Liquid Geographies: India in the Oceanic Imaginary

Makarand R. Paranjape

Abstract

In the construction of national space, is there a contrast between continental and oceanic determinants? I consider this question by looking at how India was conceptualized, conceived, imaged, and imagined in the first half of the 20th century, before it became independent. More specifically, how did the idea of India come to be articulated from two ends of the Indian Ocean, by M. K. Gandhi in South Africa, and, later, by Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore? Gandhi was the author of the seminal anti-colonial and, some might add, anti-modern text, Hind Swaraj *(1909). Bose became the commander of the* Azad Hind Fauj *also known as the Indian National Army. Though these leaders belong to two different ideological and discursive traditions, what united them was anti-imperialism and "colourful" cosmopolitanism. I argue that their work was not just normatively constitutive of the Indian nation, but that it might more fruitfully be seen as part of an older, looser, and more fluid Indian Oceanic cross-currents of cultural formation and circulation. These networks are today almost forgotten, with the end of empire and the rise of independent nations in the Indian Ocean system. Yet, it is of vital importance to reconsider, if not resurrect, them if we wish to arrive at a better understanding not just of the Indian Ocean but of Asia. This paper, with the help of both textual and visual sources, illustrates how the national space was shaped by geo-critical politics, by oceanic hybridity, and by a special type of anti-imperial, colourful cosmopolitanism. The space which gave rise to such discourses constitutes a vital link between the world shaped by Western imperialism and the post-national world which we might regard as coming into being before our very eyes.*

Is there a contrast between continental and oceanic perspectives, especially in the way in which nations are imagined? I propose to raise this question by looking at how India was conceptualized, conceived, imaged, and imagined from two ends of the Indian Ocean, by M. K. Gandhi in South Africa and Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore. Gandhi was the author of the seminal anti-colonial and, some might add, anti-modern text, *Hind Swaraj* (1909). Bose became the commander of the *Azad Hind Fauj* also known as the Indian National Army (INA), announcing the provincial government of free India from Singa-

pore in October 1943. Though these leaders belong to two different ideological and discursive traditions, what united them was anti-imperialism and "colourful" cosmopolitanism.[1] The term "colourful cosmopolitanism" itself is of recent coinage, first used by Sugata Bose "to evoke a kind of cosmopolitanism that springs from vernacular roots and is compatible with the best traditions of anti-colonial nationalism" (Bose 2012: 18). Nico Slate's *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Slate 2012) is a valuable contribution in this regard, showing transnational and trans-continental connections and alliances among blacks and Indians against colonialism. Such an idea of cosmopolitanism is quite at variance with Martha Nussbaum's 1994 essay in which she claimed that "Cosmopolitanism [...] offers only reason and the love of humanity, which may seem at times less colorful than other sources of belonging" (Nussbaum 1994: 161). Both Gandhi and Bose, eventually, constituted not so much discordant, but interconnected strands in India's freedom struggle. I argue that their work as not just normatively constitutive of the Indian nation, but that it might more fruitfully be seen as part of an older, looser, and more fluid Indian Oceanic cross-currents of cultural formation and circulation.[2] These networks are today almost forgotten, with the end of empire and the rise of independent nations in the Indian Ocean system. Yet, it is of vital importance to reconsider, if not resurrect, them if we wish to arrive at a better understanding not just of the Indian Ocean but of Asia.

I am also concerned with the dialogical relationship between imaging and imagining, specifically with how images contributed to national imaginaries in the first half of the 20th century, before it became independent. This paper, with the help of visual sources, illustrates how texts and activities by leaders like Gandhi and Bose helped to fashion the nation that India became. This nation was shaped not only by an oceanic hybridity, but by a special type of anti-imperial, colourful cosmopolitanism. The space which gave rise to such discourses constitutes a vital link between a world before Western imperialism and the globalized world of the future which we might regard as coming into being before our very eyes *after* Western hegemony.

[1] I develop this idea at greater length in my book, *Cultural Politics in Modern India: Postcolonial Prospects, Colourful Cosmopolitanism, Global Proximities* (Paranjape 2016). An earlier version of this paper was published as "Liquid Geographies: India in the Oceanic Imaginary," Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series (Paranjape 2015). A German adaption appeared as "Fließende Räume: Indien in der maritimen Vorstellung." *Zeitschrift fuer Weltgeschichte: Interdisziplinare Perspektiven* (ZWG), 17.1 (Frühjahr 2016): 91–112.
[2] Throughout this paper, I use "oceanic" both as a cognitive metaphor and as an actual geo-spatial site, with the relation between the two left multivalent.

The Indian Ocean has been characterized as "the ocean of notions" and "cradle of globalization."[3] As it begins to reveal its own stories to us, we start seeing it not only as a geo-political, but cultural and conceptual space. It allows, even invites us, to evolve an alternative paradigm of area studies from the perspective of post-colonial societies so as to promote a holistic understanding of Asia, a vast and complex continent, which demands a multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual methodology to understand it.

It would be useful to invoke here a note circulated by the late *svarajist* scholar-researcher, Dharampal, several years back, but revised in September 2003. Dharampal argued that India's relations with its large neighbourhood both to its West and East constitute what might be termed as an enduring Indian Ocean oecumene. He advocated a reorienation of Indian scholarship so that this region could be studied more seriously, with a view to understanding the the social, cultural, political, and economic structure of this region. According to Dharampal:

> *"Such a recovery of knowledge and self-awareness requires a major scholarly effort to work on this past in all its manifestations and detail, say from 1500 AD backwards to 600 BC. Regaining of such knowledge would require search of original sources not only in India, but initially perhaps much more in China, Korea, Japan, S.E. Asia, etc, where such sources seem to be more known and perused by scholars in recent times"* (Dharampal 2003).

In this ambitious, even daunting project, scholars from several countries would need to work together. It is such a spirit of cooperation that will create a new, non-Western and truly Asian Asian Studies.

As much recent work in a variety of disciplines shows, region-making is comprised of multiscalar networks, marked by coalitional and conflictual webbing. Prasenjit Duara, for instance, observes, "Networks in this sense are effective carriers of circulatory histories not only because they can cross various boundaries of territories, institutions and ideologies but produce unexpected coalitional results" (Duara 2015: 242). He goes on to speak more specifically of how networks in maritime Asia produced space. When capitalism and imperialism triumphed over the vast breadth of the continent, these older networks were coopted and harnessed to the new "territorial organizational systems";

---

[3] Shanti Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal adapt the phrase "ocean of notions" from Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* in their *Introduction to Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives*; like Rashid in Rushdie's story, the Indian Ocean too "becomes its own storyteller" (Moorthy & Jamal 2010: 3, 20). "Cradle of globalization" is used in by Cassanelli, Spooner & Nichols (2002) as well as Moorthy & Jamal (2010: 25).

even so, "these networks continued to maintain their transborder and multiscalar character, and in the current era of hyperconnectivity, net works have become a new force to be reckoned with" (Duara 2015: 242–243). Thus, Dharampal's older call, with its anti-imperialistic overtones, resonates with scholarly trends in recent times, trying to emphasize circulatory, global histories over nationalistically confined narratives.

Apart from attending more closely to oceanic rather than continental stories, my second major thrust in this exercise is that I wish to incline to visual in additional to textual sources. Such a move follows another strand of scholarship which examines the manner in which visual histories sometimes compliment, sometimes contradict, but always inflect the more official textual accounts. It would therefore be useful to see how the optical archives of the Indian Ocean impact the more authoritative and familiar textual histories. In *Photography's Other Histories* , Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson (Pinney & Peterson 2003) offer a useful starting point that signals, to use Arjun Appadurai's phrase, "visual decolonization." What is implied is a way of reading visual images so that they become sources of an alternate history of modernity, or in this case, of nationalism. Pinney calls this "vernacular modernism," the manner in which the received practices of Western visual representation were resisted and subverted in the colonies by a radically different use of backdrops, depth, perspective, and style.

In *Photos of the Gods* (2004), his follow-up monograph, Pinney shows how such an alternate history "made by art" may be assembled and read. Pinney suggests that we regard visual culture not merely as a reflection of history made elsewhere but as actively shaping and influencing politics and religion in the subcontinent, in fact, "as an experimental zone where new possibilities and new identities were forged" (Pinney 2004: 8). If, as early colonial missionaries realized, what defines India is "idols, idols everywhere," visual icons certainly have the power to mobilize masses. They are also the site of complex contestations, articulations, and negotiations of power and ideology. That is why, such a way of regarding Indian visual culture forms the other subsidiary strand of this paper. Thus, the way India was *imagined* was also intrinsically linked with how it was *imaged*; visual narratives thus intersected, even collided, with textual accounts of nationalism. Though each of these is a complex discourse in its own right, I present here a preliminary account of how these two cross-currents intermingle, opening up new ways of thinking about not just how India but the Indian Ocean came to be conceptualized in the first half of the 20th century. Such a task in inter-referencing will, it is hoped, deepen and strengthen our understanding of both India and of Asia. Verbal and visual cross-

currents thus combine in this very physical space of the Indian Ocean to offer two vantage points in the Indian Ocean system, South Africa and Singapore from which to conduct our inquiry.

There is a rich and growing body of work in Indian Ocean studies, notably that of K. N. Chaudhuri and, more recently, Sugata Bose. Chaudhuri, using the distinction made by Fernand Braudel, regarded the Indian Ocean as "a more meaningful human unit for historical analysis" (cited in Bose 2006: 286) than the geo-spatial construct of the continent. This "interregional arena" was a fertile "sphere of action and interaction" (Bose 2006: 6, 285) from where significant anti-colonial struggles could be waged. From such an examination it should be clear that it was the Indian Ocean not just the land-mass of the sub-continent which became the crucible of Indian nationalism and anti-imperialism. These networks of oceanic communication and exchange are today almost forgotten by many scholars, with the end of empire and the rise of independent nations in the Indian Ocean system. Yet, it is of vital importance to reconsider, if not resurrect, them if we wish to understand each other better in Asia. This paper, with the help of visual sources, illustrates how texts and activities by leaders like Gandhi and Bose helped to fashion the nation that India became. What emerges is that India was shaped not only by an oceanic hybridity, but by a special type of anti-imperial cosmopolitanism. The space which gave rise to such discourses constitutes a vital link between a world before Western imperialism and the globalized world of the future which we might regard as coming into being before our very eyes *after* Western hegemony. Verbal and visual cross-currents thus combine in this very physical space with oceanic perspectives from two vantage points in the Indian Ocean system.

To better understand the ramification of these developments in the first half of the twentieth century, it might be useful to consider a world before Western hegemony. In her 1989 book with the title "Before European Hegemony", Janet Abu-Leghod says that the world system in the 13th and 14th centuries, before the rise of the modern West, had three essential spheres: the European sub-system, the Mideast Heartland, and Asia (Abu-Lughod 1989). In this larger arrangement the Indian Ocean system played a crucial role because India was literally on "on the way to everywhere" (Abu-Lughod 1989: 261). During Western hegemony, which lasted for nearly five hundred years, from the rise of the Portuguese power in the last years of the 15th century, right up to present times, the Indian Ocean system continued to play a vital role. European powers such as the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British ruled these regions for centuries, also exerting their authority and influence on neighbouring territories. These imperial powers came to control not only the rich trade routes all the

way from Africa to China, but also the countries of the Arabian Gulf, the Indian peninsula, and the islands of Malaysia and Indonesia.

From Aden to Singapore, the British Empire ruled the Indian Ocean and its sub-regions, its supremacy being challenged, briefly, only with the Japanese conquest of much of oceanic East Asia during World War II. Japanese imperialism, of course, was hardly a better option, causing as it did untold miseries upon the peoples of Asia that it conquered and colonized. During the ascendancy and consolidation of the British Empire the earlier, looser and more fluid configuration of smaller states, trading settlements and coastal towns was replaced by massified colonial structures into which the earlier units were incorporated. This older Indian Oceanic space of cultural formation and circulation upon which imperial designs were superimposed was, in great measure, lost with the end of the empire. Yet, this space remains the vital link between a world before Western imperialism and the new world which is coming into being almost before our eyes after Western hegemony. Recent scholarship, including "Asia Redux," an influential paper by Prasenjit Duara, seeks to explore the possibilities inherent in such recuperation.

Colonialism more or less destroyed pre-modern societies and patterns of living. That is why post-colonial societies still struggle to understand who they are. Unable fully to be a part of the modern (Western) "universal" civilization, they are also cut-off from the roots that nourished their pre-colonial life worlds. In India's case, a better understanding of the Indian Ocean world would be a step in the right direction, helping it realign itself in its "real neighbourhood" in the Indian Ocean. Mohandas Karamchand (or Mahatma) Gandhi was deeply aware of this. His foundational text, *Hind Swaraj* (1909), was not only a critique of modern (Western) civilization, but also an appeal to return to a traditional and more "authentic" Indian civilizational narrative as a pre-requisite to freedom and self-rule. Such a civilization he called *sudharo*, the positive or the beneficent stream of life as opposed to the *kudharo* (negative flow) of capital and machine driven, hence amoral, modernity.

Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* between 13th and 22nd November 1909 on board the S. S. *Kildonen Castle,* on his way from England to South Africa. In that sense it was literally an oceanic text, written on a ship that traversed moving waters, not on solid land. The journey traversed two oceans, the South Atlantic and the Indian. Indeed, it reflects the tensions between these two worlds of the colonized and the colonizers. In her seminal paper, "The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean," Isabel Hofmeyr asks, what difference does the Indian Ocean make, "What broader theoretical issues does it raise? Does it unsettle and relativise some of the Atlantic categories that we have come to accept as 'normal'?"

(Hofmeyr 2007: 4). She goes on to answer that Indian oceanic intellectual circuits produced a world of crosscutting and contesting universalisms, producing a view of colonialism less as an encounter of the local and the global than as a contestation of different universalisms. The Indian Ocean provides an arena in which such universalisms of the south become apparent. (Hofmeyr 2007: 7–8)

Gandhi was quite in the middle of these circuits and contributed significantly to the creation of a colourful cosmopolitanism. The whole manuscript was written on the ship's stationary and fills 275 pages, of which forty were written with the left hand. It is clear that *Hind Swaraj* was very much not only an inspired but also, quite literally, a fluid text. I do not wish to create two Gandhi's, one oceanic and the other landed. Rather, I wish to suggest that the idealism, romantic non-violence, and uncompromising rejection of modern, mechanistic and capitalistic civilization was more in keeping with the moving, liquid, oceanic locus of this text.

"Hind Swaraj" literally means Indian self-rule. For Gandhi this was not merely political independence but the formation of a society of highly evolved individuals who insisted (*agraha*) on truth and non-violence, individuals who were self-regulating and self-governing, thus in need of little external control or supervision. *Hind Swaraj* was thus a programmatic proclamation of a new political methodology, soul-force as opposed to brute-force, non-violence as opposed to violence, not just to win India's freedom, but also to construct an alternate nation-hood and modernity.

Hind Swaraj was also the "Bible" of non-violent revolution. Addressed largely to expatriate Indians, especially those revolutionaries Gandhi had met in London who advocated a violent overthrow of British rule in India, *Hind Swaraj* takes the opposite stance and proposes a non-violent revolution to overthrow colonialism. Gandhi argues that counter-violence cannot be India's way, given her civilizational ethos; instead, the use of superior moral force would win India's freedom. In the process, Gandhi clarified the deeper meaning of *svaraj* or true liberty for himself and for Indians back at home.

Gandhi's intention's was clear. He felt that Indians could never be free until they overcame their awe and craving for modern civilization; hence his critique of modernity as a Godless, mechanistic, inherently violent, and dehumanizing system. Modernity was "merely dynamic," while traditional Indian civilization was "adaptive" and "contemplative." Gandhi regarded the British as representatives of a "belligerent civilization" (Introduction by Parel in Gandhi 1997: xx–xxii), which Indians should not imitate. In the process, Gandhi also connected colonialism with modernity, going a step farther from Lenin who had linked it with capitalism.

The text was published first in Gujarati in *Indian Opinion,* a multilingual newspaper that Gandhi himself had founded in 1903. Then, in early 1910, it was published as a book in English in Gandhi's own translation from native Gujarati in which it was originally composed, again by the Indian Opinion Press. Gandhi used the printed word, newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets, to good effect as an alternative form of modernity. Hofmeyr in a more recent book, *Gandhi's Printing Press* (Hofmeyer 2013), calls it an *Experiment in Slow Reading.* Gandhi used hand-operated presses and labour-intensive and outdated printing techniques to emphasize reading as a mode of contemplation, with new and originally written material juxtaposed with carefully selected excerpts from various sources. This was a unique form of forging a communing, imagining a nation from the edge of the Indian oceanic diaspora, not so much through print capitalism, as through a self-help, self-service, and self-produced print culture.

But more germane to our argument here, I wish to emphasize that *Hind Swaraj* was an Indian Ocean text*,* though it is considered a foundational text of Indian nationalism. Moreover, if one considers not just the specific text called *Hind Swaraj* but also the overall idea of an alternate imagination of an Indian nation, then it is noteworthy that such a conception emerged not from an "imperial" or a "national" space, indeed not from a *continental* site, but from the fluidity of the oceanic system. This is all the more remarkable because Gandhi has now been appropriated as the "Father of the Nation."[4] Years later, Gandhi would return to the oceanic metaphor when he tried to conceptualize his notion of an independent India. In response to a question, he published a detailed account of his idea of India in the *Harijan* of 28 July 1946:

> *"In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units"* (Gandhi 1999, 91: 326).

From the oceanic textuality of *Hind Swaraj* early in his career to the oceanic circle of the latter days of his life, we can thus see a clear continuity in idea and metaphor.

---

[4] According to Sugata Bose, it was Subhas Chandra Bose or "Netaji," who "had been the first to hail" Gandhi with this title (Bose 211: 1).

This brings us to the all-important issue of the relationship between nations and oceans. I have argued throughout this essay that the Indian nation was literally conceived from the seaboard of the Indian Ocean. Perhaps, only an alternate point of reference such as afforded by the Indian Ocean system could inspire Gandhi to discover a new political praxis and theory of resistance. Indeed, one could argue that most of Gandhi's key texts including *Satyagraha in South Africa* and *The Story of My Experiments with Truth,* were, in this sense, Indian Ocean texts because they were either written in or mostly depicted his life and experiences in South Africa. Though South Africa was a colony, oceanic labour, indenture, trade, and religious cross currents formed its various communities. Gandhi's own origins in Porbandar, Gujarat, another oceanic town that faced a greater world of trade and commerce, was the source of many who ventured across the waters. Indeed, Gandhi's little room on the third floor of his many-roomed home, faced the sea. He would have looked out across the waters wondering of the worlds that beckoned him from yonder. Though he first went to England, returned to India as a barrister, and only then left for South Africa, it was in the latter country that both his thought and praxis was formed in a vortex of anti-imperialistic, oceanic cosmopolitanism.

Gandhi needed and used creatively the distance offered by his Indian Ocean location to both understand and reconceptualize India. Judith Brown points out that South Africa enabled Gandhi to be a "critical outsider" to India (Brown 1985: 21–34). Even if the label outsider is debatable, I agree that the critical distance from India enabled Gandhi to evolve a unique, even original response to the task of freeing India. *Svaraj* and *satyagraha* were thus invented in the Indian Ocean region, not in India itself. Phoenix Farm, Gandhi's first ashram (experimental settlement) was a "nursery for producing the right men (and women) and right Indians" (Gandhi 1999, 9: 382). Hofmeyr, too, argues that "we need to think of the Indian Ocean as the site par excellence of 'alternative modernities,' those formations of modernity that have taken shape in an archive of deep and layered existing social and intellectual traditions" (Hofmeyr 2007: 13).

To get an idea of the "oceanic" founders of the Natal Indian Congress, which Gandhi created in South Africa in 1895, just a few years after the foundation of the Indian National Congress in India in 1885, let us observe a group photograph.

Makarand R. Paranjape

Fig. 1: Group photograph of founders of the Natal Indian Congress, 1894

The varied dress, head gear, and postures of the figures suggests a sort of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism, in which to be "Indian" in early twentieth century South Africa, was to be a part of several intersecting and different worlds. Another photo of the ambulance crops that Gandhi organized during the Boer War, in contrast, shows the homogenization that colonial dress imposed on these diverse people. Indian Ocean identity was thus a dialogic negotiation between colonial homogenization and native differentiation.

Here is another photo of the ambulance crops that Gandhi organized during the Boer War.

Fig. 2: Standing: H. Kitchen, L. Panday, R. Panday, J. Royeppen, R. K. Khan, L. Gabriel, M. K. Kotharee, E. Peters, D. Vinden, V. Madanjit. Middle Row: W. Jonathan, V. Lawrence, M. H. Nazar, Dr. L. P. Booth, M. K. Gandhi, P. K. Naidoo, M. Royeppen. Front Row: S. Shadrach, "Professor" Dhundee, S. D. Moddley, A. David, A. A. Gandhi
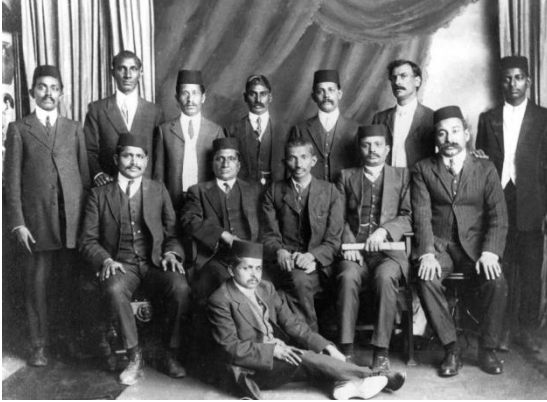
Fig. 3: Here is Gandhi (sitting, third from the left) with the leaders of the non-violent resistance movement in South Africa

A cartoon from that period captioned "Playing with Fire" satirizes the public burning of 1300 registration certificates at a Congress meeting of Indians at Fordsburg on Aug 16, 1908. This cartoon is among earliest such images of Gandhi to circulate outside South Africa. Gandhi is in a frock, but his native "difference" is emphasized by his headgear. Gandhi's call on 16 August 1908 at the Hamidia Mosque, Johannesburg, to publically burn the certificates of Indians registered under the "Black Act" is compared to the Boston Tea Party of 1773, which started

Fig. 4: "Playing with Fire"

the American Revolution against the British. A bonfire against the British at the rim of the Indian Ocean seemed to bear fruit thirty-nine years later when India became independent a day before, on 15 August.

Though in Indian dress, Gandhi wears many more clothes here, quite a contrast with the image of the Mahatma in a loincloth. No wonder this image was never iconized or became popular. Indeed, it was in September 1921, a few years after his return to India, that Gandhi officially adopted the loincloth as his official attire (Gandhi 1999, 24: 346).

From Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (Indian self-rule) to Bose's *Azad Hind Fauj* (Free India Force) is an interesting journey. *Swaraj* invokes ancient, Upanishidic ideals; it was originally a spiritual concept implying self-mastery and self-illumination, thus literally a kind of "enlightenment" (*rajdeepnoti; raj*=that which shines). Applied to the body politic, it implied a notion of enlightened governmentality. Many such modern political terms including *svatantrya*, the usual word for independence, have residual spiritual connotations, invoking a trans-political dimension to Indian nationalism. It always aimed at more than "mere" nation formation; Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi and others leaders who resorted to this word implied by it a much wider vision of

Fig. 5: Gandhi and Kasturba returning to India in 1915

society and human destiny (see Brown 1984). Svaraj to them was a cosmopolitan, not sectarian ideal.

Azad Hind, on the other hand, literally means "free India" – instead of the Sanskritic *svaraj*, Bose uses *azad*, a Persio-Urdu word, much more commonly understood by the masses. Under Bose, the Indian National Army's (INA) motto of *Ittefaq* (Unity), *Eitmad* (Faith), and *Kurbani* (Sacrifice) no doubt preferred Hindustani words of Persio-Arabic extraction. Could we argue that Bose's vocabulary was more appropriate to a unified India than Gandhi's? The invocation of spiritually-charged terms such a "faith" and "sacrifice," however, remained common to both. There was no mistaking the cause of nationalism as anything but sacred; nationalism was no less than a sort of religious cult.

Bose's Indian National Army was the second such army raised in Singapore; the first under the command of Mohan Singh, soon after the fall of Singapore in 1942, was unsuccessful. Mohan Singh, remarkably, started raising this army in Malaya, even before the fall of Singapore. He was "removed" by the Japanese when he was found not as amenable to their designs as they may have wished. Rash Behari Bose lobbied in Japan for Subhas's taking over of the INA, which he did after he sailed from Europe to Japan in a German submarine. This voy-

age, with Allied bombs going off about him, was quite as romantic and oceanic as Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* journey several years ago. Bose wrote a good deal of his ideas of independent India in the context of world politics during this trip. That much of it was actually underwater makes it submerged if not underworld history.

After Bose landed in Singapore from Japan on 2 July 1943, the entire atmosphere changed. He arrived to a tumultuous welcome, assuming command of the INA on 4 July 1943. Addressing his troops the following day, he gave them the resounding call, "Chalo Dilli" or "Onward to Delhi." Indian independence was proclaimed from Singapore on with the formation of an interim government on 21 October 1943, which several countries actually recognized. To accomplish this extraordinary feat, Bose had not only to flee from house arrest in India under disguise, undertake a long an arduous journey to Germany, but, in order to further the cause of India's independence, to align his anti-Anglo-American and anti-imperial rebellion much more decisively with the Japanese occupiers of Singapore. His alliance with the Japanese was not viewed favourably by most leaders of the time including Tagore, Gandhi, and Nehru. Nevertheless, Bose became a hero, even a cult figure in India. If the INA had not lost to Britain's Indian army in India's North Eastern front, one can only wonder what course history might have taken. Defeating the British and reconquering India by the force of arms would certainly have given Indians a different kind of self-confidence. A strong man at the helm of affairs in Delhi and the British thrust out might have also prevented the Partition of India. Bose's INA and Provisional Government were models of communal amity, a fact that Gandhi also acknowledged and lauded. The INA lost; several of its recaptured soldiers, once members of the British Indian army, were imprisoned and made to stand trial in the Red Fort in the capital. These INA soldiers became national heroes, supported by the Congress and Gandhi. Nehru himself donned his unused Barristers' robes to defend them. Though the defence lost, the days of British power in India were, however, numbered; the sentences against Bose's soldiers could never be carried out. Bose's slogan of "Chalo Dilli" had had an ironic fulfilment; his army had not stormed Delhi as victors but were brought there as captives. Yet, history had the last laugh; though Bose was dead and the INA defeated, its soldiers were released and India was soon free.

More pertinent to this paper than Bose's alliance with the Japanese imperialists or the fate of his mission is what we might call his "oceanic vision." Conceived from the other end of the Indian Ocean, Bose's idea of *Azad Hind* or "Free India" was especially influenced by the last three years of his life which he spent in Singapore, for which all his previous life can be seen as a prepara-

tion. What was impossible to conceive in India or even in Berlin, the heart of the Axis powers, seemed almost within snatching distance from sea-town Singapore. Bose actually believed that he could liberate India and go on to form a benignly authoritarian, Socialistic republic. Some of this idealism survived even reverses and defeats in North-East India and Burma and the long retreat away from the borders of India back to the as yet unreclaimed South East Asia.

There exist several images of Bose announcing the formation of the Provisional Government of Azad Hind or Free India (Paranjape 2015: 15). It was a momentous act by any standards, but especially so by that of a people so colonized and dominated as Indians. The following photo of Bose on the left in military uniform was one of several such pictures widely circulated in India, a common pin up in patriotic families who developed a sort of cult of Bose as the "real" hero of the war for India's freedom, in contra-distinction to Gandhi. The heroic pose taken at a low angle makes his upward looking face all the more grand:

Fig. 7: Subhas Chandra Bose
(1897–1945)

Fig. 8: Flyer of Bose (Lithography)

On the right we see an artistic impression of the same pose. The painting was reproduced through lithograph prints all over India.

Almost presaging this historic eventuality, a much younger Bose was seen in full military uniform in the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in December 1928 (this latter photo is available, courtesy of the Netaji Research Bureau, Bose 2011). Another image, from the archive of the Western powers, is quite in contrast to the heroic one we've just seen. Captioned the "Quisling of India," it shows a mild and scholarly looking Bose. The Western powers suppressed the circulation of Bose as a military commander, but the later image stuck in the popular Indian mind. Whatever he may have "really" looked like, Bose in military dress became a national icon in India. That is perhaps because

Indians, defeated and colonized for centuries, needed a heroic, manly, and military model to make them feel better about themselves.

The image of Bose in military uniform went "viral" in India, reproduced as a part of a national(ist) hagiography in calendars and popular art. It was India's way not only of acknowledging one of its great, now lost, sons, but also of defying the imperial narratives trough their own counter-deification of native heroes. Along with Bhagat Singh, a revolutionary hanged by the British for terrorist activities, Bose became the other representative of armed struggle against imperialism. In visual history, this violent strand of anti-colonialism was far more popular and celebrated than in the national histories sponsored by the Congress-led governments after independence. Gandhian non-violence, though very much the dominant and official narrative, could not erase its violent sibling; the nation's psyche had a place of honour for both. The visual, in this case, offered a counter-history to the textual accounts of India's freedom struggle. Images such as these entered a national visual imaginary, mass circulated through posters and calendar art.[5]

Images like these show how Bose continued to occupy a place in the popular imagination that was powerful enough for him to be incorporated into the national(ist) pantheon along with Gandhi and Nehru. In the popular imagination, the contradictory ideologies posed no difficulty. In another popular depiction Bharat Mata or Mother India herself bestows the sword upon Bose, her valiant and heroic son, who will fight to liberate her from foreign rule (Paranjape 2015: 18). This is an interesting fantastic corroboration of the real, if ceremonial, sword that Bose received from the Japanese after he had announced the Provincial Government of Free India in October 1943. The sword bore the legend "Destroy evil, establish justice," and was brought after independence to India by General Fujiwara Iwaichi. The sword made a symbolic journey from Kolkata to Delhi, greeted by solemn and reverential cries from Netaji's admirers, with flowers showered on the process that carried it to the historic Red Fort (Bose 2011: 12–13).

Later, postage stamps and feature films would be made on Bose, renewing his memory in public culture (Paranjape 2015: 19). A postage stamp, issued about twenty years after his disappearance, shows how Bose continued to occupy a place in the popular imagination that was powerful enough for the state to recognize him posthumously and incorporate him into the national(ist) pantheon.

---

[5] For another version of this representation of Bose in military uniform compare the picture of Bose on a white horse as Kalki, the avatar of the future. The uniform is from the INA picture in the earlier figure (Paranjape 2015: 17).

Makarand R. Paranjape

A feature film made by Shyam Benegal also used INA imagery in its construction of Bose. The film concentrates on the last five years of his life, some of the most notable moments of which were here in Singapore (Paranjape 2015: 19). There were also several "alternate" readings of recent Indian history as a play by Singapore playwright Elangovan. Elangovan's poster also shows Bose in heroic profile (Paranjape 2015: 20). According to the play, forgotten and misunderstood, Bose is the victim of a conspiracy by Nehru, his old rival. At the end of the play, three soldiers in Gandhi masks, strangle Bose with a tricolor, thus suggesting how the nationalist state played a role in snuffing out Bose's legacy. In a startling case of another Indian Ocean connection, it seems as if Tiger Airways, Singapore's low-cost airline, has borrowed (without proper acknowledgement?) the springing tiger from Azad Hind, merely adding a slight twist in the tail and a tawnier pelt (Paranjape 2015: 20). Today, a statue of Bose at the Eden crossing, Kolkata, tries to capture the 'onwards to Delhi' slogan, with Bose in INA uniform. The statue is used by political groups from different backgrounds – including the CPI (M) – for their purposes (Paranjape 2015: 21–22).[6]

Fig. 9: Flag of "Azad Hind"

I have tried to show, supplemented by optics, two kinds of oceanic anti-imperialism in this paper, one represented by Gandhi's non-violent *satyagraha* or truth-force and the other by Bose's Indian National Army, which advocated an armed overthrow of British power. Both of these anti-imperalisms were cosmopolitanism rather than parochial or nationalistic, just as they were characterized by fluid networks rather than fixed or landed relations, whether agrarian or industrial. Both Gandhi and Bose, thus, instantiate not so much an oceanic hybridity, but a special type of anti-imperial cosmopolitanism which was central to the shaping of the new India and the post-colonial world. Such an alter-modern viewpoint was not the outcome of creolized admixture, but, paradoxically, of a rediscovery at a distance of a unique civilizational core as

---

[6] In the iconography of post-independence India, both Gandhi and Bose have been trumped by B. R. Ambedkar, whose statues in "suit and boot" outnumber all other representations. Another paper would be required to tease out the implications of this proliferation.

far as Gandhi was concerned and how that might be cemented into a more practical coalition of soldiers and expatriates ready to fight for the Motherland in Bose's case.

Gandhi and Bose were able to mobilize both classes and masses in the diaspora for the cause of the incipient Indian nation, a phenomenon that we may find hard to explain today.[7] High modern forms of territorial, monolithic nationalisms vary from the diverse manifestations of pre-colonial patriotism or post-colonial circulation of both labour and elites. Today it is hard to comprehend the depth and fervour that Gandhi and Bose were able to evoke among expatriate Indians and people of Indian descent. Yet, even today, the crowds of enthusiastic expatriates who flock and range over the grounds of the Indian Embassy in Singapore on independence day offer a glimpse of how powerful the idea of India still is in these parts. As Sugata Bose says,

> *"It is impossible to fully comprehend Indian nationalism, sense of self, and mission without knowing the experiences of those who operated in the wide Indian Ocean arena. The oceanic dimension of anticolonialism may go some way in freeing the study of nationalism from its land-locked state"* (Bose 2006: 152).

Indeed, "land-locked" nationalism, as we have seen, can only tell one part of the story; the other part must include the oceanic cross-currents of ideas and people. Gandhi and Bose are, no doubt, iconic, even emblematic, examples of Indian anti-colonial nationalism. But for the fuller picture to emerge, their stories will have to be supplemented by those of thousands of others, some of whom went before just as many followed.

But the deeper question remains: did Gandhi and Bose *both* fail? The simple answer would, unfortunately, be "yes," if we wish to be realistic. We would have to admit that the India that came into existence after independence was quite different from what was conceived by either Gandhi or Bose. For one of the achievements of the cosmopolitan, oceanic anti-colonialsm of both Gandhi and Bose was its ability to "combat religious prejudice without making religion the enemy of the nation" (Bose 2006: 192). Somehow, this was not possible on the sub-continent, especially towards the end of the freedom struggle and upon the formation of the two independent nations of India and Pakistan. Once the genie of competitive religious *realpolitik* was unleashed in India, the inexorable compulsions of territorial nationalism resulted in the partition of India. The composite overseas nationalisms of both Gandhi and Bose were defeated by the demands of sub-continental politics. The idea of India as conceived by Gandhi

---

[7] See Kaplan & Kelly (2006) and Kelly (1991), which show the diaspora origins of colonized national consciousness.

in South Africa and Bose in Malaya had an important similarity in that it was predicated on solidarity between all ethnic and linguistic communities, particularly between Hindus and Muslims. On the sub-continent, however, the different and rather deadly logic of the "two nation" theory prevailed. A divided India reached the altar of nationhood through an internecine bloodbath.

The dreams of oceanic nationalisms both in South Africa and in South East Asia were thus belied in more ways than one. These oceanic conceptions of India also had much less divisions across class and gender. Both Gandhi and Bose made especial efforts to involve women in the forefront of the movement, the latter even forming an all-women's regiment named after the Rani of Jhansi and lead by her namesake Lakshmi Swaminathan (later Sahgal). The fluid and flexible locations in the Indian Oceanic system enabled more idealistic and aspirational ideas of nationhood than the more pragmatic and entrenched (sub)continental sites could. Gandhi's androgynous resistance to the hyper-masculine imperialism of the British has already been commented on by Ashis Nandy.

Reverting to Gandhi, neither India nor the rest of the world have renounced modernity as he exhorted us to. Yet, the concerns that he raised have become central to us today, including the dignity of the downtrodden, crises of ecology, limits to growth, consumption woes, non-violent states and civil societies, and the quest for an ethical way of life. As to Bose, the political party that inherits his legacy, the Forward Bloc, manages but a few seats in the Legislative Assembly of Bengal, yet Bose himself remains a charismatic if mysterious figure, even identified sometimes with Kalki, the *avatar* of the future. His grand-nephew, the Harvard historian Sugata Bose, was elected to the Indian parliament from the prestigious Jadavpur constituency in Kolkata on a Trinamool Congress ticket.

The conceptualizing of both Gandhian and Boseian alternative nationalisms needed sites different either from metropolitan England, where both Gandhi and Bose studied, or the colonized territory of India, where they were born and raised. The looser, more fluid possibilities of the Indian Ocean world gave rise to their unique if not entirely new way of looking at world and conceiving a future for the Indian nation. Glimpses of this can be found not just in their writings and speeches but also in visual images and imagings of their activities that circulated both textually and visually from the Indian Ocean world. This is not to imply that Britain was a continental power; indeed, its mastery over the oceans was the source of its imperial might. British imperialism, too, was oceanic in many ways, evolving unique and rather different patterns of colonialism in its vastly diverse territories.

The Indian Ocean, nevertheless, remains our special site of study. As Jamal, following Andre Gunder Frank, observes,

> "*no body of water – given the density of its coves, the intimate proximities of its connections, the beneficence of its monsoon winds, and the fact, prior to 1500, that it was the most easily navigable and consistently traversed water –gestures more self-assuredly to its provenance as a watery cradle and substantive axis for the exchange of goods, cultures, beliefs*" (Moorthy & Jamal 2010: 412).

This paper has tried to suggest that, in addition, the Indian Ocean offers a unique space to launch anti-imperial movements and discourses, which are still relevant to us today as alternatives to dominant "continental" discourses. The oceanic perspectives as I have outlined here offer us ways to fracture or at least inflect the hegemonies of these dominant discourses, especially in a post-imperial and fast-globalizing Asia, which nevertheless has not yet achieved a significant degree of intellectual autonomy.

References

Abu-Lughod, J. 1989. *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Appadurai, A. 1997. The Colonial Backdrop. *Afterimage*, 24, 5, pp. 4–7.

Bose, S. C. 1965. *An Indian Pilgrim; An Unfinished Autobiography, and Collected Letters, 1897–1921*. Translations from the Bengali by Sisir Kumar Bose. New York: Asia Publishing House.

Bose, S. C. 2007. *Chalo Delhi: Writings and Speeches, 1943–1945*. Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau and Delhi: Permanent Black.

Bose, S. C. 1998. *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose*. Eds. Sisir K. Bose and Sugata Bose. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Bose, S. 2006. *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bose, S. 2012. Rabindranath Tagore and Asian Universalism. In R. Bhowmik (compl.) *Tagore's Asian Voyages: Selected Speeches and Writings on Rabindranath Tagore*. Singapore: Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, ISEAS, pp. 10–18.

Bose, S. 2011. *His Majesty's Opponent*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brown, C. M. 1984. *Svaraj*, the Indian Ideal of Freedom: A Political or Religious Concept? *Religious Studies*, 20, pp. 429–441.

Brown, J & Prozesky, M. (eds.) 1985. *Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics.* Petermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Cassanelli, L., Spooner, B. & Nichols, R. 2002. *The Indian Ocean: Cradle of Globalization.* Summer Institute at the University of Pennsilvania, http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/indianocean/ (accessed on 19.03.2018).

Chaudhuri, K. N. 1985. *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750.* Cambridge: UP.

Dharampal. 2003 (Sep). "Note" on Indian Ocean Studies. Circulated to friends via email.

Duara, P. 2010. Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for Our Times. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69, 4, pp. 963–983.

Duara, P. 2015. *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Elangovan. I. 2009. *Bose.* Singapore: Elangovan.

Gandhi, M. K. 1997. *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings.* Ed. Anthony Parel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gandhi, M. K. 1999. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG). Electronic Book. New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, Vol. 98.

Jamal, Ashraf. 2010. Telling and Selling on the Indian Ocean Rim. In S. Morthy, A. Jamal (eds.) *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social, and Political Perspectives.* Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 403–417.

Kaplan, M. & Kelly, J. 2006. Diaspora and Swaraj, Swaraj and Diaspora. In D. Chakrabarty, R. Majumdar, A. Sartori (eds.) *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition.* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 311–331.

Kelly, J. 1991. *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hofmeyr, I. 2013. *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hofmeyr, I. 2007. The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean: Forging New Paradigms of Transnationalism for the Global South – Literary and Cultural Perspectives. *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies*, 33, 2, pp. 3–32.

Lenin, V. I. 1939. *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline.* 1917. New York: International Publishers.

Morthy, S. & Jamal, A. 2010. Introduction: New Conjunctures in Maritime Imaginaries. In S. Morthy, A. Jamal (eds.) *Indian Ocean Studies: Cultur-*

al, Social, and Political Perspectives. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–31.

Nandy, A. 1988. *The Intimate Enemy.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Paranjape, M. R. 2016. *Cultural Politics in Modern India: Postcolonial Prospects, Colourful Cosmopolitanism, Global Proximities.* New Delhi & London: Routledge.

Paranjape, M. R. 2015. Liquid Geographies: India in the Oceanic Imaginary. *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series,* 238, pp. 1–26. www.nus.ari.edu.sg/pub/wps.htm.

Pinney, C. & Nicolas, P. (eds.) 2005. *Photograph's Other Histories.* 2003. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Pinney, C. 2004. *"Photos of the Gods": The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India.* London: Reaktion Book.

Pinney, C. http://www.christopherpinney.com/.

Slate, N. 2012. *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.