas in the Global North labour constraints motivated opening up the militaries to women, in India there is no shortage of male volunteers. The current shortage of majors and captains in the

Indian army has less to do with numbers of candidates and more to do with the standards laid down. The services do not want to dilute the standards, even marginally, for fear of compromising the quality of intake. But when it comes to women, 'standards are reduced to extremely low levels,' Gen. Suman added (2010). Ignored is the material reality that the limited vacancies for women meant keener competition, with the entry of women with better qualifications than their male peers.

With uniformed women continuing to be permanent outsiders,¹⁰ it begs the question why states, and specifically the Indian security establishment, abandoned policies of exclusion and promoted women's military participation as an integral part of the forces? Was it driven by aspirations of becoming a modern military? Was it the influence of transnational norms and values exemplified in the human security discourse, UN Security Council R 1325 on women-peace-security,¹¹ and the mainstreaming of gender and gender integration in national militaries and international peacekeeping missions and alliances? Was it driven by the socio-cultural evolution of gender equality struggles for inclusion and equal participation in the country's security forces? Technological transformations and the emphasis on smart armed forces have unsettled the hegemonic masculinist paradigm of fighting institutions, but has India graduated to a third-generation technology force in which manpower and intensive physical strength are decisive? Is it a function of instrumentalising servicewomen in the narrow confines of female friendly tasks of civilian outreach?

Are we overlooking the evolutionary repurposing of militaries, the re-envisioning of state militaries' combat roles, structures, cultures and ethics resulting from the increasingly complex security politics and missions confronting militaries, especially in democracies? The professional profile, social values and ethics of the soldier in combat are being transformed as they confront a broad spectrum of assignments ranging from civil, humanitarian tasks all the way up to the execution of domestic and international peacekeeping in so-called pre-emptive civil wars, counter-insurgency operations and inter-state territorial defence (Müller, et al., 2011).

India's, too, is a striking case—a democracy in a region where the militaries have been political protagonists. The institutional

and sociological profile of India's armed forces has been reshaped by the exigencies of meeting a broad spectrum of challenges: fighting conventional inter-state wars, defence against territorial aggression, suppression of counter-insurgencies, ceasefire-pacification, deployment in aid of civil power to quell communal and ethnic conflict, border security maintenance, international peacekeeping and disaster risk management. The slippery slope of military professionalism and ethics, following the army's increasing deployment in complex security politics 'in aid of civil power', is teased out by scholar Ayesha Ray (2013) and commentator Lt. Gen. Panag (2023). Less explored is the requirement of servicewomen for specific functional tasks such as in counter-insurgency: 'winning hearts and minds', cordon and search, management of public order in civil strife situations and in international peacekeeping.

'We are a transactional force, oriented to getting the task done,' explained Lt. Gen. Balbir Singh (Rtd.) to the author on why the gap persists between policy and induction. 'The organisation has to weigh the limits of the suitability of inducting women for getting specific tasks accomplished. That has a higher priority than gender equality.'¹² The general was from the Army Service Corps (ASC), the stream to which most women officers are assigned. Although full of praise for the value and competent service women bring, he gave no quarter. 'We are working in a highly competitive professional environment, and no commanding officer wants to jeopardise not getting the task done and spoiling his career prospects in the process.'¹³

Were servicewomen a liability? Whether it is COs today, Mrinal Suman a decade earlier, or Capt. Bakshi before that, the patriarchal mindset inhibited gender parity in roles. For instance, could a colonel commanding a unit in a 'disturbed area' with two officers available, when confronted with a midnight order for deployment of a contingent of troops in a remote area by early morning, risk sending a young woman captain to lead an all-male patrol? Not likely. There were issues such as the high-risk environment, hygiene, sexual vulnerability, and, finally, uncertainty about 'suitability' to get the task done.

Would women, who are in line for command postings today or those emerging from the NDA, agree that the military is a discomfiting fit for female bodies? Would they accept the patriarchal observation that they are 'pampered', and monopolise soft and plum

assignments, denying male officers staff opportunities? Are women officers justified in asserting that because they are structurally denied promotional avenues, senior officers tend to appraise their ACRs cursorily and even under-evaluate them, because it does not matter?

The pathway to gender mainstreaming remains uphill and rough, but before another generation is discouraged about even imagining displacing gender binaries in a hyper-masculinist institution—a front page photo in the *Indian Express*, of an army officer, in the midst of a phalanx of saluting Agniveer cadets at a passing out parade, carrying his infant baby.¹⁴ Is it an opening salvo for displacing gender binaries?



NOTES

1. SC: *Babita Puniya* 2020.
2. SC: *Lt. Col. Nitisha* 2021.
3. <https://www.livewlaw.in/top-stories/physical-limitations-mentality-of-male-troops-reasons-deny-command-appointments-women-in-army-centre-tells-sc-152347>.
4. SC 2020: 45.
5. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/5376/reviews/36940/janda-dean-warriors-without-weapons-victimization-military-women>.
6. <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/206171/the-lonely-soldier-by-helen-benedict/>.
7. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/343/defence-subcommittee/news/156892/report-protecting-those-who-protect-us-women-in-the-armed-forces-from-recruitment-to-civilian-life/>.
8. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23337486.2017.1411117>.
9. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/sexual-misconduct-canadian-forces-vance-mcdonald-1.5980394>.
10. <https://nyupress.org/9780814735480/camouflage-isnt-only-for-combat/>.
11. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES1325%20.pdf>.
12. Personal interview with the author in Delhi, July 2023.
13. Ibid.
14. <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.jagranjosh.com%2Farticles%2Fagniveer-recruitment-2023-passing-out-parade-of-first-batch-held-in-these-states-watch-highlights-1691393931-1&psig=AOvVaw0oosr72MTnl0P9SqHeDyfu&rust=1693636139821000&source=images&ecd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBIQjhxFwoTCMD8sbknIEDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE>.

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PHOTO ESSAY

THE LIFE SHE LIVES

Women at the Margins in India

CHITVAN
GILL

June 14, 2023

Three women workers died and four others were injured after a mound of mud fell on them while digging a pond in the village of Dararpur in Pataudi, India. The women had been working at the site for six months under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme and had no safety gear. The deceased were aged 30, 40 and 45 and had been identified by their first names. The injured women were taken to hospital, and a compensation package will be provided in line with the MGNREGA Act.

Abhimanyu lost his wife Priyanka... who was the only earning member of the family. 'I have been unwell for the past two years. My mother is old and my father passed away some time ago. We have a four-year-old son and a two-year-old daughter...'

April 11, 2019

The National Human Rights Commission said on Thursday that it has sought a detailed report from Telangana authorities on the deaths of at least 10 women workers in a reported mudslide in the state's Narayanpet district on Wednesday.

The women were working under the MGNREGA programme in the Marikal block to dig a rain collection pit, ANI reported.

40-year-old Budamma was among the 10 women MGNREGA workers who were killed in a minor landslide on 10 April in Telangana's Thileru village in the Marikal mandal. Chenna said he only found out about her death after he went to find his mother for the key.

'That morning was the last time I saw her,' said Chenna, who works as a farmer. 'I don't know how we will survive without her. She

used to manage everything single-handedly from cooking to finance,' he said.

These two news reports, more than four years apart, reveal the sense of tragic fatalism that shrouds the world of poverty, and caught within this world of banal violence are the most vulnerable sections of society. Dozens of similar cases are reported year after year. But what is also revealed is the stark reality of the role of women within this world. In both cases the women are mourned, their loss made more acute as they were the principal earning members of their families, despite the presence of the men. And this reality visits thousands of households across this country, as women bear the burden and single-handedly support families. According to World Bank data, 17.5 per cent (approximately 52.92 million) of total households (302.4 million) in the country were headed by women in 2021.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, India ranks 135th out of 146 countries. Yet, what do these statistics actually mean, or tell us? That her immense and unique contributions to family, society, economy and the nation are so tragically undervalued? They tell us that the life of a woman, even today, within this country, counts for very little.

What is defined as work? A woman's access to salaried jobs is severely limited. Schemes such as MGNREGA offer opportunities, but the woman who works in the fields, who spends hours walking to the nearest source of water, who does backbreaking work with cattle and livestock in her home, and who is the prime caregiver within the family—how would we quantify these?

Women at the margins of India's socio-economic system endure lives that are marked by struggle and fortitude. Poverty infinitely compounds the multiple torments of gender discrimination, as women struggle—often alone in women-headed households—to make ends meet, to ensure that their children are fed and have a roof over their heads. For millions of women, this has been the reality of their entire lives, with little hope of escape or relief.

Relentless hardships keep coming her way: climate change, farm distress and environmental degradation have brought shortages of potable water and fuel, forcing her to return to long treks for firewood, fodder and water. Accelerating cycles of floods and

droughts deepen her suffering. And as the government and state pull away the safety net, decreasing allocations for various relief programmes, such as MGNREGA, her life becomes infinitely more difficult, pushing her to the very edges of despair.

Worse, as the government forces shut-downs on environmentally hazardous and toxic industries, tens of thousands of workers and their families are dispossessed, entire townships become redundant, and many occupations are driven into the sphere of illegality. This is dramatically visible in the *beedi* and stone-cutting industries. While the original objectives cannot be questioned, the government has yet to formulate any policy or strategy of just transition, which could help create alternative livelihoods for those who are rendered jobless. Further, technological transformations have marginalised millions, pushing entire sectors of the economy into distress. Industries such as handloom and a vast array of crafts, once the very lifeblood of the village economy, and among the largest sources of employment at one time, are dying rapidly.

Further, as climate and environmental changes wreak havoc across the globe, women on the margins are among the worst impacted. Escalating natural disasters and crop failures propel waves of distress migration into the uncertainties of urban chaos, where new challenges of survival confront them; or the menfolk migrate, abandoning women and families to even greater insecurities in their degrading rural environments.

Women themselves have little voice in the global transformations, or in the smaller but, for them, momentous decisions, that affect their lives, excluded as they are from the traditional structures of power and participation. At the wider level of state policy, with little access to political power, women's issues are pushed into the perpetual background. Of 542 members in the present Lok Sabha, just 78 are women (14.4 per cent); of 224 members in the Rajya Sabha, 24 are female (10.71 per cent). Thirty-three per cent of all seats in local bodies are now reserved for women and while this has certainly impacted community services and interests, women's empowerment is 'yet an undone deal', with a large number of elected women put forward as proxies of powerful menfolk, who remain the unseen decision-makers. Moreover, as one study notes, '65 million women—around 20 per cent of eligible female voters—are missing from India's electorate,

raising a question of how well their concerns are represented in democracy' (Kapoor and Ravi, 2014).

The cumulative crises of the past years have enormously worsened conditions. The most dramatic impact, of course, was of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within a year of the outbreak, the World Bank estimated that with poverty increasing for the first time since 2011, the number of the poor in India had risen by between 23 and 56 million.

Crucially, as life ground to a virtual halt, particularly in the informal sector, 80 per cent of all job losses were estimated to have been among women. Women's participation in the workforce dropped to a bare 16 to 19 per cent, according to different estimates, and more than 62 per cent of job losses among women were among those above the age of 30—substantially reducing the likelihood of their return to the workforce in future.

The pandemic was not alone in the rolling crises that have added to the misfortunes of women. The agrarian crisis is now chronic, as productivity declines on overstressed lands, and profitability shrinks in a skewed market, dramatically worsening conditions in India's vast rural hinterland. The unorganised industrial sector, where most of the poor secure employment is outside the rural economy, has also been in a state of increasing distress for years, squeezed progressively by demonetisation and a range of policies that favour the large and corporate sectors. More recently, the Ukraine war and its impact on essential commodity prices, particularly including fuel, has added to the economic slowdown, and consequently to the challenges of employment and poverty, with a disproportionate burden falling on women on the margins.

As she battles all this, her children are drawn into the vortex of the labour market. The Census of 2011 put the number of child workers at 10.1 million. By 2018, their number was estimated at a significantly lower 8 million. Tragically, after decades of gains in reducing child labour in India, the pandemic and the complex of economic setbacks brought about an abrupt reversal of the trend, pushing an additional 8.9 million children, according to estimates, back into the workforce by 2022. Even as opportunities for adult employment shrank in the unorganised sector, the exploitation of underpaid child labour expanded. The gender bias has ensured that more boys were kept in school, while girl children were put to work in greater numbers.

Forced by circumstances into manual labour at a tender age, the compounding lack of education, adequate nutrition and access to health facilities condemns the female child to suffer not only physically, but also mentally.

The country's rapidly skewing economy is throwing more and more families below the poverty line and into a relentless struggle for sheer survival. If we fail to provide jobs that pull families out of poverty, we will fail to address the basic factors that push children, and disproportionately the girl child, into the labour force.

Within the past decades, child labour in India has shifted out of factories and hazardous industries, and increasingly into household and village-based units. Areas such as the agricultural sector, brick kilns, tiny industrial units and small commercial establishments continue to use the services of children.

One of the surest ways of combating child labour is to bring children into the school system. Every child out of school is a potential child worker. Alec Fyfe, in his *Compulsory Education and Child Labour* (2005), observes,

The global effort for EFA (Education for All) and child labour elimination has no more important battleground than India. India probably has the largest population of illiterates and the single largest population of child workers in the world today. India represents over a third of the global total of out-of-primary school children. About a half of all children aged 5-14 years are not enrolled in schools, or approximately 105 million. These so called 'nowhere children' do not feature in official child labour statistics. In fact, estimates for child labour range from 10.4 million from official figures to NGO estimates of 114 million.

Global figures mask vast disparities reflecting caste, sex and urban/rural inequalities. The net effect is that a boy from a non-poor upper-caste family has a 75 per cent chance of attaining the eighth grade whilst a girl from a poor scheduled-caste family has virtually no chance of reaching the fifth grade.

According to the latest available data (2019–2020), 89.7 per cent of children are enrolled at the upper primary levels, but this ratio diminishes rapidly and, by the higher secondary level, 48.6 per cent

of children are out of school. Nearly half of all children, thus, are potentially at risk of being pushed into the labour force.

Women and girls strive, within an enveloping environment of indifference, exploitation and abuse, to give meaning and worth to their lives. Accidents of birth define much of the trajectory of the life each will live. The economically disadvantaged female, by virtue of her gender, is trapped by birth in an arc that she cannot escape. From childhood to old age, her life remains one of struggle and privation.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development's High Level Committee on the Status on Women notes,

Indian women reflect a pluralistic India, one in which practices and discrimination thrive—based on class, religion, caste and ethnicity. Women from all classes, religions, castes and ethnic backgrounds are marginalised in multiple ways, given that patriarchy and gender-based discrimination cuts across all these sectors.¹

Despite being so severely undervalued, she remains undeterred and quietly goes about the job that has to be done. If you take the woman and her contributions out of the equation, our accomplishments would amount to very little. She is the stoic framework on which the nation rests.



NOTE

1. See High Level Committee on the Status of Women, 3: 274. Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015. <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/vol%203.compressed.pdf>.

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Life in the Shadows

CHITVAN GILL

































DARKNESS AT NOON

SRINJOY
CHOWDHURY

This was not *A Nightmare on Elm Street* kind of dream, but about football—slash-and-burn football—The Beautiful Game played by hard men, reborn as a bar-brawl. These hard-tackling Italian-inspired back-four I was playing against were the Mafiosi of Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas*; they had studied the mechanics of pain; they were nasty pieces of work. From somewhere, a name, (Marco) Tardelli, the Italian midfielder, swam towards me in the dream. Stretching a little as I heard the sounds of dawn, of birds chirping, my fingertips touched a plastic bucket: 'Who placed one beside my bed?' I wondered. Almost awake, I found myself in an unfamiliar place, cramped, my back hurting, my T-shirt wet, sticking to my back. I was lying on the bathroom floor. I must have got up in the night and then, passed out. This, along with the RTPC test result emailed to me minutes later, was the initial face of COVID-19.

A week ago, on my chocolate croissant day, it was all very festive. Vaccinated (Astra-Zeneca's Covishield), I was halfway towards the warm comfort of safety and after a second jab, four to six weeks later, this malevolent Chinese import, already in ignominious retreat, it seemed, would not be a threat.

In early 2021, nobody realised there would be a 'Second Wave'. Nobody imagined that crippling oxygen shortages were a fortnight away, that Remdesivir injections would not be available, even on the black market, that doctors would work all day and almost all night and still fall short, that people waiting for beds in hospitals would choke to death in the corridors, that burning ghats would run out of firewood, that the official death toll would cross

400,000, that every telephone call meant someone you knew had just died. Tragedies, we thought, happened to other countries.

There is a price you pay for safety; the Covishield vaccine is angry turbulence, fighting off the hordes of Ghengis Khan, all the bad guys of Wuhan. Astra-Zeneca meant three days of low-grade fever, headaches and worse. 'It shakes you up,' a friend warned. 'You'll be tired, dead tired, like you've played tennis all day.'

In the post-COVID-19 world, it is about: 'Where did you get it?' The answer, often enough, is 'at the hospital'. It is life's latest trick—the supreme irony of getting vaccinated and being infected on the same day, at the same place. There weren't any queues at my vaccination centre, though; you had all the social distancing you wanted. After ₹250 for the shot, you were on your way, walking down the corridors smelling of hospital—a euphemism for disinfectant—into the paperwork section, and finally, for the Covishield vaccine. An hour later, I was home, and I hoped, dry.

No flu-like symptoms, no headaches either, nothing but a tiredness treading heavily inside me, but there is also that promise of deliverance—72 hours and one would be halfway towards the promised land of immunity and freedom from that 'I've dodged the COVID-19 bullet for over a year' feeling. There it was, that sense of lassitude, like a heavy cold before Christmas, threatening to ruin it all. Is patience really a virtue? Maybe it isn't, maybe I should have called my doctor about the ugly, phlegmy, heavy cough.

Before the football dream, it had not been easy falling asleep. Then, at midnight, my GP called, 'What are the numbers?' 'Early 90s and the 120s,' I told him. 'I am not satisfied with 91. I am not happy at all. Prepare to get admitted,' he warned, abruptly ringing off. A pulse rate of 127 was off the charts, far above the 72 it usually was. My body was fighting the virus; my body was losing.

Irene Hospital, in Kalkaji, New Delhi, was all I had left. Another hospital had been recommended; they did not have a bed, they claimed, turning me away, relieved there was no fuss. As I waited at the reception for admission, a call changed my life. I filled up a form, paid an 'advance' and was told: 'Yes. We've got a message. We have a bed for you.' Many thousands, I would learn later, never got a bed, because there were not enough of them. I was a little ahead of the curve; the Second Wave surge had not quite begun. There are various reasons why people survive and people do

not, but falling ill before most others would be an extraordinary one. After I was discharged, I would hear of the darkness that was Delhi in April, a city full of despairing people; the national medical system on the verge of collapse.



In a world bathed in blue light where the creak of machinery competed with the cries of the critically ill, I had a cubbyhole in the intensive care unit (ICU), opening into a large room with eight to 10 beds. Did I need intensive care? I didn't think so, but the doctors were aware of the blackout; they wanted to be certain. In the little room—the standard hospital bed, painted white, pushed against the wall, a large mechanical device (did someone tell me it was a ventilator?)—I felt secure, uncomfortable only when a nurse fitted the cannula.

'Do you have to?' I was complaining, looking away. 'Yes sir. Otherwise, there'll be so many injections. It will take a moment. And it is just this once,' she replied, as I cringed. I would chat with them, several of them from Manipur. 'Are you from Ukhrul?' I would ask, remembering where all the trouble was, the insurgency. They were mostly from Imphal, and they would always do their best. It would be merely a few days, we had imagined; but we had underestimated the Delta variant; I didn't even know I had picked up the Delta variant. Only later, one of my doctors, told me: 'If there are 10 people in a room and one's got the Delta virus, six or eight of the others will be infected. It's that deadly.'

If I had 'gone upstairs and knocked on the door', as my GP joked later, it was the senior doctors who helped to find my way back. I seemed fine; the oximeter was behaving itself; the 90–92 readings were not so unpleasant. Maybe, the worst was over; the blackout was only a rude shock and keeping me in the ICU was not even right; many, many people, battered by the virus, desperately needed a bed. Easily the fittest person in the ICU by far, I had walked to the X-Ray room (politely declining a wheelchair with an 'I still have legs' quip). Promoted to the ward, I shared Room 211, sunny and pleasant, with Mr. AT & T (Always Talking and Talking), 10 years older, healthy enough to worry about the moody air-conditioner and the fitfully functioning TV. When he was not

complaining about the TV, he would cheerfully try out a basic yoga asana. A great believer in the powers of ghee and honey, he would constantly advise me to have a little every day. Very soon, I would need a miracle, and ghee or honey were not going to be enough.



I was going to die. I knew it and the doctors knew it; they would have seen enough patients go. I saw it in their eyes, in the way the nurses fluttered around me, in the way the doctors checked my oxy-saturation rate with a second oximeter, just hoping the first one had malfunctioned. It was 15 April, mid-morning: my oxy-saturation rate, the mask on, was a catastrophic 72. I had approached, I learnt later, the ‘organs shutting down stage’. I could still speak, though with some difficulty. ‘I walked into your hospital (on 10 April) with an oxy-saturation rate of 91. Now, with full oxygen (15 litres per minute), it is 72. What have you done?’ I asked the doctor. I saw how distressed he was; he wasn’t sure I would recover.

Could I sit up? I tried... I couldn’t. With the help of an attendant, I somehow managed and for a while he firmly patted me on the back hoping the mucus sticking to my lungs would detach, allowing them to ‘process’ more oxygen. I had viral pneumonia. ‘Will he be all right?’, my partner asked. ‘Inshallah’ was all he told her. It was getting very close to the end.

There was not much point in tears. I said farewell to my daughter Kaushiki, studying linguistics and computer science at the Sorbonne, in Paris. This would be my last letter—a final, excruciating goodbye. ‘I am not very well. I am down with COVID and in the six days I have been in hospital, I have got worse. You can never know about COVID, so I am alerting you. In case I don’t survive, I am sure you will manage quite well,’ I wrote. A few hours later, she wrote, ‘Good to hear from you. Good luck through these hard times. Hopefully, you’ll be all right. Here are some pictures of spring in Paris. Hope they cheer you up.’ The photographs—one, inevitably of the Eiffel Tower, and two more of trees, pink with new flowers—most certainly did, though not more than her message. I replied, three minutes later. ‘Thanks for your message and the lovely photographs. They are beautiful. They were highly appreciated.’ It was already 16 April; I was still critically ill, I was still fighting.

Kaushiki wrote again on 17 April, and her advice—she was only 20—was: ‘Life is worth fighting for. You’ll get through this.’

So I would fight—I would not die. I had asked myself the ‘Do you want to die?’ question. It was not going to be easy the way I was, but I had decided I did not want to, for all the discomfort, for all the pain. ‘Thanks for getting back. Every note or message is a morale booster. I am fighting hard, doing my best. I am hoping that the medicines work. Look after yourself,’ was my reply. ‘I’ll see you in August,’ she wrote. I had difficulty speaking; I would cough horribly, painfully. WhatsApp messages were the only way.

To Mekhala, my partner, I had said farewell. She kept telling me, again and again, to hold on. I would get better. I was getting the best treatment, the best medicines. She was there; she was doing everything she could. I had also appointed her my executor. Here she was, my ‘Head Office’, coordinating with colleagues, arranging for food, medicines, and later, oxygen and plasma. What was this ‘farewell’ about? ‘Nonsense,’ she wrote back. As she would say later, ‘All my mental strength...it was for your survival. I wasn’t going to let you go.’

There were messages, there were calls...I could barely see them, leave alone reply to them. ‘We’re not letting you go,’ wrote my editor-in-chief. ‘Just hold on for a few hours,’ said a senior colleague. ‘Your Remdesivir is coming.’ When it did arrive, it was really necessary.

I knew I was getting close to the end. I wondered what it would be like, what I’d leave behind. ‘Do you really want to die?’ I asked myself, eyes closed, my body shaking with the effort of just breathing. Survival seemed impossibly difficult. It was easier to die than fight the virus, less painful. But I wanted a few more years. Life, as Kaushiki, had said, was ‘worth fighting for’. The mind works in strange ways, clutches at unusual straws, searches for hope in unfamiliar spaces. ‘I am 59,’ I told myself. ‘My mother went at 53, my father, at 72. That adds up to 125. Divided by two, it’s nearly 63, still a distance away! I have four more years. Maybe, I can meet my parents a little later.’ In hospital, alone in a hospital bed, away from a life I have known, to die at 63, as opposed to dying later that day, or the next day, or the day after, seemed like a blessing. Four more years was a good idea, like another life.

The Remdesivir worked, at least for a while, though there were indifferent moments. My oxy-saturation rate went up, even if there

were still sharp dips from time to time, creeping up to the 80s and then, the 90s for a bit. I felt a little better, I could get up and what was unimaginable just a day or two earlier, sit and eat dinner. I had recovered a little, but COVID-19 is an unyielding enemy; a demon that doesn't like to let go or admit defeat. After a couple of days, my oxy-saturation rate, never anywhere near comfortable, began to fall; it would not consistently be 72, but it was not much better.

Back in bed after brushing my teeth (who would ever imagine it can be a life and death effort?), my lungs burning, my knees buckling as I stumbled back, I was confronted by that familiar number: 72. Being unable to do something as basic as brush one's teeth, something we do twice a day without even thinking about it, it is hard to accept that I did not have the strength for it. For the next fortnight, it had to be a quick gargle with medical mouthwash after a meal. My anxious doctor wanted something just as impossible to find: plasma. It had to be from someone who had had COVID-19 before and then, recovered. Who, in the middle of a maelstrom that was Delhi, could get me two shots of plasma?



How did I get to 'boiling point?' For a few days, as my oxy-saturation rate teetered in the mid-70s, I was delirious at times, slipping into a grey blur. All through that time, my doctors were always encouraging; the battle towards recovery is also won in the mind.

As my oxy-saturation rate began to fall, the doctors wanted me back in the blue caverns of the ICU. Lesions were why my lung capacity had declined. I am glad I did not know what lesions were; knowing my lungs were infected and studded with blood clots would not have been good for morale. Just before I was discharged, I saw the X-Rays. About half my lungs were a reassuringly healthy black, and therefore, functioning; the other half was a ghostly, sickly white, and of no help.

Twice a day, I would meet the doctors on their rounds, meeting patients, in their white coats, masked, and also, wearing plastic gloves and a cap. In the Delta era, everyone took every precaution. I looked forward to the meetings; I would get an idea of how I was. It was the only time I would be able to talk, even if it was for a few minutes; it was like being back in a familiar world.

Getting to the bathroom, only several strides away was a challenge; it was the most exhausting thing I had ever done. Every action, every move towards the bathroom and inside had to be done quickly, every second without oxygen was difficult and returning back to the bed, gasping, the lungs frantic, like I had run for miles or climbed a Himalayan peak, I would reach for the mask. It would take a while to catch my breath. Then, and only then, I would ask the nurse to put me back on the drip. One night, very late, I found myself standing outside the bathroom, almost embarrassed and for a moment, just as bewildered, gasping, my arms slightly outstretched and Chotu, one of the ‘oxygen boys’, a short and squat young man, holding on to them. ‘Kya hua, Chotu?’ I asked. He kept looking at me and gradually, guided me to my bed. I had got out of the bathroom and blacked out; there had been a ‘thump’ and he had rushed inside.

I was hanging on, struggling, desperately oxygen dependent. The blood group is only where you begin; the donor—and that is where it got difficult—had to have had COVID-19 in the last year. How much (or how little) was available? In an ideal world, there would be enough in any blood bank. In the wasteland of Delhi in April 2021, you would have to think of someone who knew someone who had access to plasma. Finding a supplier was just the first step. If available (my blood-type was harder to get, I heard), my partner would have to explain why I needed it more than many, many others. It was also about getting it quickly, almost immediately. It was such a long shot...

The only silver lining was that people you had never heard of would emerge out of the shadows and help you get your life back. An organisation, known for its plasma donor-recipient management programme, was one of them. The plasma was available. Just as I was not feeling well again, the blood bank at the Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, handed over the ‘precious cargo’ in an icebox after receiving Irene’s compatibility report. Who do you thank for saving my life? Someone who had had COVID with the kindness to donate blood, knowing that someone else would desperately need it. I felt better soon after. I slept well and the next day awoke with an oxy-saturation rate (still receiving full oxygen, though) of a joyous 96, entirely normal if I were not on oxygen. After a second blood transfusion, the doctors felt secure: this was the turnaround we had

all hoped for. What if the blood transfusions had not worked? What if the benefits had been, say, transient? There was one last hope; I had heard my doctor mentioning it: Actemra. There was a ring to it when he spoke, a kind of ‘Act-em-ara’, like Ex-cali-ber.... It was available, in the fridge at home for a few days, but thankfully, not required.

I didn’t think I would get this far.... There had been better phases—several hours when I felt better or at least, more comfortable—particularly during the five days of Remdesivir, but there is something relentless about this enemy of mankind, something unforgiving. Each time I thought I would get better, the virus would roar back, ripping away the benefits that Remdesivir and the other medicines had brought, and threatening to do its worst.



It was all about oxygen, I lived from cylinder to cylinder, there were nebulizer moments, a fistful of medicines, including steroids, every few hours—those troubling early-morning injections were still essential. I would use the oxygen mask for weeks, all night, and virtually all day, even after a fashion, during meals—I would take a mouthful, and wear it again. Getting up was an ordeal best avoided; I only did when I had to, but just looking at the doctors told me something: I wasn’t going to die. They were in the ‘worst is over’, phase, they imagined I was a ‘manageable patient’. Oxygen, something we take so entirely for granted, was the difference between near normalcy and enormous discomfort (or worse). And it was barely available.

Chotu came over one afternoon. ‘Can you organise oxygen from home?’

‘Of course not! I am in hospital for the oxygen.’

‘We don’t have any. There haven’t been supplies for three days.’

‘How much oxygen do I have in the cylinder?’

‘There’s enough for about 30–40 minutes.’

‘And then?’ I asked quietly. Chotu just looked at me. There was nothing to be said. Three minutes later—the word ‘miracle’ doesn’t even apply—the hospital truck carrying oxygen cylinders arrived. I wrote to the lieutenant governor, a senior bureaucrat, efficient and scrupulously honest. I was not asking anything for myself, but for my hospital. It had not had any oxygen for days. He saw the Whatsapp message; he was frantically busy, of course.

My doctor's refrain was roughly the same. 'When you were on that side of the room (I had shifted to the other side, just a little bit closer—only a few steps, but they mattered—to the washroom) I was worried... I am not worried now. We've saved you once; we won't be able to save you again. Get yourself oxygen, go home.' In the days before discharge, it was not so much hunger or thirst, it was about oxygen. It was always, 'How much oxygen do I have? Is there another cylinder available?'

Once, when getting a replacement cylinder was taking time, they had patched me on to the cylinder the patient in the next bed was using. A convict, I imagined, calculates how much time he has before release. It was the same with oxygen. I was not on 'full' oxygen anymore; the doctors were suggesting I use less and less. One day, whenever it is, I would have to get off oxygen. They would ask, 'Why do you keep checking your oxygen saturation levels? Let it be. You have a thermometer at home. Do you check your temperature all the time?' I would hear the noisy clatter of iron on concrete, of ward boys dragging oxygen cylinders up and down the corridor. How many of them were empty, I would wonder. Most of them were, I was told. There were good nights; there were bad nights. You are suddenly awake, you have run out of oxygen, there is no one around, you are panicky, shouting. It takes a while to get a cylinder from the store; your lungs are protesting; you are scrambling for the mask when it is being hooked up. Then, there were nights of plenty: how reassuring was it to have a cylinder at the foot of your bed, like the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey* before you fell asleep, knowing you will be hooked up when you needed to be.



For all the encouragement by my doctors, a COVID-19 ward is not a beach in Goa; and it is not only about the discomfort that deadened lungs bring—it is about pain. Brave soul I am not; pain's pain. and the early morning shot was a 'grit your teeth and pray it gets done really quickly' moment. 'How much longer?' I would usually ask the nurse, the needle still in my arm. She would say she was only halfway there. Changing the cannula, when they ripped off the bandages—I used three during my stay—was just as distressing.

You could live through those times, but most painful were the two occasions the doctors wanted arterial blood to check my oxygen 'tensions'. Warning me it would 'hurt', the doctor himself did the honours the first time. 'Do you absolutely have to do it?' I had asked. 'It's necessary,' he replied. So polite, almost apologetic he was. The entire hospital, maybe even the neighbourhood, heard my screams of pain. Arteries are not just below the skin, like veins; the needle ventures deeper inside, locates the blood vessel and then, with an effort, punctures it. There is a strangeness about it, the blood test: it is good for you, but it is insane. Just before my 30 April discharge, a senior nurse confided in me. 'I've been asked for another sample of arterial blood. But you're getting better and you'll be out soon. So, I am not going to do it.'



You have made it, you are going home, and you want to walk out, one happy stride after another, show your survivor face to the world. The nurses, wisely, want a wheelchair, insist on it, an oxygen bottle in attendance. There is a sense of deliverance, not just about going home, but returning to a familiar world. The streets tell the story of the near-invisible virus' challenge to human civilisation: death has washed over Delhi; it was not the living organism I had left behind to be admitted for the ICU. Just the odd car on the roads, a stray bicycle maybe, a couple of pedestrians. Worldwide, many million people would die, many more would suffer. Then, we would hear about the profiteers of Delhi, the people who hoarded oxygen concentrators. How much money did they make? How many people would have lived if they had got oxygen supplies?

Skeletal—I had lost 20 kg in three weeks—and mask-free for a moment when I got home, my oxy-saturation level, I found, was a vastly improved but still dodgy 79. I had found R2D2, my name for the concentrator. Acquiring one was as difficult as trying to stay alive and just as important. Without one, I would be in hospital, vulnerable, prey to all kinds of ailments, with my doctor's grim warning about not being able to save me again.

Still, you are at home...it is your bed, those are your pillows, your family and friends are around you, but you have been reading

and you are afraid. After all this, you learned about black fungus, or something equally ghastly, how much destruction it is capable of. What is worse: Blinded by black fungus and barely alive or plain dead, courtesy COVID-19? Sometimes, I would find myself thinking: 'Why had I made it when so many others had not?' Doctor friends had the answer: it's called Survivor's Guilt.

'What would you want to do first when you get home?' I had asked myself, when I knew I would. 'Have a shower!' was the answer. It is still difficult; it is like learning to live your life all over again. You are on a plastic chair, right in front of your bucket. Everything is close by—the soap, the towel, and you are out of breath, always out of breath. Then, getting up and walking those few steps to the bed, avoiding the concentrator wires and after that, the 'where is the mask moment' ordeal all over again. On a house call days after the discharge, my doctor snatched the mask away. 'Learn to breathe on your own. Aim for ten minutes every hour. Make it 15 minutes tomorrow. You have to try. You have to do it. When you're stronger, do deep breathing.' It was so impossible, at first. But slowly, you had to force yourself to live without R2D2's genius, you began to manage. When he dropped in a second time, a week later, I opened the door. 'I am so happy,' he said, 'so pleasantly surprised.'

There were triumphs, no other word suffices: the first night without oxygen; going to bed not wearing a mask all night and waking up the next morning, not feeling too uncomfortable. Then, a month after discharge, a one-kilometre walk, a gentle stroll, just looking at the trees (I had not seen them for weeks), a celebration of life. Had going to the loo been so impossible once? There was a last frontier: climbing stairs, walking up to my third-floor flat. I managed on 30 June; it was a two-month-after-discharge gift to myself. I needed to catch my breath, rest several times, but I got there. Weeks later, it got easier, not easy enough to ask myself what the fuss was all about.

Last summer, a year after Delta, a year after I recovered, I called my doctors, just to thank them for what they did. They would tell me something they had not told me earlier. There were many patients, some 10 years younger, some 20. None of them, they said 'made it'.



BOOK REVIEW

WHERE THE MADNESS LIES

Citizen Accounts of Identity and Nationalism

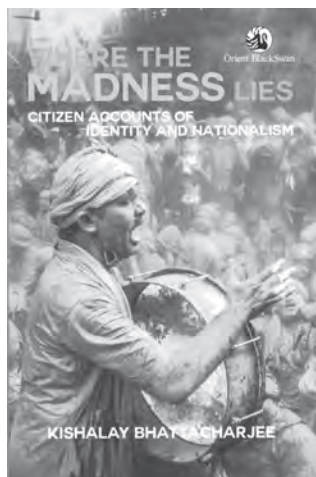
ENAKSHI
GANGULY

**WHERE THE MADNESS LIES: CITIZEN ACCOUNTS
OF IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM**

Author: Kishalay Bhattacharjee

Publisher: Orient BlackSwan, 2023

Details: pp. 304; Price: 950.00



When the CAA–NRC (Citizenship Amendment Act–National Register of Citizens) protests were peaking, my mother called in panic. She could not find her passport, which, according to her, was the only ‘valid legal document’ that mentioned that she was married to my bureaucrat father and thereby established her citizenship as an Indian. Little did she know that the passport would not do that for her. Kishalay Bhattacharjee asks, ‘Why is it that in 2020, the Indian State, which insisted on creating a citizenship register, did not consider a document like the passport (that verifies nationality) adequate?’ (p. 153). Are nationality and citizenship not connected? And how does that connect to the identity of the individual? Reading this book gives me a constant sense of *déjà vu*—so much of what he writes, particularly towards the beginning, resonates with my family and me. ‘In the volatile growing up years, I developed an acute need to avoid confrontation, because “minority” should stay quiet’ (p. 59), took me back to the times we just kept quiet. Like him, ‘It has taken me a long time to recognise the differences between minority

and majority.’ While Bhattacharjee says, ‘I was part of a minority community in Shillong, but part of the majority in other parts of the country’ (p. 59), I have often wondered if that is quite true, because even if one may be a religious majority in other places, one can be a linguistic and ethnic minority! Here, of course, we were both.

When Bhattacharjee began writing this book, the NRC was underway in Assam. My mother was not the only one who was panicking. My aunts and uncles, all of them over the age of 70, were rushing to the nearest computer centre to upload their details and establish their citizenship. Ma wanted to do the same and hence her sudden state of agitation.

They had reason to be worried. In the draft list of 2018, 400,000 people were left out of the NRC list, a majority of them Bengalis. In the final list declared on 31 August 2019, 190,000 had been left out. Even though Bhattacharjee was declared a bona fide citizen, his father was excluded in the initial list, but later included. Ten-year-old Riya Das in Bongaigaon district, 10-year-old Siddhartha Saha of Barpetta Road and nine-year-old Sofia Khatun were not so lucky—they were deemed foreigners. Sofia’s parents were declared citizens (p. 19). Clearly, there was no logic as to who was deemed fit to be included in the NRC and who was to be left out.

My mother and her family, like the author’s family, are from Sylhet about which he writes: ‘So while [the] Sylhet Referendum (6 July 1947) remains a footnote in partition studies, it is critical to the understanding of identity’ (p. 51). My father’s family is from Dhaka. His family moved to north Bengal while he himself began life in the AG Office, like many Bengalis of his time, retiring as the finance commissioner of Tripura, another state that saw the movement of population from East Pakistan in waves.

Bhattacharjee reminds us that while Partition is remembered as the breaking up of Punjab and Bengal, very few remember that the line went through Assam and Tripura as well. And unlike Punjab, the partition in the East started in 1947 and went on till 1971, the year Bangladesh was formed. This long-drawn process meant that people had to change their citizenship multiple times. The impact of this is many are still not sure of their citizenship and identity—refugee, migrant or outsider. How is this all connected to their nationality? And how has all this affected the identity of generations over the years?

Our family and most of my mother's extended family left their homes in Shillong and Guwahati and moved to other cities after the 1970s–1990s anti-Bengali agitation in Assam and Meghalaya.

I have often wondered where we belong. What is my identity? I was born in Shillong, and after moving around the country with my father, completed my university education in Shillong at the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) in 1984 in the years that saw the anti-Bengali, anti-tribal movement gathering speed in both Assam and Meghalaya.

Even as we had moved cities with our father as he got transferred, whenever we were asked to fill the column, 'Home Town', our parents taught us to fill in Shillong. Sadly, while we thought of Shillong as home, the others who lived there did not think so. We were outsiders, the *dkhars* who needed to be driven out—and leave we did. Like the author I can say, 'I belonged to a Shillong that would not let me live there. I had legitimate claim to call it my home, but the idea of "homeland" had by then assumed multiple meanings' (p. 61). Bhattacharjee refers to his identity as that of an Outsider/Insider (p. 58). Like him, although an unwelcome 'outsider' when in Shillong, it still forms the locus of my identity when I am outside it. And this is true of many others like us.

As we were always considered outsiders, we had to leave. My family—both immediate and extended—sold their homes and moved. As described by Bhattacharjee, my parents, who had invested all their savings in building a house for their retirement, sold it at a throwaway price and moved into a tiny apartment in Kolkata. But in West Bengal, too, people like us from the East are Bangals—'outsiders'. The difference in accent, the use of dialect and even the subtle differences in cooking are pointed out, thus separating identities.

The book describes how identity plays out both inside and outside an individual. Who decides the identity of a person—that of 'outsider'? Often, how we are viewed is not the same as our view of ourselves—I see myself as belonging, but others do not. How is my identity related to my citizenship and nationality?

It is this confusion and conflation of identity and citizenship that the book addresses through its four chapters. In Bhattacharjee's own words, 'The book straddles the notion of citizenship, the idea of nationality, and the sense of identity through oral literature,

case studies, memoirs, genealogy, reportage and archival accounts, both personal and collective' (p. 206).

Bhattacharjee views the Indian identity as emerging from various identities—the migrant Indian, the stateless Indian, the anti-Indian, the tribal Indian and the Dalit Indian. While there are many overlapping features, the author studies them as they have evolved in post-Independence India, as they play out in the everyday lives of people.

The Prologue sets the context to the book by identifying the problems of identity, citizenship and nationality with reference to literature, history and reportage. Chapter 1 examines the questions that arise regarding identity, and draws upon the author's own family history and genealogy, along with other histories of migration and displacement.

Bhattacharjee notes that the notion of citizenship derives from the word city—a space that provides individuals security and dignity. By 2030, 590 million Indians will be living in cities. He says: 'A city is not made of history or monuments of bricks and mortar—it is human. In order to understand the mind of a "citizen", I travelled across different cities' (p. 27). Beginning with the idea of citizenship in the city of Harappa, the author takes us through 'citizenship' in four other cities in Chapter 2. He draws upon his conversations with its 'citizens' in Jalandhar, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Hampi and Banaras to understand how they perceive their rights and duties in today's India. Those interviewed in each city are from marginal communities, or outsiders in some sense, and he finds that the identities of people who have gone through extensive periods of exclusion are 'borne from having been subjected to reactions of disgust and exclusion' (p. 27).

Chapter 3, 'Where the Madness Actually Lies', raises questions on the notion of a nation through heterogeneous experiences that forge different identities, where nationality and citizenship confront each other. He includes case studies of Kayas (Marwaris), who started to spread out during the Mughal era and consolidated themselves in Bihar, Bengal and Assam during the British economic expansion; Manipuri Gorkhas, who arrived in Manipur in 1824 during Maharaja Gambhir Singh's reign; the Coolies who were Chotanagpur tribals taken to work on the plantations of Assam by the British; the Indian Chinese community who were taken to the

Deoli camp in 1962, and who became outsiders overnight; and finally the Chakmas, who have been forced to migrate as refugees to India and live in Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

All these communities face different levels of ‘othering’ where they live. About the Kayas or Marwaris, the author says: ‘They may hate them, but they cannot ignore them. The Marwari stranglehold over affairs of the state makes them serious stakeholders in Assamese society, but they remain “outsiders”’ (p. 145–46). The Gorkhas, ‘once invited to settle in Manipur by the king, are now no longer wanted in their place of birth and belonging’ (p. 148); the ‘Adivasi coolie could never become an Assamese’ (p. 149); and the ‘Indian Chinese continue to live, not as Indians, but somewhere in between’ (p. 151). In Mizoram and Tripura, the Chakmas, categorised as Scheduled Tribes with Indian citizenship, face discrimination. In Arunachal, they are identified as non-natives and face continuous violence, forcing the Supreme Court of India in 2015 to order the state to ensure that they enjoy citizenship rights. Despite court orders, the Chakmas remain outsiders in the state.

National and anti-national are terms that are being used loosely in the country today. Several people continue to languish in jails, being labelled anti-national. How does it relate to nationality and identity, or even citizenship? Through the stories of individuals and communities, Bhattacharjee delves into the notions of nationalism and the nationalist in Chapter 4. He also takes the reader through the various ‘separatist movements’ in the country—Nagaland, Kashmir and Manipur—and ends with the stories of citizens of India walking home during COVID–19.

According to Bhattacharjee, the ‘new found nationalism in the country was almost entirely a product of European nationalism’ (p. 22), and that its adherents turned their gaze towards linguistic and cultural revivalism. He asks: ‘Can citizenship and nationality be interchanged?’ (p. 153). Does it in anyway relate to what people perceive as nationalism or being nationalist? While citizenship refers to the citizen’s relation with the state, the right to a nationality is a basic inalienable human right under international law. But nationality is a concept that arose out of the creation of the modern-day nation-state—it had nothing to do with international law till two centuries ago. In the context of India, he says, ‘Citizenship and nationality in India have gained agency through their

politicisation—when untenable anti-minority laws collide with the majority’s resentment against “minority appeasement” (p. 154).

Through the examination of notions of identity, citizenship and nationality, the author arrives at a deeply disturbing conclusion. He says, ‘What comes through from these heterogeneous experiences is the banality of everydayness, where voices speak up and often their experiences collide and where the “nation is no longer in our imagination”. It is indeed the heart of darkness!’ (p. 206).

What remains with the reader is how each one of us carries multiple identities within us. Often the clash of identities is because of the manner in which we perceive our identity is different from how others perceive us. Our identity, despite all the documentation we may have, has little to do with what is defined legally as our citizenship or how we perceive our nationality. And what is the role of the nation state in all of this—this is where the madness lies!



BOOK REVIEW

BECOMING BABASAHEB

The Life and Times of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar

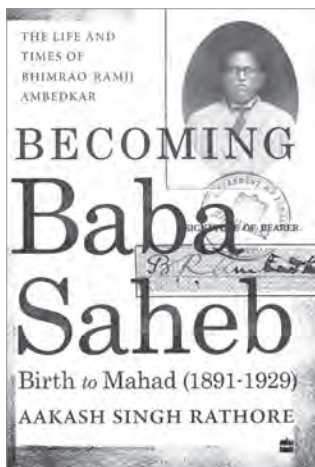
SURINDER S.
JODHKA

**BECOMING BABASAHEB: THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR. VOLUME 1:
BIRTH TO MAHAD (1891–1929)**

Author: Aakash Singh Rathore

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2023

Details: pp. xxiii+273; Price: 699.00



Biographies are typically written as celebratory accounts of the lives and achievements of the individuals in question. While they need not necessarily present a reverential account—some could even be seriously critical of the ideas and actions of the individual—it would perhaps be difficult for an author to be completely dispassionate and uninvolved with the individual whose life's trajectory they choose to write about. To put it more succinctly, great biographies are not merely life stories, but also tell us about the politics and value orientation of the authors who write them. *Becoming Ambedkar* is one such example.

The story of Ambedkar's life is fairly well known to those who are likely to be attracted to the book being reviewed. There are more than a dozen biographies, published in different languages. Some of these have been written by authors who personally knew him, including a recent volume by his second wife, Savita. Ambedkar has himself written some very powerful, though brief, accounts of his life in his well-known collection of essays, *Waiting for Visa*.

Besides this, his life has also been the source for several films and documentaries.

More importantly, perhaps, Ambedkar is not merely a historical figure. He is a living legend, a deified persona, revered and worshipped by large sections of Dalits and 'backwards' across the subcontinent and beyond. Stories of his life experience are narrated by his 'followers' every day as a source of motivation, dignity and mobilisation. He has come to represent the politics of justice, democracy, and the struggle against caste-based discrimination.

Aakash Singh Rathore is acutely aware of these facts. It is perhaps for this reason that he spends a good deal of time in the 'Preface' providing a justification for writing the book and the superiority of his biography of Ambedkar over earlier attempts. First and foremost, he claims to have worked on the book for nearly a decade to get a 'feel' of Ambedkar's life experiences by 'spending time at every known address where he may have experienced a moment of personal significance' (p. xii), to understand how Ambedkar became Ambedkar. Unlike other biographies, which, the author claims, provide a lacklustre account of Ambedkar's life or a mere summary of his intellectual and political achievements, Rathore's version approaches Ambedkar as a person 'complex, charismatic, kind, conflicted'.

Besides, Rathore also finds most existing biographies marred by factual inaccuracies. He is particularly critical of the first and most popular of Ambedkar's biographies, authored by Dhananjay Keer. He argues that since most later biographers have used Keer's book as reference, they carry the same set of inaccuracies. Keer's biography is incorrect not only factually, but also with regard to some of the substance. Perhaps its most misleading narrative is the comparison drawn between Ambedkar and Hindutva ideologue V. R. Savarkar, as if they were both on the same page. Although they were contemporaries, and from the same region, they were certainly not comrades in arms. Rathore stresses that Keer completely ignores Ambedkar's disagreements with, and criticism of, Savarkar.

As the title suggests, the core focus is on Ambedkar becoming a political leader, an emancipator of the Dalits. As Rathore shows in the early chapters of the book, Ambedkar was not temperamentally suited to such a role. He appears to be more of a committed student and scholar, someone obsessed with studying, reading and collecting

books, and earning degrees. As is well known, he studied in some of the best institutions of the world and earned two doctoral degrees: one, Doctor of Science (DSc) from the London School of Economics; and, two, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from Columbia University, New York, both degrees in the discipline of economics. Besides, while living in London he also enrolled for a degree in law and became a qualified lawyer.

Earning these academic degrees was obviously not easy. Not only did it require an academic bent of mind, focus and hard work, it also meant some expense. Ambedkar was not born into a poor family. His father was himself well-educated and had a secure job with the British. Although it ensured a kind of middle-class upbringing, Ambedkar could not escape the everyday violence and humiliation of caste, experiences of which Ambedkar has himself written about. More important, his family had no ability to fund his education in the United States and England. While he managed to find sponsors to help him fulfil his dream of educating himself up to the highest level, it had not been easy, both on him and his family. It had meant managing on a limited budget, which often also meant not being able to afford proper meals. He would have also been pained by the hardships that his wife had to bear as a result of his absence. Of the five children born to the couple, only one survived to adulthood.

On the positive side, Ambedkar did very well academically. Despite the difficulties, he managed to earn the degrees to which he had aspired. His teachers thought very highly of his calibre as a scholar. The knowledge and the degrees acquired gave him a tremendous amount of confidence to speak up for justice and the rights of the marginalised. These were also to be his most important assets in the later years when he helped independent India draft her Constitution as Chairman of the Drafting Committee. His educational qualifications and persona were to become a valuable resource for future generations of upwardly mobile Dalits.

However, becoming Babasaheb Ambedkar was not what he had set out to do when he was planning to study abroad. Even on his return, he did not appear particularly enthusiastic about joining public life. As he became involved with the world around him, he realised the need for serious engagement, both social and political, with the question of caste. Being a serious intellectual and a trained

social scientist, he not only emerged as the most articulate voice of the 'untouchables', but also wrote extensively on caste and theorised about the Hindu social order.

The castes ... are arranged in hierarchical order.... like a tower, each floor of which is allotted to one caste.... (T)his tower has no staircase and therefore there is no way of climbing up or down from one floor to another.... No matter how meritorious a person from a lower floor might be, there is no avenue for him to climb up to the upper floor. Likewise, there is no means by which a person entirely devoid of merit can be relegated to a floor beneath the one to which he has been assigned (61).

These words are not merely a description of what prevailed during the early decades of the 20th century. They are also profoundly theoretical insights to the underlying structures of hierarchy, which are built upon the ideas of discrimination and exclusion. On the face of it, a lot has changed in India and its order of caste over the past century. However, 'the tower without a staircase' has not yet been demolished. On the contrary, it appears to have become a model for the architectural design of the emerging neo-liberal city. Here lies the value of Ambedkar and the pressing need to engage with him.

Rathore's book is indeed a meaningful addition to the growing popular and academic literature on the subject. Written with passion on a subject that he feels deeply about, and in accessible language, the book will find, and help, its many takers to engage with one of the most critical thinkers of our times.



BOOK REVIEW

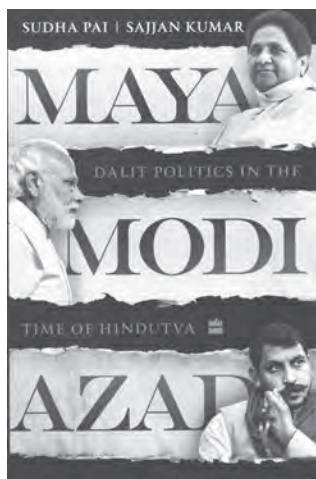
MAYA, MODI, AZAD

Dalit Politics in the Time of Hindutva

VARGHESE K.
GEORGE

**MAYA, MODI, AZAD: DALIT POLITICS
IN THE TIME OF HINDUTVA**

Authors: Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar
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Dalit autonomy is never taken kindly to by Indian nationalists. Hindu unity is considered an essential ingredient of nationalism, and discourses which challenge that are easily labelled unpatriotic in the nationalist framework. Gandhian nationalism sought the unity of Hindus, and Hindu–Muslim unity; Hindutva seeks Hindu unity by othering the Muslims.

The Dalit attempt to carve out an autonomous social and political space that is distinct from the dominant nationalism has had at least two remarkable eras. The first was either led or influenced by B. R. Ambedkar in the decades around Independence. The thoughts and movements spurred by Ambedkar were soon submerged by the euphoria of the Congress master narrative on the birth of the new nation. By the 1980s, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) emerged on the scene and would later become the most successful experiment yet in the spectrum of Dalit politics in India. The BSP is currently in decline, challenged by restive Dalits who no longer find it adequate, and Hindutva expansionism that lures Dalits with a special focus. This volume is an account of that

process which is still underway in Uttar Pradesh (UP). It is in fact a running commentary of a churn, and it helps us make sense of several historical and current strands of events and thoughts as one compact.

The extent of accommodation that the Congress system accorded to Dalits was sufficient to avoid a rebellion for long after the challenge raised by Ambedkar was managed. The Hinduisation of Dalits was progressing alongside the growth of a modern national consciousness, and leading to it, through the national movement. Dalit assertion and weakening of the Congress happen together, the book notes, but steers clear of suggesting what is cause and what is effect, or if such a query is relevant at all. If the rise of the BSP corresponded with the decline of the Congress, its decline corresponds with the rise of Hindutva—a more aggressive and exclusive iteration of Indian nationalism. The core of this book deals with that process of the BSP's rise and decline in the context of the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh. The unravelling of the BSP also corresponds to the emergence of newer Dalit platforms, the contours of which are still unformed.

This triangular process is suggested in the title, referencing Mayawati, Narendra Modi and Chandra Shekhar Azad who is known for his spontaneous street reactions to caste violence against Dalits. Both Mayawati and Azad draw their strength primarily from one particular Dalit caste which has been historically ahead of others in democratic awareness. The BSP is challenged by new forces of subcaste and subregional identities, ideologically and organisationally by new Dalit formations and the new Hindutva under Modi. In a manner, the BSP is a victim of its own success—many actors in the Dalit spectrum outgrew the BSP canopy.

The era of BSP decline, the authors note, began in 2012, but was preceded by its peak in 2007 of winning an absolute majority in UP, by shifting from Bahujan politics that focused on Dalits to *sarvajan* politics that reached out to all, but more specifically to the Brahmins of UP. The defeat in 2012, followed by the ones in 2017, and then in 2022, set the BSP on a steep downslide that continues. The polarisation of UP politics between the Samajwadi Party (SP) and BJP has limited the appeal and utility of the BSP. The book locates and narrates this from three parallel perspectives—the morass that the BSP descends into, new leaders and outfits within

the Dalit spectrum, and the new promise of Hindu solidarity, which is both material and intangible, under Modi.

Unlike Dalit movements in other parts of the country such as Maharashtra, Kerala or Tamil Nadu where a social awakening preceded political power for the community, the BSP's strategy was to single-mindedly focus on capturing political power and then turn that into an instrument of consciousness. Although its rise to power was dramatic and swift, the limits of this approach would rapidly become apparent as the BSP soon turned into a single caste, single leader party—a downfall from the promise of Dalit solidarity and creation of leadership. The personal culpability of Mayawati in this downturn of the party is examined in the book.

The Hinduisation of Dalits has had a long history and it was not strictly about Hindutva. The third chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Balasahab Deoras placed *samajik samrastra*, or social harmony, at the centre of Sangh outlook, which in practice meant a proactive approach in mobilising non-savarnas for Hindutva causes. The debate is framed on the defining question of 'who is a Hindu' that sits very closely with another adjacent question: 'Who is an Indian?' Under the Congress, state policy for the uplift of Dalits made reservation conditional upon their Hinduness. Dalits who convert to Christianity and Islam would lose their eligibility for reservation. These efforts by state policy and a range of social reform movements nudged Dalits to be more Hindu, and Hindutva campaigns that equate the Hindu identity with an Indian identity entered into this welcoming ambience. Whether Dalit warmth towards Hindutva is tactical or strategic is, as the authors suggest, immaterial.

This analysis is from the vantage points of three political formations—the BSP, the BJP and the Bhim Army, or its leaders. How do parties mobilise and interact with Dalit identity? That these parties use various coalition building strategies is one way of seeing the process; an alternative way of approaching the same process is to see how other castes respond to Dalit aspirations, and use various political parties as platforms for reproducing the social order in new contexts. The book does detail the shift of UP Brahmins to the BSP, and away from it to the SP, but not so much about what they did before and after. In the last three decades of the unravelling and remaking of UP politics, including in the regimes

of the SP and BSP in UP, Brahmins remain a powerful constituency, a point that the narrative accounts for, but the vantage point of Dalits is restrictive in this context. Therein lies a fundamental challenge in Dalit Studies—a framing bias that tends to overlook upper-caste motivation. In UP, the Brahmins shifted from Congress nationalism to Hindutva nationalism, and then tactically shifted to two subaltern platforms, the SP and the BSP, before returning to ride the Hindutva storm from 2014. By shifting political platforms, they managed to preserve their social status through turmoil that appears universally unsettling. The perspective of the observer might be the only distinguisher of autonomy from separatism. The authors prefer the word separatism, in the process endorsing the nationalist framework.



BOOK REVIEW

MAULANA AZAD

A Life

ARVINDAR
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The life of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad is no doubt a mesmerising story and who better to tell it than S. Irfan Habib, renowned academic and prolific scholar of volumes dealing with theology and history that are important contributions to the libraries of both subjects.

Azad was a multifarious personality—and while making this comment it must be borne in mind that English is a language of understatement. He was a scholar of Islam, an otherwise learned man, a leading Congressman and the first education minister of Independent India till his death in 1958. Born Mohiuddin Ahmad on 11 November 1888, he had no formal education and was taught at home, his father Maulana Khairuddin being his first teacher. He was so proficient in Persian that he began work on a dictionary in the language when he was merely 10 years old.

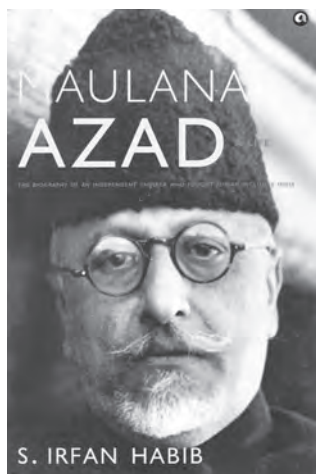
His father lived in Kolkata where Azad spent most of his formative years. Azad's meeting with Gandhi in 1920 had a deep impact on both men, and from then onward he became totally

MAULANA AZAD: A LIFE

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immersed in the Congress Party and the freedom movement. His second tenure as Congress president began in 1940 when he defeated communist ideologue M. N. Roy by a huge majority for the post.

A significant matter, covered substantially in this biography, is the manner in which the Maulana saw the pitfalls of the partition of the country and opposed the idea to the best of his ability. Addressing Muslims who had decided to leave for Pakistan from the United Provinces in 1947, he said,

You are leaving your motherland. Do you know what the consequences will be?....Will your position in Pakistan be anything more than uninvited guests? The Hindu can be your religious opponent but not your regional and national opponent. You can deal with the situation. But in Pakistan, at any time you will have to face regional and national opposition. Before this opposition, you will be helpless! (p. 9).

Prophetic words indeed as the population that migrated from India to Pakistan are still called 'Muhajirs' (migrants) even after 75 years in that country, whereas India has assimilated without discrimination all those who came from that side of the border.

Of Azad's writings, *Tarjuman al-Quran* is indeed a cerebral work which Habib describes as his magnum opus. The project, many years in the writing, was finally completed while he interned in District Jail, Meerut, on 20 July 1930. Even though the manuscript had been destroyed several times by British Police during his various incarcerations, he tenaciously rewrote every single page. His commentary on the Quran made it clear that truth and humanity, or the feeling for it, is ingrained in all faiths.

Given his seniority in the Congress Party, it was obvious that he would be a senior minister in the first cabinet of Free India, and he was designated education minister in the cabinet of Jawaharlal Nehru. Habib writes,

Maulana Azad was not a run of the mill politician—he was a scholar who with him brought decades of experience as a writer and thinker on different aspects of Indian public life. Nehru visualized him as a 'bridge' between the cultures of the East and the West, as the man

who magnificently spanned in his person the gulf between the past and the future. Without any English education, without speaking and writing in English, he was easily and effortlessly at home with Western culture as in Indian or Eastern or Islamic culture. Nothing that was good was stranger to him (p. 212).

In 11 years as education minister, Azad laid the firm foundations of education in all its spheres in the country. He strove to emphasise the cultural aspect in the education policy so that Indian children could be raised to be broadminded in their outlook. He played a pivotal role in setting up various institutions which have since proved to be of vital importance for the newly independent nation. Among them were the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in various parts of the country, providing a large network of laboratories for the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Sahitya Akademi and the Sangeet Natak Akademi, to mention a few. An important act by Azad was making the National Anthem compulsory at all school morning assemblies so that every child would learn to sing it solo or in chorus. Azad was a disciplinarian as well. When art historian Kapila Vatsyayan wrote 'Academy' in the context of Sahitya Akademi, Azad insisted that she write the word 'Akademi' a hundred times and send it to him!

What will India remember Azad for? This is an underlying question which runs throughout the book. According to Habib there is much the country owes him. Apart from being a stalwart of the independence movement, he was a scholar of Islam who interpreted it with a broad perspective in tune with the world view of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's progressive version of the religion to which he had been attracted as a young man. Last but not least is his contribution to education in the first decade of the newly independent nation when he steered a clear-cut education policy and established institutions of lasting value.

Habib has done yeoman service by bringing out this work as it is timely as well as informative. M. O. Mathai, Nehru's private secretary, has written in his controversial book *Reminiscences of the Nehru Age* (Vikas Publishing House, 1978) of Azad that 'among colleagues he (the Maulana) was a rare one who was not afraid of Nehru. He spoke out his mind without fear or any inhibition' (p. 150).

However, some aspects of his personal habits would have added more value to the book as no matter how great the personality some warts ought to appear in a biographical narrative.

Despite minor shortcoming, Irfan Habib has authored a work of immense literary value by writing on the life of a great son of India. One hopes that younger generations will benefit from this volume.



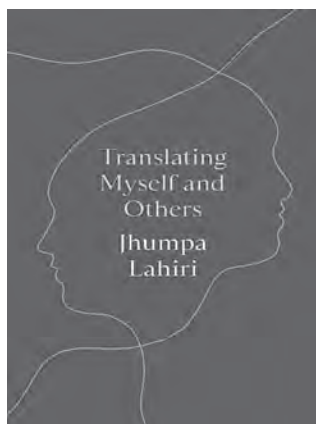
BOOK REVIEW

TRANSLATING MYSELF AND OTHERS

PROMODINI
VARMA

TRANSLATING MYSELF AND OTHERS

Author: Jhumpa Lahiri
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From being in the shadows as the poor cousin of creative or original writing, translation has moved centre stage. Not only has translation become the ‘fundamental and dominant metaphor of our times’,¹ but we are now living in the age of translation where every act, not only of reading and thinking, but of being, is an act of translation. Translation, as Andre Lefevere declared, is the act of rewriting an original text (1992), and since we now acknowledge the whole world as text, every attempt at engaging with it is an act of translation; ergo, translation rules the world. And, in this context, academia has been hit hardest. Translation has infected, and been infected by, colonialism, feminism, multiculturalism, cultural studies, comparative studies, et al. While Harish Trivedi (2005) deplors the holdall use of this term, complaining that in this process ‘translation itself’ has been ‘untranslated or detranslated’, it is difficult to escape its spreading tentacles and overpowering influence.

Today, the market is bursting at the seams with books on translation and in translation, by academics, writers, pure

practitioners of the craft, amateurs and celebrities. Add to this Jhumpa Lahiri's *Translating Myself and Others*, her most recent. Lahiri had been taken to task by Trivedi, in the very same essay quoted earlier, for not only daring to talk about translation in this very wide sense and without having actually 'translated a word' from one language to another, but also for undertaking 'cultural translation', another formulation that Trivedi deplores. Cultural translation, as formulated by Homi Bhabha, Tejaswini Niranjana, Hanif Kureshi and Lahiri, Trivedi argues, boils down to 'translations' arising out of 'the process and condition of human migrancy'. As Madhu Kaza puts it, 'the immigrant experience is an act of translation: we translate ourselves back and forth in incessant loops' (2017). Cultural translation is non-textual and non-linguistic, which is not translation in any recognisable sense of the term, says Trivedi. But now that Lahiri has translated her way into a third culture by translating not only from Latin and Italian into English, but by also translating herself from Italian into English, perhaps Trivedi will disapprove of her less. However, considering the 'semantic explosion' of the term translation, and its fallout, which is now widely accepted, Trivedi, I think, is fighting a losing battle in trying to limit the scope of translation—if it has not been lost already.

Considering that she is an established writer in English, one naturally wonders why Lahiri ventured into the world of translation in a third language, Italian (English and Bengali being the first two), with which, as she says, she had no connection, either personal, familial or professional. Taking head on the question 'Why Italian?' that is constantly thrown at her, in the opening piece of this volume she answers it by saying that she did so in order 'to grow a new variety of myself'; 'to grow another pair of eyes and to experiment with weakness' (p. 18). And that, I think, is Lahiri's strength—to be able to acknowledge her limitations, imperfections and failures and in doing so to not only be able to live with them, but almost to celebrate them.

Although she started to translate late in life, she admits that translation has played a central role in her thought processes, and that she has been thinking of it 'all her conscious life' (p. 2). Based on her experience of translating a number of Italian writers into English, including short stories and three novels by Domenico Starnova and then translating her own novel, *Dove mi trove*, written

originally in Italian, into English, Lahiri has put together this meditation, not only on literary translation, self-translation, famous translators and the nature of language, but a number of such allied concepts as originality, authorship and authenticity. The book also charts her deeply personal journey from writer to translator, and back.

The central concern of the book, however, remains translation, or the act of intensive reading and rereading (for, as she says, no act of reading is as intensive as the act of reading for translation), of interpretation and of choosing between words and phrases 'at times wisely, at times reluctantly, always with lingering misgivings' (p. 69). Documenting in detail her own practice, both as practitioner and teacher of translation, she declares: 'I translate therefore I am' (p. 2).

Crucial to her project of translation is Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 'governed by ambiguity, instability, and acts of becoming' (p. 148), which for her is a 'trenchant metaphor for the process of converting literary texts from one language to another' (ibid.); and within it the narrative poem of Echo and Narcissus illustrates for her 'what translation does, means, or is' (p. 7). In the essay 'In Praise of Echo', she says that the myth speaks to her 'personally, acutely, about what it means to shift from writer to translator and back again' (p. 46), and adds that Ovid's famous narrative poem can be read 'metaphorically as an example of translation, given that creatures are constantly changing states of being' (p. 46). She goes on to elaborate, in a highly nuanced reading of the tale, how Echo, cursed with being able to only repeat partially what others have said, is just like a translator who finds it impossible to convey fully in another language that which makes the original beautiful and unique. Like Echo, the translator must fall in love with the text before she can approach it; like Echo she is content to follow and be second, not first, and just as Echo pursues Narcissus, the translator must pursue the text by countless readings and re-readings. Narcissus, on the other hand, in refusing to embrace and accept Echo is reduced, undermined, tricked into falling in love with himself, a position which is self-limiting, just as an untranslated text is limited in its reach. Lahiri concludes her reading of the myth by observing that 'translation—which simultaneously repeats, converts, reflects, and restores—is central to the production of literature, not an accessory to it' (p. 58).

Later in the essay, Lahiri also recounts how she was berated for writing introductions to her translations because translators are supposed to remain out of sight, erased, unknown. By introducing her own translations, she thrust herself on to the reader's consciousness, an unforgivable sin on the part of a translator. However, no matter how much one may want to, one cannot take the translator out of the translation for her imprint remains, not only through her choice of words and phrases, but also through the lens that she uses to interpret the text; and because each translator belongs to her own age and milieu, each translation carries the marks of its times within itself. Which is why no translation is ever the definitive translation and every generation needs to translate iconic texts anew. Although Lahiri swears by the 'true' translation—the translation that is so smooth that it never lets you feel that it is a translation—there is also a school which believes that it is also good to 'foreignize' (Chandler, 2022) one's translation so that one is aware that what one is reading comes from another language and another culture, and also so that the translation does not hegemonise it, and attempt to wipe out the culture from which the original arises.

Which brings me to the politics of translation. That translations are governed not only by social and cultural concerns, but also by ideological and political considerations has been established beyond doubt by Lefevere. That there is a hierarchy amongst languages, and that power relations operate in the field of translation, is also undeniable. Who translates, from which language to which, and why, are all fraught decisions. And even though the politics and the gendering of translation have now come to the fore, and much has been written about it, the economics of translation still remains obscure. 'The price of translation is tied to the field's feminization. Compared to the historically masculinized project of authorship, translation has long been seen as woman's work. No wonder it's undervalued,' says Mariam Rahmani (2021). For most of us translation remains a labour of love, unacknowledged and underpaid if not unpaid, and even finding a publisher is a herculean task, leave alone expecting any royalty payment after the copyright fees have been paid off. But now that Daisy Rockwell, who translated Shantishree's *Ret Samadhi* from Hindi to English (as *Tomb of Sand*), has won the Booker and has been acknowledged on an equal footing with Shantishree, let us hope that things will change.

Self-translation, of course, remains the elephant in the room. Is the author the best person to translate herself? Is her translation the final and authoritative version? Does the author translate or transcreate, and then does it remain the same text? What about revising the original version in the process of translation? Some writers, proficient in both, the original and target language, have refused to translate themselves. Others, like Jhumpa Lahiri, have chosen to self-translate even as they have struggled with the target language. Although there are no final answers, Lahiri does wrestle with many of these vexed questions, which is what makes *Translating Myself and Others* so interesting and worth a read.



NOTE

1. See 'Politics of Translation', Editorial, *Eurozone*, 16 January 2004. <https://www.eurozine.com/politics-of-translation/>.

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MANOJ PANDE served Indian Railways in different capacities, retiring as Member Staff, Railway Board. Postings in Jhansi, Bhusaval, Jabalpur, Varanasi, Bhavnagar, Bhopal, Secunderabad, Garden Reach, among others, were an opportunity to explore and research railway history and heritage, on which he has written several articles. He was also associated with *Indian Railways*, a coffee table book published by Dorling Kindersley in 2020. Pande divides his time between Delhi and Dehradun.

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Ather Farouqui
Chitvan Gill
Manoj Pande
Rita Manchanda
Arvindar Singh
Shekhar Seshadri
Ashish Khokar
Sonia Sikka
Enakshi Ganguly
Maitri Gopalakrishna
Srinjoy Chowdhury
Promodini Varma
Meera Oke
Varghese K. George
Sachidananda Mohanty
Surinder S. Jodhka