Cultural Elites and Elite
Cultures in South Asia

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International Quarterly for Asian Studies

Cultural Elites and Elite Cultures in South Asia

Special Issue edited by Jyotirmaya Tripathy and Uwe Skoda

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Cultural Elites and Elite Cultures in Contemporary India and South Asia
Constructions and Deconstructions

Editorial

Jyotirmaya Tripathy, Uwe Skoda

Situating the subject – Introduction

Definitions are slippery; they reveal as much as they conceal and hence are not always a productive pursuit. But to open our discussion, at least as an entry point, we propose that elites are a small group within a hierarchical framework with unequal distribution of authority who claim power and privilege on the basis of socially accepted credentials and then strive to extend their dominance. As a relational construct it implicitly includes references to variously identified non-elites (the working class, subalterns etc). To use Vilfredo Pareto's observation (1991), elites are a class of people who have the highest indices or outstanding assets in their branch of activities. That said, throughout 20th century, literature on elites or elite studies have primarily been focused on political or politico-economic elites, with the unspecified term "elite" usually implying a political elite and with a significant part of elite theory aiming at conceptualizing elite changes. How are new elites established and what happens to the old elites in the process: are elites reproduced, i.e. older elites managing to maintain an exalted position at the top; transformed with a changing modus operandi or rather circulated, i.e., replaced by other new groups, for example? While a major part of elite theorizing focussed on the formation of elites and their social function, the literature and case studies have largely been drawn from "Western" experience and dominated by sociologists and political scientists such as Pareto (1991), Mills (2000), Putnam (1976), Bourdieu (1996), and Hartmann (2007) among others.

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What has been less evident, if not in fact absent, is cultural and anthropological research providing us with a ring-side view of things, though there have been a few isolated attempts such as in Shore / Nugent (2002), Khan (2012) or Salverda / Abbink (2013). Though theorization of elites was influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) pioneering broadening of the concept of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) and habitus as fundamental to social relations, these ideas have not percolated into or been interpreted in a comparative Indian perspective, nor has the literature on elites on the Indian subcontinent critically engaged with the shifting definitions and significations of the elites. In order to fill this gap, scholars working on elite cultures and cultural elites met at Aarhus University, Denmark from 5–6 May 2015 to address issues relating to elite formation, its performativity and representation. Selected deliberations arising from the workshop form the content of this special number of the *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* (formerly known as *Internationales Asienforum*).

We may add here that when we say India, we broadly refer to the idea of a cultural experience and epistemology which continues to influence social and cultural life in parts of the South Asian subcontinent. However, it is understood that this broad-based narrative does not attempt to suggest any sort of uniformity. It is because of the cultural overlap, shared historical processes and symmetry that papers on Nepal and Sri Lanka have been included in this number of the journal besides various narratives on India. Starting with a general understanding of elites as "makers and shakers" in influential positions in society, the present number aims to expand Bourdieu's insights, to deploy them to understand the shifting nature of elite cultures in the subcontinent and to explore the evolving landscape of elite discourse in India and South Asia based on ethnographic, historical and cultural analysis in discourse with existing literature and research. Awareness of rising inequality, demands for inclusive politics, the march towards economic development, together with rapid social-cultural changes create unique situations of imagining elitism in South Asia.

Since elites often perform as elites, it is important to discuss the "the language and practice through which elites represent themselves" (Shore 2002: 13) and "the way social reality is constructed by actors themselves" (ibid: 5). Academics, student leaders, activists, journalists, artists, film makers often come together to articulate the aspirations of people and form new elite collectives, challenge older ones or even style themselves as an anti-power elite – though in very heterogeneous ways. This leads or can lead to an elitization of subalterns, for example caste/class leaders, or in the reverse process to a subalternization of elites. Without proposing any essentializing approach to culture, we would like to emphasize cultural factors and elements explicitly because culture is increasingly referred to in public discourses and has almost become

the new socio-economic, though it does not lose sight of gender, social stratifications etc. with which it overlaps. However, it is here in a self-spun web of symbols and meanings (Geertz 1973) that struggles over truth and values are taking place more than ever before, forming public opinions and affecting people's lives and thereby leading to both the manufacture of consent (Lippmann 1998; Herman / Chomsky 1988) as well as the manufacture of dissent.

The culture question

Before turning to Bourdieu's already mentioned contributions, a few more words about the idea of culture as just indicated above with reference to Clifford Geertz will be productive. While culture is shared among groups, there is a constant interdependent and at times contradictory interplay between invention and convention, between newness and innovation on the one hand and control, the defining perspectives of actors, even legitimation on the other, as Roy Wagner (1981: 21ff) argued. In creative processes of symbolization, signs are constructed, re-interpreted or even manipulated – commonly within a range of "meaningful" symbols and codes, whose meaning is generated within a variety of contexts. Applied to political rituals as "action wrapped in a web of symbolism", David Kertzer (1988) explored the role of leaders as symbolmakers and interpreters in processes of legitimation or de-legitimation.

While anthropology, especially symbolic anthropology, and adjacent disciplines have furthered this analytical understanding of culture, Wagner (ibid.: 21 ff) also pointed out that culture does not have one referent and remains an ambiguous term. Beyond the broadest, "democratic" signification of culture as something all collectives inherently possess, a narrower meaning of culture as refinement co-exists alongside this general notion. Called the "opera-house" sense of culture by Wagner, this latter idea also goes back to the earlier Latin term in its meaning "to cultivate", but is used in an elitist or aristocratic sense of being cultivated or cultured – precisely as polished, refined or possessing *noblesse oblige*. Retained also in distinctions between high and low culture, this idea is crucially connected to institutions – not just the opera but first and foremost educational institutions, which have also been the focus of Bourdieu's research.

Culture as capital on which elitism is commonly predicated, has often been tied to and in fact subordinated to economic power in Bourdieu's (1996) approach. Within a Marxist framework, culture according to Bourdieu is the second order system which is not just the effect of the first order system of economy, but which in itself leads to something else, namely power. Instead of repeating the conventional wisdom that culture is an autonomous space of cre-

ativity and aesthetics, Bourdieu expands the scope of capital to include culture, because the latter requires investment of a particular type so as to guarantee a return. Elsewhere Bourdieu (1984: 1) compares cultural capital to economic forms of capital like houses or money and argues that – within limits – there are ways of transubstantiating cultural or symbolic capital into economic capital and vice versa. Accumulation of such capital (for example through education) ensures a type of habitus that inscribes distinction and value upon the individual and legitimates existing inequality. In a sense, economic capital not only produces cultural capital but is also produced by the latter.

Since culture has no absolute value on its own and is metonymic of economic capital, it would be a misrecognition to argue that the aim of culture is only to reproduce economic and social power relationships. Culture is creative, open-ended and even arbitrary; even though its public performance is aesthetic, its hidden transcripts are that of power. Thus the intrinsic value of culture and its experiment with beauty are often exposed as sites of conformity and domination. For Bourdieu, culture is an empty container and there is nothing intrinsically appreciable in it; rather, culture is meaningful only in relation to those who have and those who do not have culture – the cultured versus the uncultured. Culture disguises and camouflages itself as non-economic and consistently reproduces the conditions of economic production. However, as Rob Moore has proposed, this does not explain how some lower-class pupils reach the highest level whereas upper-class pupils may be less successful (2004: 452), while David Halle (1992) argues that members of different groups do not relate to art in fundamentally different ways and that cultural capital may not be as difficult to obtain as Bourdieu suggests.

What is frequently elided in this discussion on culture as a site of distinction is the making of culture, its genesis and its sustained iteration. First, Bourdieu tends to treat cultural elites as carriers of culture, as if it is a possession, something which can always reproduce social hierarchy and confer privileges. Secondly, elites are seen as a singular formation, a perception which ignores the power play between the elites. What is also ignored is the constant stylization of elite roles which are important for changing ideas of power and politics. It is reductive to say that one elite type transforms into another so as to consolidate power in the face of popular movements from below. Cultural elites, as members of a distinct category independent of the economic sphere may have other ways to legitimate themselves, such as through disavowal. It means that segments of cultural elites which do not enjoy institutionally approved positions of authority and may be pitted against what is state or economic power, nonetheless can ironically draw some sort of moral power in that act of resistance. Unlike ideology, which creates an imaginary relation with real problems of production and distribution (Althusser 1978), such soft power claims to speak truth to power.

The Indian experience

During India's independence movement, the Western educated Indian elites strove to create a social order which was free from both foreign rule and social inequalities at home (Desai 1984: 641). The democratic process, as outlined in the Indian constitution, led to the rise of new regional elites linked to language or nativist movements, and in turn to an increase in their political power and economic benefits after independence (Brass 2009). Decades after independence, in what is considered a "second democratic upsurge", other new elites rose in politics, i. e. the so-called Other Backward Classes (OBC) – the term used here as an administrative disguise for castes. Thus, lower backward castes, often relatively wealthy peasants, but also so-called Dalits or ex-"Untouchables" increased their political influence in the 1980s and 1990s – a process described as a "silent revolution" (Jaffrelot 2003) and the "rise of the plebeians" (Jaffrelot / Kumar 2009). While lower caste leaders have created an aura around themselves as champions of justice, they often undermine their resistance politics by allowing themselves to be coopted and used by the mainstream political parties or they compromise their principles, given the temptations of money and power. Simultaneously a broader urban and small town middle class emerged, defined and defining themselves by a new consumerism and with occasional leanings towards communal politics – particularly towards a Hindu nationalist movement. This new and complex pattern has begun to replace old binaries of elite and mass, if they ever really existed in such simplified forms, thus leading to new ideas of political community and citizenship.

   At the same time the postcolonial anti-elite elitism continues to date and is still concerned with the removal of a hierarchical society ridden with social evils. Now, contemporary India is a site of many new era elite identities in the arenas of technology and media, neo-religious movements, indigenous and subaltern groups, new social movements, films and sports to name a few examples. In the intellectual and cultural spheres, a new community is emerging as avant-garde or thought leaders (often referred to as conscience keepers of society), wielding immense clout as well as celebrity capital. Activists and intellectuals exercise enormous influence in terms of their capability of shaping public opinion and of offering new visions of politics and development. This group of elites may be called moral elites (Zhuravlev / Kupreichenko 2014: 5) because they help form moral consciousness and influence large masses.

   Gennady Batygin questions the idea of intellectual elites as disinterested and sees ambivalence in the habitus of these people when he says that intellectuals usually maintain an elite life-style with regard to food habits, sexual behaviour, clothes, speech style etc. (2001: 259). Over a period of time, this

intelligentsia degenerates into "a corporate status system" (Batygin 2001: 264). Though ideationally and operationally these elites are different, they all carry what we can call "influence or celebrity capital" and they may even share a conviction that an ideal society is a society without elites. It is this disavowal which distinguishes the present cultural elites from the traditional ones. This special number thus seeks to broaden the critical discourse on the social processes through which elites are constructed and create frameworks through which such performativity can be deconstructed. In this critical discourse the social, political and economic understanding of elites is seen as interwoven through the fabric of culture. This is a perspective that we hope will encourage a more nuanced and mediated theorizing not limited to the typical tropes. Thus elites might be viewed not only as a constructed category but also as an imaginary in its various hues.

The political, social and economic complexities of postcolonial societies such as that of India offer opportunities to study societies which got independence with the intention of bringing equality among its people and reverse the culture of domination. At a time of deepening democracy and progressive politics that facilitate representation of the marginalized (for example in reservation policies for backward communities or for women's representation in various local government bodies), the cultural elites may transform themselves by opting to be on the side of the subaltern. Such politics of elite subalternism often lead to a condition wherein only conscientious elites can represent the disenfranchised. One can say that Indian political and cultural discourses oscillate between the politics of representation and the politics of presence. In the former, the elites speak for and represent the subaltern, for example in the political parties' or in the intellectuals' and activists' appropriation of dalit or minority voices, whereas the latter refers to a politics when the subalterns take upon themselves the responsibility to speak for themselves and refuse to be coopted by mainstream representation.

If the manufacture of consent is what the cultural elites do as is broadly understood, the present time of political egalitarianism has created an environment which makes the cultural elites blur the difference between the elite and the subaltern. Contemporary elites, new and older ones, appear to get their legitimacy by manufacturing dissent rather than consent, though the latter still plays an important role. Instead of perpetuating the status quo and existing terms, cultural elites may resist and transform such norms, thereby reversing the idea of the elite as the invisible enemy of the marginalized. If C. Wright Mills saw democracy as incompatible with elite power (2000) and Karl Mannheim (1940) believed that it is the mass which is inimical to democracy, others like Frank Bealey (1996) believed that it is not possible to generalize about elite attitudes to democracy. Thus the role of elites in a democracy can be dynamic and their response to the state and power could be equivocal.

The question of methodology

This brings us to a methodological challenge. Cultural anthropology (including cultural studies in humanities circles) was more interested in producing knowledge from below and in interrogating the subtle ways through which power produced subjecthood. In the last 60 years or so, academics have sustained the production of knowledge of subalterns and their everyday life. It might come easier to us to study the Other from a distance or maybe through participant observation, and do the "god-trick" to understand the Other. We have tended to produce these rescue narratives, possibly because of our training in left-liberal university spaces. For us the subaltern subject is always a resisting subject, or somebody who acknowledges our intent to emancipate them. But we do not simply seek to emancipate them; we are equally interested in establishing ourselves as emancipators.

How can we turn the gaze inward and study ourselves (as cultural elites) without that critical distance that will compromise our truth claim. This partly explains the absence of cultural elite literature. Here Seyla Benhabib's (2002) insights could be revealing when she distinguishes between the social observer and the social agent. For the former, culture may appear as a finished product and a complete whole without any fracture within. In contrast, the social agent responds to culture in an ambivalent manner and offers enough scope to see culture as a site of contestation and negotiation. For Benhabib, "from within, a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it" (2002: 5). It means while studying cultural elites (ourselves), we must consistently imagine ourselves as both, i. e. as social observers while continuing to remain social agents.

Let us return to the methodological question of how we know what we know. Producing critical material on cultural elites, on those who are us or like us, is more difficult as it is a narrative from within. Self-representation offers a huge challenge since cultural elites are a lot more heterogeneous than any supposedly "traditional" elites. This raises many associated problems like self-representation and the question of authenticity and acknowledging our role as culture producers, because so far we have imagined ourselves as recorders or interpreters only. There is also the problem of critical vocabulary, which has been good enough to capture subaltern experience or interrogate elite power, but may not be an appropriate vehicle to articulate our ambivalence given our material privileges and our theoretical moments of epiphanic conscience. The challenge for our current postmodern vocabulary on which most of our theorizing rests is how to implicate ourselves in that constructed linguistic and cultural universe.

The broad range of questions engaged in the following pages are: What kind of capital does a particular group possess and how does it go about reproducing that capital? How does this capital get converted into new socio-political currencies? How do the elites grapple with competing notions of social morality and their place in it? What are the performative strategies that are at work, legitimating certain types of elites but not others? Are elites interest groups, or do they mutate into identity groups in changing social environments? Do the elites reflect a new social order or create one; are they conscience keepers of a society or do they produce a particular consciousness? How do cultural elites position themselves vis-à-vis the state, class, caste and gender or the people, the masses? The following papers of this special issue, in varying degrees, address some of these questions. They bring together scholars, junior and senior, Indian and European, who have worked intensively on the Indian subcontinent and its elites. Kaamya Sharma, Tereza Kuldova, Stefanie Lotter, Sudarsan Padmanabhan and Jyotirmaya Tripathy are among the contributors. We are also pleased to include a special contribution from Jakob Rösel, Professor Emeritus at the University of Rostock and former editor of the *International Quarterly of Asian Studies*.

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Elites and Aristocracy in Colonial and Postcolonial Sri Lanka

Jakob Rösel

Abstract

"Elites and Aristocracy in Colonial and Post-colonial Sri Lanka" attempts to answer two major questions: First, what is an "elite" and how can we define one? Concentrating on aristocracy and with reference to Georg Simmel, I will describe forms of social and cultural self-aggrandisement and self-construction, which have served many elites as a model and ideal type for emulation and further development. My second question is: How did the Sinhalese up-country Kandy aristocracy in Sri Lanka react to British, colonial change and how did it interact with newly emerged and much more numerous low-country elites? This interaction will be described as a process of political marginalisation of the Kandy aristocracy and of cultural emulation on the part of the new low-country and Colombo elites.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, aristocracy, Kandy, elites, colonial change

1. Aristocracy as an ideal type of elite formation

Where can we position provisionally an aristocracy or an elite in the general sphere of social interaction, and in "society" at large? In this question we follow the political sociologist Jean Baechler, who insisted on a definition and strategy which rejected any objective, statistical and stratifying attempts. Instead Baechler opts for a radical, subjective and voluntaristic solution: Every society consists of an elite, people and the rabble, "l'elite, le peuple, la canaille" (Baechler 1985: 347). The images and self-definitions we construct and operate are ultimately interpretations driven by experience as well as wishful thinking. They reflect the unavoidable cognitive necessity to operate with dualistic concepts and perceptions – the high and the low, the white and the black. They likewise reflect the psychological tendency to search for and secure a middle ground, a majority. This need for self-positioning certainly does not rule out further sociological work on defining and differentiating social order – estates, ranks, class, levels of income etc.; and obviously it coexists with endless varieties and evolutions of "elites", "peoples" and "underclasses". For us here the posi-

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tion and formation of an elite or elites is of interest. And we approach this constituent of social order, both constantly changing and irreplaceable, with a further concept and definition provided by Georg Simmel (2008/1907), namely that of aristocracy.

This German sociologist regards aristocracy not as a historically confined, European, "feudal", socio-cultural construct. Instead he sees it as a universal element of any increasingly complex group and group formation, which is thus not only social but political. It is universal, because aristocracy answers social and political needs for distance, self-legitimation and self-containment of a minority wielding authority, surrounding power holders or competing for power. As a necessary element at least of traditional power, aristocracy therefore can be defined as an ideal type. It is a model which is universally emulated and admired, as well as rejected and denounced, by "l'elite, le peuple, la canaille". What then is "aristocratic", and what are an aristocrat's salient features?

First: There is the tendency of aristocrats to be seen and to perceive themselves as guardians and wardens of a corpus of tradition, a canon of historical conventions, events and experiences of supposedly far-reaching and primordial significance. This corpus and canon have not only formed and protected, maintained and moulded this group but society in general, its history and institutions, its "body politic".

Second: Resulting from this, aristocrats are thus seen and see themselves not only at the apex of a social pyramid, but at the very centre of ever wider social circles and cultures.

Third: Perceived as a dominant, dominating and necessary social force they are simultaneously seen as a tie between a golden past, an uncertain and contested present, and an unsure yet promising future. Aristocrats can thus act in the original, etymological sense of "natio", "birth" group, that is, as the first prototype for an eventual, future political and historical nation.

Fourth: This credo and these assumptions impact directly on the specific, "aristocratic" mode of individuation, an individuation seen here as the outcome of the antagonism between group pressure and an individual, the child. This antagonism leads to many variants, variants of creativity, unpredictability, imbalance, and disorder. There is the contrast of etiquette versus eccentricity and ceremonialism versus originality. There is, in the words of Max Weber, the unbound territory of benevolence and arbitrariness, "das freie Reich von Gnade und Willkür" (Weber 1972: 133). Yet, ultimately these variations of contrasts between the interplay of psychological forces and extremes rest on the complementarity and paradox of unbound "independence and responsibility".

Fifth: This contrast, this productive or destructive predicament, which is an endowment as well as nemesis, operates as the genuine origin and powerhouse

for the creativity, self-perception and "boosterism" of an aristocracy. To these self-images belong the "hero with a thousand faces", the constructions and sublimations of "chivalry", the self-serving notions and ideals of the "call of duty", the self-entitlement of "born to rule", the ideas of mission and self-sacrifice. This folklore of the aristocracy, these cultural, ethical and psychological pretentions rest on a further paradox, derived from the complementarity of freedom and responsibility, namely equality and supremacy.

Sixth: Aristocrats, operating on the same psychological and moral principles, in the same social universe, constitute a "band of brothers", a community of equals. They are equals because exalted; they are exorbitant in privilege and self-imposed burden. This creates a further, optional role model: The aristocrat acts out his own, self-determined calling, he experiences life as an adventure. The role model is predicated on the "travelling hero" and it facilitates and legitimises far-ranging mobility.

Openness and cosmopolitanism are thus legitimate ingredients of an aristocratic habitus. Aristocrats are thus well placed to enter into transregional, often trans-"national" marriage alliances, religious networks, commercial ventures and most importantly of all new and far-flung political loyalties. The aristocrat, true to his convictions, in defence of his freedom is not only empowered but expected to change king and country if the occasion so demands. Aristocrats are thus placed above narrow ethnic, religious, regional and language communities. Their eminent class consciousness and independence allows them freedom of travel, universal albeit aristocratic contact and changes of loyalty and alliance. Openness combined with curiosity leads to adventure and facilitates diplomacy.

Seventh: Becoming and staying an aristocrat thus resembles a highly complicated work of art. How do aristocrats maintain such an order, artifice and estate? According to Georg Simmel, aristocratic individuation and the respective aristocratic role model coexist with a specific type of group maintenance. This tradition, not mechanism, ensures the social distance, the unquestioned cultural superiority and political cohesion of any functioning aristocracy. In contrast to the mathematical average, the social average tends in most groups to operate according to the convoy principle. It lowers itself to the level of the less ambitious and capable. The least motivated, the laggards impose their expectations, presumptions and routines on the respective group. Their leaders and majorities take such restraining forces into account.

Aristocracies, if they want to survive, can and must operate in the opposite direction. They must and they can ensure an elevated social and cultural group average. They can thus be compared to other highly specialised and exclusive, that is sectarian, professional or commercial groups. But in contrast to these groups aristocrats operate from a different strategic position: They operate at

the apex of power, they can claim to speak for society at large (l'elite, le peuple, la canaille) and not for just one sectional interest.

Aristocrats, furthermore, maintain their group identity and cohesion not only through professional training, memory, discipline and mechanical imitation in face-to-face interaction. In addition through the concession of self-determined space for liberty and responsibility, that is through an education which allows for reflection, self-definition and decision, they are prepared for adult roles which facilitate as well as restrain. They are prepared for a habitus, which regards life not as an instrument or an obligation but a work of art. Seen thus, aristocracy becomes a challenge, an "unmasterable" art. It is an art in which every succeeding generation must engage – and possibly fail. The outcome is uncertain. The only certainty is: When identity, cohesion, distance cannot be maintained through these (or other) means, the aristocracy will fail – only to be replaced by new, more capable and more assertive pretenders.

Aristocrats are therefore, according to Simmel, trustees of tradition, guardians of power, virtuosi of self-determination, traveling heroes and cosmopolitan networkers, class-conscious internationalists and lobbyists, artists among politicians and statesmen above provincials and pedestrians. In all this they answer to universal needs of states, polities and power formation.

2. Aristocracy and new elites in Sri Lanka

2.1. Buddhist elites and the *rajakariya* system

Drawing on these considerations, can we find evidence of something we can reasonably define as an aristocracy in Sri Lanka? Our attention should first be focused on caste, here as *jati* or *varna*, since these concepts can embrace notions of estate and socio-political status, quite apart from endogamy, craft-specialisation, "liturgy" and sect. But in Sri Lanka since antiquity only an indistinct variant of a caste system has existed, derived in all probability from South India. This already truncated form was transferred from Tamil Nadu to the island. Social distance from India and two millennia of the pervasive influence of Theravada Buddhism have further eroded this caste system. In this simplified caste system we find a majority of peasants, some fifty percent, constituting the largest caste – Goyigama among the Sinhalese, Vellala among the Jaffna Tamils. These peasants, "the people", at least in the case of the Sinhalese are enormously differentiated according to their different land titles, obligations and privileges. Thus the majority is upwardly open, where it comprises various levels and varieties of elites, monks and abbots, courtiers, officials, clerks and commanders. The majority is strictly closed off towards the bottom, the "rabble" or the unadjusted and aliens (Pieris 1956: 169–194).

Here the Goyigama majority is surrounded and served by three dozen specialised castes or service groups – village craftsmen, urban artisans, itinerary and petty traders, jewellers and merchants. There is thus no clear-cut, ritually defined warrior, aristocratic or feudal caste stratum. Aristocrats there might be, but ultimately, in Buddhist eyes and from the perspective of an overwhelmingly rural social order, they were merged into the general category of Goyigama. When *jati* and *varna* fail to define and to localise an aristocracy, is there any conceptual substitute – sociological, historical or political?

There is, yet this term is enlightening as well as confusing. Since the emergence of a new, simultaneously ethnic and religious nationalism, since the elaboration of a Sinhala Buddhism at the turn of the 20th century, the Buddhist majority on the island has imagined itself as the "people of the lion", the Sinhalese. This is an old, classical concept, although with a surprising ideological history: For more than two millennia, since the advent of Buddhism, the "canonisation" of a founding myth for the (Buddhist) dynasty and the onset of Buddhist chronical writing the idea has existed that the discoverer and conqueror of the island was Sinhala – in the sense of "descended from a lion" and "like a lion". For centuries the island itself was called Sihala or Tri Sihala and the language of its Buddhist inhabitants later was also called Sihala.

According to the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*, the fifth and sixth century chronicles, the conqueror of the island and leader of a band of North Indian, "Bengali" migrants, was descended from a lion and a Vanga/Bengali princess. This Vijaya was a misfit and public nuisance, and he and his followers were deported to a harbour near the present day Mumbai port where they were put into a ship and pushed into the southern sea. They then stranded on an island originally called Tamraparni, "red-handed", from their fingerprints in the copper-red sand. As the island was inhabited by demons, sorcerers and witches, it took all of Vijaya's skill to conquer Tamraparni. He took a renegade witch, Kuveni, as his consort, united with her and thus broke her power. After the conquest he rejected her and their two children. He then procured from Madurai (Tamil Nadu) ritually and socially acceptable brides as well as artisan castes for himself and his followers. Finally, on his deathbed he handed power to his Bengali nephew, who thus founded a lion-like and lion-descended, Sinhala dynasty.

The discovery and conquest occurred while the Buddha in faraway North India was entering his Parinirvana. Here, on his deathbed, the Buddha declared the island to be his most distinguished future *dharmadipa*, the "island of the Buddhist law". Earlier, the Buddha had already visited the island three times, he had terrorized and lectured the assembled demons, dwarfs and snake people (Nagas), and thereby preordained and hallowed the island (Geiger 1959: 51–61). Some two centuries after this conquest Buddhism was finally brought to the island, as part of a mission led by Mahinda, Ashoka's son. He

brought the doctrine and, most importantly for a future sacred centre, a sapling of the Buddha's Bo tree from Bodh Gay. Since then, as the chronicles never fail to declare, Sihala or Tri Sihala, is the Buddha's island par excellence.

The followers of Vijaya, now the majority, the Buddhists, thus own the island through predestination, conquest and through their conversion to "Buddhist righteousness". While in the early chronicles the king, his Madurai brides and the court are termed "Sihala", over the centuries the term has widened. At the end of the first millennium the chronicle tends to contrast the invading, impious, destructive, demon-like (Hindu) Damila/Tamils with the valiant and pious Sinhala warriors, warlords and aristocrats. It was only in the middle ages, parallel to the abandonment of the Rajarata, the classical kingdom in the north, and the slow drift to the monsoon-fed south west, that the concept was further extended: It now comprised all the Buddhist subjects of the kingdom in the south west, the kingdom of Kotte near Colombo. Yet, it was only with the onset of far reaching modernisation and the rise of Sinhala Buddhism, that the concept turned into a fundamental, ideologically and emotionally laden category, holding centre place in most forms of political, social and cultural discourse. It now thus crowds out other and older concepts of profession, caste, locality and region. „Sinhala" as a term is thus instructive for Sinhala identity and politics.

But it leads us nowhere in our quest to define and locate a Sinhalese aristocracy or elite (Gunawardana 1990: 45–86). Instead we have to extricate an elite, an aristocracy, from the political and economic, feudal structure, which underlay and constituted the medieval Buddhist kingdom. This kingdom emerged and consolidated in the 15th century, in the south west near latter-day Colombo (Seneviratne 1997: 3–22).

This enormously complex, productive and malleable structure of service and tax obligation, was called *rajakariya*, "work for the king". It is probable that it already existed and regulated the Rajarata kingdom of classical times. *Rajakariya* was taken over, manipulated and transformed first by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch VOC. More than three centuries of adjustments, arbitrary interventions and accelerating economic change profoundly transformed this system, its beneficiaries and its rules. But an older, or at least a genuine feudal version survived in the realm and the operations of the Buddhist kingdom of Kandy, an isolated "hermit kingdom" in the mountains and jungles of the south west. This kingdom separated from Kotte at the beginning of the 16th century. When the British took over control from the Dutch, entered into contact with the kings of Kandy and finally invaded the kingdom and dissolved the monarchy, they had ample opportunity to study and describe this system, in their eyes an amazing and ponderous one (Pieris 1956: 95–142).

From the outside *rajakariya* might appear to be a well-designed system of feudal service and tax obligation; seen from within it operated as an ever

adapting process of technical improvisation and social change. The court and capital were serviced through a village "Jajmani system" writ large. Administration, warfare and religious patronage were conducted through forms of feudal privilege and obligation. In contrast, the needs of diplomacy, transport, overseas trade and money transactions necessitated the involvement of specialists, foreigners, mercenaries, hostages, itinerate craftsmen, peddlers and religious minorities. A medley of people was thus integrated into *rajakariya* and at the court.

Yet at the apex of the system, as court officials and guardians of a patrimonial bureaucracy a genuine, that is independent, self-confident landed aristocracy can be found. The independence and diversity of this aristocracy were to some extent derived from the inaccessibility and territorial fragmentation of the different territories of the kingdom. Although small, it consisted of at least three components. First there was the core kingdom, restricted to the valleys around Kandy, protected through the rims of the mountains. This mountain and forest area, the Udarata, was sparsely populated by paddy and slash-and-burn farmers. Then, at the court, under close supervision, there was a top stratum of functionaries and four chief ministers, the Adigars. Finally, the various small units of the Udarata, the twelve different Ratas, were governed by Rathe Mahatmyas (Codrington 1939: 178–182).

To the west and the south, the hermit kingdom was surrounded by five provinces, sloping down the mountains into the lower country and thereby towards the seldom demarcated frontier with the colonial powers. These provinces, the Dissavanis, were controlled by governors, the Dissaves. They were further subdivided into districts, the Korales. The Korales, comparable with the up-country Ratas in size, seem to have been the genuine units of control and collection, dominance and exploitation. In addition, it was here that the bulk of the up-country Sinhalese lived, not under the control of a king, but of regional and local strongmen, the aristocrats. The governors, the Dissaves resided at court, in Kandy – at least under strong kings. When they had to visit their province they left their families behind as hostages; as a rule they were recruited from families who had their roots and possessions in different parts of the realm. However under weak kings, Dissaves would tend to consolidate and "localise" their control over their allotted Dissavanis. And in any case it was the district, the Korale, where service obligations and taxes, overwhelmingly in kind, were registered, organised and collected. It was from here that the Korale officials interacted with the villages, that is, with the headmen of the villages and of the local service castes. It was here that the bulk of the local extraction and accumulation of goods and services, of *rajakariya*, took place.

Besides the core kingdom and the five provinces there existed a third realm, the Northern dry zone, the former "classical" Rajarata, now emptied of its paddy farmers. Centuries earlier the ancient irrigation works, the earthen

dams and the tanks, had broken down. They had been abandoned and were soon overgrown by jungle. The whole area, a third of the island, was covered by an immense forest, inhabited by elephants and deer. The villages and sacred cities had disappeared, and only small and impoverished groups of slash-and-burn farmers had survived, often in the middle of the broken, dried up irrigation tanks. They were ruled by a new class of petty chiefs, the Vanniyars. These chiefs sometimes visited Kandy, bringing symbolic tribute and departing with, in comparison, precious gifts (Knox 1989/1681: 21–33).

Naturally every Adigar, Ratemahatmya, Dissave, Korale and Vanniyar had his establishment, his "manor", his more or less imposing, timber-built *walauwa*. Here he ruled over his landed possessions, over his circle of relatives and more importantly over his array of messengers, pole bearers, pack oxen owners, measurers, accountants, granary guardians, night watchmen, field wardens, militias, border guards and tax officials. There were numerous checkpoints fortified with thorn bushes on the roads between the provinces, the Udarata and the outlying "borders".

It was with this medley of higher ranking Goyigama aristocrats that the British had to collaborate, after the conquest and the dissolution of the Kandy kingdom.

2.2. Elites under British rule

Since the beginning of British rule, that is since the early 19th century, the British thus were confronted in the up-country with a "feudal" aristocracy, which in their eyes, was exotic, archaic and yet strangely familiar. It stood in complete contrast to the elites with whom they had to cooperate in Colombo and in the low-country.

Due to the destruction of the Buddhist kingdom and Buddhism – its temples, rituals and orders – in the low-country by the Portuguese, and due to the incomprehension, manipulation and corruption of low-country *rajakariya* through the VOC, this system and its traditional Goyigama service aristocracy had been eroded and marginalised. The Portuguese "Estado" and the Dutch VOC financed their state and their operations through trade monopolies, mostly on cinnamon, through indirect taxes on consumption, through custom dues and the sale of offices. This not only destroyed *rajakariya* in its original form, but it also weakened the established caste hierarchies, above all the supremacy of the Goyigama and the established feudal order with its rules of conduct and etiquette. Now, for the lower castes there emerged new mobility, freedoms and options.

In particular three lower ranking castes benefited from new economic opportunities and the loosening of social constraints. First, there were the cinnamon peelers who exploited the new business opportunities that the Dutch

created through the strictly enforced monopoly on the cinnamon trade. Constantly rising demand and rising prices increased the bargaining power of the cinnamon peelers vis-à-vis the Dutch, and the monopoly created countless opportunities for corruption and clandestine trade. Then there were the Karava, traditional fishermen but also ship-builders, seamen and costal traders who likewise profited from new colonial demand, while at the same time they engaged in smuggling and contraband trade. Finally there were the Durava, the toddy makers and arrak sellers, who now benefited from the new sales opportunities of inn-keeping, arrak export and coconut planting, created through the tax interests of the colonial rulers.

In each of these upwardly mobile castes there emerged a new commercial and entrepreneurial elite which since Dutch times had competed against the established Goyigama elite and among themselves. In addition, the more assertive and innovative sections of low-country Goyigama had equally benefited from change and had invested in new cash crops, trading ventures and urban properties (Jayawardena 2000).

The upshot of all this competition was that these three low-ranking castes undertook a religious as well as a social investment for the re-establishment of Buddhism. They sent emissaries to Thailand and Burma to procure properly ordained Buddhist monks, consecrated statues and much-desired manuscripts for the low-country Sinhalese, in reality for their own caste clientele. The missions thus resulted in the re-installation of the Buddhist orders – not under the control of a *dharmaraja*, the king of Kandy, but under the control of lay committees of the respective castes (Malalgoda 1976: 90–150).

The British administrators and reformers were thus confronted with different elites. These elites would mingle in business, but not merge in religion and politics. They competed along two lines: Up-country aristocrats versus new low-country commercial elites; and all of these new elites against each other.

Setting up colonial administration – the dilemma

The British were thus acutely aware that the imposition of a uniform, centralising administration would run counter to the aspirations and interests of an up-country aristocracy entrenched, for three centuries in their positions of power and authority. At the latest since the early 1830s, the colonial administration faced a dilemma: to pursue a reform policy or to maintain the Kandy aristocracy.

A team of government advisers under Colebrooke and Cameron, initiated a reform program: It aimed at transforming the crown colony into a colonial laboratory for experimenting with laissez-faire market economics. The island was to become a plantation economy on the basis of a deregulated cinnamon sector, possibly complemented by tobacco, sugar cane, coconut and coffee. In

addition the bulk of the population, the Sinhalese peasants were to turn from undernourished subsistence farmers into cash crop producers and the island was to become self-sufficient in rice production. A new administration and infrastructure was to provide the preconditions for this market revolution. The administration planned to dispense with intermediaries – tax farmers, middlemen and the last remnants of the anachronistic low-country *rajakariya* system – and instead to rely on bureaucratic, province- and district-centred control. The new bureaucracy was to be overseen by not more than 60 to 70 British administrators, but in its 20 districts it was to rest on college trained, highly qualified native officials, "burghers" and later Jaffna Tamils and some low-country Sinhalese.

Heading this new centralising structure there was the governor general, responsible to the colonial office in London. In cooperation and in possible opposition to him was a legislative council, operating with ex officio officials as well as "appointed" native gentlemen from all the islands communities. This council as a counterweight was responsible to the British parliament (Silva 1981: 254–281).

The Kandy aristocracy and a misunderstood promise

Against this bureaucratic and economic reform movement there stood a solemn promise that the British had given to the Kandy aristocracy. To depose the king the British had enlisted the help and consent of most of these Adigars, Ratemahatmyas and Dissaves. The Kandy aristocracy had rather naively expected that their king and court would be merely replaced by a British governor or political agent, while everything else – the royal ceremonies, the Buddhist establishments, processions and rituals and most important of all their privileges, possessions, status and functions at court, in politics and in *rajakariya* – would remain unchanged. The British had not disputed these hopes and ambitions. Instead, in the Convention of Kandy before the assembled aristocracy and minor chiefs, they had promised to uphold the Buddhist religion. This promise was interpreted by the aristocracy as a firm commitment to uphold the separate traditions, conventions and forms of government of the former kingdom. Thus between the promise to the Kandi aristocracy on the one hand and the Colebrook-Cameron reforms on the other the British policy makers faced potential conflicts either with the chiefs or their high-flown development expectations.

However, as with most reforms, the actual results were vastly different from those intended: The establishment of a market and plantation economy did not transform the Sinhalese peasants into cash crop farmers and the island remained an importer of Indian and later Burmese rice. The cinnamon export collapsed under the competition from the very much cheaper foreign export-

ers. In the end it was coffee production and following its collapse after 1870, tea, rubber and coconut which transformed the hill country and the north western part of the low-country into a huge plantation sector. This plantation boom controlled by British agency houses (tea) and low-country elites (coconut) displaced, marginalised and exploited the local up-country and low-country peasants. Again the plantation sector never constituted a truly laissez-faire enterprise. Instead the plantation lobby constantly demanded assistance from the colonial government in the form of roads and railways, and state regulation for migrants and Kuli labourers (Silva: 282–296).

Emergence of Mudaliyars – the new aristocracy appointed by the British

While road building into the hills opened the up-country for coffee plantations, and while the British administrators in the meantime invested heavily in coffee estates, neglecting their government work, the question of how to treat the former kingdom and its aristocracy had to be solved. This was achieved through a characteristic process of "incrementalism".

The establishment of a new, centralising administration, the opening up of the interior through road building (organised with corvée labour with the help of *rajakariya* and the local chiefs), finally the introduction of new regulations, licenses and procedures of tax collection – all these interventions shocked and angered most of the up-country Sinhalese. In outlying areas in the east, the local governors or chiefs had not even heard that the kingdom had fallen or simply did not believe it. Over the next 20 years various local and general rebellions broke out, led by royal pretenders, former Adigars or mere social bandits. The campaigns to quell these insurrections were costly. The general plan to replace expensive troop cantonments with coffee estates, that is, to control the highlands, and thus earn tax money instead of expending it, seemed to be failing. To counter this unsatisfactory development and to (re-)integrate and fragment the still formidable aristocracy the administration reacted in various ways.

First, it upheld the ideal type of a Colebrooke-Cameron-inspired bureaucracy, with a pragmatic and cosmetic supplement: On the village and village circle level (Pattu), the colonial administration now rediscovered and strengthened the roles of village headmen and other hereditary and honorary office holders, all of them officials who were entitled to only small, but highly visible emoluments and privileges. In addition it revitalised the village council, the *gansabhava*. The government thus saved money, while increasing its ground level support, and its knowledge of local affairs and its efficiency.

Secondly and more importantly it now systematically widened, upgraded and exploited a traditional honorary "aristocratic" title, the title of Mudali or Mudaliyar. In Kandyan times Mudaliyar or Mudaliyanse denoted an upper

Goyigama stratum from which the higher officials and their families were derived – Ratemahatmya, Dissave, Adigar. The British turned the title into an honorary, purely ceremonial one which was normally not attached to a hereditary position. Mudaliyarships were now created on every level of the bureaucracy – in the capital, provinces, districts and even at the village level. A highly visible, native, folkloristic parallel service emerged which ran from the gubernatorial "Gate Mudaliyar" to the humble village Mudaliyar. During Buddhist or other public ceremonies, dinners, royal visits, inspection tours, inauguration ceremonies and anniversaries the general governor, governor or district agent would be accompanied by his respective Mudaliyar. For the class conscious and caste conscious British as well as Kandy aristocrats this was a most productive and dangerous instrument (Silva 1981: 188, 322–325).

The British now appointed into the Mudaliyar top positions those aristocrats who had sided with them, especially during rebellions. Apart from top-ranking loyalists, a huge number of lower and middle-ranking aristocrats entered the various Mudaliyar positions. With the Mudaliyarship they acquired prestige, access to the British decision-makers and very soon enormous visibility and prestige vis-à-vis their followers, aristocratic competitors, monks and monasteries. In cases of doubt, scandalous behaviour, political dissent or arbitrariness Mudaliyars were excluded, demoted or replaced by more amenable competitors.

Both aristocratic insiders and outsiders were therefore held "in dread and awe" as to their positions, expectations and future careers in the consolidating British developmental state. Yet of even greater importance were the economic prospects, which now opened up with the growth of coffee estates and tea gardens in Kandy and later the Nuwara Eliya area (Peebles 1995: 115–144).

Booming coconut plantations: economic elites

As the coffee plantations spread, an extremely lucrative land market emerged. By traditional right, through arbitrary control and through the forgery of land titles aristocrats profited from this boom. They were not alone in this market, but competed with the four new low-country elites in the acquiring, clearing, amassing, buying and selling of land. They also invested in the building-up of an adjoining sector of rubber plantations. The coffee and then tea sector as well as the rubber sector were controlled by foreign planters and very soon by British agency houses. Sinhalese participation in tea gardens was marginal; it was only in the rubber sector that Sinhalese capital and planters played a certain role. In contrast the coconut sector, the enormous "coconut triangle" spreading in the northeast of Colombo served different goals: From the beginning it served speculative, productive and representative functions. Nearly every elite family, up-country or low-country, Mudaliyar or non-Mudaliyar,

invested in this sector. Building up vast alleys of coconut trees and residing in the midst of them in old-fashioned Kandy-style manors, *walauwa*s, was a sure sign that the owners family counted among the honoratiores, that these native gentlemen had arrived at the top – at a Mudaliyarship, at the governor's dinner table, at temple trusteeships or the planters' club. This was true even when the investment proved a failure and when the profits were made elsewhere, for example in coffee and tea transport, ship building, furniture making, export houses, advocacy or in disreputable arrak renting.

Thus land speculation during the coffee and tea boom, investment in and ownership of rubber plantations and coconut "gardens" and *walauwa*s constituted three stages in the competition, then the intermingling and finally the convergence of the various elite groups: Kandy aristocrats and Colombo elites (Goyigama, Salgam, Durava, Karava). Intermarriage and business partnerships facilitated a rapprochement (Peebles 1995: 145–170, 197–230).

British reforms of 1929

But until the 1930s traditions, differences and political mistrust persisted between up-country and low-country elites. These apprehensions and suspicions operated along the lines of high versus lower castes, inherited versus acquired status, conservative versus liberal politics, traditional, rural Buddhism versus Anglicanism and low-country, "protestant" lay Buddhism. Highland aristocrats were seen as backward, ceremonial, hypocritical and brutal; low-country elites as opportunistic, excessively anglophile, brash and servile.

A fusion of these various elite groups was brought about through political reform: in 1929 the British government decided, after a mere pro forma consultation of the native political spokesmen, to allow full voting rights, free parliamentary elections and government by national parties. In short this was de facto political self-government though it remained incomplete since it lacked explicit and symbolic independence. Only finance, the judiciary and the police department remained under British control. This was a diplomatic move by which the British India government wished to convince the Congress Movement, Nehru and Gandhi, that they could strike a deal with the British on factual if not complete independence, and that the British could be relied on.

This imposition of democratic mass politics came as a shock to minorities, the Jaffna Tamils, the Tamil plantation labourers and their union, and the Muslims, the Moors. The minorities knew that from now on they would be submerged under the advancing wave of an ethnic and religious Buddhist Sinhala majority. But the leaders, low-country as well as up-country, the honoratiores of the Sinhalese majority were equally shocked. To preserve their leadership positions, their status and their estates from now on they had to establish political control over a vast mass of Sinhalese peasants and *Lumpenproletariat*,

which their speculation and plantations had expropriated and impoverished. Both Kandy aristocrats as well as low-country planters and honoratiores were in the same predicament.

The introduction of the secret ballot, mass politics and self-government shocked the Sinhalese elites into joint action. It enforced a new unity on them and drove them down the path to anti-Tamil and anti-Muslim xenophobia and ethnic and religious chauvinism. With extraordinary speed what had been a sectarian and fringe ideology of Sinhala Buddhist militancy now became the official programme of the Singhalese honoratiores, organised in the formerly moderate and liberal Ceylon National Congress (CNC). This ideology centred on the "the land, the race and the faith" of the Sinhala Buddhists (Russell 1982).

The CNC promised to defend the common Sinhalese against their enemies, namely Tamil colonial officials suppressing the majority, and Tamil estate labourers displacing the Kandy Sinhalese in their last Terra Sancta, their Buddhist homeland. The honoratiores made a sweeping promise to protect the Buddhist majority from British imperialists and Indian compradores and entrepreneurs. Wine drinking, meat eating and tobacco smoking missionaries, Christian schoolmasters and Anglicans as well as arrack contractors and Muslim fishermen and fish sellers were increasingly singled out as enemies of the "innocent and pure-hearted children of the Dharmadipa", the island of the Buddhist law. The CNC honoratiores had remarkable success in persuading an increasing mass of Sinhalese voters, peasants and labourers, not to vote for a Communist Party demanding a land reform and better wages – in times of mass hunger and a worldwide depression. Instead these smallholders, landless labourers and rural unemployed from now on voted for the CNC, now exclusively Sinhalese.

Parallel to the introduction of the so-called Donoughmore constitution and democracy, the party spectrum split along ethnic lines: There was now a "Tamil Congress" for the Jaffna officials and Jaffna's western educated elite; a "Ceylon Indian Congress" for the south Indian Tamil estate workers and their trade union; a "Moors Association" for the Muslims. In 1946 the CNC finally transformed itself into the decisive "United National Party", united and national for the Sinhalese, and still in existence. The advancing steamroller of majority rule secured complete control of the government to the evermore homogenous and assertive Sinhala Buddhist voting bloc. This emergence of an ethnic divide, ethnic two-party democracy – with the later founding of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party – and finally ethnic civil war is outside the scope of this paper. Instead, we have to concentrate on the driving force as well as the consequence of this process of ethnic "snowballing" and polarisation (Rösel 1996: 245–330), namely the fusion of competing groups into a compact pan-Sinhalese power elite.

In the late 19th century a curious by-product of the British (re-)integration of Kandy aristocrats in the Mudaliyar system had already emerged. Parallel to the economic and administrative integration of the highland and the levelling of political and social differences between high- and low-country there arose a folklorisation and idealisation of the kingdom's traditions, culture and history. It was the Kandy aristocrats who profited in the first place from the antiquarian interests of the British elites and the exotic curiosity of British gentlemen tourists. Ceylon now became the ideal symbol for "serendipity". In Colombo as well as in England there had appeared what has been called "Victorian Buddhism" (Almond 1988).

This was Buddhism as a philosophy (of tolerance), as a civilisation (of monasteries and irrigation works), as an ethic (of peace and compassion). While British archaeologists rediscovered this classical Buddhism in the Rajarata, the northern dry zone, a unique, exotic, diminutive but living remnant, and a remainder of this "Great Tradition" could be admired in Kandy. Its aristocrats, with their strange (festival) costumes (derived from Portuguese baroque prototypes), their sturdy *walauwa*s and their impressive pedigrees and titles came to be regarded as living fossils, as embodiments of a now only minor but exuberant tradition. In the famous (Buddha) tooth festival and procession, the Esala Perahera, all the constituent elements of Kandy society came together in a perfectly composed, hierarchically structured, feudal pageant. Here every component of tooth temple, court and *rajakariya* marched for hours behind the royal elephants: priests, (former) Adigars and Ratemahatmyas etc., but also the headmen, and the representatives of all the *badde*, service groups (Rösel 1996: 122–130).

With this new romanticism Kandy aristocratic families, inside or outside the Mudaliyar system, with or without estates, now increasingly turned from objects of curiosity into valuable assets for the low-country elites. Apart from political allies and economic partners they constituted a marriage market through which lower ranking but prosperous Colombo elite families might "gentrify" their careers and families. Radala/Ratemahatmya brides could upgrade such families and provide the bride's family with new resources. Obviously these marriage opportunities acquired a new urgency when the new mass politics forced up-country and low-country elites into closer cooperation. It was certainly significant and helpful when the political heir of the richest plantation owner of the island, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the future founder of the ultra-Sinhala Buddhist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) married a bride from a renowned up-country Radala family, Sirimavo.

Thus with the onset of mass politics, first with the Donoughmore constitution 1930, then with independence 1948, and finally with the founding of the SLFP 1951 and its messianic Buddhist triumph over the UNP 1956 a rapprochement of the various elites seemed to have taken place. Until the early

1950s there was an up-country political bloc, run by Kandy aristocrats and politicians. It operated largely inside the ruling party, first the CNC, later the UNP, and could sometimes enforce its resentments and special interests on the government – for instance the disenfranchisement and repatriation of the Tamil labourers to facilitate complete control over the up-country electorates by the Kandy aristocrats. The competition between the UNP and the SLFP and the consolidation of an ethnic two-party and one-majority democracy seemingly eroded this Kandy-Colombo divide.

What has emerged instead since the 1940s is the primacy of some ten elite families that have dominated either the UNP or the SLFP, in the former case the Jayawardhenas, in the latter case the Bandaranaikes. Yet these families were in addition closely interrelated and their lesser relatives held memberships in most of the other respective opposition parties. With the exception of the Bandaranaikes, who overwhelmingly concentrated on their family enterprise, these families would never lose control (Jiggins 1979). Thus it was not an up-country versus low-country but a top-elite versus lower-elite divide which characterised Sinhalese mass politics, at least since 1956. When intra-party conflict arose it operated along the cleavage between honoratiores versus (lower) party functionaries but not between Kandy and Colombo.

When Ranil Premadasa replaced Junius Richard Jayawardhena in 1990 as head of state and the UNP this was resented because a party functionary, in possession of his own party machine (in the Bazar/Petta area across the Colombo harbour) had replaced the grandseigneur among the UNP honoratiores. That Premadasa was seen as an uneducated upstart from the Dobhi, the washermen caste, was only an additional irritant (Rösel 1997: 269). When Mahinda Rajapaksa replaced the Bandaranaikes in the ownership of the SLFP this was seen in terms of a coup, orchestrated by a provincial functionary from the deep south against the founder family.

3. Elites today – Conclusion

At least in the public discourse of Sinhala mass politics the traditional markers of identity, region (first and foremost Kandy) and caste have disappeared. They have been replaced by meritocratic, that is acquired markers like education, engagement in Buddhist and developmental (political) activities and professional achievements. Thus the different caste backgrounds of the competing elites as well as the specific interests, entitlements and sensibilities of the aristocracy have vanished, at least from the public eye. Yet on a different, social and cultural stage the traditions and imagery of the Kandy aristocracy are alive and well. Visits to Kandy, its tooth temple and its Perahera are de

rigueur for tourists. The huge parliamentary complex built in the newly re-established Kotte Jayawardhanapura near Colombo is constructed in timber, in the form of a gigantic *walauwa*. It was financed, "gifted" by Japan and designed by a renowned Muslim architect who had rediscovered the Walauwa style for the dozens of five-star hotels he constructed all over the island. He thus gave to Sri Lankan tourism, its accommodation, cuisine, gift shops and souvenirs a distinct, Kandy aristocratic style (Rösel 1996: 88). But most importantly a self-confident "national" Sinhalese political elite now expresses its ideas and visions of national culture, history and identity through the medium of an architecture, ornaments, costumes, dances, masks and handicrafts inspired by the Kandy aristocracy and Kandy Sinhalese.

This brings us to an interesting result: Three centuries of rapid colonial change gave rise to new elites, elite competition and an anachronistic aristocracy. But subsequently, since 1930, British-introduced and then self-inflicted Sinhalese mass politics have transformed elite fission into fusion. The elites have increasingly compacted into one supposedly "national" Sinhalese class and power elite. Even the aristocrats have vanished into this new elite stratum, though their self-images and pretensions live on as part of a national culture, emulated by a new nation, the totality of the "people of the lion".

This leads to a final question: Were the Kandy aristocrats aristocratic according to Georg Simmel's definition? And: Can the new Sinhalese power elite really lay claim to these aristocratic virtues? In conclusion we can only state: The Kandy aristocrats were a poor specimen for Simmel's demanding definition and ideal. They certainly stood near the apex of power; and though they did not always act as such they perceived themselves as the guardians and trustees of a great, now minor tradition. They were not exactly torn between the internal forces of freedom versus responsibility, and as to their openness and cosmopolitanism they were severely restricted by the seclusion and inaccessibility of this hermit kingdom. However they were open, class conscious and opportunistic enough to collaborate several times with the British, finally acquiescing to British military intervention and to the dissolution of the monarchy, in the naive belief that such change would not erode their positions and estates. In addition, the maintenance of their specific identity, distance, authority and habitus was not really the result of internal discipline, the ability to prepare for "life as a work of art"; instead it resulted from the continued existence of a feudal hierarchy, a service aristocracy based on the *rajakariya* system and upheld by the king. When the monarchy fell and the British discontinued *rajakariya* their class and their positions decayed.

Can the present power elite claim to be an aristocracy? Definitely not. It operates as an embodiment and guardian of a Sinhala Buddhist culture, history and nation. In this role it has levelled the differences between itself and the constantly extolled "common (Sinhalese) man" – in ideology, public ceremo-

nies and political speeches. It parades its lay Buddhism, decorates its consumerism with touches of Kandy folklore and acts as a purely political and economic "national" class. Centuries of colonial modernisation and decades of ethnic mass politics have whittled down a traditional, feudal order. In the process genuine and presumptive aristocrats have vanished into a dominant and militant "national" class.

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How to Dress a National Elite:
The Case of the Kalakshetra Sari

Kaamya Sharma

Abstract

This article looks at the emergence of the Kalakshetra sari as an object of consumption for the Indian nationalist elite in the 1930s within the context of the Theosophical Movement, preoccupations with the role of women in public life, and the material culture practices of colonial South India. The Kalakshetra School of dance and music, founded by Rukmini Devi Arundale, is considered a leading institution in the classicisation of the performing arts to promote pan-Indian nationalism. This article looks at the way discourses on female attire, women's cultural role in society and middle-class nationalism were shaped by the Kalakshetra School through its strategic use of colour and design in the Kalakshetra sari. The visual-material atmosphere the sari created and inhabited off-stage reinforced the aesthetics and classicism of on-stage performances. In the process, the Kalakshetra sari became part of the visual palette of elite nationalism in colonial and post-colonial Madras/Chennai.

Keywords: India, Kalakshetra, sari, dress, art, elite, nationalism, gender

The making of a sartorial icon

The nationalist discourses propagated by various subaltern elites at the turn of the twentieth century in colonial India were all indelibly concerned with the question of gender, and more specifically, that of womanhood. Partha Chatterjee's seminal essay "Colonialism, Nationalism, and Colonialized Women: The Contest in India" (1989) provided a pioneering explanation of the nationalist dilemma of repudiating colonial orientalist narratives about Indian women (as oppressed, backward and victimised) whilst preserving the traditional, spiritual core of the nation (believed to be embodied in its women). This dilemma was resolved by a formulation of womanhood that required women to be educated and progressive while simultaneously embodying the nation's spiritual traditional core. This formulation continues to exert its presence within dichotomies in being and performing womanhood in urban India today.

Chatterjee notes the effect of this resolution in splitting public and private spheres into the outer, material, masculine contrasted against the domestic, spir-

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itual, feminine. Indeed, domesticity was a recurrent preoccupation in multiple, sometimes overlapping projects of cultural reform, often linked to projects of womanhood (Hancock 1999: 149). This link between domesticity and womanhood, prevalent both in Victorian thought and Indian nationalist discourse, served to foreground debates surrounding the moral, social and sartorial propriety of women. These dilemmas were most visibly resolved in the matter of women's dress, through the nationalisation of the sari as a sartorial code for traditional feminine respectability (Bhatia 2003). The sari has been a subject of fascination since colonial times and is one of the signal tropes of the exotic "Indian woman", popularised by Raja Ravi Varma in his famous nineteenth century portraits (Thakurtha 1995, Jain 2007). The depiction of Mother India in the Nivi sari[1], from Abanindranath Tagore's paintings to its dissemination in popular visual culture in India, aided the nationalisation of the sari "as a material symbol of nation, draped and duly contained from rapid erosion by English mill-made fabrics and the tyranny of colonial rule" (Kawlra 2014: 217). The integrationist rhetoric of post-independence Indian policies resulted in the sari embodying both the material representation of ideal womanhood and the nation's unity-in-diversity. Today, it enjoys a degree of continuity with a steady, if varying, role in urban Indian women's wardrobes and their social lives.

Mary Hancock (1999: 149) describes the "efforts to frame homes both as (feminine) 'backstages' of new (masculine) public realms, and as sites for producing new nationalized and classed subjects who espoused modernist values of individualism and scientific rationality" as part of elite nationalist projects. While these debates were dominated by men in the nineteenth century, women became more actively involved in the twentieth (ibid.). The Swadeshi and Home Rule Movements, propagated by the cultural elites of the time, were involved in the mobilisation of colour-scapes that explicitly linked morality with design and aesthetics in articulations of Indian national identity.

This article discusses a particular instance of sartorial reform that was intimately entwined with the classicisation of the performing arts within the nationalist movement: the establishment of the Kalakshetra School of Fine Arts by Rukmini Devi Arundale at Madras in 1936. Rukmini Devi staged classical dance (Bharatanatyam) as a spiritual and nation-building activity. Kalakshetra's co-optation into the nationalist ethos created a template of the classical performing arts, tradition and femininity in an elite, upper-caste mould.

While Kalakshetra's on-stage performances have been extensively documented and analysed, the institutionalisation of the Kalakshetra sari, which is

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1   The Nivi sari was developed in 1866 by Jnanadanandini Devi, wife of civil servant Satyenendra Nath Tagore and sister-in-law of Rabindranath Tagore. She adopted the Parsi style of wearing the sari with a *choli* (tailored blouse), and petticoat with the *pallu* draped over one shoulder. This style of drape "took on political dimensions in the early twentieth century when women involved in the nationalist movement adopted the style" (Kawlra 2014: 30).

a relatively unexamined by-product of this process, has not. The politics of colour and design usage in the Kanjivaram saris of Madras/Chennai are an instance of this "material"-isation of femininity, revealing homologies between colonial knowledge productions about Indian textiles and post-colonial preservationist attitudes towards handloom textiles as national heritage. I argue that the Kalakshetra sari played a key role in the transformation and reassertion of tradition, femininity and everyday aesthetics.

Through an analysis of writings published by the Kalakshetra Foundation, biographical texts (books and interview material) about Rukmini Devi, magazine articles and exhibition catalogues about the Kalakshetra sari within the historical and religious context of the Theosophical Movement, I suggest that Rukmini Devi's efforts in building Kalakshetra as a school of traditional dance and music, with all its attendant visual atmosphere, were aided equally by her off-stage displays of the Kalakshetra saris produced at the Weaving Centre. Clothing and costume symbiotically re-fashioned an ideal of womanhood in elite, upper-caste terms that helped reconcile the moral perils of public performance with middle-class feminine respectability. This was established through contiguities between the on-stage dance performances of the Kalakshetra School and the off-stage performances of the "feminine" through the school's sari.

The Empire's anxieties about Indian textiles

Textiles as objects of aesthetic and utilitarian value characterised a fundamental concern about the complex relationships between Britain and India during the nineteenth century. Even as an exploitative trade market selling British cloth was set up in India, Indian textiles formed part of a circulatory transnational space between India and Britain, contributing to conflicting opinions about India. Even as some eminent figures expressed concern about preserving the "purity" of Indian textiles in the use of natural dyes and "native" ornament, sartorial practices were increasingly designed to create distance between coloniser and colonised, resulting in dilemmas amongst Indians (men in particular) about the degree to which they could adopt Western dress (Tarlo 1996).

Under the auspices of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the 1880s, the ideologies championing the "decorative arts, the vernacular and the politics of work" were united under a single banner (Greenhalgh 1997: 25). Within this juxtaposition of increasing industrialisation and the concurrent romanticisation of village life, the notion of India as an artisanal haven became important to the Arts and Crafts Movement (Venkatesan 2009). Colour and ornament came to be symptomatic of the corruption of the Indian aesthetic by Western influences, with the use of synthetic dyes in Indian textiles repeatedly decried

as a harmful influence by important artistic figures such as George Birdwood, William Morris, Thomas Wardle and Owen Jones. As Sonia Ashmore notes, "Indian dyestuffs were among the natural materials and 'vegetable' products displayed at the international exhibitions as products of empire. Raw materials, recipes, and dyeing methods were meticulously recorded in India and displayed at the exhibitions" (Ashmore 2009: 3). Owen Jones's *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), which was intended for didactic and imitative purposes, dwelt with energy on the restraint in the use of colour in Indian textile samples. George Birdwood, an Anglo-Indian official and commentator on Indian art, remarked on "the natural beauty of the dyes used, and the knowledge, taste and skill of the natives of India in the harmonious arrangement of colors […] the simplicity and treatment of the decorative details" (Birdwood 1880: 298–99). Many articles in *The Journal of Indian Art*, published between 1886 and 1916, lamented the loss of native taste in clothing. Accounts of the textile industries of various provinces reported the substitution of Indian natural dyes with "sight-killing and offensive" European dyes, which are "gaudy, fine and pleasing" initially and "become too ugly for a second wear" after washing (Sastu 1890: 23). The "decline in taste" was viewed as a tragedy, a result of "the use of bright but fugitive aniline colours" and an increasing "demand for cheap and bright-looking articles" (Mookerji 1894: 2).

This discourse was appropriated and subverted by the visual imaginaries of the Swadeshi Movement. The homology between "colonial ways of knowing" (Venkatesan 2009: 7) and nationalist appropriations of the aesthetic discourse around textiles can best be understood through Gauri Viswanathan's principle of complementarity in the "capacity for transference, in criss-cross fashion, of any one or more of these factors – subject, agent, event, intention, purpose – not in the sense of wholesale borrowing, but of readaptation" (Viswanathan 1989: 8–9). If colonial administrative powers orientalised India through the acquisition and display of Indian textiles, the nationalist bourgeoisie appropriated such orientalisations for their own purposes. Tropes of the exotic (such as the use of vibrant hues and pleasing designs in saris) were absorbed and reclaimed in the image of the Indian woman who donned the Kalakshetra sari, as we shall see in the following sections.

Theosophy in the Madras Presidency

The seeds of Kalakshetra as an institution and zeitgeist were sown by the establishment of the Theosophical Movement at the end of the nineteenth century in Madras. Madras, as the earliest established British colony and administrative stronghold of South India, was the site of an incipient nationalism, located predominantly within the city's burgeoning educated

middle classes. This form of bourgeois nationalism was bolstered by the establishment of institutions such as the Theosophical Society. With the increasing presence of women in public debate at the turn of the twentieth century, imaginaries of ideal womanhood began to circulate among different actors from the nationalist patriarchy, transnational feminist movements and subaltern elite groups (Hancock 1999). As the Home Rule Movement gathered momentum, the suburb of Adyar in Madras became the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in 1895 led by Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky, C. W. Leadbeater, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and George Arundale. As one of the progenitors of the Home Rule Movement in India, Annie Besant "wrote and spoke extensively on nationalism and education, women's suffrage, the simple life, and cultural revival, as well as establishing the Hindu university at Varanasi and the Home Rule League" (Eaton 2013: 627).

As a syncretic religion that relied heavily on discourses of spiritualism, rationalism and eugenics, Theosophy aimed to "create a synthesis of 'east' and 'west' which would be simultaneously spiritual and scientific, traditional and modern" (Dixon 1999: 195). The Theosophist ideal of Indian womanhood was similarly embodied in a syncretic amalgam of traditional and modern virtues (ibid.). Besant produced the idea of the "World Mother" in 1928, a syncretic amalgamation of mother figures across religious faiths (Srinivasan 1985: 1874). This World Mother was now to be represented by Rukmini Devi, as the ideal Indian woman who was a synthesis of traditional and modern values, who could participate in civil society, and who had "racial purity" (ibid.). Through their championing of Home Rule and the "nationalisation of Indian art and life" along with other figures such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, E. B. Havell, and Rabindranath Tagore, Theosophists won over the native Indian elite (ibid.). Later, Rukmini Devi would also deploy the rhetoric of the World Mother in her writings as a figure that would "serve to spiritualize the politics of the modern nation-state in both 'east' and 'west'" using tropes of "purity, refinement and delicacy" (Dixon 1999: 204).

Rukmini Devi was born in 1904 in Madurai to an upper-caste (Brahman) family. Exposed to Theosophist ideas at an early age, she embraced the movement completely after her marriage to Theosophist George Arundale. Following Annie Besant's call to work with her, the couple moved to Adyar. In her biography, Rukmini Devi characterised Besant's influence upon her: "She encouraged me to be true to the most beautiful and simple traditions of Indian life. She said, 'I do not like Westernised Indian women'. She told me to wear only beautiful colours, never white without any border, nor black or brown" (Samson 2010: 53).

Colour was an important element of theosophical thought. Besant and Leadbeater, in a book called *Thought Forms* (1901), sought to establish a link

between thoughts and their material manifestations; the mental plane was believed to be possessed of matter, and they wished to capture, in words and images, how thoughts looked when manifested materially. The book outlined three basic principles governing the "production of thought-forms": 1) the quality of thought determines the colour; 2) the nature of thought determines the form; 3) the definiteness of thought determines the clearness of outline (Besant / Leadbeater 1901: 21).

In a chapter devoted to ascertaining the meaning of colours, they assigned emotional qualities to different colours[2], noting that the "brilliancy and depth of the colors are usually a measure of the strength and activity of the feeling" (Besant / Leadbeater 1901: 24). Evidently, Theosophy used colour as a crucial link between material and moral-spiritual dimensions of universal being, by developing a "theory of moral colour-space […] in which colours are experienced by their auras, or 'thought forms'" (Eaton 2013: 624). Colour could bleed into the dimensions that separated the material and spiritual, blurring the distinctions between the two. Dress and colour are thus meant to act as mediators between the inner spirit and the outer material world – sartorial codes were not only expressions of the moral being, but a form of moral praxis. In this context Annie Besant firmly believed in the need for a revival and patronage of the Indian arts:

> The inner feeling and outer expression often go together, and he who westernises his outside attire is very likely to grow western *inside* as well, and therefore instead of strengthening he really tends to weaken his motherland. […] And this leads me to the next point: namely, that it is the bounden duty of every patriotic Indian to encourage Indian art, Indian manufactures and Indian labour; and not to go across the seas to bring here endless manufactured articles, but to give work to his own people […] in the Indian [goods], the colours are most delicately graduated and blended giving an exquisite softness of shading to the Indian carpet, and this is the result of generations of physical training in the sense of colour; while in the carpet of foreign manufacture, it is harsh and crude, and there is no need to print upon it "manufactured in Germany" for you only have to look at its colouring to know it is not Indian (Besant 1895: 25–27).

Theosophists thus employed the rhetoric of spirituality and eugenics, playing on the already racialised discourse that separated Brahmans and Non-Brahmans in Tamil Nadu. Opposing social reform, Besant believed that the best course for Indian women was to return to the traditions of the past. This created oppositions between the Dravidian movement, which believed in radical social reform, and the Brahman-dominated Theosophical Movement. The tensions between the two were notably manifested in their perception and treatment of the much-maligned community of Devadasis.

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2   As, for example: red means anger, brown means avarice, orange denotes pride or ambition, green denotes adaptability and yellow intellectual gratification, etc. (Besant / Leadbeater 1901: 22-24).

Devadasis and the anti-Nautch movement in colonial Madras

In spite of extensive public debate and literature surrounding the history and role of the Devadasi, she is still a figure spoken for rather than speaking, frozen in what Davesh Soneji terms "unfinished gestures", insufficiently able to participate in the modernity she was instrumental in creating (Soneji 2012: 226). Devadasis were part of a heterodox tradition, which involved being "courtesans, secular dance artists […] temple workers" (ibid.: 3). Their ambiguous social position stemmed historically from their being in "quasi-matrilineal communities, non-conjugal sexual relationships with upper-caste men" (who were frequently their elite patrons) and having access to financial independence and literacy (ibid.). The launching of the anti-Nautch movement by British and Indian social reformers in 1892 witnessed the conflation of Devadasis with prostitutes and "dancing girls", in the heyday of Victorian morality. From this period until independence, the collusions between transnational first-wave feminism and the nationalist patriarchy framed monogamous conjugality as the sole means of legitimising Indian women's rights to the resources of citizenship (Sreenivasan 2011).

The consolidation of this view resulted in the legal and social disenfranchisement of the Devadasis through The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947. While the Dravidian movement sought the erasure of the Devadasi through her portrayal as a prostitute, the "revival" movement dominated by the Theosophical Movement and the Congress depicted her as a "nun", a figure of religious piety and devotion cleansed of the taint of sexual promiscuity (Srinivasan 1985). Within this context, Rukmini Devi appropriated the Devadasi dance form of Sadir and recast it in the image of Bharatanatyam, the dance of the nation. Rukmini Devi's travels abroad, a notable encounter with Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova and interest in dance inspired her to learn Sadir under Gauri Ammal. As an upper-caste woman, this was culturally taboo at the time, occasioning outrage from both Brahman and Devadasi communities – the former considering the dance vulgar and unfit for performance and the latter considering the art form the prerogative of their community.

The Birth of Bharatanatyam

The reconciliation between womanhood of the past and womanhood of the present was effected by the transference of the wifely qualities of ideal Indian womanhood beyond the bounds of domesticity, into fighting the good fight for the nation (Chakravarti 1989: 52). Thus, the spiritual potential of women in resolving the crisis of national identity lay in their role as sahadharminis, part-

ners in religious duties (ibid.). Rukmini Devi used this desexualised construction in her own project for cultural reform. Her Theosophist education and the influence of Annie Besant resulted in a life-long concern with dance, aesthetics, national identity and the role of women in the nation. Influenced by the orientalised Theosophist narratives of Indian womanhood as embodying restraint, refinement and beauty, she set about enacting a project of cultural reform that began with dance and eventually extended to the realm of clothing. She gave her first performance at the Theosophical Society in 1935, which was lavishly described by Leela Samson: "then thirty-one years old, yet slim and girl-like, extremely beautiful, with long, dark tresses, and with mystery surrounding her new-found passion for the dance of the Devadasis, [she] danced her first performance of Bharata Natyam, the ancient and classical dance art of South India" (Samson 2010: 87).

Another description of that performance by S. Sarada attests that "she had proved that this physical art, when presented with purity, devoid of vulgarity, could convey the soul-uplifting message of ancient India" (ibid.). Descriptions of her dance performances continued in this transcendent vein; the stylisation of the physical body, its adornment and disciplining through dance would eventually lead to the uplifting of the soul. Though many have rightly read her sanitising influence on Bharatanatyam as an erasure of its erotic and sensual propensities, Rukmini Devi believed principally in spiritual uplifting through bodily discipline and aesthetic conditioning. Hence, the engagement with corporeality and material aesthetic was justified and cleansed by its larger spiritual promise. The sanitising of Bharatanatyam was two-fold – it was desexualised and decommercialised, i.e., removed from its original socioeconomic context where performance was a means of livelihood. Rukmini Devi's message of art for art's sake, as being "devoid of vulgarity and commercialism", refashioned performance in elitist terms and birthed a new generation of dancers drawn predominantly from upper-caste, upper-class families who could afford to take up dancing as a "hobby" (Ganesh 2016).

In 1936, she established the International Academy of Arts at Adyar in Madras, which would later be renamed Kalakshetra – a temple of music, dance and fine arts. Rukmini Devi's project of aesthetic and cultural reform, posited as a national concern, was strategically rationalised using the teachings of Theosophy. Motherhood was often deployed in her writings but its physiological necessity was removed from its link to the programme of cultural reform as "she emphasized the link between motherhood and cultural creativity, and redefined all of women's creative endeavours as a manifestation of 'that great spirit of Motherhood'" (Dixon 1999: 204). The spirit of motherhood was believed to characterise all of women's cultural and political endeavours, but not necessarily its bodily reality. Motherhood linked domesticity to women's participation in civil and political society. Tropes of the home were transmuted

to the nation through this carefully constructed image of women's work. Though motherhood had been deployed as a metaphor in both Dravidian and pan-Indian imaginaries of the Indian nation (Ramaswamy 1993), the sartorial ideal affixed in the Nivi sari was furthered by Rukmini Devi's use of the Kalakshetra sari as an aesthetic and cultural index of womanhood.

Figure 1: Students at the morning prayer, Kalakshetra
© Kaamya Sharma (2015)

The Kalakshetra campus was constructed along the lines of the Swadeshi-inspired aesthetics of Shantiniketan, also inspired by Rukmini Devi's encounter with Rabindranath Tagore (Samson 2010), emulating a rural utopia entirely lacking signifiers of modernity through the use of "wooden panels of the brick and stone rooms […] an auditorium constructed of bamboo and an assembly area at the roots of a sturdy Banyan tree" (Aggarwal 2012: 84). The project of artistic revival and the reform of sartorial modes went hand in hand for Rukmini Devi. When asked about her weaving centre, Rukmini Devi would say:

> What I want is not merely to encourage dance, drama and music, but to have the arts of the people that will create the atmosphere of nationality. I will start a weaving centre too. I have discovered that wherever I go, it is hardest to find a beautiful Indian sari. Fashionable saris with a European touch that even they don't use are now found in our markets (Samson 2010: 99).

The project of aesthetic reform

Rukmini Devi adapted Theosophist ideals to a project of cultural reform through the strategic deployment of syncretic ideals and images of womanhood. Beauty of form for her was not merely an aesthetic goal but a spiritual one. In a pamphlet entitled *The Message of Beauty to Civilization*, she wrote:

> We have to learn more and more of the beautiful. The more we respond to the beautiful, the more will our religion become beautiful. The more will our civilization become beautiful, the more will our daily lives become beautiful, and we shall get rid of the many ugly things that exist in the world (Arundale 1904: 9–10).

She advocated a stylised idea of gender and womanhood, believing the creative spirit to be the true core of womanhood. The reinfusion of aesthetics into everyday life would be accomplished by the stylisation of the feminine, both sartorially and socially as an embodiment of the ideal of the beautiful. Art and womanhood were considered kin in their emotional spirit in an interesting inversion of the traditional nature/culture – female/male binary; thus, she wrote that "if these two can combine, whether in the home or in politics, whether, according to modern times, even at a typewriter, then woman can be her real self and can express herself through all the graces of life, the beauties and the refinements of life, and the influence she can bring upon her surroundings" (Arundale 1904: 17–18).

Kalakshetra as an academy for the fine arts was inaugurated and organised in this spirit of beauty as embodying an inner spiritual core – in the visual atmosphere of the school and the colours that students were allowed to wear. In a letter to potential students of Kalakshetra, Rukmini Devi wrote: "Most important of all, is to have good taste. This has almost entirely vanished from the educated classes in India and it is in this field that I have the hardest work" (Samson 2010: 105).

Though much of her writing emphasised the spiritual and internal revolutions necessary for a creative revival of an art form, Rukmini Devi was considerably preoccupied with costuming the dance form differently, as she felt that the Devadasis "used saris with lots of false lustre and tinsel" (Devi 1983: 63). Through the study of scriptures and temple sculpture, she introduced several changes in costume (Samson 2010: 126).

The choreography of dance dramas based on religious and mythological themes enabled her "to revive the ancient presentation with the very costumes and hairstyles which carried a stamp of authenticity, based as they were on the essential characteristics of the ancient Tamils" (ibid.: 108). Ironically, the portrayal of the Devadasis as figures of cultural degeneration coincided with the development of much of the repertoire of Bharatanatyam today (Soneji 2012). This growth was unmistakably aided by the urban, cosmopolitan nature of

Devadasi performance in the Madras Presidency as "salon dances", which were private performances conducted in the homes of Indian elites and Europeans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While salon culture gave way to the rise of *sabha*s (cultural organisations) later in the twentieth century, the composition and patronage of the audience as middle-class or elite Tamil Brahmans was important to the constitution of respectability in the dance itself (Meduri 1988). Indeed, the performative dimensions of spectatorship remain as crucial to on-stage performance in contemporary Chennai today (Ram 2011). Spectatorship as a means of participating in elite, nationalist identity-formation was also aided by the aesthetic and performative dimensions of the Kalakshetra sari, as we shall see later on.

Reviews of Rukmini Devi's project from her peers and protégées also attest to the specificity of her aesthetics, her certainty that only some dance forms, saris and costumes were appropriate. This is contextualised as appearing in a place-time when aesthetic taste in the material was in a welter of confusion, in "chaos because handloom merchants tried to cater to the market by weaving a hotchpotch of designs incorporating European motifs and other innovations which they felt were saleable" (Ramani 2002: 12).

Weaving and sartorial praxis at Kalakshetra

Narratives about Rukmini Devi supposedly encountering a sari with a gramophone motif on it demonstrate the birth of the Kalakshetra sari as a "clarifier of taste". The inappropriateness of the design on the sari, believed to have been a part of the art-deco and art-nouveau traditions, consisting of aeroplane and gramophone motifs favoured by the mercantile elites at the turn of the century (Kaul 2016: 16), spurred her to further exploration of traditional textile crafts. In a magazine article about the Kalakshetra tradition, Shakunthala Ramani, an associate of Kalakshetra, writes, "It was a time when traditional designs in textiles were considered outmoded and the wearing of handloom saris was given up by the newly westernized bourgeoisie" (Ramani 2006: 28). Rukmini Devi considered it her calling to bring the traditional sari back into vogue, and to give its aesthetics a politics of purpose.

The link between sartorial and artistic revival was further bolstered by the inauguration of the Weavers' Service Centre on 19 September 1937 with one loom at Adyar. At the inauguration ceremony of the Weaving Centre in Kalakshetra, Rukmini Devi made the following statement in her speech:

> In this centre we hope to weave all kinds of different material both in cotton and in silk. As far as possible we will try to keep the idea of beauty as our main object and that what we weave must be totally INDIAN in design, material and colour […] our aim is not to set up a huge factory but rather try in a small way to produce fine materials of

beauty and simplicity. We hope that what we produce here will reflect the most wonderful things that have been produced in our country in olden days (Ramani 2002: 14).

From its inception, the Weaving Centre took up all aspects of sari-making, such as yarn-dyeing, spinning, and weaving. Production, though slow to meet the growing demand, was centralised and experiments were made with using natural dyes for silk and chemical dyes for cotton. The weaves and motifs of the neighbouring town of Kanchipuram were emulated in the making of these saris, with contrasting colours in the body and wide borders. The saris used by the students at the dance school, the costumes for their stage performances and the saris for women who ordered them were all made at the Centre, reinforcing the contiguities between everyday clothing and stage costume. The Weaving Centre expanded from one loom to about twenty by 1954, but shrank again when handloom co-operatives were established by the government to support weavers closer to their homes. The work of the Centre shifted focus later, to concentrate on the processing and development of natural dyes. The saris produced from these looms were soon heavily in demand, and were considered fine collector's items by the elite of Madras. Women would custom-order saris from the Centre, giving them colour and design suggestions; though these saris were meant to be Kanjivarams (produced in the design grammar of Kanchipuram's weaves), they came to be known as Kalakshetra saris for the bold proportions and wide borders.

In the process of creating "traditional authenticity", a design data bank was assembled with saris obtained from Rukmini Devi's circle of friends, largely bourgeois, upper-caste, upper-class women. "Fresh colour combinations and innovations" were made "within the framework of tradition", in addition to the assignation of "appropriate traditional names" to these new combinations (Ramani 2002: 14). Positioning itself as a nationalist response to the flood of British cloth, bizarre designs and synthetic dyes in local markets, the Kalakshetra sari appropriated discourses of Indian tradition and heritage in particular ways that derived from the aesthetic palate of Swadeshi, a movement that began as a rebellion against the production and use of synthetic dyes and foreign cloth.

The Kalakshetra sari made it possible for the affluent public to participate in the atmosphere of art, cultural heritage and nationalist pride spawned by the institution without being an actual practitioner of the performing arts. The act of consuming the sari, or its imitations, became part of the performance of bourgeois nationalism, along with the consumption of Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam as classical dance. As a cultural niche garment, the Kalakshetra sari effectively became a byword and visual representation for high aesthetics in the burgeoning visual culture of Tamil Nadu as a post-colonial regional state.

Colour and the Kalakshetra sari

The use of colour for legitimation is evident in the textual productions of Kalakshetra, for instance in statements such as the following: "Indian tradition had a well-defined grammar with reference to colours" (Ramani 2002: 50). The *aharya* (costume) section in the Nrittasutra and Chitrasutra[3] were both referenced as valuable sources of ancient India's perception of colour. Colour is romanticised as present in a shared vocabulary between weaver and wearer for traditional saris such as *manthulir* (russet red and green of the tender mango leaf), *mayil kazhuthu* (the iridescent blue and green of the peacock's neck), *kempu* (ruby red), *arakku* (deep lac red) (ibid.). Natasha Eaton has emphasised the chromatic preoccupations of the Swadeshi Movement wherein Sanskrit treatises that dealt in colour and costume such as the *Natyashastra* were combed for insight into assembling a newly minted, completely Indianised visual palette (Eaton 2013).

Sartorial reform consisted of an underlying critique of the western notion of originality as newness, contradistinguishing the Indian sartorial aesthetic from the West as eternal and unchanging. The intent was not for the weavers to constantly innovate at their loom, but rather to create permutated and combined versions of existing elements that were recognised mutually between creator and buyer. Artisanal praxis was balanced on the delicate creation of beauty within the limited variables of colours, motifs, patterns and proportions. The sari as an object of "fashion" did not apply here. Those "fashion designers of the West" who produced something new every season were derided and regarded as harmful to the weavers who imbue their craft with artistic vitality as well as spiritual significance (Ramani 2002: 51).

Playing on the discourse of racial distinctions between North and South, Brahmans and Non-Brahmans, the Kalakshetra sari also sought to fix the image of the South Indian woman; hence the emphasis on how the "the sari tradition in the south of India is much older to that found in the north, and has retained its Hindu character" (ibid.: 54). The production of particular designs and colours in saris were socially legitimised as being more distinctly "Tamil". The aesthetics of authenticity are materially manifested in the Kalakshetra sari:

> While handlooms in the north have been greatly influenced by Moghul designs those of the south, especially the saris, have remained untouched by outside influences […] the Benarsi design is rich with floral vines and creepers, delicate buttas, guldastas and similar motifs, which have a cameo-like fragility, while Kanchipuram designs are more geometrical, with simple lines and checks, forming the body of the sari design (Ramani 2002: 54).

Thus, institutions such as Kalakshetra were as much a stakeholder in affirmations of a South Indian essence as the actors of Dravidian nationalism. The

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3   The Nrittasutra and the Chitrasutra are part of the *Vishnudharmottarapurana*, a Sanskrit treatise on music, dance and painting written roughly between the 6th and the 8th centuries.

design grammar of the Kalakshetra sari was perceived to be authentically south Indian, with ornamental excess being othered. The traditional vocabulary of the Kalakshetra sari preferred the simple to the over-embellished, evoking the simplicity of artisanal and rural life as opposed to the labyrinthine complexities of industrial urban life.

Mythologies about Rukmini Devi frequently emphasise the importance she gave to harmony in colour combinations. She reportedly "had no qualms about ripping it all up and starting from scratch" if the colours were perceived to be out of sync (Guhan 2006: 26). In a magazine article about the Kalakshetra sari, Rukmini Devi's associate Shantha Guhan reports having observed her cross out a request from a customer for a pale blue and pink sari, stating that "these are not traditional colours":

> She was absolutely clear on what was acceptable and what comprised an aesthetically appropriate sari […] Kalakshetra saris embodied an aesthetic that emerged from the colours of the earth, from the saris that mothers and grandmothers had worn and loved, from saris which suited the complexion of the wearer and the life she lived (Guhan 2006: 26).

In this description, the mill-made, "ill-made" colonial sari with foreign motifs and brash colours requires replacement with the more subdued, refined hues of the Kalakshetra sari, reflecting a preoccupation with womanhood itself as ideally embodied in restraint. Though the "colonial" saris are reviled as aesthetically and morally reprehensible, the manner in which the Kalakshetra sari was rationalised in discourse "made (it) available to the European gaze" through "a certain structure or order" that "had to be discerned beneath the surface" (Weidman 2006: 209). Thus, European epistemes were deployed even in the antithesis to a so-called Western aesthetic.

The importance of bringing the aesthetic and functional together in harmony was consistently emphasised – the sari made with true integrity would achieve a synaesthesia of sorts, of sight and touch. In a conversation with the dancer Chandralekha for a newspaper article, Rukmini Devi highlighted the three-dimensional nature of the sari and the importance of a garment having atmosphere, pointing out that in the past, women would customise their clothes in very subtle, quiet ways – suiting them to their bodies and appearances using "colours that echoed sun, sky, earth […] directly related to the colour of the women wearing them" (Devi 1983: 63). Racial and aesthetic essentialisations are united in this discourse of stylised womanhood. The "daring proportions" of saris such as the Mubbagam saris of Kanchipuram (saris segmented into three parts with three complementing colours, where the borders are one-third the width of the body) supposedly demonstrated a "sophistication in colour usage […] in the way colour works to melt the initial divisions even as it accentuates them" (ibid.). The Kalakshetra sari was thus presented as a way to look distinctively Indian by enacting "traditional" aesthetics that could affirm elite,

upper-caste status through distinctions in taste and morally appropriate consumption. Rukmini Devi created a standard in her reform attempts, one that fixed the image of ideal womanhood in explicitly bourgeois, Hindu, upper-caste tones, similar to other "disciplinary projects that regenerated societal inequalities, as they asserted racial and national homogeneities" (Hancock 2001: 903).

In a signal instance of auto-exoticisation, the Kalakshetra sari appropriated discourses surrounding colour use and design sensibilities generated by the orientalists and imperial exhibitionary complex of the nineteenth century. The sartorial indexes of tradition thus became synonymous with handloom textiles and natural dyes, expelling the synthetic and artificial, which was considered representative of the "western". The Kalakshetra sari was meant to reclaim the province of good taste from the coloniser, by disrupting the narrative of the "noble savage", and appropriating orientalist narratives of colour. The use of muted colours was metonymic of Rukmini Devi's prescriptions for ideal womanhood as subdued and refined. The rhetoric and method was also focused on paring down excess, the removal of extraneous motifs and loud, garish colours. Yet the process of determining extraneous features was largely ad hoc, derived from the saris owned by a particular class of elite women and relying on reconstructed memory. Kalakshetra saris powerfully indexed the past through visual and discursive references to female genealogies, particularly in their status as the saris "mothers and grandmothers" wore.

Chandralekha, the dancer and contemporary of Rukmini Devi, was to say later in an interview (about Rukmini Devi):

> I was able to see from very close quarters, her work and her personality, the tremendous aesthetic quality of her life. I was not seeing her dance as much as the entire aesthetic environment that she would always carry with her. If there was a performance, the way she arranged the flowers or the costumes, the colours, it was tremendous; I thought she was the best-dressed woman in India.[4]

The heirloom saris produced by Kalakshetra continued to be imbued with sticky associations to Rukmini Devi's personal charisma, as elite Tamil Brahman heritage. The clothes had exceeded the wearer. Thus Kalakshetra, founded on an ideology of artistic and aesthetic revival within the nationalist framework, functioned as an index of "tradition", "culture" and the "fine arts" in Chennai, with state recognition as an Institute of National Importance since 1993 (Kalakshetra 2017a). The Kalakshetra website emphasises the importance of the Kalakshetra sari in the cultural milieu by stating that "50 designs have been licensed to the Tamil Nadu Handlooms Directorate, and marketed as Kalakshetra saris" (Kalakshetra 2017b), which resulted in an exhibition-cum-sale jointly organised by Kalakshetra and Co-optex (the retail face of the Tamil Nadu State Handloom Weavers Cooperative) in 1990. In a message

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4   Television interview with Chandralekha on NDTV Talking Heads in November 2000.

prefacing the exhibition catalogue, the then President of India, B. Venkatara-man, wrote in praise of Rukmini Devi's work, "They [Kalakshetra saris] teach us that colour, like music, does not have to be high-pitched to be appealing; that patterns like dance need balance to be beautiful".[5] Evidently, this description plays on the "slippage between traditional textiles and classical music" (Weidman 2006: 134). The President was continuing the language of "purity, refinement and delicacy" that had been given a gendered, eugenic spin by the Theosophical Movement and deployed by Rukmini Devi for her project of cultural-aesthetic reform (Dixon 1999: 204). Though the Kalakshetra sari is considered by some of the older and middle-aged residents of the city to have passed its heyday[6], the Tamil Nadu Handlooms Directorate cites an ever-present demand for Kalakshetra saris (TNHD 2017).

The Weaving Centre today – reified, displaced pasts in the present

Today, the Weaving Centre is housed in the Craft Education and Research Centre (CERC), consisting of the Handloom Weaving Unit and Kalamkari Unit.[7] Kalakshetra has been involved in the last few years in the revival of the Kodali Karuppur sari[8] in another of its indexations of saris as affective objects of cultural value. The Weaving Centre today is partially self-sufficient, with spinning and weaving done there and yarn dyeing done partially at the centre and partially elsewhere.

A conversation with the master weaver at the Weaving Centre in Kalakshetra yielded interesting insights into the narratives that legitimise his presence. When I questioned him about the designs and colours the centre's weavers used on the saris, he repeatedly used the Tamil word *parampariya* (which is often translated as "traditional") or the word "traditional" (in English) to denote the woven features of the sari.[9] Evidently, the Centre follows existing patterns and the instructions received from the director or administrative body of Kalakshetra regarding the saris to be woven. Customers are shown existing

5   This citation is taken from the foreword of *Homage to Rukmini Devi*, the catalogue that was published when Kalakshetra and Co-optex organized the exhibition of Kalakshashmetra saris together in 1990.

6   During an interview on 8 November 2014, a volunteer at a Crafts NGO remarked that Kalakshetra saris today were nothing compared to what they had been, citing also the actual shrinkage in the size of the Weaving Centre. Thus, there was a meta-narrative of decline even within the patronage of Kalakshetra, which positioned itself as a response to decline.

7   Kalamkari refers to a kind of hand-painted or block-printed textile, *kari* meaning "craftsmanship" and *kalam* meaning "pen".

8   The Kodali Karuppur sari is described as being made by a "combination of wax resist hand painting, block printing and intricate weaving" woven "exclusively for the Maratha queens of Tanjore until the end of the nineteenth century" (Craftrevival 2017).

9   Interview by author with Krishnan in Kalakshetra on 25 July 2015.

templates of saris either as samples or images; the interaction between weaver and wearer is not merely mediated, but completely determined by the elite actor who steps in as the creative director of this revival of traditional styles. The application of "traditional" to a range of weaving practices demonstrates the word's role in legitimising heritage both in terms of the Centre as the site of its production and the sari as an object imbued with performative value.

Figure 2: Weaving Centre, Kalakshetra
© Kaamya Sharma (2015)

The master weaver's native town was the weaving centre of Arani, and he came from a generation of weavers. Contrary to the dominant narrative of weaver families transferring to other occupations, both his children were to continue the family occupation of handloom weaving. His presence in Kalakshetra was an index of authentic heritage, his artisanal praxis signifying traditional practices and aesthetics. When asked about the weaving process, he affirmed that at the Weaving Centre, they tried to replicate as far as possible the weaving practices of his home town. Thus, the production and performance of Kalakshetra as a heritage site was premised not only on the availability of Kalakshetra saris, but also on the aesthetic and performative trope of weaving as authenticity – in this case, displaced from its original context. Though the master weaver's presence provided the vital stamp of authenticity to the proceedings at the Weaving Centre, he was subordinated to the agency of the

Weaving Centre, which would really determine the production and consumption of the Kalakshetra sari.

Conclusion – the heritage body

Uma Chakravarti wrote of the recasting of ideal womanhood in the image of the "Aryan woman of the Vedic age" as a collusion between nationalist patriarchy and orientalist nostalgia, noting the elisions of caste and class in such a formulation, creating "a narrow and limiting circle in which the image of Indian womanhood has become both a shackle and a rhetorical device that nevertheless functions as a historical truth" (Chakravarti 1989: 28).

However, I argue that such a carefully orchestrated image of femininity also provides opportunities for self-assertion, as Rukmini Devi's life demonstrates, born out of the appropriation and erasure of other identities. The project of creating a bridge between art and craft, between everyday life and aesthetic contemplation, was carried out in the ambiguous drapes of the Kalakshetra sari, which was both performance and not, everyday and special, a conscious re-crafting of "a sartorial unconscious". Everyday life itself became an enactment of an aesthetically, materially crafted tradition and the female body, which was the site of this enactment, became a heritage body. By linking nostalgic memory to the presence and performance of saris, Kalakshetra signalled a key moment in the search for a national essence, as auto-exoticisation that appropriated the colonial-orientalist narrative of Indian womanhood (Kondo 1997).

This history of the institutionalisation of a garment also reveals the confluence of economic and cultural factors that make the sari an object of class display in present-day Chennai. Performances of clothing in arenas such as *sabha*s (concert halls/cultural organisations) and other venues with cultural value place a premium on particular elite identities – such that national and cultural legitimacy is the province of the elite, upper-caste Hindu. But dress has simultaneously rendered these identities ambiguous because legitimacy is accessible to anyone who can perform it. The globalisation of Bharatanatyam as a dance form is also an extension of its inextricable links to colonial modernity and the transnational community of Tamil Brahmans who are its custodians, a sign of how "Brahmin taste is universalized through Chennai's global, neoliberal economy" through the "marriage of capitalism and heritage" (Soneji 2012: 224–6). The Kalakshetra sari abetted the visual atmosphere of elite performance, spectatorship and patronage that continues to inform Bharatanatyam as the "dance of the nation" today. By cleverly inserting herself into what Swarnamalya Ganesh terms "nation-state womanhood", Rukmini Devi rendered herself indispensable to the incipient project of Indian modernity (Ganesh 2016).

The economic reforms of the 1990s witnessed the rise of a "nouveau riche" class in India, characterised by conspicuous consumption in contrast to the socialist austerity ideals of earlier times. The preference for handlooms and revivalist projects such as the Kalakshetra sari are presently perceived as indexing an older, cultural elite characterised by restraint in taste (Kaul / Varma 2016: 44). The Kalakshetra sari may also be read as an effort of this elite class to assert its aesthetic and moral superiority over the nouveau riche class. The fears that impelled the mobilisation of the Kalakshetra sari are, in many ways, more realised today than they were in the time of its inception. In spite of the efforts of the state to promote handloom textiles invested with discourses of moral integrity, consumer culture in Chennai is largely determined by global capital flows and the proliferation of synthetic clothes (saris being no exception). A vast majority of the lower-middle and lower classes wear synthetic saris because of their cheap prices and low maintenance costs; the fashionably-minded middle classes wear chiffon and crepe saris alongside the inroads made by the salwar kameez[10] as a garment of daily use.

In spite of these transformations, the Kalakshetra sari is emblematic of a lingering narrative of alter-modernity and nostalgia that has co-opted performances of a nationalist, Theosophist ideal of womanhood in the cultural landscape of contemporary Chennai.

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10 Two-piece dress consisting of a tunic and loose trousers, originally from North India and now universalised in India as dress for urban, mostly young women.

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Forcing "Good" and the Legitimation of Informal Power
Philanthrocapitalism and Artistic Nationalism among the Indian Business Elites

Tereza Kuldova

Abstract

Until recently, India's wealthy were held in contempt and perceived with suspicion both by the general public and the media; newspaper articles about the greedy rich and their excesses proliferated. However, following the global financial crisis of 2008, magazines like *Forbes India* began aggressively pushing the idea of the generous and caring Indian business elites, a "force of good"; annual events such as the Forbes sponsored *Philanthropy Awards* and art and fashion galas for a good cause became popular and the notion of philanthrocapitalism was embraced by the elite. It is argued here that behind this development is a particular convergence of underlying legitimation crises, the first within the realm of business and the second within the realm of fashion and the arts. These then force the two realms into collaboration in a pursuit of the common goal of social legitimacy, accumulation of symbolic capital and (re)production of the power mystique of the elite. The article is grounded in extensive ethnographic fieldwork among the North Indian business and fashion elite, from 2008–2013.

Keywords: India, elite, fashion, art, symbolic capital, philanthropy, business

In 2003, a journalist covering an elite fashion show at the Hyatt Regency, the famous five star hotel in New Delhi, proudly proclaimed that "Om Shanti, a charity event by designers and artists, represents a new chapter in the trend of creating luxury products for the wealthy with the aim of making life comfortable for the less privileged" (Tankha 2003). Back then, such high-profile events – where fashion designers present collections created in collaboration with famous artists and donate a percentage of their income to NGOs – were still rela-

tively rare.[1] It was only at the beginning of the 2000s that the exploitative luxury fashion industry began more consciously to attempt to transform its image from wasteful and elitist towards benevolent, charitable and socially aware. Around the same time, the FDCI (Fashion Design Council of India), the chief organisation of the Indian fashion fraternity, also began displaying its benevolence and morality through annual mega-sales of *prêt-à-porter* lines of popular Indian designers, with five per cent of the proceeds distributed to selected charities and NGOs. However, it was only after the financial crisis of 2008 that the industry fully embraced the "ethical sell" as its visible identity, with designers running NGOs alongside their businesses, "raising awareness" during their fashion shows and sharing their benevolent actions through profit-oriented "clicktivism" on social media (White 2010). Suddenly, the business of luxury fashion was redefined as "ethical fashion". But it was never clear where this ethicality was concretely located. It could refer to anything from a clean working environment, care for female workers, and organic cotton to *ahimsa* ("non-violent") silk (the silkworm is not killed). Today, the gated elite circles (Waldrop 2004, Kuldova 2016c, Kuldova 2017b) overflow with VIP charitable art and fashion galas sponsored by the multiply localised transnational business elites.

I shall argue here that behind this current wave of donations among the Indian business elites – within the particular social field where elite philanthropy merges with "artistic nationalism" (Ciotti 2012, Kuldova 2013a, 2013b) – is an underlying convergence of three particular legitimation crises, coupled with a fear of a breakdown in the established social order (Berger et al. 1998). While Indian philanthropy has historically been significantly influenced by the ways in which philanthropy has been conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom, and is thus part of a transnational movement (Kapoor 2016, Hay / Muller 2014, Cantegreil et al. 2013, Sundar 2013, Kalra 2013, Harvey et al. 2011, Nowell 2004), there are still particularities specific to the context that set it apart. This is also clearly visible in the legitimation crises to which it presents itself as a solution. The first legitimation crisis pertains to the status and disproportionate power of the transnational business elite, a problem that was exacerbated by the financial crisis of 2008. The second legitimation crisis relates to the position of the elite vis-à-vis the impoverished Other and the elitist desire to perpetuate strict divisions of class. The third legitimation crisis is specific to the Indian fashion industry and concerns the socio-economic position of the fashion designer within Indian society. Philanthropy in art and artistic education increasingly serves as a "safe remedy" for these legitimation

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1   In contrast, Indian fashion marketed to the "socially aware" middle-classes had a much longer tradition of "fair clothing", as shown by the iconic case of Fabindia, which spurred among other things the revival of *khadi*, the material symbol of artistic and artisanal nationalism par excellence, now increasingly embraced even by high-end luxury fashion designers (see Radhika Singh, *The Fabric of Our Lives: The Story of Fabindia*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010).

crises; it provides the elite with moral credibility, authority, symbolic and cultural capital, while reproducing rather than unsettling social hierarchies and inequalities, thus effectively keeping the poor in their place. In other words, philanthropy is and has been throughout its history, "practical and advantageous to the elite" (Dinello 1998: 111).

It is through this convergence of legitimation crises, I argue, that a particular elitist social field comes alive together with its specific form of symbolic (Bourdieu 1984) and cultural capital (Ostrower 1998), framed by the "philanthrocapitalist" business model (Bishop / Green 2008). These legitimation crises converge as they bring together different elite actors in a shared struggle for legitimacy, a legitimacy of their wealth and informal social power. In order to show how this takes place, I first discuss the role of benevolent giving among the Indian business elite, then consider the aforementioned legitimation crises and finally show how they work together in shaping the elite business sphere. The force of the joint struggles for legitimation will finally be shown in the examples of Satish Modi's ventures, the Art for India foundation (est. 2010) and the International Institute for Fine Arts in Modinagar, NCR[2] (est. 2000).

Benevolence, the Indian business elite and the crisis of legitimacy

India has a solid tradition of charities, religious giving, NGOs and civil society organisations and a long history of the business community engaging in strategic philanthropy. Gifting (Parry 1986), whether selfless, anonymous and strategic (honour-oriented), or as a form of *noblesse oblige*, has been integral to India for many centuries, incorporated in the scriptures of its main religions, politico- economic structures and systems of patronage, prestige and respectability (Appadurai / Breckenridge 1976). And yet, there is something new about this reinvigorated and boastful trend of contemporary elitist philanthropy that acts in a world of increasing socio-economic inequalities aggravated by neo-liberal reforms. Even though prominent families of industrialists have always been involved in charity and benevolent giving, the current engagement with philanthropy has reached new proportions, dynamics and organisational structures. The Indian business elite circles have embraced philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) with renewed enthusiasm, particularly following the financial crisis of 2008. This was not only a financial crisis but also a worldwide crisis of the reputation and legitimacy of the business community at large, to which they undeniably belong. The business community was accused of irresponsible financial speculation, worldwide exploitation of

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2   NCR refers to the National Capital Region, a metropolitan area surrounding New Delhi.

cheap labour and environmental destruction. Back then the media were filled with anger against business, and old critiques resurfaced, as shown in an opinion piece by B. V. Krishnamurthy (2008), entitled "The Price of Greed":

> Five thousand years ago, our scriptures emphasized that greed spells doom. That's precisely what we are witnessing today. Managers of these companies could do no wrong. Buffered by fancy salaries, variable incentive schemes, and a host of perks, they turned speculators – with disastrous consequences. […] Who is to be held accountable for the mess we find ourselves in?

The same accusation was levelled against the Indian business elite circles; Indian millionaires were labelled as greedy and immoral. A range of critiques of neoliberal capitalism emerged, arguing that it systematically fails the majority of the world's population. Amidst these critiques, the elites feared the rage of the poor and delegitimation of their own power. Capitalism was experiencing a global legitimation crisis (Sawaya 2008). Only morality could improve the image of business and of capitalism and encourage the population to doubt those who had become capitalism's public critics. Morality had to be reinserted into the market. Only through morality could the business elite acquire an appearance of legitimacy and capitalism be rendered good, a "capitalism with a human face" (Kothari 1986, Žižek 2009), capable of fixing its own evils.

When I returned to India in 2011 after a previous fieldwork visit in 2008, millionaires were no longer represented in the popular media as greedy and self-obsessed, but instead as selfless and good (this is not to say that the population would necessarily share this view). To my astonishment, they had become the only thinkable saviours of a country with millions in poverty. Suddenly, these new national heroes were the proclaimed hope of India's progress and transformation into a high-tech nation. In 2009, *Forbes India* established annual Philanthropy Awards and began pushing the idea of business as a "force of good", consequently joined by organisations such as Dasra.[3] At the same time, "celebrity humanitarianism" (Kapoor 2013) had been enjoying increasing popularity in the media, simultaneously turning powerful billionaires into celebrities of their own. And the boom of individual and corporate philanthropy shows no signs of slowing; on the contrary, the "philanthropic funding from private individuals recorded a sixfold increase in recent years: approximately INR 36,000 crore in 2016, up from approximately INR 6,000 crore in 2011" (India Philanthropy Report 2017).

This shift in perception of the millionaires was a result of media campaigns and lobbying to improve the image of business following the financial crisis. The crisis, however, also reactivated old Indian social critiques of business.

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3   Dasra (est. 2000, transl. "enlightened giving" or "remover of bad faith") is one of the leading organisations in strategic philanthropy in India. It works with Indian and international donors and organises the annual Dasra Philanthropy Forum, in locations such as New York, London and Stanford, as well as the annual Dasra Philanthropy Week in India.

The political role of the Indian business elite has, as Kochanek pointed out, been inhibited by "its lack of ideological legitimacy […] in a society that traditionally tended to view the profit motive and private gain as inherently antisocial. Indian communists, socialists, Gandhians and sections of the intelligentsia have persistently portrayed industrialists as rapacious exploiters who might be grudgingly tolerated but whose motives and actions are always suspect" (Kochanek 1987: 1281). Precisely because the crisis re-activated such old critiques of the business class, philanthropy – a fairly traditional solution to problems of legitimacy – offered itself as a solution. Only this time, it had to be recast anew, while building on familiar tropes and avoiding past pitfalls.

Already in the pre-colonial era, wealthy merchants were accused of patronising deities and gifting only for their own benefit, instead of gifting selflessly, as the Hindu scriptural ideal would command. In the colonial era, philanthropy became a way of complying with the ideals and developmental policies of the British, a way of acquiring power and political influence in the public sphere, as exemplified by the famous industrialist Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy (Palsetia 2005). India has always had its philanthropic heroes, such as Jamshedji Tata, Jamnalal Bajaj and GD Birla, who were instrumental in the building of modern India and during the freedom struggle. They supported Gandhi and invested their wealth in cultural institutions, colleges, hospitals, museums, public parks and so on (Sundar 2013, Haynes 1987). And yet, despite being prominent and reputable, businesspeople and philanthropists were viewed with suspicion, an opinion that was consequently strengthened by the socialist governments in particular, which at least for a period effectively replaced and denounced business philanthropy through the social welfare system. But they were viewed with suspicion not only under Nehruvian socialist ideology, but also in times preceding it for a simple reason – they could control others through their capital; through benevolence they could implement policies, enforce moralities and keep people dependent. Gifts have been strategically used as a tool to maintain hierarchy (Derrida 1993), something that appears to be a general function of gifts (Parry 1986, Mauss 1990). In a study of Sanatana Dharma Sabha movements between 1915 and 1940, Malavika Kasturi showed how socio-religious gifting formed a crucial socio-political terrain where elites articulated their authority and power, and reinforced hierarchies and relations of patronage, while regulating "the people" and demarcating the deserving from the undeserving (Kasturi 2010).

Following Independence, high taxes replaced donations and philanthropy was discredited by accusations of the misuse of trusts, money laundering, and of interference in the lives of the beneficiaries. However, as the rhetoric of the state's inefficiency slowly began to take hold in the 1960s, philanthropy began returning to the public stage. In 1970s, laws providing tax exemptions for donations were established, leading to a rise of NGOs. This proliferation of

NGOs has accelerated even further in the post-1990s era of neoliberalisation. At the same time, however, these NGOs, initially critical instruments of civil society, became increasingly swallowed into the governmental and corporate body politic, and in the process were prevented from acting as critical opposition (Kothari 1986).

At the same time, the power of business in politics increased, as did the popularity and quantity of public-private partnerships. During the early 2000s, the worldwide business community began struggling with an erosion of trust and CSR was posited as a remedy (Singla / Sagar 2004). Instead of donating to local and transnational NGOs, which were increasingly criticised for pursuing their own interests and developmental agendas (Escobar 2011), CSR was formulated as a new and more natural way for businesses to weave together ethics with profit. But even prior to the Indian government passing the reworked CSR law in 2014, which obliges corporations to spend two per cent of their last three years' average profits on CSR activities, the Indian business elite was already rediscovering national philanthropic heroes in an attempt to emulate their strategies of acquiring legitimacy through philanthropy and CSR. The pre-Independence idea of the heroic philanthropist had returned, albeit with a new wrapping, this time coinciding with a new wave of Hindu nationalism and artistic nationalism (Kuldova 2014a). Even the young self-made rich began to act as if they were part of this imaginary "legacy", thus artificially staging continuity where there might have been none. To them, philanthropy promised not only legitimacy but also "charismatic authority" (Weber 1985) à la Carnegie.

Throughout history, benevolence has been used as an effective instrument of power, from the benevolence of kingly rulers, of the British over the colonies, to the benevolence of business leaders. Benevolence produces a clear division between the powerful and the powerless (Kuldova 2016c). Philanthropy in business is best understood as a form of staging benevolence, a "worldmaking process through which already successful entrepreneurs use their power to accumulate more power, extend their social and political influence, and increase their capacity to shape society according to their will" (Harvey et al. 2011: 429). Philanthropy is essential in acquiring symbolic capital, generating trust and improving reputation, thus legitimising the business ventures and strengthening the public image of the CEO, so crucial to contemporary brands across the world – be it Starbucks, Microsoft or WIPRO. It can also formalise informal power through awards and honorary functions circulating within the elite spaces. For the late 19th century Indian business community "philanthropic activities were but part of a large 'portfolio' of symbolic investments that merchants developed in building stable social relationships with members of their community and with their rulers" (Haynes 1987: 340). Gifting played "a critical role in the exercise of political influence", in appeasing "members of the ruling group" and in upholding family prestige and in "maintenance of the

community's social and religious life" (Haynes 1987: 340), as well as in generating reputations of trustworthiness. Moreover, "in return for valued gifts" the donors "shared in the mystique of the imperial power and thus reinforced their local prestige" (Haynes 1987: 341).

Contemporary philanthrocapitalism (Bishop / Green 2008) functions similarly; it, too, constantly seeks to insert itself into political structures and governance. However, there is a key difference between philanthropists and philanthrocapitalists, one that pertains also to the difference between contemporary and past structures of philanthropy – the philanthrocapitalists treat philanthropy as a business and employ managerial strategies of gifting (Edwards 2008; McGoey 2012, 2014, 2015). Moreover, unlike classical philanthropy, which rarely idealised the unjust market system, philanthrocapitalism endorses the idea that so called "human capitalism" can be a force of good and can become inherently philanthropic. The most striking example of this thinking is expressed in the persona of Bill Gates, who "embraced the chance to make his foundation run more like Microsoft" (McGoey 2014: 110) and who knows well that strategic investments in charitable causes may result in increased profit and market expansion. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was also a direct response to a crisis of legitimacy; throughout the 1990s, Microsoft was pursued by the Justice Department, which in 2000 accused Microsoft of unlawful monopolisation and of crippling competitors, which led to fines from the US and EU and damages to Gates' public image. Gates consequently bought back his public image and legitimacy for the high price of the aforementioned foundation. Today, he is perceived globally as a humanitarian (McGoey 2015). As any other philanthrocapitalist, Gates too claims that because of his success in business, he knows best how to make the world a better place. As Ilan Kapoor has argued, such "construction of celebrity corporate philanthropy helps repudiate corporate capitalism's 'dirty' underside, which is to say that celebrity charity helps stabilize and advance the global neoliberal capitalist order" (Kapoor 2016: 113). The Indian philanthrocapitalists say the same, while promising to relieve the "inefficient" Indian state of all its responsibilities. In the process, governance is depoliticised and the market pushed into invisibility, as are the root causes that create the "need" for philanthropy in the first place (Nickel / Eikenberry 2009).

Overall, elitist philanthropy perceives itself as superior to other forms of giving. Dasra's *India Philanthropy Report 2015* (Company 2015) is revealing in this respect. Without second thoughts, the report divides Indian donors and NGOs into two categories: the sophisticated, a minority consisting of the superrich and prestigious NGOs; and the unsophisticated, the majority of India's donors and NGOs, who are dubbed "untrustworthy", "non-transparent" and "confused". Only elitist philanthropy, with its claims to business-like structure, transparency, goal-orientation and high-quality market research, is

posited as capable of solving India's problems; it is celebrated as future-oriented and strategic, as opposed to the "unsophisticated" philanthropy of the masses, oriented towards acute needs in the here and now. Hence, elitist philanthropy, while invoking the benefactors of the past, at the same time breaks away from the old-fashioned philanthropy still endorsed by the majority of so-called "unsophisticated" givers, and hence perceives itself as superior. Such reports systematically reinforce the view that only the rich can envision the future; the majority of community and civil society initiatives, which may in fact better know the needs of the beneficiaries, are rendered as lacking any such ability. As a result, the philanthropy sector, constituted in such a manner, systematically reinforces the split between the powerful and knowledgeable and the powerless and at best skilled. In practice, it does the opposite of what it claims to do; it reproduces the power structures rather than disrupting them.

Elite philanthropy is also far more concerned with the mediatised public persona of the donor and his or her political influence (Kapoor 2013) than the majority of charitable giving. In India, this has been a feature of elite business philanthropy since the colonial era, when the honours of the British rulers were sought through strategic giving (Palsetia 2005). However, while this trend reinforces pre-existing hierarchical structures and resembles the methods of "strategic giving" of the business elites of the past (Haynes 1987), there is still something new about it; this has to do with the constraining influence exercised by the transnational business elites over their spending, their obsession with control over donated money (different funding structures), their increasing wealth and their extreme separation from the recipients. Moreover, Indian elitist philanthropy has witnessed a shift with respect to the cultural idea of who is a deserving recipient. It has shifted away from the Indian cultural model in which the poor are not to be blamed for their poverty, towards the American model inspired by social Darwinism, which encourages help only to the strongest among the poor, to those who are able to help themselves, while overall blaming the poor for their poverty (Dinello 1998). Such examples follow below – philanthropy that helps only the talented and able-bodied young students among the poor, those who are perceived as possessing an inherent strength, drive and potential.

Struggles to legitimate one's power are at the core of the current philanthropic endeavours. And even though business elites have wrestled with the same questions throughout history, it could still be argued that they enjoyed, back then, a degree of "traditional authority" (Weber 1985). This traditional authority has become progressively under threat by forces of democratisation, which have opened up the playing field to a larger number of people, traditionally not part of business communities. At the same time, due to rising socio-economic inequality, more and more people are being expelled across the internal boundaries of "society" (Sassen 2014). Hence, a new layer of struggle is

added under these changed conditions, with democratisation, liberalisation and an increased competition over resources, on the one hand, and an increasing concentration of wealth on the other.

Legitimation struggles in the Indian fashion industry and the arts

There is no doubt that gated elitist fashion and art events are important spaces where the elite's cultural and symbolic capital is constructed, acquired and displayed – and that such events serve the legitimation of the elite's superiority and disproportionate power. But before we look more closely at exactly how this happens, let us engage with the pervasive legitimation problem within the fashion and arts industries in India, which is, in some respects, specific to the Indian context. The Indian fashion industry is only 30 years old; the first institutions appeared around 1986, when the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) was established. The Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) was, however, established only in 1998 and the first fashion show took place in 2000; it was modelled upon similar shows in the Western fashion centres. But it was not only fashion education and fashion weeks that were new to India, it was first and foremost the concept of design itself, with its associated cultural and economic value – a striking problem in a country of exquisite crafts, fabrics, traditional arts and talented artisans.

The first generation of designers, educated in New York, London and elsewhere in the West, struggled with establishing fashion design in India as a respected profession. When in 1975 Rohit Khosla, the heavily mythologised founding father of the Indian fashion fraternity, said that he wanted to become a fashion designer, he was met with laughter: "*Bade hokar darzi banna hai kya?*" ("Do you want to be a tailor when you grow up?", Khosla / Johnston 1996: 21). In response, Khosla set out to prove that fashion design is something more, that it deserves recognition and that its practitioners should belong to the social elite and upper middle class, as opposed to the country's millions of artisans, who, as the design practitioners claim, do not possess the same imagination, creativity and drive for innovation.[4] Rohit Khosla, as one of the first in this field, combatted the legitimation crisis by claiming that fashion design is a form of modern art and by creating an authoritative narrative about the difference between craft and fashion, while also separating fashion from costume design in the film industry (Wilkinson-Weber 2013). Others followed and used this formula to claim superiority over the country's craftspeople. In a manner

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4   For a detailed account of this particular struggle between craft, traditional art and modern design and art, see Kuldova 2016b.

similar to the elitist philanthropists, they created a distinction between a sophisticated *us* versus an unsophisticated *them*.

And yet, the Indian fashion industry depends fully on the labour of the country's artisans; heritage luxury and "royal chic" are in vogue and they are unthinkable without elaborate craft (Kuldova 2016c, 2013b). Moreover, the artisans, portrayed by marketing as "authentic Indians", infuse the design with an indispensable quality, namely "Indianness". This is also clearly visible in the ways in which the industry has revived the iconic *khadi* and turned it into a luxury fashion statement for the consumption of the rich (Kuldova 2016c, 2014b). The unique selling point of contemporary Indian fashion is Indian "heritage" – anything from hand-woven silk to exquisite embroideries, all wrapped up in images of the flamboyance of royal courts of the bygone eras, stitched for the contemporary business elite, which likes to cast itself as "neo-aristocracy" (Kuldova 2014a, 2016c, 2013b). This business neo-aristocracy also revels in public displays of benevolence, which position them as patrons of arts and Indian culture. The important point here is that crafts have, over the last century, been idealised by the middle classes, India's political leaders, the elites and recently the fashion designers themselves, as the "spirit that is India" (Singh 2009: 13) and as such have become central to the production of contemporary designers; they provide the leverage to Indian design in the international market. This obsession with crafts and neo-royal aesthetics also falls within the trend of "artistic nationalism" (Ciotti 2012).

Nonetheless, in order to legitimise the superior class and power position of the designers, it is necessary to, on the one hand, claim that the artisans are important, while on the other hand argue that without the intervention of designers, the artisans' crafts would never have this role in the first place, or even survive. Within this argumentative logic, it is the designer who benevolently grants certain limited importance to the artisan, an importance that remains intangible for the artisan but translates into financial capital for the designer who articulates it on his or her behalf. In reality, it is the designers who would not exist without the artisans and who are dependent on their labour.

Indian fashion designers employ three core strategies in order to deny this fundamental reality and to legitimise their position. The first strategy is (1) artification, i.e. turning non-art, such as fashion, into art and thereby adding value to one's product (Geczy / Karaminas 2012, Radford 1998, Müller 2000). While artification is a worldwide phenomenon, it presents itself in India with additional urgency, due to the need for designers to distinguish themselves from artisans. Globally, this process manifests itself for instance in the rise of fashion exhibitions curated at prominent art museums (Kuldova 2014b, Pecorari 2014, Melchior / Svensson 2014, Steele 2008) or through an increasing number of designer-artist collaborations and multi-platform events (Kuldova 2015).

The second strategy employed by the fashion designers is (2) claiming legal status as artists. Tarun Tahiliani, a leading contemporary Indian designer, fought a legal battle in the late 2000s for an exemption on his income tax from overseas earnings, claiming to be an artist under section 80RR of the Indian Income Tax Act; Tahiliani argued that designers are artists because unlike craftsmen, their work is about "individual" creativity as opposed to "traditional" and "collective" creativity. In November 2010, the Bombay High Court ruled that designers are artists and thus entitled to the exemption. This ruling not only legally separated designers from craftsmen, but also mirrored the designers' self-legitimation discourse: designers are afforded individuality, while craftspeople are deprived of it and are represented as a collective incapable of progress (Kuldova 2016b). Moreover, designer creations and labels enjoy intellectual property right protection, which is not afforded to the products of the anonymous artisans. The designer's privileged position over the craftsman is legally enshrined; the rights are available only to those already privileged, while at the same time legally reinforcing and reproducing their privilege.

The third strategy of legitimising the designer's position is (3) through charitable actions on behalf of the poor, especially, in this case, on behalf of the impoverished artisans who are patronised by the designers and their NGOs or CSR programmes. As I have argued in my previous work, such NGOs established by designers often in practice reproduce the radical separation between craft and design, reinforcing hierarchies rather than destabilising them, while claiming to act on behalf and for the good of the artisans (Kuldova 2016c, Kuldova 2016a). In reality, there has not been a single artisan turned designer; the two worlds are kept separate. The craftspeople are cast as in constant need of rescue, while not allowed to themselves define what is "good for them". Paradoxically, the necessity of their upliftment becomes one of the arguments of the designers for the high pricing and value of their goods – after all, they are in the business of "ethical fashion". The "ethical" designers, much like the business philanthrocapitalists, present themselves as benevolent patrons imitating the *noblesse oblige* of the maharajas, princes and Mughal rulers of the past – a principle that "legitimized and sanctified the discrepancy between the benefactor and the beneficiary" (Dinello 1998: 113).

At the core of all these strategies is an attempt at the legitimation of inequality itself; for obvious reasons this is most visible in the struggles of the wealthy elite to legitimise their power vis-à-vis the powerless – be they the "unsophisticated donors" or the "skilled but not knowledgeable" (Venkatesan 2009, Kuldova 2016c) artisans. However, none of these legitimation strategies, no matter how well thought through or executed, would ever work if there were no "contingent reaction of others who provide consensual validation" (Berger et al. 1998: 379) within a particular cultural space; in other words, "legitimation is a collective process", in which "social reality needs to

be redefined to create legitimacy" (Berger et al. 1998: 380). If social actors desire to acquire legitimacy, in particular of their informal power within society, such as the power to persuade and influence beyond their formal roles appropriate to their position, they need to come together and collectively construct their legitimacy. Such struggles for legitimacy are constitutive to the gated elite spaces in contemporary India, and arguably elsewhere. Here, the business elite fearing delegitimation joins forces with fashion design and art, which are struggling equally for their own legitimacy in a country overflowing with creative practitioners. They meet in the name of a social cause and public good (the support of high culture and art is, after all, a noble goal).

The International Institute of Fine Arts and the Arts for India Foundation

In 2000, Satish Modi, with his wife Abha, established the International Institute of Fine Arts (IIFA)[5], a private educational institution, in Modinagar, a town around 45 km from New Delhi, a city built by his father, Rai Bahadur Gujarmal Modi (1902–1976), the famous industrialist and philanthropist who established the Modi Group of Industries. The Modi family is one of the country's oldest and most famous business families. The family fortune began with a sugar mill established in 1933 in Modinagar; by the late 1970s Modinagar became a prominent industrial hub. However, in the late 1980s family infighting began and the business was neglected as the brothers and cousins fought over their industries and property. In 1989, the Modi empire was divided among Gujarmal Modi's five sons, now all extremely prominent and wealthy businessmen[6] and the three sons of his step-brother Kedar Nath Modi (for a detailed account of the epic family battle see Majumdar 2014). Following this battle and decline, Modinagar was hit the hardest, as factories were misman-

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5   Prior to establishing the IIFA, Satish Modi launched in 1993 India's first private airline, at the time known as Modiluft, and now known as Spice Jet. According to the IIFA website, "in collaboration with Lenzing, Austria, S. K. Modi is currently setting up the world's largest Viscose Staple Fibre Plant of 240,000 tons per annum capacity at Patalganga near Mumbai", while also further diversifying into Real Estate through his company Regent Realty Limited, in London, UK, "to develop an area of 3,000 acres into a new township in the National Capital Region (NCR-Delhi) near Modinagar, in collaboration with Pacific Consultants International (PCI), Japan and Surbana of Singapore. As Chairman of this project, his vision is to establish this new township as a world class Dream City. Satish Modi founded a Football Club in the U.K. in 2013, known as Modi Town Football Club Limited, with its registered office in Harrow, London" (IIAF 2015).

6   For instance, Krishan Kumar Modi owns one of the prominent cigarette manufacturing companies in India, Godfrey Phillips India Ltd.; Bhupendra Kumar Modi is one of the richest people based in Singapore and is the chairman of the Indian conglomerate Spice Global, primarily working in telecoms, and is chairman of Asia Crime Prevention Foundation's India chapter, while also planning a high-tech hospital in New Delhi. Umesh Kumar Modi is the president and CEO of Umesh Modi Group with a billion-dollar turnover, trading in pharma, cosmetics, iron, steel, sugar, alcohol and other goods; he was awarded the title "Man of the Year" in 1984 from the Ministry of Industries.

aged and some eventually closed down. While sugar mills, weaving mills and distilleries have almost disappeared from Modinagar's landscape, the town is emerging anew, this time as an educational hub with 24 colleges and numerous schools, most established by and named after different members of the Modi family, e. g. Multani Mal Modi College, Dr. K. N. Modi Institute of Engineering and Technology, Dayawati Modi Girls Degree College, Rukmani Modi Girls Inter College and so on. The city's shift from industry and manufacturing to cultural industries, the immaterial economy and education, can be also read as a symptom of the global shift in the economy at large.

With the establishment of the IIFA, Satish Modi followed a family legacy of philanthropic engagement in education, which has become central to his quest for cultural and symbolic capital. And yet, even though conceived and built in the name of the "public good", the institute is fully privatised. The private educational sector has boomed in the last decade and many businesspeople and industrialists have opened colleges and private schools alongside their regular businesses. They both cater to the desire of the aspiring lower middle classes and middle classes for private education (Altbach 2007) and satisfy their own desire for being perceived as owners of large amounts of symbolic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). What is interesting about the IIFA is its disproportionate visibility in the attempt to legitimise the socio-economic power of the Modi family – in particular, following the establishment of the Arts for India Foundation in 2010 and the establishment of the Arts for India Week in London in 2014, featuring India's best fashion designers, artists and filmmakers, amidst charity and award galas. According to the official website, Arts for India was presented at the Kensington Palace, London, in October 2010, in Zurich at the Rietberg Museum in September 2011 and in the USA at an event held at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, on 26 April 2012. Arts for India's mission is "to lift disadvantaged young Indian people out of poverty through the provision of education in Art and Creative Design to a global standard" (IIAF 2015). The Arts for India Foundation now also presents the Dayawati Modi Award for Art, Culture and Education (est. 1994), named after the late wife of Gujarmal Modi. The award functions as a way of acquiring symbolic capital and powerful connections: among the winners of the award have been Mother Theresa, the Dalai Lama, Ravi Shankar and Simon Beaufoy.[7] Satish Modi himself was in 2010 nominated for a Prince of Wales Medal for Arts Philanthropy. Distributing awards and honours, and receiving them in turn from powerful players within the same elite circles, is clearly one of the crucial strategies of acquiring legitimacy and symbolic capital.

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[7]   For a full list of award winners see http://www.iifaindia.org/award_dayawati.html (accessed 6 July 2017).

The IIFA currently provides private education, with fees around 60,000 INR per year,[8] in fashion design, textile design, painting, applied arts, photography, computer graphics and 3D animation, and is planning to launch a Film and Television Institute as well. While the fees are not excessive in comparison to other fashion institutes, the crucial point to note about this institution is that, while possibly the most economically marginal among Modi's businesses, it is symbolically the most central, as it produces cultural and symbolic capital on behalf of the whole business family, while also providing legitimacy to the informal socio-economic power of the family. As such, this economically peripheral venture becomes symbolically indispensable.

The advisory board of the IIFA includes, among others, celebrity fashion designers such as Rohit Bal, Manish Malhotra and Rina Dhaka and distinguished Indian artists such as Arpana Caur and Satish Gujral. The education at such institutes in practice translates into buying one's entry ticket for access to elite circles and a chance to participate in prestigious events – something that the public art colleges are often unable to provide, as they do not necessarily facilitate contact with the wealthy and with industry. At the same time, designers and artists themselves need to participate in the boards and committees of educational institutions in order to claim their value by association with institutions widely held in great esteem; this provides the designers with an opportunity to also present themselves as educators, and more importantly as experts. Conversely, the designers' business sponsors feed off their association with high culture, thus improving their own image. A tightly knit network of elitist spaces and events emerges, distinguished by multiple dependencies among different actors joined together in the process of resolving and addressing their respective legitimation crises.

In the American philanthropic context, Ostrower argued that while cultural capital is important, it does not consist, as Bourdieu would have argued, of the actual tastes and shared aesthetic knowledge of the elites, but rather of "the social organization of elite participation in the arts. Thus, the link that cultural capital theory draws between the arts and cultural cohesion is correct, but occurs through an alternative mechanism" (Ostrower 1998: 43). It is precisely the participation on boards of institutions, in diverse foundations, award committees, gated luxury events, art auctions and art fairs and so on that both sustains eliteness and provides the elite with cultural legitimacy. As Ostrower noted, and I believe this applies also to the Indian case, the "elite's esteem for arts is reflected in the fact that they enjoy contact with artists. Providing such contact is one of the 'perks' used to solicit donations" (Ostrower 1998: 46). The fact that this reworked correlation pertaining to cultural capi-

tal is more accurate here is also confirmed by the fact that Indian elite fashion designers struggle every day to "educate" their elite clients in "good taste" (Kuldova 2016c); to the Indian designers the elites appear misbehaved, too flashy, uneducated about crafts and heritage – as part of the designers' own struggle for legitimacy they claim that their place is in teaching the wealthy how to dress in a classy and tasteful way, instead of mixing and matching clashing status symbols as they please. Both education and charity are crucial for the legitimatory discourses; this brings us to the Arts for India Foundation, an example of how legitimacy and symbolic capital are constructed through capital investments.

The Arts for India Foundation facilitates contact between the rich and famous, in the UK and elsewhere, and the leading celebrity Indian artists, while also giving the wealthy an opportunity to fund the education of an upcoming artist of impoverished background, whom they then can follow as patrons through his or her education and in the end receive some of his or her artworks. This then enables the elite patrons, through such fundraisers, to "derive prestige from the identification with non-profits" (Ostrower 1998: 49). But no matter how economically peripheral this venture is to other businesses owned by Modi family, they never forget to put business and profit first, irrespective of how marginal. Hence, the only twist in this philanthropic story is that the education funded is precisely the one provided by IIFA, owned and run by the same Satish Modi. Instead of giving donations away to external NGOs or charities, Modi funnels the funds raised through his foundation, which operates solely as a fundraiser and organises spectacular events at the Sotheby's or the Indian Art Week in London, directly into his own IIFA institute. It has been customary that a private educational institution in India reserves a certain number of seats for qualified students of poor background, with either free or minimal tuition. However, in this case the foundation is set up to raise funds for scholarships from private donors at the very institution the philanthropist owns. A member of a family of billionaires controlling vast industries, including tobacco, iron and sugar, receives tuition fees to grant students an education at his very own private institution and that too, through his own philanthropic foundation. This is fundraising for profit dressed up as philanthropy. The point to make here is that what matters is the display of morality that needs to be staged. The intent is to spend money in order to raise money instead of donating that same money directly; only in such a way does spending becomes visible. This "spectacular spending" (Kapoor 2016) then further contributes to the staging of the business family's symbolic capital, while at the same time displaying them as owners of cultural capital by promoting the art institution they own.

Precisely here it becomes apparent that what is at stake is the acquisition of legitimacy – for legitimation to take place, public acknowledgement is neces-

sary and for public acknowledgement to occur, the media need to be mobilised, a show needs to be staged, money needs to be spent, awards distributed, champagne consumed, and star designers like Sabyasachi Mukherjee showcased. If money were to go directly to the students – who would ever notice? Moreover, the legitimacy and prestige of all the other elite members, be they from the UK or India, is dependent on displaying their benevolence publically and supporting and promoting initiatives such as Arts for India. This is exactly the result of the aforementioned shift towards philanthrocapitalism, in which philanthropy itself is to be run like any other business and, moreover, with the intent to increase turnover and capture new markets and consumers. This strategy also enables the philanthrocapitalist to control all flows of his or her wealth, which also translates into funnelling it only into non-threatening causes beneficial to his or her own image (such as fashion and art galas and education), while enjoying tax breaks and looking good before the public.

Satish Modi has even bigger plans for the future, namely a new arts university, the largest private Fine Arts University, a part of the "Universe of Arts", a megalomaniac construction project envisioned on his land in the suburbs of Modinagar. This project should transform Modinagar into the nation's cultural capital by developing not only the university, but also a performing arts centre and an art museum modelled upon the Tate Modern and the Guggenheim, as well as serving as a rival to the Qatari Museum of Islamic Art. When Satish Modi was based in London, he partnered with the London College of Arts and the Prince's Drawing School, which sent their teachers to visit India in order to increase the quality of the education, something that in turn becomes part of their own institutional charitable endeavours. The project is also partially funded by the Prince's Foundation for Building Community (Prince of Wales); more fundraising for the building of the "Universe of Arts" is scheduled for the upcoming years.[9] This is where the Prince of Wales Medal for Arts Philanthropy, a formal honour – symbolic capital – has become transformed into economic capital. This logic is not new to any Indian businessperson; the fact that cultural and symbolic capital could translate into economic capital is also captured in the Hindi word *abru* with its double meaning of "social reputation" and "economic credit" (Haynes 1987: 343). And yet, the institutionalisation, execution and marketing of this logic have reached new heights in the global struggle for legitimacy and power.

9   See http://www.iifaindia.org/Universe%20of%20Art.pdf for the project proposal.

Conclusion

The Arts for India Foundation is wrapped up in the rhetoric of uplifting the marginalised through artistic education; this brings us to the core problem of acquiring social legitimacy for a position of power – namely, the relationship to the poor and the desire for reproduction of the existing social hierarchy. Satish Modi's statement, circulated across web platforms, hints at exactly that: "I feel that real philanthropy is to enable the disadvantaged to earn a decent living". Note that the disadvantaged are not encouraged to dream any bigger than achieving a "decent living". In an interview, Modi stated that "the secret of success lies in the cause. Because what we are doing is, we are taking out underprivileged children, students, from the circle of poverty, giving them free education, and not only that, we are putting a career in front of them, so that really brings them out of the poverty. And you know, poverty leads to all kinds of problems, including human trafficking, because parents can't give dowry, girls are poor, so what are they going to do, the options are very little. So this programme does a lot for them." But then, Satish Modi remarked that the "rich have the money, but the poor have the blessing".[10]

While this remark can on the one hand be read as the expression of the specifically Indian cultural attitude towards the poor, where service to the poor is represented as service to God, it at the same time points us to the mutual dependency of the rich and the poor. The rich are dependent on the poor, not only for their wealth, which they have acquired largely by the exploitation of the poor, but also for an appearance of morality and legitimacy, that can be granted to them only by the poor who let themselves be patronised, or are patronised against their will, and thus in the end "bless" the rich. The poor, often imagined as superior in their virtuousness and morality precisely because of their poverty, thus have something that the rich desperately need (Kuldova 2016c, 2017a; Tooley / Dixon 2005; Reich 2005). This may be one of the reasons why they need to be kept exactly where they are precisely by the force of social consensus on the legitimacy of the rich – one significant social force, among others, that prevents the poor from organising themselves and rebelling.

As Silver has argued and as we have seen, the funders' "prevailing interest is to uphold the class system from which they derive the money they give away"; hence they "seek to promote only those social changes that they regard as institutionally safe" (Silver 1998). Moreover, in the legitimation struggles of both the business philanthropists and the fashion designers, the boundary-making process between themselves and the "low Others" always inherently dominates the legitimation discourses, even if it is not always directly stated,

10   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYPdnfsIFrM (accessed 5 December 2015).

is not necessarily a matter of intention or is not even necessarily conscious to the elite members or designers. This is an important point, as we are not necessarily dealing here with intentional reproduction of hierarchies and exploitative social structures; there is no doubt that on the individual level philanthropy can and does improve individual lives, but this does not mean that it does not have structural effects that are potentially destructive and do not benefit the public at large. The elite spaces, where morality is displayed and photographed by eager page 3 journalists, and where benevolence and care for the nation's progress and culture are staged for the public gaze, emerge out of the fears of delegitimation in the case of the business elites and out of struggles for legitimacy on the part of the fashion and art practitioners. Yet, at the core of both of these legitimation struggles is the ultimate fear of the lower class Other, who, on the one hand, needs to be acknowledged and can also increase the elite's moral portfolio, but who, on the other hand, also needs to be kept precisely in place. In the end, most elitist philanthropy operates like the Arts for India Foundation, granting the selected few access to the space of the elite, while the whole institution comfortably reproduces eliteness, social hierarchy and exclusivity. As Ilan Kapoor convincingly argued, today's philanthropists operate "in the service of capitalism, tranquilizing its worst manifestations […] their charity work is integral to the logic of capitalism; it helps regulate the system, calming it down when it runs amok. The irony, of course, is that it is the philanthropists' own business activities that help hyperactivate the system in the first place" (Kapoor 2016: 126).

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The Broom, the Muffler and the Wagon R: Aam Aadmi Party and the Politics of De-elitisation

Jyotirmaya Tripathy

Abstract

This paper explores the new alternative politics popularised by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as an antidote to the conventional politics that plague Indian democracy. It locates this politics not in an already constituted framework like other caste-, community- and class-based political parties, but as a performative construct articulated through the symbols of the broom, the muffler and the Wagon R. Contrary to the understanding that AAP leaders are fully evolved common men, it is proposed that their commonness was a product of these symbols. These representational devices are made to resonate among the people through a carefully orchestrated spectacle of de-elitisation. This process involves both disavowal of the elite Self and a kind of reverse mimicry of an irrational other. It is this strategy that successfully converts administrators, academics, lawyers, etc. into appearing as one of the common people. The paper argues that the characteristic features of the common man found among AAP leaders are not natural conditions but manifestations of what may be called self-othering.

Keywords: India, Aam Aadmi Party, Kejriwal, representation, elites, self-othering, symbols

Introduction

On an ordinary day in April 2014, in the run-up to India's general election, the people in the streets of Mumbai were pleasantly surprised by an unusual sight. Some of their adored actors from film and television, such as Ranvir Sheorey, Vidya Malvade and Ayub Khan, among others, were seen carrying placards in support of the Aam Aadmi Party (roughly translated as "Common Man's Party" and abbreviated as AAP) in various localities throughout the city (see Figure 1). Not that these actors were part of India's box office elite, but the fact that they had crossed the threshold that separated celebrities from their fans, for a perceived sense of social commitment, made the exercise a spectacle of sorts.

Whether such an exhibition was later converted into votes, or if the actors were doing this to publicise themselves and boost their own fledgling careers rather than the fortunes of the Aam Aadmi Party, is debatable. The most eye-catching element in this reality show was the posters which read e. g. "I am not Ranvir Shorey, I am an *aam aadmi*"[1] or "I am not Vidya Malvade, I am an *aam aadmi*", complete with the Aam Aadmi Party's symbol, the broom, through which they not only persuaded prospective voters to vote for the AAP in the forthcoming election but also established themselves as "common men".[2]

What is perhaps more intriguing and a little problematic in this parade is the representational act itself, which made these celebrity elites appear spectacularly ordinary. No one among the viewing public would have failed to note in the slogan the fact that these elites are not actually the average man or woman on the street, but have chosen to be so for the sake of the new idea of a corruption-free India. By no stretch of the imagination were these members of the entertainment industry the everyman of Mumbai streets, nor did they have any shared everyday life experience with the city's invisible folk. It need not be emphasised here that their commonness did not spring from their socio-economic condition or material lived experience, but through a set of dissimulative tactics, such as standing in the streets, as well as in their iteration through the slogan of commonness. This commonness, however, is unlike any other, because becoming common can be a choice only for the elites, from the vantage point of their privilege. For a celebrity, it is extraordinary to be ordinary.

The AAP as an alternative ideological formation has been discussed on television and newspapers, both in celebratory (Bidwai 2015) and critical (Srinivasa-Raghavan 2014) ways, as have its economic (or lack thereof) principles and consensual politics. Though the AAP is a fairly recent phenomenon, which explains the absence of critical literature relating to the party, what has been missing from the popular and journalistic discourses is the performative nature of the AAP and its construction and legitimation of certain political claims. As a cultural critic, I am interested in understanding the processes through which its ordinariness is achieved, sustained and made believable. The actors mentioned above are not the only AAP members to have come from a celebrity culture; in fact, the entire AAP leadership and think tank members came from a social life of privilege, and before the formation of the AAP they were all members of the cultural capital market.

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1   The words *aam aadmi* can be translated as "common man".

2   Literally, the term *aadmi* is the Hindi equivalent of "man", as distinguished from *aurat* or "woman". However, in everyday conversations, *aadmi* is used in a gender-neutral way meaning "common man", the sense captured in "Aam Aadmi Party". The present paper, for the sake of convenience, presumes the same gender neutrality in its use of *aadmi* and "common man".

Figure 1: Ranvir Sheorey and others advertising for *Aam Aadmi* Party
Source: http://pages.rediff.com (for link details see list of references)

The present paper locates the foundation of AAP politics not in an already constituted party framework such as the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar or Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) in Tamil Nadu, each with a clearly defined constituency, but as a performative construct articulated through the signifiers of the broom, the muffler and the Wagon R. It is not that the AAP has officially claimed to be transmitting its ideas through these symbols (except for the broom as its election symbol); it is that these symbols have been the most visible manifestations of AAP's ethical and political difference. These representational tools are made to resonate among the common people through a carefully orchestrated technique of de-elitisation, or what we may call a process of self-othering. This process involves both the disavowal of the elite Self and a kind of reverse mimicry of the ordinary or subaltern other, i. e. the *janata* or "the public".

Here it is proposed that the characteristic features of the *aam aadmi* found among the AAP leaders are not particular situations or inherited conditions but exercises in de-elitisation. The first part of this paper, centred on the party symbol (the broom), engages with the utopian post-political politics proposed by the AAP, for which a movement from below is seen as an imperative. The second part deals with the performative nature of AAP ordinariness and problematises the iterative process of self-othering, which is crucial for the political project of ordinariness formation. This section will deal extensively with the semiotic possibilities of the muffler and its affective power over people. The third part concerns itself with the reconfiguration of the idea of the *aam aadmi* around the symbol of the Wagon R. The conclusion is intended to place the AAP's politics in the same conventional framework that it sought to replace, thus projecting its leaders not as missionaries but as professional politicians.

The broom and post-political politics

The AAP came into existence in late 2012 out of an anti-corruption social movement called India Against Corruption (IAC), which had been fighting for the introduction of the Jan Lokpal Bill ("Citizen Ombudsman Bill") in the Parliament, which was aimed at ensuring probity in public life, delivering transparency in governance and fighting corruption. When the movement did not succeed in the introduction of the bill, a group within IAC led by Arvind Kejriwal, a former Indian Revenue Service officer and winner of the Magsaysay Award (and the incumbent Chief Minister of Delhi), decided to form a political party, given that the extra-parliamentary nature of the movement had failed to achieve its goal. The objective was not just to introduce the Jan Lokpal Bill through political power, but more importantly, to usher in a new type of post-political politics.

If conventional politics in India is characterised by caste-, class- and interest-based affiliations, the approach AAP promoted went beyond this formula, at least theoretically. Instead, it offered to protect the common man's interest by fighting against corruption. The party ideologue Yogendra Yadav always harped (until his expulsion from the party) on the idea that the AAP was not a mere political alternative or a party with a difference but an attempt at an alternative to politics. As per the Party's vision document, the objective was to clean up politics from within and make it "a noble calling once again" (Aam Aadmi Party 2017a). This novelty was captured in the party's election symbol, the broom, which symbolised the "dignity of labour" and was presented as an instrument for cleaning "the filth which has permeated our government and

our legislature". The party believed that "the country needs a clean sweep of its corrupted mainstream political parties" (Aam Aadmi Party 2017b).

However holier-than-thou the above lines may seem, the political goal was to co-opt the voice of a large chunk of class-based voters who usually vote for the communist parties (and also the Congress Party), as well as caste-based voters who saw in the broom and the motto "dignity of labour", a possibility for their inclusion and a transcendence of the stigma associated with cleaning, sweeping and scavenging. Much more than BSP's elephant, the Samajwadi Party's cycle, RJD's lantern or the hammer and sickle of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)], the broom was symbolic of a political experiment from below. Investing the broom symbol with political significance transformed it from a cleaning tool or even a metaphor of low social status into a potent vehicle for social and political transformation (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Aam Aadmi Party's election symbol
Source: http://www.aamaadmiparty.org (for link details see list of references)

The appeal of the party to the class voter was so visible and so unsettling to the CPI(M) that its General Secretary Prakash Karat accused AAP of imitating the leftist parties. The polysemous idea of the broom was also able to successfully appeal to the middle class, the young and the professional, who saw in the party a distrust of mainstream political parties and politicians in general while at the same time a commitment to the cause of disinfecting politics. Other founding members of the party such as Shanti Bhushan, Prashant Bhushan, Yogendra Yadav, Manish Sisodia, Gopal Rai, Sanjay Singh, etc. came from illustrious families or from an administrative services background, all apparently motivated by the dream of making India corruption-free. The slogan in one of the Party's election campaigns *jhadu chalao, beimaan bhagao* ("Swing the broom, get rid of the dishonest") captured that militant desire of using politics to clean up politics.

During elections, the party depended both on contemporary social media to attract the young, the middle-class and the students, and also on conventional campaign tactics such as rallies and public meetings. Door-to-door campaigns, *mohalla sabhas* or community councils, campaigns on cycles and on foot, and clean-up campaigns of streets and neighbourhoods attracted diverse members of the population: the young and the old, the educated and the uneducated, the male and the female, all equally motivated and driven by sincerity and social responsibility. Their campaign during the Delhi Assembly election of 2015 also involved such novel tactics as flash mob performances accompanied by Bollywood music, street plays, wall art, etc. It should be mentioned here that the AAP runs a practice centre for various styles of protests called Santosh Koli Centre for the Protest Arts, in Sunder Nagri in North-East Delhi (Brahmachari 2015). This is the same district from where Kejriwal, with Manish Sisodia and Santhosh Koli, ran the NGO Parivartan.[3]

It was both the lure of the AAP model of politics and the frustration with the current brand of conventional politics which enthused an otherwise indifferent, though at times restless, younger generation. For the general public, it was reminiscent of Gandhian *satyagraha*, and the slogan (printed on the party cap worn by members) "I want complete *swaraj*" made every AAP volunteer a *satyagrahi*.[4] This brought a sense of freshness to the way people imagined politics and politicians, and established AAP workers as *tyagi* ("one who sacrifices") rather than *bhogi* ("one who indulges"). In the Delhi Assembly elections of 2013 and 2015, the voters seemed to believe in the AAP mission: "Our aim in entering politics is not to come to power; we have entered politics to change the current corrupt and self-serving system of politics forever" (Aam Aadmi Party 2017c).

In his study of the masses and the state, Rajni Kothari recognised that to unite the masses and to bring alternative politics, a new class of people, the activists, would have to emerge from within the middle class. He was perhaps anticipating the AAP when he said that "it is from this convergence of a conscious and restless people and a conscientious and equally restless class of volunteer politicians (to be distinguished from professional party politicians) that the new grassroots movements" (Kothari 1986: 214) will take shape. With his thrust on the common man, Kejriwal could successfully transform

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3   The word *parivartan* may be roughly translated as "change". This was the organisation mentored by Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia before they formed the AAP. It was based in Sunder Nagri of Delhi and dealt with grievances related to the Public Distribution System. The NGO lost its force and almost became inactive after the formation of the AAP.

4   *Satyagraha* is a Sanskrit expression consisting of two words, *satya* ("truth") and *agraha* ("insistence") and means "insistence on truth". A practitioner of *satyagraha* is called a *satyagrahi*. The term was popularised by Gandhi during India's freedom struggle and became a political practice of non-violent resistance. *Swaraj* literally means "self-rule", but during India's independence movement, Gandhi's use of the term was much more nuanced than formal and political independence from British rule and had connotations of self-liberation, self-realisation and self-knowledge, among others.

the mass from being merely passive voters, as mainstream parties believed, to citizens who are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Spivak's rhetorical question *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1985: 120–130) can be revealing here. The Congress Party always thought that its narrative was the only authentic forum of the common people, but in the process, it actually ignored them or (even worse) silenced them. Critically speaking, the AAP was not much different from the Congress Party in so far as its representation of the common man's interest was concerned, because like the Congress Party leaders, Kejriwal too came from an elite background. But in a politically conscious 21st century, the AAP story was more believable. Unlike many political parties that believe that too much democracy can undermine the principle of freedom (Nandy 1989: 11) and are driven by a certain fear of the people (ibid.: 23), Kejriwal went beyond this fear, invested citizenship in them and saw the future of India within the people rather than outside them. The moment of *jhadu* politics ("politics of broom" or "clean politics") had arrived; in popular discourses and street discussions, *jhadu* became a catalyst for that emancipatory politics.

If nationalism is a "deeply contradictory enterprise" (Sarup 1996: 149), the AAP politics was for everyone who desired to eliminate corruption. Kejriwal had said that the AAP wouldn't be guided by ideologies and that they were entering politics to change the system: "We are *aam aadmi*s. If we find our solution in the Left, we are happy to borrow it from there. If we find our solution in the Right, we are happy to borrow it from there" (Anju Sinha 2013). The problem with such an approach is that such politics simplifies the antagonistic dimension constitutive of the political (Mouffe 2005: 2). This universal consensus has a tendency to create institutions intended to reconcile conflicting values, though the objective of democratic politicians should be to create vibrant agonistic public spheres of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted (Mouffe 2005: 3). Mouffe was prophetic when she said that in contrast to post-political visionaries, what we are witnessing today is not the disappearance of the political in its adversarial dimension, but a conflict in the moral space. Although the we/they dichotomy continues, it is not defined in terms of political categories, but in moral terms; instead of right and left, we are faced with a struggle between right and wrong. The AAP's moral superiority and its dismissal of the other political parties as thieves (*sab chor hain,* "all are thieves") reveal this moral politics.

The AAP ideologues took it upon themselves to create a narrative that not only distinguished them from other politicians, but also made those other parties appear as residual colonial forces: "Before independence the common man was a slave to foreign powers […] There is a new master in our country today – the political *neta* [leader, JT]" (Aam Aadmi Party 2017a). By representing the *neta*s (political leaders) of other parties as agents of colonial legacy or

as comprador bourgeoisie, Kejriwal and his team promoted themselves as true postcolonial subjects and as the agents for real change, a change that had eluded India's *aam aadmi* for decades. In this account, the Congress Party (which was AAP's chief competitor in 2013) is not the postcolonial forum it claims to be, but is a space of mimicry where hierarchy is produced and maintained. By representing independence in 1947 as independence only for the elite rather than for the common man, the AAP limited the scope of India's freedom at midnight as a derivative discourse which has succeeded in making India's common men true subjects of postcolonial history.

It may be productive here to borrow from Benedict Anderson's (1991) idea of anticolonial nationalism as a derivative discourse. Anderson would propose that nationalism was conceived and conceptualised as an imagined community alongside the demise of feudalism and the rise of print capitalism. Even anti-imperial struggles in colonies were dependent on European models when the native intelligentsia (such as Gandhi and Nehru) received a European education. If such be the case, formal independence can promise emancipation from colonial rule and freedom of government, but can only deliver in terms of some administrative restructuring and catchphrases like *garibi hatao* ("remove poverty") to make people believe that they are indeed free. By creating a narrative of continuity that connects the present democratic regimes of India with the colonial administration, the AAP is not only derecognising 1947 as the radical turning point in Indian history, but also promoting the emergence of the AAP as that historical moment. In this new narrative, reminiscent of the subaltern collective's interventions into elitist history, Kejriwal and team appear as true protagonists of postcolonial resistance.

Chatterjee (1986), however, challenges this understanding of Indian nationalism as derivative discourse and suggests that this intricate relationship between anticolonial and metropolitan nationalisms is characterised by both dependence and difference. Drawing on Chatterjee's (1986) understanding, we may say that the AAP politics had an intricate relationship of both sameness and difference vis-à-vis the Congress Party's politics. Contrary to its claims of a radical alternative, the AAP was made possible by already existing political templates like the Congress Party's and its preoccupation with the common man. But while tapping the common man as its constituency, the AAP departed from the Congress Party's belief that the common man is only a receiver of freebies or development schemes, and invested in him the power to change and decide his future. If the form of this post-political politics was modelled on existing paradigms, the content of such politics was a radical revision of the common man's power and agency. In a way, the whole project of the AAP was to experiment with methods that challenge all kinds of electoral politics, except its own.

The muffler and self-othering

But how did this happen, and how could the AAP founders, by no means any less elite than leaders from other parties, convince people that they are one of them? Did people see them as more sincere than other leaders, or did they see in these leaders their own reflection as angry, restless or even helpless victims of a strangling system? Did these leaders capture the imagination by valorising certain acts of disobedience (Kejriwal cutting electricity metres in protest against high electricity bills) while using the language of rights and *swaraj*? Perhaps the single most likely reason why they were accepted as ordinary was cleverly orchestrated communication strategies of simulation and dissimulation through which they de-elitised and cast themselves as ordinary. Since Kejriwal was not a common man, he had to become one, and this becoming was not an event, but a sustained practice.

Kejriwal had to identify himself with the masses and also become one of them through a willing suspension of what constituted his privileged self. It required a careful re-vision of the elite self by distancing himself from all the trappings of privilege (such as a luxury car or entourage) and adopting certain types of behavioural traits, clothing, public persona, etc. Kejriwal knew that the *khadi kurta* (a type of clothing preferred by Indian politicians) had become a symbol of deceit, not least because a *kurta* is no longer a common style of dress these days, though recently some clothing brands have started marketing them as ethnic wear. But a complete break from the *neta*-complex was not such an alluring prospect, because the AAP *neta* had to re-establish himself as an honest *neta* like Gandhi or Anna Hazare. The AAP clothing thus had an inherently contradictory task: to affirm and deny *netagiri* ("ways of a politician") at the same time. In Bhabha's terminology (1984: 126) vis-à-vis post-Enlightenment colonialism, the AAP spoke in a forked tongue, which was crucial to its politics.

Shunning *kurta* did not mean a return to flashy suits (the kind used by Narendra Modi), because that is so unlike a common man. The common man prefers a short-sleeved shirt and sandals for commuting or walking to the office. If the common man dressed this way for comfort and convenience, Kejriwal had to invest political meaning in it so that its signification would not be lost on anyone. During his government job or later in his activist persona, Kejriwal often dressed formally. His conversion to the short-sleeved shirt and the excessive use of a muffler – a heavy scarf – during the winter (accompanied by endless coughing), what we may call political cross-dressing, added that ordinariness to his public image so much so that he became known as the muffler man. Kejriwal's commonness did not exist prior to the use of the short-sleeved shirt or the muffler, but was an effect of these extrinsic objects which

conferred upon him that unmistakeable ordinariness. The muffler was the most visible (because of its oddity) badge of simplicity and nearly phallic in its significance because Kejriwal's public persona was almost centred around the muffler, which in turn produced all those associations Kejriwal would be known for. Though a muffler is commonly used by people during winter, including the upwardly mobile, Kejriwal's style of pulling it over the head to cover the ears before making a knot around the neck made him appear distinctly ordinary (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Kejriwal in his trademark muffler
Source: http://www.hindustantimes.com (for link details see list of references)

The muffler could also be seen as a process of condensation, in the Freudian sense, because all acquired characteristic traits of Kejriwal had been concentrated and projected onto the muffler. The best part was that Kejriwal appeared real and comfortable, and with his drooping shoulder and down-to-earth mannerisms, looked the part. His short stature and moustache also helped sustain the image of not being very distinguished, of being somebody who could just disappear into the crowd. If difference was written in the body of Rahul Gandhi or invested in Modi's jackets to make them stand out, Kejriwal's calculated sameness (being like others) made him different as well and endeared him to the voting public. Not just the clothes, but also Kejriwal's speaking style, at times reactionary and assertive and on other occasions helpless and meek, added to his qualities as an average man.

This performance may be called self-othering, when the elite self adopts plebeian traits which allow it to legitimate itself as a member of the other. Since there is already an existing difference (lineage, education, economic stability, etc.), self-othering can be achieved with external objects like the muffler and also by using certain physical features (e.g. a moustache) to establish a shared experience with the multitude. The identification we are talking about here is not because of any genuine desire to fade into the other, but a "curious rhetorical strategy" (Germana 2010: 81). Like colonial self-othering, when the coloniser fantasised about the innocent state of the native other, for Kejriwal, self-othering involved understanding the way the supposedly irrational unpredictable people behave. It was not about taming and objectifying the irrational other as in colonial discourse, but rather becoming the irrational other through external means and leveraging those adopted features to electoral advantage. If for the Congress Party, the mass was the contrasting image through which the party could define itself (i.e. by difference), the AAP strategy was to imaginatively reconstruct itself and immerse itself into the mass (by sameness).

Kejriwal achieved otherness by a conscious production of himself through what we may call reverse mimicry. If colonial mimicry was driven by a "desire for a reformed, recognizable Other" (Bhabha 1984: 126), reverse mimicry is guided by an equally strong strategic move towards an unrecognisable Self. If the colonial mimic man was intended as "a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1984: 126), the AAP strategy was to recreate Kejriwal as a subject of sameness, but not quite. This reverse mimicry is highly ambivalent both in its theorisation and delivery and, like mimicry, often tends to produce slippages and difference. Though reverse mimicry cannot afford to sanction its contradictions consciously and must iterate its sameness every now and then, there is often some kind of incompatibility between the public performance and the inner elite core. This is a topic we will return to later. Reverse mimics are elite in taste and values, but subaltern in performance and public life. The strength of reverse mimicry is that while disrupting elitism, it legitimates itself as different and thereby worthy of unabashed devotion and trust.

Simon During believes that self-othering involves "finding a self as another or by identification with others" (During 1994: 47). Though During recognises that there is a difference between self-othering and becoming another, the two positions are very fluid and difficult to separate. Self-othering involves the appropriation of another experientially different identity, and this process involves strategies such as using common attire, speaking the common language, etc. The Congress Party's policy was the rescue narrative, whether in sloganeering or in schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and National Food Security Act. In contrast, the AAP employed a "we can" narrative where the difference between the common man and the elite has vanished.

Borrowing from Judith Halberstam's study of James Bond movies and their raw masculinity, what she calls "prosthetic masculinity" (Halberstam 1998: 3), we may argue that Kejriwal's excessive use of the muffler (as well as short-sleeved shirt) with regular coughing to iterate his otherness is an experiment with prosthetic ordinariness. The muffler confirmed his image as the guy next door who hates politics as anybody else, but unlike others has taken it upon himself to rectify the system. Far from being an essential feature of Kejriwal's character, these prosthetics were producers of that commonness and preceded everything that is known about Kejriwal's character. It is not Kejriwal's commonness which made him wear a muffler or short-sleeved shirt or sport a moustache; it is these objects which produced his commonness. Will Fisher too has spoken about the prosthetic nature of Renaissance masculinity which centred around a man's beard, and how the beard was "one of the primary ways in which masculinity was materialized" (Fisher 2001: 184).

Butler's insights into gendered subject formation (1990: 33) may be useful here to trace the processes through which one becomes a subject. The instability at the heart of Kejriwal's commonness was because of what we may call a melancholic commonness (Butler 1990: 63), which is based on a rejection or loss of elitism and acquisition of common traits by a sequence of acts. His moustache or muffler was not just there, but performatively constructed as metonymic of commonness. But unlike in Butler's ideas, Kejriwal's identity was not pre-constituted by dominant social forces as in conventional sexed identity, but rather was chosen against those forces. His speeches were illocutionary acts which performed what they uttered. Thus, when he pronounced, "we have been cheated by all political parties", he was not describing any particular event here, but constituting himself as a common man.

This takes us to the heart of post-structuralist thought. In post-structuralist thought, there is no real or present which can be represented in the symbolic realm. Instead of reflecting such a reality, language as a chain of signifiers constructs this reality. Thus meaning does not take place in the mind of a modern/rational man through his ability to access the originary moment of truth, but happens within a signifying space, thus limiting one's ability to know things outside representation. It is within this space that specific understandings become established as truth. All these make the idea of Kejriwal as an *aam aadmi* a comforting delusion, because that *aam*-ness does not exist outside those devices like the muffler or the moustache. We can never know the man behind the muffler, because the man we know is already always made by the muffler. During a raid by the Central Bureau of Investigation in his party office recently, Kejriwal dared the CBI to raid his house, adding that they would find only mufflers. It is not only difficult to imagine Kejriwal without the muffler; it is almost impossible to do so.

The Wagon R and the new (un)common man

Unlike the broom and the muffler, which are easy to associate with the common man, the idea of a car (here the Wagon R) is a little more difficult as a metonym for an *aam aadmi*. If Kejriwal self-otherised himself to be a common man through various performative practices, he also helped transform the very idea of that commonness. In democracies, and India in particular, the idea of the common man has tremendous currency in terms of political dividends. But it does not mean anything specific at all; the common man can be anything, but very rarely an individual. As Pratap Bhanu Mehta says, "it is a rhetorical invocation and has been kept vague precisely so that most people feel part of it" (Misra 2009). For the Congress Party, it means disadvantaged or poor people from weaker sections who are in need of subsidies in general and specific schemes like food security or loan waiver schemes in particular. For the left parties, it may refer to those who have no source of income other than their labour, or all those who live a life that is sub-standard when compared to the national average. For the caste parties, it may refer to a specific caste or a constellation of caste groups. It is no surprise that all major political parties speak for the common man, as no party can be portrayed as being uncaring to the common man.

But the common man can also be one who is very discerning, and not oblivious to social realities, though he has no voice which can be heard by the powerful. The AAP was perhaps aware of this fact more than any other political party and was successful not just in convincing people to vote for the party but also in expanding the scope of the common man. The party pitched its politics away from the usual party lines: from the Congress Party, which patronised the *aam aadmi*; from the BJP, which was usually seen as a party for the Brahmins and *bania*s (trading class); from the Communist parties, which romanticised poor people and their own exclusive right to speak for them; from other caste parties, for whom the *aam aadmi* was a member of a backward caste. Since all of these concepts were limiting, the AAP had to address the concerns of a large section of people and create an expanded version of an *aam aadmi* narrative. With other symbols of the common man (the broom and muffler) in place, it did not take much time for the Wagon R to become another symbol of ordinariness. When compared to the cars used by leaders of other parties, Kejriwal's Wagon R appeared to be a very ordinary and humble machine. In a place like Delhi where wealth and power are to be found everywhere and an extravagant life-style is the norm, the Wagon R contributed to Kejriwal's charm, restraint and simplicity (see Figure 4).

When Modi addressed the material (jobs, development, etc.), Kejriwal spoke of ending corruption and bringing people back to democracy. His appeal was
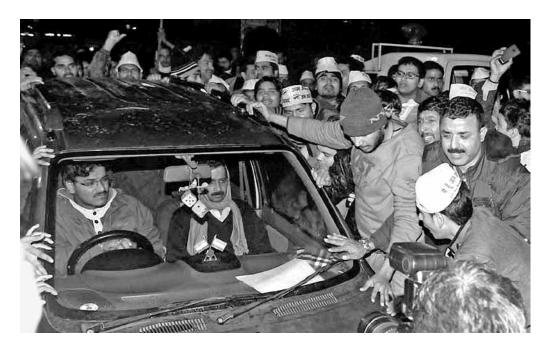
Figure 4: Kejriwal in his blue Wagon R
Source: http://www.ndtv.com (for link details see list of references)

more moral than material. In a way he de-materialised the idea of the common man and changed it from an ascriptive label to a self-identified one. Now the common man was anybody who believed in a corruption-free India, from the man on the street to corporate giants. This common man was not to be found exclusively in slums or caste villages, but everywhere. A common man was also one who expresses the hopes, aspirations as well as fears and anxieties of life, and this hope was concentrated on one man, Kejriwal who had no great lineage like Rahul Gandhi, no swagger like Modi, but was a personification of hope. At least that is how the AAP spokesperson Ashutosh (another high profile journalist turned AAP member) saw it when he titled his book *The Crown Prince, The Gladiator, The Hope* (2015) referring to Rahul Gandhi, Narendra Modi and Arvind Kejriwal.

AAP politics has been seen as a practice of social contract theory (Bhattacharjee 2013) where the sovereignty of the people ranks above the authority of the parliament. This is an idea of government where legislative proposals and decisions are discussed, debated and even overturned by the people. Though this is a romantic idea to say the least, particularly in a populous country like India with dividing lines across caste, class, language and ethnicity, Kejriwal experimented with street meetings and neighbourhood discussions, though many such experiments ended in chaos. Bhattacharjee however warns that precedence of people over party may lead to ideological inconsistencies and a pos-

sible takeover by majoritarian forces. Though Kejriwal tried to collapse the difference between the party and civil society, he created an idea of common people (including car owners) who are fed up with the political class and are clamouring for change.

Kejriwal's difference is also to be seen in a politics based on affect and emotions. If other politicians were seen as too scheming or too strategic, Kejriwal owned up to his mistake of quitting as Chief Minister in 2013 and asked for a second chance. Here too he was playing the common man, who makes mistakes and is honest and courageous enough to admit it. As Glencorse says, politics in India can be mindlessly emotional: "The same emotions that have been used to drive caste-based politics can also be used to drive an inclusive politics that inspires and galvanizes the hopeful, the non-corrupt, and the formerly fearful" (Glencorse 2015).

If he asked for forgiveness, he also practised it himself. During the course of his campaigns, he was abused, manhandled and slapped a few times in his public meetings. On one occasion, he went to meet an attacker in a gesture of forgiveness and reconciliation, and was a beneficiary of positive media coverage. When the photos of his swollen face appeared on television, everybody saw a leader looking physically vulnerable, yet dignified. It is this public display of vulnerability which took him closer to the common man. He was not just the mourned, but also a mourner who was mourning over the loss of faith in democracy. Butler has spoken about the political relevance of vulnerability as definitive of humanity: "Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies" (Butler 2004: 20). In Butler's theorising, grief is not a mere personal expression but is loaded with political significations. It is one way of establishing the experiential commonality with the *aam aadmi*. By appearing grief-stricken and intensely vulnerable, Kejriwal produced a new kind of affective politics which had its desired effect on an otherwise indifferent Delhi public.

Coming back to our old line of argument, how do we reconcile Kejriwal's self-othering with his use of a Wagon R, which may still be seen as a symbol of privilege? Ironically, instead of alienating him from the people, the Wagon R (rather than an Audi or Mercedes) brought him closer. The Wagon R was a car, without doubt, but not the type of car that one would associate with luxury and not one that created a disconnect with the people. What also distinguished him was the way Kejriwal sat in the front row alongside the driver. The sight of Kejriwal in the Wagon R front seat with his muffler covering his head created an impression of an average man. After taking over as the Chief Minister of Delhi, when Kejriwal did not abandon the Wagon R, the latter was no longer a mere vehicle; it was the symbol of a successful common man. For the people of Delhi, used to the luxury cars of politicians, the Wagon R was seen as a convenience rather than a privilege. When people saw police escort

vehicles following the Wagon R of the Chief Minister, the idea of the common man was complete. And the fact that the car was a gift by Kundan Sharma, a software professional and party member, established that Kejriwal was dear to everyone and had nothing of his own to flaunt. In a nutshell, the Wagon R made him more human and more believable.

Conclusion

If power is inevitably accompanied by slippages, so is resistance as offered by the AAP. Slippage is not something extrinsic to power structure that can be avoided; it is inbuilt into it. In the process of producing alternative politics, the AAP contaminated itself and replicated some of the practices (such as the high-command culture of the Congress Party or the authoritarian impulse of Narendra Modi) of the parties it rebelled against. Though the AAP leadership tried its best to contain its politics and behaviour within the representational regime it had created for itself, the slippages will soon become visible, with Kejriwal taking over as the Chief Minister of Delhi for the second time. The reverse mimicry will betray itself.

Whether there was any real Kejriwal behind these prosthetics (the broom, the muffler and the Wagon R) is anybody's guess. Suffice it to say that these signs float free of what they designate; in other words, what they signify is fluid and can be subject to spillage. Though this may appear to be in conflict with what I argue about the muffler, as a fixed symbol of ordinariness, what is significant to note here is the absence of the reality behind the representation. Though the signs of the broom, the muffler and the Wagon R have semiotic potential to disseminate meanings, they also point to the fact that they are the producers of an idea which may or may not exist. This complicates the whole idea of a stable Kejriwal self, determined to fight corruption; there is no core behind the language of the muffler. In this context, we may quote from Derrida, for whom "there is nothing outside the text" (1967: 163). If there is no access to Kejriwal, if we can know him only through his muffler, Kejriwal the person does not exist beyond signs. And if there is no stabilising force of Kejriwal authority, and if he is no more than a linguistic construct, the whole alternative politics or commonness he propagates is deprived of any meaning.

We will end with the 12 "commandments" found on the AAP website (Aam Aadmi Party 2017d). In fact, they read more like Napoleon's seven commandments in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (2014) rather than Biblical dictums. In more ways than one, these AAP commandments warn us against high command culture, the use of flashing blue lights in official vehicles as well as living in luxurious houses, enjoying special security and everything that makes a

leader appear elite. Similarly, the party commits itself to gender equity and principles of justice, and is opposed to the use of bribes to obtain a place on a party ticket, and to the presence of criminals in the party or any kind of financial misappropriation.

Since the AAP's spectacular victory in 2015 assembly elections in Delhi, Kejriwal has expelled some of its founding members and ideologues (such as Yogendra Yadav, Anand Kumar, Prashant Bhushan) from the party. Many high-profile members quit the party before and after the Delhi election. A coterie has formed around Kejriwal and the high-command culture is safely in place. Dissent, a once-valued means by which the AAP had developed expertise and had a near monopoly, is a bad word now. Important members like Kumar Vishwas have been accused of taking bribes; another minister has been found to have used a fake law certificate; still another has been charged with cruelty and abuse of his wife. By now Kejriwal has moved to a proper ministerial apartment. There are many accusations of financial fraud in terms of donations to the party. Out of the 18 members of the National Executive, only one is a woman and apparently not a very strong voice in the party. The AAP has become another personality cult and Kejriwal himself has become another unscrupulous politician, something which became manifest in a videotape where he is heard abusing his party colleagues. A recent RTI[5] query revealed that the Kejriwal government has been spending 1.6 million rupees a day on newspaper advertisements highlighting its achievements. Kejriwal's insensitivity came to the fore when he continued with his speech even after a farmer hanged himself at an AAP rally.

Very symbolically, Kundan Sharma, who had donated to the party his Wagon R, which had become a part of Kejriwal imaginary, wants his car back, as he feels cheated by Kejriwal's performance. Another member, Sunil Lal, who designed the AAP logo (with the broom in it) wants AAP to stop using his design (which incidentally has the same colour code as India's national flag). This was Lal's response to the party's expulsion of leaders such as Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan and also for manipulating the concept of *swaraj*. It is not important at this stage to know whether the AAP returned the vehicle or stopped using the logo. What is more important is that the prosthetics are falling off and it remains to be seen if Kejriwal can still signify without these signs.

5   RTI or "Right to Information" was passed by the Indian Parliament in 2005 to ensure transparency in governance. It empowers the citizen to seek information about delivery of various services from public authorities.

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Gender Gap, Gender Trap: Negotiations of Intersectionality and Patriarchy amongst Women Elites in Nepal

Stefanie Lotter

Abstract

Transformation is apparent in Nepal, a country that underwent a decade of civil war 1996–2006, abolished the monarchy to become a republic in 2007, agreed on a new constitution in 2015 and is currently struggling to implement federalism. Decentralisation and minority representation are being put on the political agenda alongside efforts to rebuild infrastructure damaged through two major earthquakes. Beyond this, Nepal appears to have developed into South Asia's beacon of gender equality. Since 2016 Nepal has had a woman president, a woman chief justice and a woman speaker of parliament. Implementing a quota of 33 per cent women in politics, women politicians now come from a great variety of backgrounds reflecting Nepal's ethnic, cultural, regional and educational diversity. This study takes the entry of 197 female members into the constituent assembly of Nepal in 2008 as a baseline to study the transformation of "patriarchy" and its impact on the heterogeneous group of women politicians in high office in Nepal.

Keywords: Nepal, elites, women, gender, patriarchy, politics

Introduction

With the introduction of affirmative action in 2007 the number of women in decision-making positions has risen sharply in Nepal. New legislation guaranteed 33 per cent of all seats in the Constituent Assembly (CA) to women, and the inter-parliamentary Women's Caucus now forms a critical mass in the parliament (Dalerup 2006: 3). Nepal, it seems, has developed in recent years into South Asia's beacon of gender equality with a woman president, a woman chief justice as well as a woman speaker of Parliament since 2016.

While social transformation is no doubt taking place rapidly, persistent power imbalances should not be overlooked, as women continue to be subjected to institutional and non-institutional expressions of patriarchy. Patriarchy is here

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understood as a form of social stratification which creates a set of privileges for men, establishing gendered power relations of superordination and subordination. Patriarchy ranks women's agency as inferior in a system of male dominance. This system transforms and adapts (see Walby 1990), affecting different women differently at all times. This is to say that in the example of Nepal, high caste Hindu women and women who belong to ethnic minority groups face different challenges in finding their political voice. Patriarchy frames agency consciously and unconsciously as it permeates the context of women's early socialisation as well as their adult cultural milieu (Kandiyoti 1988). For Nepal's women elites this raises the question of how patriarchy has adapted within the microcosm of high-level politics and how this impacts on the diverse group of women politicians. Deniz Kandiyoti argues that the analysis "of women's strategies and coping mechanisms can help to capture the nature of patriarchal systems in their cultural class-specific and temporal concreteness" (ibid.: 285).

The generalising category of "women" is used but is complicated throughout the paper, as gender is seen as only one dimension of diverse composite identities. As Urmila Pawar, Pradnya Lokhande, Ruth Manorama, Yoti Lanjewar and Pratima Pardeshi have discussed for India and Seira Tamang has discussed for Nepal, the homogenising category of "women" obscures difference, thereby precluding differentiated analysis. Gender is only one dimension of power struggle alongside caste, class, religion and location.

This study takes the entry of 197 female members into the constituent assembly of Nepal in 2008 as a baseline[1] to observe and comment upon not only the composition of the group of women politicians in the CA but also on the impact and transformation of "patriarchy" on the heterogeneity of women politicians in Nepal. It questions how both the system of patriarchy as well as attempts to counterbalance women's underrepresentation in high office through affirmative action influence the formation of women elites in politics. Women elites are defined, for the purposes of this study, in accordance with the notion of power elites, as women in decision-making positions. Hence, this is a study of women in high office in Nepal, no matter which intersectional components constitute their diverse identities beyond gender. To focus on women elites in politics at a specific time and place allows us to go beyond arbitrary difference. Historical processes and socio-cultural foundations of women's identities are mapped against self-representations to constitute three different categories of women politicians in Nepal. These are termed "old dynastic elites", "new dynastic elites" and "non-dynas-

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1   The study relies largely on the extensive 900-page online publication in 2011 of individual biographies of all women CA members by the Women's Caucus, the Constituent Assembly Secretariat, the Nepal Law Society and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. I am aware that the biographies followed an interview guideline and represent information obtained verbatim as well as summaries of experiences. While the interviews have already been statistically analysed they remain a primary resource for qualitative studies.

tic elites". With an admittedly prescriptive categorisation that relates, links and divides women by revealing power and powerlessness amidst high office, this study aims to present a contemporary understanding of women elites in Nepal.

Women in high-level Nepali politics: a brief history

The history of women politicians in high office in Nepal is short. Before 1958, when Dwarikadevi Thakurani became the first elected woman in parliament (NDI 2010: 7), women had been entrusted with political power only at the discretion of their husband or father or as the representative of a minor son. Early women politicians acted within dynastic families as a substitute for men or in the role of background advisor. There is no doubt about the significant political influence of Prime Minister Juddha SJB Rana's fourth wife Gambir Kumari or King Rajendra Bikram Shah's wife Samrajya Devi; however, their influence is not recorded and hence beyond this study.[2] The beginning of a feminist civil society movement demanding political participation in Nepal can be attributed to Yogmaya Neupane (1860–1941), a pioneer women's rights activist and poet who petitioned Prime Minister Juddha SJB Rana in 1936. Her death by suicide left her as a revolutionary icon without ever having achieved a decision-making position within the state (see Hutt 2013).

Within state politics, only a few women became ministers or assistant ministers during the Panchayat period in Nepal (1962–1990) (Acharya 2010).[3] At the time, preferential proportional representation guaranteed a quota of three seats for the women's class organisation. Beyond this early quota, very few women competed in open elections or were appointed to high office. After the first pro-democratic people's movement (Jana Andolan) in 1990, a 5 per cent quota guaranteed women some participation in parliament (Kabir 2003: 11) but women politicians did not exceed 6 per cent at any time until 2007.

The end of tokenistic provisions in politics came when women's representation was raised to 33 per cent through the Constituent Assembly Act in 2007 (see details IDEA 2009). These changes would have been unthinkable without the armed conflict that lasted for 10 years between 1996 and 2006. In 2008, with a strong gender agenda, Nepal adopted a mixed system of direct election and party nomination in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. At least one-third of the candidates fielded through the first-past-the-post system, as well as half of all listed proportional representation candidates, now had to be

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2   Women at the Rana court communicated amongst each other, writing notes on slates rather than paper, in order not to have a record of their influence. So far no private diaries have emerged and their legacy is only apparent through oral history, memories and fiction in the works of Greta Rana, Diamond Rana, Purushottam Rana and others.

3   These were Kamal Shah, Saraswati Rai, Kalpana Bista, Bhadrakumari Ghale, Bidyadevi Devkota, Sushila Thapa and Chanda Shah (NDI 2010: 7).

women. This resulted in the election of 30 directly elected women and 161 women nominated through the proportional representation system in 2008 (Yadav 2016: 62). Women politicians today come from a great variety of backgrounds reflected in diverse ethnicity, caste, origin and education. "Among the women CA members, 35% are Janajati/indigenous, 22.4% are Brahmin, 15.8% Madhesi, 10.7% Dalit, 10.7% Chhetri, 2.6% Muslim, and 2% are Kirant and others" (IDEA 2008: 4). Religious diversity is prominent and a surprising 26.5 per cent of all women CA members describe themselves as secular. The range of educational background extends from the 14 per cent of women who have completed their postgraduate studies to the 17.9 per cent of women who have received no formal education, but are usually literate (Women's Caucus 2011: 4).

Inclusive political representation

The striving towards inclusive politics to counterbalance established systems of power came as a direct result of three grassroots movements in Nepal – the Maoist, the Janajati[4] and the Madhesi[5] movements. As a fundamental declaration of intent, inclusion became state policy in the Interim Constitution 2007. The government then proposed "to enable Madhesi, Dalits, indigenous ethnic groups, women, labourers, farmers, the physically impaired, disadvantaged classes and disadvantaged regions to participate in all organs of the State on the basis of proportional inclusion" (Interim Constitution 2007, Article 63, Paragraph 1).

Gender was clearly identified as only one of several overlapping identity dimensions in need of affirmative action. It was immediately obvious that intersectionality had to be acknowledged and counteracted in various ways through a set of quotas. Power imbalances exist no doubt not only between men and women but also between women and women, and men and men, on the basis of class, religion and geographical origin, as well as caste or ethnicity. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality" specifically to describe women's experiences of oppression in varying configurations and degrees of intensity. She points out that experiences of oppression on the grounds of ethnicity, race, gender, class and ability are not only interrelated but bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Unsurprisingly in Nepal's Legislature Parliament, women's intersectionality results in temporary alliances across party lines voiced in the Women's Caucus – an institution internally criticised for mainstreaming feminism – and simul-

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4   A movement promoting ethnic politics, i.e. a greater political participation of indigenous nationalities in all levels of politics.
5   A lowland movement promoting regional autonomy and proportional representation for the densely populated and diverse lowland of Nepal, the Madhes.

taneously results in disunity among women's voices when conforming to and influencing party lines.

Affirmative action to counterbalance the acknowledged imbalance in power relations was not embraced by all. Prasant Jha (2008: 4) quotes a senior male Madhesi politician, who confided, "We have got a thirty three percent reservation for Madhesis but will have to give half to women. They don't know anything. What a waste." In order to counterbalance the interrelated facets of discrimination all at once, parties have to develop an awareness of the complexity of discrimination to become inclusive along several markers at once. The above example indicates that political activism is not necessarily inclusive beyond one line of discrimination. Of the political parties with only one delegate in the CA, none has chosen a woman as their only representative in 2008 and where political parties have sent uneven numbers of delegates to the CA none send more women than men (IDEA 2009: 4). Counterbalancing established intersectional power relations does not come naturally and each dimension – whether locality, caste or gender – has to be explicitly introduced in all discourses.

In future parliamentary elections, 60 per cent of the 275-member parliament are to be elected, using first-past-the-post for each single member constituency. The remaining 40 per cent of seats are to be filled by a system of proportional representation. This new rule will become effective in the local, regional and national elections in 2017 and 2018 respectively. It reduces the relative amount of proportional representation by 10 per cent compared to the earlier CA elections in 2008. As a result, while assuming that elected representatives do not show a higher percentage of diversity markers, it will be down to around 40 per cent of the members of parliament to counterbalance established elites and fulfil the criteria of all introduced quotas. In a simple example this means that should no woman be elected to the parliament, 33 per cent of the 40 per cent of seats reserved for quotas will have to be filled by women who at the same time will have to counterbalance all other underrepresented groups. As a direct result of this system it can be anticipated that compared to men, the group of women members of parliament will be significantly more diverse.

In addition, the quota system has become more complicated since 2008, as it now includes 18 different categories of underrepresentation. While the women's quota of 33 per cent remains intact, individual minority representation has de facto decreased. A contributing factor to this is for example the new minority category of "Khas Arya" (hill Hindus), which includes not only Hill Dalits but also Thakuri, an old hill high-caste group. "Khas Arya" delegates are likely to increase the absolute number of high-caste politicians, ironically through proportional minority representation.

Seira Tamang (2015) and others have criticised the fact that party lists for the proportional representation elections to the House of Representatives are processed through so-called "closed lists". Unlike in a transparent ranking system, list places in Nepal are decided upon by party elites, in a system highly susceptible to clientelism. List places thus become a further instrument of manipulation for powerful party elites.

Urmila Mahato Koiri of the Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal criticises the current system for yet another reason; in her opinion, any affirmative action that neglects socio-economic status is pointless:

> It is unfair to provide reservations to Janajatis/indigenous, Dalits, Madhesis without understanding the individual's actual socio-economic status. If the government wants to provide [a] reservation, it should be given to those who are in real need of such provisions (Women's Caucus 2011: 874).

She points out that not all quota criteria coincide with low socio-economic status. Both representatives of ethnic minorities as well as women politicians may come from elite backgrounds while qualifying for list places on the grounds of ethnicity or gender.

There are two conclusions we may draw from the above. Firstly, for as long as women are not competing and winning first-past-the-post seats, women politicians who enter parliament on list places are likely to have identities reflecting several of the 18 different quota criteria. Secondly, since gender is a quota criterion by itself, women MPs entering through the proportional representation lists can also come from highly privileged socio-economic backgrounds. In other words, the demography of women in high office is likely to be weighted towards either the upper or the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum.

While this polarisation prevails along the lines of dynastic and non-dynastic women elites, the following chapters will show that a further group of women elites can be identified in Nepali politics. These new dynastic elites share the economic strength of dynastic elites while positioning themselves ideologically in the realm of struggle, a characteristic of all new elites and opposition movements claiming the high moral ground as political victims.

Dynastic women politicians of the old elites

Nepal Congress lawmaker Nabindra Raj Joshi stated with reference to women's political participation in the Constituent Assembly: "When we don't seek the opinion of even mother and wife at home, do you think we should look for women's consent to make important decisions?" (quoted in UN Women / CSR 2014: 41). Joshi's statement is a reminder of a prevailing patriarchal view in which the location of women is not the public arena but the home. Women's

opinions are seen merely as an optional ingredient in male decision-making. Amongst the women who could, if felt necessary, be consulted by men, those related by kinship come first. With this logic it is not surprising that positions of public office occupied by women – especially before affirmative action was introduced in 2007 – were filled predominantly with female relatives of male politicians (IDEA 2008, UNDP 2009, Yadav 2016). Within South Asia and beyond, this is a common phenomenon, as prominent politicians such as Sonia Gandhi, Ambika Soni, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, Supriya Sule or Agatha Sangma demonstrate for India and Benazir Bhutto, Parveen Junejo, Shazia Marri, Sumaira Malik and Ayla Malik show for Pakistan. Frenkenberg (2012: 31) indicates that dynastic women politicians in Asia "show some strikingly similar patterns regarding their political and social biographies". She claims that they are not only well connected through their families but are also of high socio-economic status, highly educated and show a "lack of or low level of political experience". Richter (1991) adds that dynastic women politicians enter politics often in order to "fill a political void created by the death or imprisonment of a male family member". It may not be surprising that for example the first female president of Nepal, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, was married to the prominent politician Madan Bhandari who died prematurely in a mysterious car accident.

Dynastic families dominated Nepal for centuries, at times supporting or even controlling the former monarchy. Thakuri[6] families such as the Malla, Rana, Basnet, Pande or Thapa formed the landed nobility, combining positions in administration with a presence in high military ranks. The Rana for example, ruled the country for over one hundred years until 1951. They created large court families, regulating succession through an elaborate system of birthrights and proven ability. Male members of the family were taught early on to command, lead and assume responsibilities (Lotter 2004: 133).

Women amongst old elites were rarely perceived as independent agents but rather as instruments to create lasting political alliances through marriage. They were initially tutored only in music, French and drawing in contrast to their brothers, who were instructed in administration, political science and the military. Women from old elites who entered politics did so only if requested to do so. Janak RL Shah, daughter of Prime Minister Juddha SJB Rana, stood as a candidate in the 1981 elections at the behest of King Mahendra, to campaign against Rishikesh Shah, himself a member of the ruling nobility. Vir Sanghvi (2009) sees a danger in this narrow social stratification amongst political candidates, whereby "[s]lowly but surely, true democracy is replaced by a kind of feudalism in which the peasants are given the right to choose be-

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6   Thakuri self-identify as a distinct group within the Chhetri caste, comprising less than half a million members according to the 2011 census of Nepal. Thakuri are counted as Pahadi. They generally identify as having Rajput descent and an ancestry that formed the ruling elites in the Nepali administration.

tween various aristocrats". While shifting from an oligarchy to the party politics of democracy, ruling dynasties were transformed into dynastic politicians. By combining the dynastic nature common throughout South Asia (cf. Bhaumik 2008, Weiner 1989) with the hierarchical structure of Nepali society (Pradhan 1991), old elites failed to enhance diversity within politics, except to a certain degree in the realm of gender, where they supported female relatives whom they trusted. Tamang (2015) states that it is indeed "largely unacknowledged thus far […] that certain women reap the benefits of caste, class, region, language and other privileges". Tamang argues that not only are the disadvantages of double discriminations cumulative, but privileges accumulate as well, leading to political positions.

On her defeat in the 1981 elections, Janak RL Shah remarked retrospectively that if all women had supported her, she could have won. Women did not generally vote for Janak RL Shah, who was perceived as a member of the old elites and was not perceived as a women's rights activist in the first place. In a recent comparative study on violence against women in politics in South Asia, the authors state that "women who belong to political families were perceived as representatives of the elite and controlled by powerful males, which does not serve the purpose of women's empowerment" (UN Women / CSR 2014: 8). This is where women dynastic politicians are identified as "proxy women", a term signifying delegated power, applied exclusively to women. As such, high-caste women politicians have been seen in Nepal as reinforcing pre-existing socio-economic divides despite being women and despite being elected.

Regardless of their leadership skills, dynastic politicians face the dilemma of legitimation. Arzu Rana-Deuba is a dynastic politician related to the Malla dynasty through her maternal grandfather, who had been *aide de chambre*, or personal secretary, to King Mahendra. She is related to the Rana clan through her father Binod SJB Rana and she is married to Sher Bahdur Deuba, who was Prime Minister of Nepal four times: 1995–1997, 2001–2002, 2004–2005 and again since 7 June 2017. In Arzu Rana-Deuba's self-perception, being a woman politician is not about family relations, but about qualification and determination. She states that she earned her place in the CA "because of my hard work" (Women's Caucus 2011: 66). She does not see herself as disadvantaged through her gender: "I have never considered myself any less than a man and no man has ever treated me as less than equal in any of the sectors I have worked in" (Women's Caucus 2011: 67). Rana-Deuba argues that her family ties had been a hindrance to political acceptance, as many people are hesitant about her since she is a member of the Rana clan. And being the wife of a senior politician, people continuously compare her to partners of other leaders, much to her dislike.

Rana-Deuba does not fit the role of the politician's wife who gives up her own career to support her husband with voluntary charity work. Nor does she fall easily into the category of a traditional "proxy woman" who carries out a

delegated mandate. With a PhD in organisational Psychology, Rana-Deuba is amongst the most highly qualified women in the CA. It may be appropriate to refer to her as a true representative of dynastic rule who struggles to convincingly portrait herself as a feminist.

In conclusion, dynastic women in politics struggle with their public image much more than male politicians of similar background. They are seen either as "proxy women" without a political agenda of their own or as members of a privileged elite, unable to prioritise the needs of the people, let alone the needs of women. Among women political elites in Nepal, dynastic women used to be the only women who managed to gain enough political support to win seats. Today, they form a minority among all women representatives – one, however, with effective links outside the Women's Caucus. Mainstream feminism is a way for them to address solidarity with other women; however, this solidarity is rarely reciprocated.

New dynastic women politicians

Unlike the first group of dynastic women politicians that emerged from the landed nobility, joining conservative parties, a second group of political dynasties began in opposition to the Rana regime. Amongst the anti-Rana movement we find in the first case predominantly high-caste men who had been educated abroad, finding political inspiration in the Indian Congress and the broader political changes that sought democratisation and self-governance in an emerging post-war and increasingly post-colonial era. In Nepal, where political parties were not allowed during the Rana regime, a group that called itself People's Council (Praja Parishad) started an underground movement planning a political alternative and publishing leaflets during the 1940s. This group was exposed and while several key members were executed, those who were imprisoned formed one cornerstone of the political elite of the coming years. Politicians of the anti-Rana movement that led to the revolution in 1950/51 formed the second cornerstone of the political elite in the years that followed. Initially the Nepali Congress occupied the position of political renewal in opposition to the Rana regime. Prominent here was the Koirala family, a political dynasty that has produced three prime ministers so far but has not yet had any prominent women politicians.

    New dynastic politicians emerged at a further point of political friction, namely when the Communist Party of Nepal split and an initially small Maoist splinter group left politics to initiate the people's war in 1996. The political leaders of the revolution – Baburam Bhattarai, Hisila Yami and Pushpa Kamal Dahal – emerged post-conflict as new political elites who have now begun to

involve family members in politics. Dynastic politicians differ significantly from non-dynastic women elites, who entered high office from 2008 onwards without dynastic ties and without the established ability to pass political ownership and control from one generation to the next.

Kanak Mani Dixit (2008: 45) suggested that with the end of the Shah monarchy in 2008, a new political landscape should be envisioned. He claimed that a departure from dynastic politics could be within reach: "When dynasties become an anachronism, we will finally be on our way to true pluralism and inclusive democracy". Dynastic systems are relatively crisis-resistant, however, and have a surprising ability to regenerate if not recreate. The brand name of a dynastic family is easily recognised and trust is more easily extended to established elites than to newcomers. Shamus Rahman Khan explains that while all politicians are expected to aim for a dynastic reputation as well as stockpiling wealth, already established families appear less prone to corruption, as their finances are already secured. Khan terms this transition "from entitlement to privilege" (2014: 136)

In an interview with *The Telegraph* South Asia Editor Dean Nelson (2012) interviews former minister Pashupati SJB Rana,[7] owner of Nepal Gas and one of the richest men in Nepal. Rana observed that Pushpa Kamal Dahal,[8] a former revolutionary leader known also under his nom de guerre "Prachanda", had amassed disproportionate wealth. Rana reflects on Dahal's purchase of a luxury house:

> Comrade Prachanda has a war chest of more than a billion rupees (£8 million) and has achieved his own particular proletarian dream. It's just too bad for the rest of his supporters. The whole problem with the Maoist party is, that within it are the haves and the have-nots. The differences between them are quite remarkable (Nelson 2012).

For a politician for whom class struggle comes before all other struggles the accusation of accumulating wealth solely for personal gain is serious, even when it comes from the heart of Nepal's old elites.

Renu Dahal,[9] the daughter of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, became a member of the CA in 2008 through the proportional representation list. She stated that "becoming a CA member is not a big achievement in itself because what is more important is what one has contributed to the nation and achieved for the people" (Women's Caucus 2011: 642). She is aware that for her it is easy – in contrast to other young female politicians – to become a CA member as she can rely on powerful family relations. "Dynastic politics is a way of easing the otherwise difficult transfer of power from older generation to the younger.

7   Pashupati SJB Rana is a member of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, a centre right party in which many politicians of the old elites can be found.
8   Pushpa Kamal Dahal is the chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and was Prime Minister in 2008–2009 and again in 2016–17.
9   Renu Dahal is a member of the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

Older generations in powerful positions are often more amenable to stepping down if they are able to hand over power to their children or other relatives" (Chandra 2016: 51). Young male and female politicians benefit from dynastic ties, no matter whether these are old or relatively new political dynasties.

In conclusion, the new generation of dynastic politicians differs from those of the old elite with regard to the likelihood of their political affiliation arising from an opposition movement rather than established rule. They are able to rely on generational transfer of power as well as the valuable branding of a dynastic name and image while rejecting being perceived as protégés. New dynastic women politicians base the legitimacy of their office on the people who elected them and reject the association with privilege, an association they reserve for members of the old dynastic elites. Hisila Yami[10] stated, for example: "The people of Kathmandu voted for me because I am their daughter. They have faith in me" (Women's Caucus 2011: 299), indicating her position is legitimised not by her family ties but by the trust the electorate has in her.

Rounaq Jahan claimed in the 1980s that all South Asian women leaders are dynastic politicians:

> [Women politicians] were all politicised within their family environment, and gained entry into leadership through family connections. They all fall into the category of leaders whose assumption of power was "mediated" by a male relative, as opposed to those whose careers were shaped from the beginning by their own choices, attributes and efforts, grounded in a strong sense of their own political efficacy (Jahan 1987: 850).

Looking at current politics in Nepal, we can confirm that family connections are still pivotal to women politicians of old and new dynasties even if members of new dynasties may not choose to acknowledge the importance of these ties. However, Jahan's claim that all women's careers in politics have been mediated through male relatives can no longer hold in the context of Nepal. Reclaiming women's agency, we shall now discuss women whose family context did not enable their career choice. Rounaq Jahan calls this a career according to "their own choices", implying, in the above quote, that this has been a career path reserved for men.

Non-dynastic women politicians

In 2008, the vast majority of women in the CA were there for the first time and entered high office without the help of family ties – as, for example, Gauri

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10 Hisila Yami comes from a political family with a father who has been deputy minister. She is a Central Committee member of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and was president of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary). Her husband Baburam Bhattarai has been Prime Minister and she has served in several governments as minister.

Mahato Kauri.[11] Kauri was orphaned and her extended birth family did not support her. Her cousins plotted to deprive her of her ancestral land – which she eventually lost when her abusive husband bought himself a motorbike with the proceeds of the sale of the land. Her husband left after the birth of their fourth child to live with his second family, and her father-in-law also did not support her (see Women's Caucus 2011: 267). Such experiences of the hardships of gender and social inequality definitely bring non-dynastic women closer to the realities of their voters, in a way their privileged colleagues from political dynasties will never be. Chandra argues that "dynasts are in fact less qualified when it comes to grassroots political experience" (2016: 47). Understanding and fighting social inequality, campaigning door to door, putting up posters, hosting house meetings, organising demonstrations and gathering signatures for petitions is not what dynastic politicians are known for. Women politicians who entered politics through minority representation or election and dynastic strategists represent different poles within the political and the socio-economic field. Non-dynastic politicians earn expertise, credibility and support through active grassroots participation and the adoption of responsibilities, whereas dynastic women politicians enter politics at the top.

Suffering for political ideals has a long tradition in Nepal, where politicians of the opposition are often punished and imprisoned during their political career. Suffering (*dukha*) for political ideals and even becoming a political prisoner indicates personal strength and determination, unfaltering idealism and the ability to focus on long-term political goals.[12] As such, imprisonment and suffering for a political cause has become a qualification in itself, indicating the serious commitment of a politician. Nilam KC has worked as a political activist for the Communist Party Nepal (Marxist-Leninist). She sees struggle as an integral part of social transformation: "It will take some time for change to come. Change demands a lot more struggle" (Women's Caucus 2011: 531).

The experience of personal hardship runs like a common thread through the biographies of women CA members who joined the CA from 2008 onwards. They were forced to live underground during the war, experienced violence, had to abandon their children to work as "full-timers" during the war, lost their husbands or endured imprisonment. In Jun Kumari Roka's[13] biography, the connection between suffering and her political career was even more evident, when after enduring torture in jail, she was "given a ticket" to fight for the CA elections "in recognition of her struggle" (Women's Caucus 2011:

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11 Gauri Mahato Kauri is a member of the Sadbhavana Party, a socialist party promoting federalism and participatory democracy.

12 Fisher (1987) argues that in Nepal suffering (*dukha*) conceptually forgoes well-being and prosperity (*sukha*).

13 Jun Kumari Roka is a member of the United Communist Party Nepal (Maoist) who won her seat in the election in Rokum and has been involved in politics since 1989.

338). The overwhelming majority of non-dynastic women politicians share the experience of hardship and struggle in their lives. This indivisible part of their personal narrative functions as both legitimation and motivation to join party politics, often quite explicitly against family expectations.

It is beyond this study to describe in which ways the experience of individual hardship effects subsequent political decision-making. However it should be noted that non-dynastic women politicians have come to see their personal experience of hardship and suffering as an essential part of their political biography, if not a qualification for political office. Within the larger literature on women politicians and with reference to Corazon Aquino in the Philippines and Wan Azizah in Malaysia, one sees that victimisation has been used as political capital (Derichs / Thompson 2003: 31). Without belittling hardship and suffering, it should be noted that the legitimation of a politician on these grounds is directly related to political crisis and/or grassroots movements.

Whether women politicians in Nepal will continue to evoke struggle credentials to morally justify their seat in parliament beyond Nepal's transformative years will remain to be seen.[14] It is, however, abundantly clear that without a constitutional commitment to inclusive politics and the resulting quota provisions, non-dynastic women would not have entered high office in such large numbers as they did. Due to the nature of party lists that are ranked by party elites who favour clientelism, it is unlikely that non-dynastic elites will in the future transform into dynastic elites. Relying on quota nominations rather than elections, their individual future careers in politics are not secure.

Agency as governed by intersectionality and patriarchy

Arzu Rana-Deuba has stated that she was not treated differently from her male colleagues (Women's Caucus 2011: 121), suggesting that the CA is a fairly women-friendly workplace, a place where no glass ceiling exists. Linda K. Richter (1991) contradicts Deuba's impression, stating that dynastic descent is the key factor contributing to women such as Deuba breaking the political glass ceiling. To dismiss this factor and claim self-reliance means to deny privilege. Deuba is a stout but increasingly isolated promoter of mainstream feminism in Nepal. It seems that she fails to comprehend that female solidarity is not extended freely to her on the grounds of her specific intersectionality. Hisila Yami's earlier example, where she refers to herself as the daughter of the people, takes yet a different stance. She advocates an egalitar-

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14 Struggle credentials related to the 1951 Anti-Rana movement remained prominent among male politicians such as the Koirala brothers until the generation of those directly involved in this political struggle had died out.

ian position, dissociating from inherited privileges to gain political credibility. Both Hisila Yami as well as Renu Dhakal were actively involved in the civil war and their struggle credentials are beyond doubt. This provides both of them the legitimacy typical of new dynastic politicians. When comparing dynastic and non-dynastic women in politics, one difference lies in the networks to which each group has access.

Punam Yadav observes that during breaks at the CA "women who had been in politics for a long time were sitting separately, either with other women leaders (senior) or with their male colleagues, who were perceived to have similar status in terms of seniority in the leadership" (Yadav 2016: 69). It appears that within politics, a segregation between established women politicians and new women politicians exists. While dynastic women politicians are able to rely on networks beyond gender, new women politicians cannot take political networks for granted. Political networks grow with the length of political engagement and most notably, networks can also be inherited. Dynastic politicians take these alliances for granted; non-dynastic politicians struggle to build them. Members of the dynastic elites who have been in politics for some time are treated as insiders regardless of their gender. Newcomers without pre-existing networks are not.

Moreover, where the intersectionality of women politicians includes further markers of disadvantage other than gender, women's agency as politicians declines. Most noticeably, young women, women with limited formal education or women who are from any form of disadvantaged background have been sidelined or sabotaged and left without support from within and beyond their own party lines. This is particularly significant, as Meena Vaidya Malla (2011) has found that more young women then old women participate in Nepali politics.

Shanti Devi Chamar left the Nepali Congress when she was barred from sitting with upper caste people on the committee on the grounds of being a Dalit. She joined instead the CPN (UML) in the hope of entering a less discriminatory environment there. Laxmi Pariyar NC experienced similar discrimination when asked to sleep outside and not inside the house with the other delegates during a visit to a rural area (Women's Caucus 2011: 774, 450). Discrimination in politics is not limited to women, but women's intersectionality makes them particularly vulnerable. Lalita Kumari Sah, UCPN (Maoist), states that being a single woman from an underprivileged background has marginalised her, limiting her, as she perceives it, to the less prestigious position of working in the society of disappeared people. Mina Pandey of the Nepali Congress is, on the other hand, angry that without networks women are not only unable to reach significant positions but they are also exposed to accusations of incapability: "The practice of keeping women afar for [sic!] significant participation because they supposedly lack knowledge,

skill and experience is a poor psychological perception" (Women's Caucus 2011: 509). Calling discrimination a perception reveals a fascinating analytical scope, as perception relates sensory stimuli to interpretation. One of the prime locations where this process is made apparent is the media.

When the media features women politicians, interest has not primarily focused on the political statements of the women as politicians. Arzu Rana-Deuba detests being asked "irrelevant questions" about her hairdresser and wardrobe by the media rather than being invited to focus on her political agenda. She states that journalists ask "questions like those that they would ask in a fan club" (Women's Caucus 2011: 68). In the early days of the CA, articles surfaced describing CA members selling bangles, washing dishes and styling hair (Women's Caucus 2011: 15). The media limited the role of a women politician to the society pages or questioned women's professional experience by relating it to domestic or unskilled work. Both approaches undermine the authority of women politicians, whose political agenda should be central – not their domestic responsibilities or part-time jobs.

Yet the damage to women's public image is greatest where they are described as apparent traditionalists or proxy women. Prasant Jha describes in an article in the *Nepali Times* the arrival of two women CA members from the Madhes in 2008. They "came with their husbands who began doing most of the talking. The women had their heads covered. One of them asked for the day's Kantipur[15] and said shyly, 'I will return it in a minute. I just want to look at the horoscope.'" Jha introduces two women politicians in a submissive pose; they are covering their heads observing *ghumto pratha*, the appropriate traditional gesture required of respectable married women from the Terai in public.

Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) and Valentine Moghadam (2002) have both shown how the representation of Muslim women as oppressed, backward and traditional has been deployed to emphasise difference and a superior moral position. However, constructing the image of oppressed Muslim women who disregard the ideal of a secular republic not only by being visibly Muslim but further by showing an interest in the pseudoscience of astrology goes a step further. It undermines the complexity of gender relations by visualising assumed irrationality and subordination, directing the reader to the perception of dependence in decision-making. The description undermines both the independent agency of Muslim women and their ability to make rational decisions in governance.

However, by observing the tradition of veiling, the two women conform to expected cultural codes and thereby avoid criticism from within their own community. Character assassination is a malicious tool to damage achievements and reputations by relating information to a person with the intent of

15 Name of a Nepali language daily newspaper with a circulation of 350,000.

damaging their credibility or reputation. In the above example Jha judges the two politicians at a distance, observing and overhearing without engaging directly. Jha also reports in his article that the two women politicians behaved very differently when at their workplace, discussing politics inside the CA. However, regardless of the later positive endorsement of their work, it is the description as a first impression that damages the reputation of the two women politicians. The image of a traditional and submissive – as well as irrational – Muslim woman remains with the reader. The attempt to disqualify women by ignoring their work and focusing on their dress should not be acceptable, especially not when it is an identity marker such as a veil.

Denize Kandiyoti explains that when patriarchy comes into crisis, the patriarchal bargain between husband and wife will be asserted. She observes that modesty markers such as veiling intensify where women leave their familiar environment and explains, "they are working outside their home and are thus 'exposed'; they must now use every symbolic means at their disposal to signify that they continue to be worthy of protection" (1988: 283). From a traditional perspective the two women had every reason to wear the veil precisely at their workplace, where their reputation is at risk. Netra Prasad Panthi, ex-CA Member from Rupandehi confirms that "when men fail to find fault in women's activities or progress, they raise questions on women's chastity" (UN 2014: 41).

Where both the observation of traditional behaviour as well as the non-conformity with tradition is sanctioned by the press, women have little chance to emerge as powerful independent agents but are required to react to given expectations and accusations. We do not know if the husbands in Jha's narration came along for protection, reassurance, because they were proud of their wives or because they themselves wanted to walk the corridors of the CA. Neither do we know why the two women decided to wear a veil on this particular day. Sylvia Walby (1990: 173) has argued that patriarchy transforms from private patriarchy – a system in which men control kin women with the promise of protection – to public patriarchy – a system in which society controls and sanctions women's behaviour. When the press sanctions women's behaviour without listening to them the press becomes an institution of public patriarchy. Affirmative action will be needed for as long as a politician's dress is more important to the press than her ideas and statements.

Conclusion: Gender gap, gender trap

Within the intersectionality of women Linda K. Richter identifies key variables affecting women's political leadership: "an ideology of patriarchy, family ties, martyrdom, social class, female lifestyles, historical context, prison

experiences, and electoral arrangements as well as the perpetuation of the public-private sphere and its concept of female purity and family honour" (Richter 1991: 525–526). Women in Nepal have reached high-level politics through different means and despite being negatively affected by a number of the above variables. Whether they were elected, benefited from family relations or gained political credibility through political struggle, they would probably not have exceeded 6 per cent in parliament if inclusive politics had not guaranteed a quota of 33 per cent.

Unlike most women in Nepal, political elites stand in the limelight and are scrutinised by their peers and the media. In Nepal women politicians are particularly vulnerable to attempts at character assassination. They are blamed for being too strong and dominant, or too traditional and submissive and they are also said to have no opinion of their own as they are uneducated, or well-educated but still suspected of acting on the instruction of their male relatives. Unlike their male counterparts they are usually not portrayed as having exceptional leadership qualities and firm political standpoints. Instead they are expected to be mere gender advocates and are assigned so-called "typical women's portfolios", regardless of their larger political interests and their position towards gender and gender mainstreaming.

Parties in Nepal have not yet fully utilised the potential of women politicians. Non-dynastic women politicians, in particular, describe being sidelined by established male politicians, even of their own party. Like all women, women politicians have to negotiate patriarchal norms upheld by society. As the gender gap closes in parliament through affirmative action, private patriarchy transforms into public patriarchy. The relation of private and public patriarchy is complex and women politicians face varied forms of gender inequality at home, when entering public space as well as their workplace. Ang Dawa Sherpa UCPN (Maoist) a prominent politician, journalist and human rights activist sees the need to address private patriarchy first of all. She confronted her husband, who actively sabotaged her political aspirations: "I thought that if I could not change my husband, how I could [sic!] change the society" (Women's Caucus 2011: 118).

It remains to be seen whether women's voices amongst Nepal's politicians will gain increasing weight. Andrea Fleschenberg (2012) postulates that women gain only temporary influence in post-crisis societies. With a constitutional right to substantial representation in parliament, Nepal stands a reasonable chance of becoming an exception to this rule.

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Theory as Elite: The Phenomenological Dilemma of Dalit Critique

Sudarsan Padmanabhan

Abstract

In recent debates on the theoretical framework of social sciences, Indian political scientist Gopal Guru mounted a critique that Indian social science is not representative and egalitarian. In the same breath, Gopal Guru sought to rationalise this lacuna. Guru claimed that the works of Dalit scholars and thinkers are more performance-oriented and less theoretical. This paper would raise several issues with reference to Gopal Guru's claims: Does theory belong to an elite category? Does the lack of representation of Dalit scholarship present a theoretical conundrum for Indian social sciences? Is Gopal Guru falling into the trap of hierarchical complementarity between theory and performance/praxis? And, is there an intractable dilemma among the Dalit scholars between the politics of representation and the politics of ideas? This paper demonstrates that Guru's insistence on the moral, existential and social necessity of the Dalit theory is valid. But he is wrong in what he denies.

Keywords: India, Gopal Guru, Dalits, theory, philosophy, social sciences

Introduction

Gopal Guru is a respected voice in the Indian social sciences arena and a powerful scholarly proponent of Dalit social and political theory. In an interesting article published in *The Economic and Political Weekly,* "How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India?" Guru (2002) develops an argument that social science research in India harbours an entrenched notion of cultural hierarchy. (This article analyses the role of theory in the professional and social life of the marginalized groups in Indian social science establishment; it has been included in the book *The Cracked Mirror*, see Guru / Sarukkai 2012). He further proceeds to state that this cultural hierarchy manifests in the dichotomisation of the social sciences into empirical and theoretical research silos. This divide is likened to the pernicious divide between the empirical shudras and the theoretical brahmins (Guru 2002: 8). Guru gives a long list of reasons for the aforementioned pernicious divide. The arguments advanced by Guru interweave social, political, economic and cultural aspects, which have institutionalised the dep-

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rivation of the Dalits and other marginalised communities. Guru argues that in order to obviate the aforementioned pernicious division, there is a need to create an egalitarian conception of Indian social sciences. This is the central theme of Guru's article. Thus far, no one would disagree with the formal or substantive aspects of Guru's argument.

Guru's argument enunciates the problems in the domain of Indian social sciences from normative, social and moral perspectives. But Guru attempts to theorise the dichotomy between formal/abstract theory, as the twice-born brahmin (*dvija*), and the empirical as the outcaste (*avarna*). In this context, the current social science paradigm is the *agrahara*[1] in which theory continues to lord over the empirical. Guru thus problematises the whole edifice of the epistemic structure on which Indian social science is founded (ibid.: 9).

While Guru's arguments trace the trajectory of the socio-economic and cultural emaciation of the deprived classes and the attendant moral turpitude of the dominant classes, it is not limited to an analysis of the stultifying and self-abnegating effects of the caste system. Rather, it is a demand for the re-orientation and re-negotiation of the norms of intellectual discourse in the realm of Indian social sciences. But Guru's project for an egalitarian social science discipline in India is not based on the resurrection of the empirical alone, which is considered merely functional and consequential by those whom Guru calls the gatekeepers of the citadel of the Indian social sciences (Guru 2002: 10–11).

Guru's objective is to revisit the role of theory, which is used as a tool of discrimination in the domain of Indian social sciences. Guru claims that by privileging the theoretical, the experiential is elided. A deliberate chasm between the theoretical and the experiential is created in a manner of verisimilitude. The labyrinthine corridors of academia reverberate with the jargon of theory, which is the lingua franca of authenticity. Hence, there is an absence of egalitarian discursive theoretical framework in the Indian social sciences. Guru suggests a more democratic and egalitarian environment conducive to the theorisation of the experience of the marginalised, in the voice of the marginalised. Guru feels that there is a need to construct an ontology of the marginalised in counterpoint to the traditional ontology of the Indian social science disciplines.[2]

This exploration in search of a Dalit ontology is viewed as authentic and legitimate by Guru's interlocutor Sundar Sarukkai. Sarukkai adopts a phenomenological approach in order to analyse the ontological expedition of Guru (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 46–70). For both Guru and Sarukkai, authenticity and legitimacy emanate from the phenomenological experience, that is, the first person experience. Guru and Sarukkai have the onerous task of deconstructing the

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1   An *agrahara* is a traditional brahmin quarter with rows of houses often next to a temple.

2   This is a far cry from the politics of rage and identity politics in 1970s Karnataka that D. R. Nagaraj, Devanuru Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah exemplified. But Guru's critique of social science theory is also nuanced in its intent since it deepens and broadens the framework while standing on the shoulders of decades of struggle by Dalit intellectuals throughout India.

essentialist metaphysics of the traditional social science research approaches in India and proposing a new mode of doing social and political theory, more so in the case of Guru.

Guru's critique of theory, which is simultaneously a theoretical critique, is the purported voice of authenticity, whereas Sarukkai's attempt is an epistemological and methodological validation of the former. Yet there is an inherent tension between Guru's and Sarukkai's respective theoretical positions. The first point of tension could be analyzed in two parts:

1) Guru's call for an egalitarian social science theory is connected to moral stamina, social necessity and the inner necessity for the Dalit thinkers to engage with theory. Could such an enterprise be termed a phenomenological understanding of the Dalit/marginalised self? How does the Dalit self theorise its experience?

2) How is Guru's politics of presence compatible with his politics of ideas? How does a politics of rage transform into a politics of affirmation, which Guru is attempting to do with a critique of inegalitarian social science theory?

The second point of tension is: Can Sarukkai's phenomenological exegesis authentically explain Guru's critique of social science theory in which the Dalit/marginalised self is alienated? How are intersubjectivity and reciprocity guaranteed?

Guru's critique of traditional knowledge systems and his critique of the theoretical framework adopted by the Indian social science establishment are connected. The privileging of theory, in terms of *episteme* (knowledge), *doxa* (opinion), *techne* (technical knowledge), mode of communication and newer forms of knowledge, denies access to Dalits (Parry 2014). On the other hand, the functional empirical approach is also uncritical of the overt emphasis on modeling social sciences on the methods of the natural and technical sciences (Horkheimer 1972: 188–192). The predominant academic discourse in the Indian science domain is Marxist and liberal in interpretation. Marxism wants to create a classless society. Liberalism emphasises a rights-based democracy. Therefore, both Marxism and liberalism should be able to address the problems in the Indian social science framework. However, many Dalit thinkers contend that economic equality and individual equality guaranteed by law would not be able to deliver social justice. This is where a phenomenological approach to theorisation of the Dalit experience comes in.

In this article, I would argue that the theoretical fore-understanding, to borrow Heidegger's terminology, of Guru's critique betrays a contradiction. On the one hand, Guru wants to make theory morally situated, self-actualising and socially empowering, especially with respect to the lived experience of the

Dalits. This is the phenomenological and existential aspect of Guru's critique of social science theory, in which the Dalit experience is outsourced to non-Dalit scholars, as participant observers (Guru 2002: 26). Guru's assertion is that the Dalit voice should be heard on its own terms, contexts and experiences and should not be abridged. On the other hand, is there a tacit acceptance of a Habermasian ideal speech situation? Otherwise, in an asymmetrical theoretical framework, as Guru himself argues tirelessly, a more sophisticated, communicatively and linguistically competent interlocutor would always have an upper hand in a speaker-hearer situation. Hence, as Habermas asserts, it is imperative to have a dialogical process governed by communicative ethics.

I would argue that there is a tension between the phenomenological construction of the Dalit self, which is an inward-looking first-person experience, and Guru's demand for a liberal public sphere based on the modern understanding of theoretical and practical reason. The egalitarianism of modern reason is premised on the public self (Habermas 1991). Guru does not clearly explain how the phenomenological self would transform itself into an intersubjective or public self. This tension is also reflected in the debate on the politics of presence versus the politics of ideas (Phillips 2000).

Ontology of theory: Essentialist to humanist

Theory evokes an atavistic fear and is also hailed as a panacea. This spasmodic fear immediately followed by fascination is the story of theory. Guru's, and to some extent his interlocutor Sarukkai's, exploration of the architectonics of theory, in general, and in the context of Indian social sciences, in particular, are based on a conception of theory contra praxis or episteme contra techne (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 50–52).

Guru's supposition is that theory, in consort with episteme, was a weapon of the Indian elites, thus ineluctably linked to social domination. Hence, the original sin is attributed to theory and its contribution to the hypostatisation of ideas and their further ossification. For example, many religious ritual practices, social beliefs, customs and manners have become frozen in time. All customs and manners are not regressive. But some others, such as child marriage, gender discrimination and animal sacrifice, have become obsolete.[3] Social institutions such as the caste system have had a debilitating effect on the lives of millions of people. Such a process of reification has had social, political, cultural and economic ramifications in that a corresponding hierocracy of

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3   In this context, the critique of Indian philosophical practices by Georg Wilhelm Hegel and Charles Sanders Peirce refer only to the latter, though imbued with Western prejudice against non-Western systems of thought. It is interesting to note what Cornelius Castoriadis says about Roman law. The rituals that surround the legal process in Roman law have little bearing on the actual legal process. But without such a ritual display, the public might recognise neither the form nor the substance of the law.

disciplines has evolved. Interestingly, while metaphysics was attempting to re-solve the conflicts in the social and the political spheres in the lifeworld by abstracting from experience, it was theory that constantly foregrounded the incongruency.

To borrow Guru's own terminology, before we embark on an archaeological excavation of the buried structures that bespeak of epistemic erasure of the marginalised/Dalit experience, there is a need to survey the site of the dig (Guru 2002: 10–11). There are four components to Guru's critique: the methodologi-cal critique of the social sciences; the need for an egalitarian framework of so-cial sciences; moral obligation to a just process of theorisation; and the authen-ticity of the theorisation of the lived experience of the Dalits (ibid.: 202–203).

The first two components of Guru's critique of social science theory, name-ly, the methodological framework and perspectival inequality, have a clear philosophical basis. In both ancient Western and Indian philosophical systems, there is a very strong connection between metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics. Guru's methodological critique of social science theory is also connected to the essentialist metaphysics of the traditional systems of knowl-edge, both in India and the West. In India, such essentialist metaphysics is characteristic of the orthodox Vedic systems of knowledge. In accordance with essentialist metaphysics, therefore, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics were systematised into interlinked categories. But some texts such as the *Manusmri-ti*, an ancient book of Hindu laws, while appearing to be constitutive of social institutions such as the caste system, could be classified as explanatory or descrip-tive. This is not to say that such a descriptive enterprise could not have morphed into an ascriptive form, however.

Guru's critique of the traditional Indian approach to social and political institutions, such as the entire structure of caste system and its collateral dam-age on all spheres, is typified by his analysis of the archaeology of untouch-ability. Here, one can deduce how theoretical categories (the categorial) were translated into categorical social stratification.[4] The commentarial and argu-mentative Indian tradition constantly challenged the status quo, at least in the theoretical-philosophical realm. The sramanic[5] traditions such as Buddhism, Jainism and the Carvaka fervidly questioned the metaphysical, epistemologi-cal and ethical assumptions of the asrama tradition (Gupta / Padmanabhan 2014: 251–253). In this process, theory played a very important part. The system of Indian logic known as the *Nyaya* school was highly developed (Mati-lal 1986). All the students of various schools of Indian thought had to undergo rigorous training in the *Nyaya* system to master *tarka* or the "art of reason-

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4   Guru makes this argument in *The Cracked Mirror* when he explains how the *panchabhuta*s (five ele-ments) are snatched away from the experience of the marginalised by a definition of purity and impurity in the Indian tradition (pp. 205–212).

5   Heterodox philosophical schools like Jainism and Buddhism are referred to as sramanic as opposed to the *asrama* system that derives validation from the Vedas.

ing". But, what is known as the system/lifeworld distinction in the modern sociological parlance, was also prevalent in ancient Indian tradition, akin to Plato's World of Forms and World of Objects, respectively denoting reality and appearance.

In Plato's theory of the divided line in the *Republic*, the immediate knowledge of the intelligible (Forms), *noesis*, is considered to be the highest form of knowledge. The ascending order of preference is towards this theoretical knowledge of the good, which is also the highest knowledge requisite for politics. Plato's schema looks prohibitive and many would fall by the wayside in pursuit of the Forms. Plato's conception of the Forms or Ideas, which is completely abstracted from the political, is not for all but only for a chosen few. Hence, it is clearly neither egalitarian nor democratic. Plato, in many ways, wanted to rescue politics from the demagoguery of Athenian democracy. Hence, the question that arises in this context, as Guru himself concedes, is whether theory that connects the universal with the particular and vice versa could ever be egalitarian? On the other hand, is Guru trying to create a correspondence, ironically, à la Plato, between a politics of presence/representation and a politics of ideas? Interestingly, Guru also accepts the social and inner necessity of theoretical understanding for the Dalits. But both Plato and Aristotle resolve the contradictions in the realm of the political only in their metaphysics. In Aristotle's ethics, which is a clear departure from Plato's emphasis on the universal, the contemplative life is still the best life. *Phroenesis* (prudence) is not a moral virtue, but an intellectual virtue. It is a political virtue. Hence, political life is a level lower than the life of a seeker of true knowledge.

Herbert Marcuse, in *One Dimensional Man,* states that theory or an idea can never be anything but abstract: "Abstractness is the very life of thought, the token of its authenticity" (Marcuse 1964: 100). Marcuse also refers to how Aristotle's formal logic is estranged from the empirical whereas his ethics and politics deal with the everyday life of the polis. (Sarukkai also makes a similar point with reference to the difference between Indian and Aristotelian logic, Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 40). The dialectical relationship between opposing concepts is eliminated in Aristotle's logic while it continues to remain in his ethics and politics.

In the Indian context, orthodox systems feel a need to have a grand narrative of cosmogony, which requires justification in terms of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics. The world of affairs (*vyavahara)* has to be justified in terms of a cosmogony, a scheme in which most of the inconsistencies of the lifeworld cannot be explained realistically. Hence, everyday issues either have to be explained away as of lesser importance, and major social, political and economic crises would be explained away in terms of karma theory as a cause-effect relation. Many scholars question the claim that the doctrine of

karma is a theory of causation. The karma doctrine is about justifying the present as an inescapable consequence of past karma. Since the karmic past is untraceable, the future has no guarantees. Only those people who are fortunate in the present seem to have had a blessed past and, therefore, a plausible good life in the future. Hence, there is no causal explanation in terms of a logical connection between an antecedent past and consequential future.

Contemporaneously, Buddhism and Jainism, which also believed in karma, created systems that were more horizontal and less hierarchical. The major reason for the heterodox systems like Jainism and Buddhism being less hierarchical was due to their emphasis on humanistic ethics as a way of conquering the effects of the cycle of birth and death (*karma samsara*). In both Jainism and Buddhism, the metaphysics and epistemology follow ethics. Also, their ethics is futuristic: how to overcome the past karma by one's current ethical conduct. Buddhism advocates an eight-fold path (*ashtanga marga*) whereas Jainism advocates the "five great vows" (*pancha mahavratas*)[6] (Basham 1999: 83–99, 100–110).

In the case of Mahayana Buddhism, it is based on *pratitya samutpada* (dependent origination – that exists, this is produced.) The empirical cause-effect relation is easily explained. According to the theory of dependent origination of Nagarjuna, "causation is thus simply dependent arising: a certain kind of effect invariably comes into existence following upon or as the result of the existence of a certain set of relevant conditions" (Chinn 2001). Both Jainism and Buddhism are anti-essentialist. Buddhism questions even the existence of *atman* (the self or soul) and in Jainism the knowledge of reality is always limited and qualified because reality has innumerable facets. What cannot be explained easily are the causal characteristics in the rarified realms of metaphysical theorising, because it is about essence (*en soi*) and not about existence (*pour soi*) (Flynn 2004).

Guru attempts to de-essentialise social science theory. Thus, in other words, theory has to be deracinated from its cultural hegemonic and hierocratic foundations based upon the metaphysics of the *atman*. In Nagarjuna's parlance, this would be a critique of metaphysical realism. Dependent origination, for Guru, would be the identification of relevant conditions in the social science domain that propagate and reify theoretical and metaphysical assumptions. Nagarjuna's interpretation of the Buddha as propagating the truth of dependent origination, aids Guru's philosophical critique of the essentialisation of theory. Nagarjuna's method is neither metaphysical nor *a priori* but conditional.

Now we have two theoretical frameworks: one Buddhist-nihilistic and the other transcendental phenomenology. Both lead to different paths in terms of

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6   The five vows of Jainism are *satya* (non-lying), *ahimsa* (non-injury), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), and *aparigraha* (non-coveting).

ethics. The latter is a legacy of Descartes, Kant and an attempt to answer Hume. Interestingly, by way of answering Hume, transcendental phenomenology is also trying to answer the question that Buddhistic nihilism poses, *anatta* (*anatman* or the "non-self"). Sarukkai gives a detailed analysis about the self-projection of untouchability among Brahmins, which is institutionalised in various practices and austerities. This is known in the traditional parlance as *achara* or conduct (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 137). Now we are at a fork, leading towards either the ethics of intersubjectivity of phenomenology, which privileges first-person experience, or the ethics of Buddhism, which is humanistic. Guru, himself, gives a detailed description of an alternative Indian spiritual tradition that shuns theory, which is identified with the Brahminical mode of thinking (Guru 2002: 24). This is an illustration of a denial of the phenomenological-existential projection of Dalit subjectivity in philosophy, poetry, prose, music and other forms of creative-intellectual activity (Nagaraj 2012). Sarukkai's phenomenological critique of theory in traditional Indian thought will be discussed later in the article.

Let us look at Guru's arguments as advanced in his article on "Egalitarianism and the Social Sciences in India" (Guru 2002: 8–14):

1) Guru's first argument is that there is a lack of egalitarian tendency in the Indian social science establishment. This would entail a detailed critique of institutional structures and cultural hierarchies.

2) The second argument involves a dearth of conducive environs for enabling and enhancing the intellectual capabilities of the historically deprived groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes.

3) The third argument is about how to do theory ethically (in Guru's words, "Moral stamina as the necessary condition for doing theory.").

4) The final part contains a critique of arguments made by non-Dalits on behalf of Dalits. One could even claim that the theorisation of the Dalit lived experience by non-Dalits is a theory of estrangement of authorship. The more the Dalits are theorised by non-Dalits, the more they are estranged from their own lived experience.

Guru's critique begins with a direct indictment of the system of higher education in India, institutional bias against Dalits and other marginalised communities, inequities in the academic environment, and a lack of enabling environs for intellectual development of the Dalits. Guru lists several institutions of higher learning and elite academies that have little representation of the Dalits and the marginalised segments of Indian society. What Guru demands is not only formal representation such as reservations or affirmative action programmes, which are already legally promulgated. He wants what could be

termed as a capability-enhancing environment, to paraphrase Amartya Sen's capability approach vis-à-vis John Rawls's emphasis on formal notions of justice, which guarantee political, social and economic rights to the individual (Sen 1999). Even the Rawlsian difference principle, which favours the least advantaged, is grounded in formal notions of justice (Rawls 1999). As Sen avers, the formal right to pursue life, liberty and happiness does not enable everyone to pursue the good life. Here there is a need for enabling capabilities for realising substantive freedoms (Anthony / Padmanabhan 2010). But Guru's claim is not just about social and political theory in this context. For Guru, the institutionalised stunting of reflexive capabilities denies authorship of social and political theories.

As a first step, Guru emphasises an egalitarian approach to social science theory, methods and processes. Let us list Guru's points in order (Guru 2002: 10–12):

1) Any practitioner of social sciences ought to have a moral responsibility to justify why one form of social science language, in this case, theory, is privileged over empirical investigation.

2) A notion of natural disposition or stereotypical cultural beliefs based on traditional conceptions of hierarchy should not be the yardstick for judging the quality of one's competence in theoretical understanding.

3) Dalits and Adivasis should not be subjected to an "epistemological imperialism" in an attempt to conquer their "intellectual universe."

Guru's attempt is not to provincialise theory but to sensitise the process of theorisation in the realm of social sciences to the embedded arbitrariness. Without moral sensitivity, theory becomes hegemonic and intimidating to the hitherto excluded groups who are new entrants into the halls of academia. An egalitarian approach opens up the field of knowledge (ibid.: 12). Guru argues that scholars have been remiss in dealing with the social and psychological ramifications of perpetrating the idea of the superiority of theoretical understanding over empirical understanding. Guru calls for the democratisation of the social science discipline. He asserts that after India's independence, conditions necessary for variegated labour processes were created for the Dalits. But what was sorely missing was the sufficient condition, a conducive environment for imagining themselves in theory (ibid.: 14–15). There are three parts to this epistemological demand:

1) Equal opportunity in intellectual enterprise in various fields of social sciences

2) A fair system of ground rules in meta-theoretical norm formation

3) Freedom from the domination of hegemonic epistemological categories

The aforementioned expectations form the nucleus of Guru's second claim about the nature of theorising in the social sciences (ibid.: 12–13). Guru also looks at the subversive potential of theory.

Guru's critique of theory in this context becomes a critical social theory. His critique of the obsessive emphasis on theory also exposes the divorce between an organic understanding of labour (praxis) and reflection (theory). This is a case of the estrangement of *techne* from *episteme*. Dalits were allowed access only to unskilled forms of labour specially based on their supposed lack of reflective abilities. Since the Dalits did not have access to institutions of higher learning, they were forced to do menial work. This was a vicious circle. There was no possibility of vertical mobility. Guru also mentions in this context that certain groups were assigned creative labour due to which they were able to develop theoretical and professional skills. But their understanding still remained as technical understanding (*techne*) and not knowledge (*episteme*) per se. As Guru argues, labour is the activity that gives rise to knowledge, in which both *techne* and *episteme* function in consort. Specialised labour processes enable reflective capabilities. Guru contends that the Dalits were not given access to any form of innovative, imaginative or interesting labour processes (ibid.: 14).

M. S. Valiathan, one of India's earliest and most famous cardio-thoracic surgeons, who has worked extensively on Ayurveda and is the chairman of the Valiathan Committee Report on All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), wrote in his work on the ancient Indian physician Sushruta that there was a divorce between the mind and the hand that led to the decline of various indigenous systems of medicine in India (Valiathan 2007: V-VIII). Such a divorce was institutionalised in the case of the Dalits. The rigid caste stratification has created many such false dichotomies even among the higher castes, with deleterious effects. As Sarukkai writes while tracing the phenomenology of untouchability, the false dichotomy between *episteme* and *techne* exacerbated the fear of the pure and impure, leading to even further withdrawal of the Brahmins from the empirical world. Thus, *episteme* has also become untethered due to its estrangement from *techne*.

Ambedkar: Alternative theorisation with emancipatory intent

Ambedkar, argues Guru, understood the need to transcend the suffocating environs of social hierarchy. Hence, he saw the need to acquire knowledge from elite institutions outside India (Guru 2002: 15–16). While Ambedkar would have witnessed the discrimination against the African-Americans in the US, in Britain he would not have encountered caste-based discrimination. Ambedkar, both in Britain and America, had the freedom to pursue any discipline. Inter-

estingly, he chose Law, Economics and Political Science as his subjects. All three required abstract reasoning and also an understanding of the connection between universal and particular categories. Ambedkar utilised his first-hand experience of caste discrimination. He attempted to unearth the foundations of caste discrimination in the canons of religious and philosophical thought in India. Ambedkar wanted to uproot the entire edifice of the caste system. He therefore studied the ancient texts of India on philosophy, religion, dharma, statecraft and law. His trenchant critique of the Hindu religion as the fountainhead of the caste system led to the mobilisation of the deprived classes of India (Ambedekar 1936).

As D. R. Nagaraj argues, Ambedkar, who clashed bitterly with Gandhi on the question of untouchability, desisted from pursuing a politics of rage and instead chose a politics of affirmation. Ambedkar attempted to create an alternative narrative and a Dalit imaginary in which they would not be beholden to the tradition of hierarchical complementarity, to borrow Charles Taylor's phrase (Taylor 2004: 11). Since he understood the need to imagine oneself in history and culture, Ambedkar, while repudiating Hinduism, chose Buddhism as his spiritual *marga* (path). Buddhism envisaged a horizontal access society, a *sangha*. There was no godhead; even the Tathagata was not one. Metaphysics was not important. The Buddha was silent on metaphysical questions. The problems of suffering (*dukkha*) and cessation of suffering (*dukkha nirodha*) were identified. The path for solving the suffering (*dukkha nirodha marga*) was also given. This path is the noble eight-fold path (*arya ashtangika marga*), which is based on an understanding of dependent origination (*pratitya samut-pada*) (Kalupahana 2004: 84–86). Hence, Ambedkar's alternative narrative and theoretical critique eschews the essentialist and metaphysical vestiges of the orthodox systems. An unswerving emphasis on tolerance, equality, integrity and humanistic ethics forms the fundamental ethos of a democratic society (Nagaraj 2012: 162–163). In Buddhism, social service becomes a spiritual quest. For Ambedkar, a community of people whose moral order is undergirded by a principle of horizontal access society is a powerful contrapuntal social, philosophical, political, economic and cultural model to the caste-riddled Hinduism, which institutionalised hierarchical complementarity.

In both liberal and republican political models, there is an attempt to subsume the particular under the universal. Thus, justice or equality is based on an understanding of a generally accepted shared public moral order. Governments in the Western world are expected to ensure an environment where justice and equality as fundamental principles are reflected in institutional practices and public policy. But postcolonial and developing world democracies did not have the luxury of fashioning a public sphere based on the values of equality and justice. Notions of the social, political, cultural, economic, public and

national were being constructed and imagined all at once (Guha 2008). The values of old traditions had to be reinterpreted or reconstructed with reference to emerging ideas, practices and institutions. A new understanding of what is public and private became necessary. Yet, the social and economic status of the Dalits and marginalised groups, while part of the politics of ideas, were seldom a voice of presence.

Guru credits Ambedkar for awakening the Dalits and other marginalised groups to the myriad issues faced by them in their lifeworld in spite of constitutional guarantees. Political democracy governed by the Constitution, for Ambedkar, was only a blueprint for an egalitarian and humane polity. But the change of mind and heart has to happen in the individual and social realms. Gandhi wanted to transform traditional structures of domination, through a process of immanent critique, to be more humane, inclusive, non-violent and truthful (Iyer 2000: 5–12). But Ambedkar was not convinced that people steeped in the traditional hierocratic structures were capable of moral transformation. Hence, he wanted complete transcendence of traditional customs and manners and emphasised a new beginning inspired by Western ideas of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – freedom, equality and fraternity.

America's individual freedom and procedural democracy appealed to Ambedkar as well. In America, the individual was respected for her/his labour, not for pedigree. Thinkers such as Tocqueville and Weber have written about how voluntary associations in America play a very important part in representing the interests of various groups (Turner 2004). Weber also pointed out the paradoxical relationship between the Protestant puritanical ethics and flourishing capitalism, the former forbidding ostentation and profligacy yet the latter deriving its oxygen from consumption (Weber 1958: 181). In an advanced capitalist society, as Marcuse writes, the relation between capital and labour ceases to be dialectic and hence becomes much more complex, as does the traditional Marxist opposition between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Marcuse 1964: 10–12).

Ambedkar, while admiring liberalism and republicanism, and mindful of the excesses of capitalism and its powerful Marxist critique, was much more concerned about the existential issues of his people, the Dalits. His struggles, though informed by the ideas of freedom and equality, were a struggle for everyday existence, for water, jobs, food and basic amenities that were denied to millions of people due to caste injunctions. Ambedkar was fighting for equality at all levels. Thus, spiritual upliftment, access to modern education, political office, legal recourse, economic opportunities and cultural space were all part of his agenda. Guru's reference to *muknayak* ("leader of the dumb people") pertains to the condescending attitude of the elite, who anoint themselves as the leaders of the unsophisticated Dalits (Guru 2002: 25). While caste relations were much more adversarial during Ambedkar's time, he was defi-

nitely strongly opposed to being represented even by Gandhi (Nagaraj 2012: 43–47). While there was a grand narrative of traditional Indian philosophy, society, culture, religion and arts, Ambedkar sought to reimagine a culture and tradition that would break the cycle of life and death, the samsara, to use the Buddhist phrase (Ambedkar 1957). Ambedkar converted to Buddhism to forswear the tradition that disowned his people. But this would not solve the issue of the social and economic backwardness of the Dalits and other marginalised people. There was a need for an egalitarian and free political system that would enable the Dalits to represent themselves as free and equal citizens of India and also to participate in the political process. Thus the Indian Constitution was envisioned to ensure equal rights and opportunities in what would be a modern India (Austin 2012: 4–10).

Ambedkar's gargantuan efforts were possible only through intense reflection on the inequalities and injustices institutionalised over several centuries. A thorough theoretical examination of the reason and logic of the social, political, economic and cultural institutions of India was undertaken by Ambedkar in order to begin a process of unlearning for the Dalits, in particular, and Indians in general. Such an opportunity arose when he was appointed the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. This is where Nagaraj's understanding of the Gandhi/Ambedkar debates becomes germane to our discussion. While the Dalit imagination needed to be nurtured, a democratic and free India was indispensible for the nourishment of the Dalits. This was a shared and collective enterprise in which the Dalits had to strive together with the larger Indian population. Here, the Dalit imaginary and the imagining of India as a nation manage to, if not coalesce, at least rendezvous. In this way, Ambedkar was able to convert the politics of rage into a politics of affirmation (Nagaraj 2012: 207).

The Dalit self as phenomenological and existential: An examination

In a phenomenological understanding, there is a difference between experience and lived experience (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 33). Experience is a combination of the subject, the structure of experience and the content of experience. Hence, objectification of experience is not possible; there is no materiality of experience to be considered independent of the experiencer. Therefore, experience cannot be replicated. Sarukkai argues that while the subject has the choice of experience, lived experience has no element of freedom of choice. He mentions three kinds of choices associated with experience, namely, the freedom to be a part, freedom to leave and freedom to modify. Lived experience is thus a necessary experience (ibid.: 34–35).

> Lived Experience = Subject + Context + Content
> Dalit Lived Experience = Dalit Subject + Dalit Context + Dalit Content

There is no role for participant observers. Sarukkai writes: "To be a Dalit is not to share all that they have but to share what they cannot have" (ibid.: 36). Thus, the Dalit lived experience signifies the lack of freedom in an experience. Guru wants lived experience as the final validation of theory (ibid.: 36–37). By establishing the unbreakable and necessary nature of lived experience, theoretical reflection can only be an extension of the Dalit lived experience. Guru demands not only ownership but also authorship of the theorisation of the Dalit lived experience. Sarukkai, while recognising Guru's line of reasoning, asks whether only owners of experience can become authors or vice versa (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 38). Sarukkai illustrates the ownership versus authorship debate with the example of the owner and author of a book. The owner has little control over the contents of the book. The author controls everything. But Guru's claim appears to be an extreme case of Husserlian *epoché*. Guru's claim is an absolute claim, both formally and substantively. Sarukkai's claim is more contextual. Formally, it recognises the legitimacy of Guru's claim. But can the Dalits be the sole owners of their experience (ibid.: 38–39)? If that were to be the case, any claim to phenomenological intersubjectivity is denied.

While discussing the need for a conducive intellectual and academic environment to foster reflective growth among the Dalits, Guru's critique of the "twice-born" theoretical and the menial empirical research is not unique. Hannah Arendt, and a large number of illustrious Marxist, para-Marxist, feminist and post-structural theorists, including Jürgen Habermas, have discussed this in great detail (Marcuse 1964: 102).[7] In Hannah Arendt's writings, the distinction between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* is a recurring theme. But Arendt emphasises the *activa* as much as she does the *contemplativa*. Plato's *Republic* effectively settles the dispute in favour of the *episteme* against the *techne*. But this dispute is resolved metaphysically and not in the realm of the political. And *episteme* is only a stage beyond *techne*. The challenge posed by Glaucon and Adeimantus to Socrates to create a polity that embodies justice still towers over political theory like Shelley's Ozymandias, as the sands of time pass by (Farrar 1993: 33–34). Guru does not want to engineer a violent insurrection against the episteme or in this context, theory. He wants to question the metaphysical resolution of the ancient tension between the *episteme* and the *techne*. For this struggle is waged on the turf of the political. Guru claims that when the political is elided to theorise justice in the polis as in the works of Plato, and even Aristotle, so is the moral/ethical. In the Greek

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7   Herbert Marcuse (1964) writes in *One Dimensional Man* the following: "Logical abstraction is also sociological abstraction. There is a logical mimesis which formulates the laws of thought in protective accord with the laws of society, but it is only one mode of thought among others."

polis, the *demos* is well-defined and so is *res publica* in the Roman republic (Hornblower 1993: 12–15). There is no separation between the political and the ethical, especially in Greek thought (Aristotle 1893). The Dalits in pre and post-colonial India fall in the liminal space. How does the Dalit self project itself? What is the role of Dalit subjectivity in theorising about their experience? Hence, there is a need for a phenomenological exegesis.

It is understandable that Guru, on the one hand, needs to retain the project of enlightenment, which is equality and rationality, and, on the other hand, to de-hyphenate theory from rationality, the formal component, and re-hyphenate it with equality. Normally, in liberal social and political theory, rationality and equality are the founding principles. Reason is the fount of liberty, fraternity and equality. In Marxist theory, praxis is the substantive principle. Here, what Guru terms as functional-empirical social science seems to have the upper hand vis-à-vis theoretical social science.[8] This is also true of the utilitarian method, which is severely criticised by Marx. But this theoretical/empirical dichotomy or the domination of the one or the other is dependent on various disciplinary factors. Guru, however, is addressing a very specific and particular socio-political context and the theorisation that emanates from the said context. In this case, the Indian social science framework is the theory that arises out of the caste- and class-conscious intelligentsia and the dominant socio-economic structures. As a corollary, this translates into cultural and political hierarchies as well. Furthermore, the Dalit/marginalised subject is completely invisible. Therefore, is Guru's attempt a case of reverse engineering of theory as praxis, à la Marxism, a de-elitisation of theory? Guru is not prepared to confine his archaeological excavations to the marked area of liberal or Marxist theory. This is thus a problematic analysis of Guru's project, since he is not interested in the de-elitisation of theory. Guru's target is theory itself, that is theory that is elite. Thus, he constructs a phenomenological account of the Dalit experience as a theory of lived experience.

The term "phantasy" is used by Edmund Husserl to refer to "merely intuitive imagination". Guru's analysis of the Dalit poems, stories and other artistic productions fits neatly into this term in reference to the merely representational and not ideational (the Husserlian ideal types; Beyer 2015: 6). This representationality is in stark opposition to the singularity and intentionality of the phenomenological Dalit lived experience. Guru's charge is that in the

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8   In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt makes a distinction between *vita contemplativa* (thinking, willing and judging) and *vita activa* (labour, work and action). "Although Arendt considers the three activities of labor, work and action equally necessary to a complete human life, in the sense that each contributes in its distinctive way to the realization of our human capacities, it is clear from her writings that she takes action to be the differentia specifica of human beings, that which distinguishes them from both the life of animals (who are similar to us insofar as they need to labor to sustain and reproduce themselves) and the life of the gods (with whom we share, intermittently, the activity of contemplation). In this respect the categories of labor and work, while significant in themselves, must be seen as counterpoints to the category of action, helping to differentiate and highlight the place of action within the order of the vita activa." (D'Entreves in Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy).

realm of Indian social science theory and in social life, there has never been an opportunity for the Dalits/marginalised communities to theorise their experiences. In the social sciences, someone always speaks for the Dalits and the marginalised. Their presence is only in the ideas of others and they are to partake in the world of Forms. Hence, the gates to the theoretical paradise, that is, the world of Forms or Ideas, are barred. The leitmotif of Guru's argument is the *agrahara* of theory as the sanctum of the twice born, which he refers to by the acronym TTB (Guru 2002: 16). Dalit artistic productions, whether poetry, plays, dance, craft or prose, are only a speck in the realm of ideas; as a product of the Dalit experience, the artifacts are part of the world of opinion, which is a particular representation of the universal world of Forms. Phenomenologically, it would appear as if the artistic endeavours of the Dalits would be bereft of intentional content (Beyer 2015: 6–8). Guru argues that the correlation between the politics of presence and the politics of ideas that happens organically among the TTB is also beyond the socio-cultural horizons of the Dalits for the aforementioned reason (Guru 2002: 22–24).

The next point of Guru's critique is the most problematic claim in the context of Guru's phenomenological epistemology, which is utilised to critique the formal character of the theory, to explicate the sociology of *Umwelt* or "homeworld" and to emphasise the primacy and immediacy of lived experience, as well as the politics of presence vis-à-vis the politics of ideas in disavowing participant observation. Guru's theoretical claims are based on the lived experiences of the Dalits as a basis for authentic Dalit experience in authorship vis-à-vis what Sundar Sarukkai calls the ownership experience (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 33). For Guru, the Dalits are not just owners of the lived experience, which is a necessary experience, but also the authors of the lived experience. Guru's emphasis on the egalitarian principle that is at once normative, interrogative and suggestive is not based entirely on notions of formal justice (justice as fairness as political). Guru wants to effect an *epoché*, which is to say that "any phenomenological description proper is to be performed from a first person point of view, so as to ensure that the respective item is described exactly as is experienced, or intended, by the subject" (Beyer 2015: 15). The *epoché* or bracketing of first person experience, as intended by the subject exactly to be experienced, is a methodological constraint. It does not depend on the extramental world for a represented object (ibid.: 15). Edmund Husserl's famous work on phenomenology posits the bracketing of first person experience or *epoché* from any existential assumptions regarding the external world. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is based on intentionality, singularity of indexical experiences and intentional horizons. Thus far, Guru's theorisation is on sound phenomenological footing. But Husserl's phenomenological perceptual experience also involves concepts such as empathy, intersubjectivity and lifeworld. In all these concepts, the subject is the author, whether

in terms of reflective self-consciousness or pre-reflective self-consciousness. "In fact, one of the most important aspects of transcendental phenomenology is intersubjectivity" (ibid.: 21). Intersubjectivity constitutes our selves in three ways – as objectively existing subjects, other experiencing subjects and the objective spatio-temporal world.

Beyer writes about the concept of lifeworld, which is very important in the context of lived experience used by Guru and others, who justify the intensely personal intentionality and singularity which is governed by one's intentional horizons. For Husserl, the subjective-relative lifeworld provides the foundation for natural sciences and a court of appeal for them as well. The concept of *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) and *Umwelt* (homeworld) is explained as "already pregiven and generally unreflected intentional background", which is the bedrock of one's belief system (Beyer 2015: 22–23).

My reference to Husserl's phenomenology is to show that Guru's theoretical framework is phenomenological but that his moral framework does not follow from this. The reason is that Guru stops with the first part of his phenomenological analysis and does not take it to its logical conclusion. If he accepts transcendental phenomenological framework then as per his project of moralising theory it should encompass what Husserl calls the "iterated empathy", intercultural understanding, and categorical imperative (ibid.: 26–27). One has to remember that Husserl's analysis suffers from the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy and he tries to utilise the concept of lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), which authenticates intersubjectivity (which is literally between subjects in the Husserlian context). The concept of lifeworld and world-horizon are intersubjective in the aforementioned sense. Hence, homeworld (*Umwelt*) is an understanding of the surrounding or environs. There is a localised intersubjective understanding (pertaining to particular groups), and a broader understanding of the lifeworld is based on an understanding of *a priori* general structures that are common to all cultures (Beyer 2015).

Conclusion

Husserl's definitions of the *Umwelt* and *Lebenswelt* are very important for our analysis of Guru's critique of theory. The first point about *Umwelt* or homeworld is restricted to a particular culture. This understanding of the *Umwelt* has been utilised brilliantly in Guru's critique of theory. But the second point about the "a priori general structure unconditionally valid for all subjects" of the lifeworld is conveniently ignored by Guru. This denial of intersubjectivity, which is founded on the "respective lifeworld" that is the crucible of "pre-delineated world horizons of potential future experiences of given

groups under given time and conditions" (Beyer 2016) is in favour of the *Umwelt* or homeworld.

From this theoretical assumption emanates Guru's stand against a politics of ideas in favour of a politics of presence. Here there are no horns of a dilemma for Guru, as a politics of ideas necessarily emanates from the politics of presence. There is no concept of Buddhist silence here. Ironically, Guru's silence seems to deny the ontological status of the other as an interlocutor. The introjection of the archaeology of Brahminism that Guru has sought to disavow seems to be complete. In Sarukkai's words, for the Brahmins the highest form of purity is untouchability, exemplified by a complete withdrawal and insulation from the world. This code of conduct (*achara*) is governed by extremely strict codes. This understanding of purity-impurity was projected as impurity on to the Dalits (Guru / Sarukkai 2012: 189–195). But Guru's emphasis on the moral hegemony of the Dalits and phenomenological ownership sans discursivity might end up creating an insular Dalit self formally resembling the Brahminical self (Guru 2002: 127). Thus, there seems to be an asymptotic relationship between the Brahminical and Dalit theoretical enterprise. It seems to be a mirror image. Guru is right in what he affirms, that the rationale for the caste system was theoretically established and justified. Hence, Guru's insistence on the moral, existential and social necessity of the Dalit theory is valid. But he is wrong in what he denies. Guru denies the importance of the discursive process (ibid.: 26–27). Hence, contestation of validity claims through the process of communicative action is forsworn. As Nagaraj argues, the grand narrative of Brahminism was not a monolith. It was constantly challenged within and without. Brahminism succeeded in making people believe in the infallibility of its grand narrative (Nagaraj 2012: 144). Ambedkar deliberately constructed the Buddhist grand narrative to create a rival approach to social and political theory. This theory was also not a monolith. But Ambedkar's sole agenda was the emancipation of the depressed classes. He thus did not want the dissipation of the energies of the depressed class movement. This theoretical enterprise is uncannily similar to Plato's *Republic* in form. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar, until his Chairmanship of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, steadfastly adhered to the principle of phenomenological exclusivism sans intersubjectivity. Franz Fanon (1978) also denied any form of humanistic relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. But Ambedkar's involvement in the Round Table Conferences, the Lothian Commission and Constitution Drafting Committee was due to his belief in legal and political due process, a core liberal belief (Ambedkar 1949). His openness to discourse was based on the Constitutional ethos of justice and equality (ibid.).

Guru does not evince any such keenness on discourse. Both in the case of Brahminism and the emancipatory narrative of Ambedkar, the theory reaches its completeness only in metaphysics, not in politics or ethics. Guru refuses to

acknowledge this. In Plato, the philosopher-king exemplifies the marriage be-tween theoretical wisdom and empirical power. In Aristotle, the relation be-tween the happiness of the individual and that of the *polis* is based on a *telos*, that people have an inherent motivation to be good. Guru's exhortation for an egalitarian theory in the social sciences ends up only as a theory qua theory, *sans* polis. The correspondence that Guru tries to establish between the Dalit experience and theory resembles Plato's schema. Perhaps at its apogee it has a philosopher-king, Ambedkar. Therefore, it becomes the converse of a social theory – metaphysics. It is no longer about the political, but politics. Is it no more an idea, no more elite?

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Book Reviews

"The alleged victory of the West in 1989 was also the onset of its decline", writes Eberhard Sandschneider (p. 10). This is a normal historical process, and the main task of today's politics is to manage it responsibly. Dangers lurk in miscalculations and in smug, self-righteous attitudes. From 1989/91 onwards, the West as a strategic entity has ceased to exist, perspectives are diverging across the Atlantic, and national interest has returned with a vengeance. Unexpected shocks and creeping trends (i.e. demography, IT development, resource scarcity) have led to international shifts in power. One example is the financial crisis of 2008, which, with its continuing repercussions, has caused a dramatic decline in the reputation of the West. When the pursuit of growth becomes greed and achievement is revealed to be simply fraud, the attractiveness of Western values, which Western politicians and journalists like to brag about, inevitably crumbles (p. 32). Values should not be held up to others but should determine one's own moral standards. What if the rest of the world were to treat us now as we have treated them for the past 200 years? And Sandschneider points to another problem with value-based politics: values are not negotiable. There are only winners and losers – or double standards, which are so evident in Western politics (pp. 32–33, 81).

Sandschneider reminds readers of Barbara Tuchman's 1984 book *The March of Folly. From Troy to Vietnam*, where she emphasised the consequences of insisting on false choices, and of rigid mindsets. The absence of critical questioning of established political behaviour patterns, and the misguided use of information, remain two major sources of error. Modern means of communication place decision-making under huge time pressure, and few people have the courage to deliberately slow down that vicious cycle. Instead, many people rely on previous decisions, on master plans, and on ideas from the past. Thinking in black-and-white binary opposites is part of the folly, as is the search for enemies, in academic discussions as well as in practical politics. We should instead come to recognise and end our self-deceptions; we should reform our thinking and refrain from zero-sum games, dichotomies, bogeymen and double standards.

It appears questionable to both the United States and China, how much political weight Europe will retain in the future. One chapter of the book ad-

dresses "transatlantic self-deception", leading to a call for more European realism. We in Europe are living with the negative consequences of the overambitious extension of the EU. In the EU as a construct *sui generis*, national interests will remain dominant. The EU does not need a constitution but rather a stronger effort towards consolidation as well as a readiness to solve problems pragmatically wherever they may emerge. Sandschneider cautions against debates about identity which are exclusive; the strength of the EU is in its diversity, not in enforced homogeneity. Europe has always been an elite project, whose complexity can hardly be explained to voters. Consequently, the main issue is not more participation but rather enhanced transparency of interests and decisions. Europe needs to increase its problem-solving capacity or it might sink into obscurity.

Aggravating the decline of Europe are think tanks that mostly benefit from crises: "Europe's continuing crisis is mostly feeding those who constantly revive it in debates" (p. 154). Another problem is the media, in which disinformation now supersedes information. Pictures can be manipulated and used in global disinformation campaigns. The internet offers similar problems, and many people nowadays feel overwhelmed by a flood of information and withdraw into private life altogether; yet democracy needs critical public debate. And that presumes an educated public that is aware of hidden dangers, as well as of the disinformation campaigns (p. 65) that are being discussed in some social media and online debates – and are very slowly becoming a topic in some official media circles that recognise the need for self-criticism. The nuclear disaster at Fukushima vanished from the media within just one month. Sandschneider criticises the fact that politics is not in the habit of evaluating such events, in contrast to private industry, where this is common practice (the book appears to have been finished before the German government's adoption of the *Energiewende*, a transition to low-carbon, environmentally-friendly energy). Sandschneider touches upon far-reaching questions, about energy policy and the ongoing financial crisis, that continue to confront us; he only briefly mentions the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, who has described the political process by which industrial (and other systemic) dangers are produced: they are economically externalised, legally attributed to individuals, legitimised by a subservient science and finally politically belittled (p. 123). The motto of Sandschneider's book reads: "Questions not asked can be more dangerous than misguided answers."

The world is changing rapidly, and visibly: economic growth, export developments, resource needs, demography and educational standards are changing our international environment, and many in Germany do not even perceive these international trends. Sandschneider stresses that politics needs to talk about uncomfortable truths, like the declining influence of Germany and Europe. Whether we recognise these major challenges, and whether we find peaceful

responses, depends on our ability to correct old patterns of thinking. A grow-ing self-assurance among the emerging countries is evident. China criticises Western weaknesses, such as our failure in development policy towards Afri-ca, and the problems in our political systems, which have come to the surface during the financial crisis. The bipolar world is gone, and the idea of a multi-lateralism of cooperation among equal partners is unrealistic, according to Sandschneider. Non-polarity is his term for the present. To deal with this situ-ation peacefully presupposes new forms of long-term cooperation. This period of major international changes requires historical consciousness among the main actors; accordingly, it is not helpful that German parties tend to have ever younger people in leadership positions.

In its negative experiences with colonial powers, China realised that there was nobody to rely on. The "Western community of values" must sound rather hollow to many countries with similarly negative experiences as well. And this self-declared community of values has not integrated any new members as equal partners. Therefore it is all the more important to recognise the signifi-cance of the new G-20 state grouping. This is a more promising step towards international partnership than if emerging political powers have to fight for their rights at every step of the way (p. 108). As models for the future role of Europe, Sandschneider contrasts Great Britain, which has been struggling for about 100 years now to accept its declining international standing, with Swit-zerland, which has achieved an international political role without ever having been a major political power.

In times of widespread self-deception in Western political debates, and after years of political instrumentalisation of the "human rights debate", Sandschnei-der's appeal for realistic appraisal may well be called courageous. The book addresses important questions to broaden the thinking of those dealing closely with politics in process. The first advice can only be: more humility.

Sabine Grund

T. A. HEATHCOTE, *Balochistan, the British and the Great Game. The Struggle for the Bolan Pass, Gateway to India*. London: Hurst, 2016. 288 pages, £30.00. ISBN 978-18490-4479-0

Ever since Rudyard Kipling popularised the term the "Great Game" in his novel *Kim* (1901), the history of the British political, military and colonial engagement and competition with Russia in the borderlands to India and later the Raj has been of particular interest to historians and to a predominantly British audience. The fateful military campaigns in Afghanistan from 1839–42 and 1878–1880 still influence the perception of Afghanistan and the Afghan

tribes as unruly, resilient, traditionalist and cunning. Thus, the relevance of the region derives, as the author notes in his introduction, from its continuous challenge to regional security until today.

The Iranian province of Sistan and Bolchestan, Pakistan's province of Balochistan (by far the largest administrative unit of Pakistan) and the three southern Afghan provinces of Nimruz, Helmand and Kandahar are considered as an economically underdeveloped, politically marginalised and volatile region. T. A. Heathcote, a graduate of the School for African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) and former curator at the Military Academy Sandhurst, leads the reader back to these restive edges of the British Empire, to Balochistan in the late 18th and 19th century. The book, an expansion of the author's PhD thesis at SOAS, is exclusively based on British archival sources and Heathcote offers a meticulous description of British military and diplomatic operations in the region from the late 18th century until the enforcement of British rule in 1893.

The manuscript opens with a historical account on the establishment of the Khanate of Kalat in the 17th century, when Mir Ahmad Khan achieved autonomy from the Mughal Empire. Heathcote bases this introduction on the standard English secondary literature on the region. The local political dynamics, the conflicts between various groups are represented in terms of the traditionalist checks and balances of a tribal society which had experienced little transformation or change. The following chapter introduces the competition among Iran (then under Qajar rule), Russia and Britain in the region in the first decades of the 19th century. The subsequent chapters, the main part of the manuscript, depict the expansion of British rule in the region from 1839 on, initially led by the East India Company and then later under the rule of the Viceroy. The author organises his material in strict chronological order and pays detailed attention on the careers of individual British officers and adventurers who took Benjamin Disraeli's line in *Tancred* literally: "The East is a Career". The myriad of geographical and personal names, the at times circuitous descriptions of various battles and smaller skirmishes between the British (including their auxiliaries) and their Balochi adversaries will fascinate historians of the colonial and military expansion of Britain in South Asia; a more general audience might well consider the volume an exhausting read, however.

Besides the detailed microhistory of events, there is only a limited interest in the larger political (for instance, the "Great Game" as such) or social transformation in the 19th century. While Heathcote is predominately interested in the trials and tribulations of his British heroes, their Afghan-Balochi antagonists remain the stereotypical "Other" – the volume would have benefited from a stronger consideration of the entangled history as well as the indigenous perspective.

Tim Epkenhans

ALI RIAZ / MOHAMMAD SAJJADUR RAHMAN (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh*. London: Routledge, 2016. Xix, 448 pages, £140.00. ISBN 978-0-415-73461-5

Bangladesh has a tradition of bringing out excellent reference works in the English language, and the new *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh* is a welcome addition to this trend. This is all the more remarkable given that the country won its independence after a long fight for its own language and, decades ago, decided to publish official documents in Bangla rather than in English. In 2003, a twelve-volume national encyclopaedia was published both in English and Bangla and is also available on the internet. Its second edition came out in 2016. The handbook under review, however, is less a compendium like the *Banglapedia*, but rather a collection of 36 articles dedicated to pressing issues and problems, written almost exclusively by academics from Bangladesh, mostly with a background of study and service outside of the country, especially in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. As the editors write in their Introduction:

> In a few years Bangladesh will celebrate its fiftieth year of independence. The country emerged as an independent nation in 1971, although it has existed for centuries – as a part of the Mughal Empire, as part of the British-colonized subcontinent, and then as the eastern province of Pakistan (1947–1971). [...] Since its independence Bangladesh has faced adverse situations – political, economic, and environmental. Yet, it has not only survived, but thrived. Once described as a "test case for development", the country has achieved significant social and economic progress in the past decades (p. 1).

Accordingly, the book is a proud recounting of achievements, as well as an attempt to present the difficulties, with all their complexities, that the country has faced. This has been done with great attention to brevity and clarity. All of the contributions are highly informative and readable.

That the project took longer than expected speaks for the optimism of the editors. Their success in having articles updated as needed should be gratefully acknowledged. All texts are well referenced, and at the end of the book there is a detailed index. The book is organized into six parts:

Part One "History and the making of contemporary Bangladesh" is dedicated to topics including: Bangladeshi politics since independence, nationalism, secularism and the genocide of 1971. The last article on the Shabagh rising – in support of the government's policy to not only finally bring the perpetrators of the massacres of the Liberation War to court, but also have them executed – explains how sentiments and frustration are passed on through generations and can erupt out of the blue.

"Politics and institutions", the second part, deals with political parties, elections and the party system, public administration, non-governmental organizations and civil-military relations. The shifting nature of NGOs from

service delivery to advocacy in their first phase, to the development industry in their second, and to "marketization and hybridization" (p. 126) in the third, is a wider phenomenon, but can be studied par excellence in Bangladesh. On reflection however, the concept of non-government organizations needs greater differentiation, as not-for-profit organizations are major providers of social services not only in "developing" countries.

The third part is for good reason the longest section, encompassing "Economy and development". It took Bangladesh more than twenty years to recover from civil war und reach a level of consumption equal to that in the last year within an undivided Pakistan, made possible by advances in three areas: first and foremost in agriculture, allowing an improving food supply for a growing population; in industry, where Bangladesh advanced to become a world leader in ready-made garments, produced by millions of young women with a predominantly rural background; and in the emigration of millions of workers, whose home remittances are amongst the highest in the world. Self-sufficiency in food production (more or less), textile exports and remittances allow Bangladesh large-scale imports and the building up of foreign exchange reserves, both of which were unimaginable in the difficult years after independence.

The next part, entitled "Energy and environment", is the shortest section, with articles on power and energy potentials, climate change and water issues. The country has a deficit in primary energy, but a reliable (electric) energy supply is a precondition for export-oriented industry, where instant reaction to rapidly changing world market trends is required. With most of the country only a few metres above sea level and located in one of the largest river deltas of the world, natural calamities like floods, droughts and cyclones are regular events that easily become disasters. Global warming, a rising sea level and the prospect of the increasing frequency of extreme weather phenomena add to such problems, and will affect millions of citizens. This could trigger mass migration within the country and beyond.

Diverse questions are analysed in part five on "State, society and rights". Human rights and the law, the state of gender, the CHT and the peace process, religious minorities, print and electronic media, the education system and public health are all examined. The fact that Bangladesh has managed to surpass countries with higher production and income levels such as Pakistan and India in the field of social services has attracted international attention. Beyond the satisfaction this has created in Bangladesh, this is important evidence that social development is not just a function of economic growth. As Sri Lanka had earlier shown, education and health can be improved significantly also in poorer countries.

The final section, on security and external relations, is characterized by Bangladesh's unique geography and history: tucked in a corner of the subcontinent, Bangladesh shares a long and winding boundary with India, and a

much shorter stretch with Myanmar. The country blocks India's access to its own northeast, a region which could – in theory – be reached easily by rail and road across Bangladesh. Historically and culturally the country was part of Bengal, and the idea of Pakistan as a separate state for the Muslims of India was especially strong here. Bangladesh's history as East Pakistan (1947–1971) ended almost half a century ago, but the role of religion in the state is far from defined. As for the outlook going forward: "Besides domestic drivers, such as political instability, growing authoritarian tendencies of the ruling regime, proliferation of intolerance, polarization of society, and lack of space for reli-gio-political parties within the mainstream, the future trajectory of terrorism in Bangladesh will depend on the global political situation, especially in the Middle East. If the role of the West, mainly the USA, in international politics reinforces the sense of Muslim victimhood, then the appeal of violent extrem-ism to the common people in Bangladesh is likely to intensify" (p. 435).

This book will be a standard reference work on Bangladesh for years to come, and a necessary addition to any collection on the region in general and on Bangladesh in particular. Bangladesh as a "test case for development" of-fers useful insights for other "less developed" countries and their donors.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

ANDREW SMALL, *The China-Pakistan Axis. Asia's New Geopolitics*. London: Hurst, 2015. 319 pages, £30.00. ISBN 978-1-84904-341-0

In a book of over 300 pages dealing with an under-researched state-to-state relationship, the reader can expect a reasonable number of footnotes, as well as a bibliography and an index of perhaps 25 pages. In this regard, Andrew Small's book clearly surpasses expectations. It is telling that the main text of this meticulously researched and well-written book on the history and trajec-tory of the China-Pakistan axis consists of 188 pages, while the remaining 131 pages are solely devoted to an impressive quantity of documentation.

Small writes on page 5 that "in-depth studies on the China-Pakistan rela-tionship are few and far between, with virtually no full-length treatments ap-pearing since the early 1970s". Clearly, the author has successfully taken up the challenge and chronicles what has happened, and, more importantly, what is currently happening between Pakistan, the Islamic state, and China, the Communist state. The book provides a detailed account of the origins and de-velopments of this relationship, China's secret role in (and not so secret sup-port of) Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme, trade issues, the current status of extremist movements in both countries, and possible future developments.

The China-Pakistan relationship, often described by both sides as an "all-weather" friendship, dates to the 1962 Sino-Indian war, a defining event in the history of India and a lasting trauma for Indian elites until today. The fact that Indian forces proved vastly inferior to their Chinese counterparts led the Pakistan leadership to focus on, even align with China. Especially when the USA rejected Pakistani military demands during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, the latter was in dire need of a strong international ally, and, to the surprise of many, found it in communist China. Pakistani leadership, beginning with Field Marshal Ayub Khan in 1962, followed by Yahya Khan, General Zia-ul-Haq and all their successors, all undertook to deepen and widen this relationship.

Andrew Small impressively demonstrates in the seven chapters (and dramatic introduction) of this book that geopolitical considerations, arms/weapons, trade and infrastructure are the four major pillars upon which this unique axis rests. The latter two, in particular, have received their fair share of criticism in recent years, with, for example, the Gwadar port development project on the Arabian Sea and the Karakoram Highway linking China to Pakistan both failing to bring about the desired economic improvements, despite the huge amounts of Chinese capital invested in the two projects. The author makes use of extensive interviews conducted in both China and Pakistan, as well as ample citations from the memoirs of relevant actors involved, especially from the military and politics. For Andrew Small, the nuclear question is also of utmost importance, and the author has been able to unearth many details regarding nuclear matters, probably unknown to most readers, in addition to highlighting how Pakistan has helped many "rogue" states to obtain nuclear material or plans for building centrifuges.

It goes without saying that the problems in this axis are many, particularly in the form of unbridgeable cultural differences and widespread terrorist activities. Small (p. 30) describes an incident during the brief war of 1965 when then Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai met a Pakistani delegation that, to his surprise, only requested ammunition for no more than 14 days. "How can a war be fought in that short time?" Zhou wondered. "I would be interested to know if you have prepared the people of Pakistan to operate in the rear of the enemy. […] I am talking about a People's Militia being based in every village and town." Pakistani generals, many of whom had received training in the UK, were speechless: "What does Zhou Enlai know about soldiering and military affairs anyway?" Such differences in military tactics and approaches remain characteristic of this relationship today.

On page 67, Small cites a Pakistani sinologist who said: "China has a good understanding of almost everything in Pakistan, political, security or economic, that might affect the bilateral relationship, but there is one piece they just don't get: Islam." These words reveal the major dilemma underlying the axis. Critically, China is worried about violence in its Muslim Xinjiang province,

along with violence against the more than 10,000 Chinese nationals living and working in Pakistan. Pakistan is home to one of China's most feared terrorist movements, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which fights for Uighur freedom in Xinjiang and is partly based in tribal areas in Pakistan. Much to the chagrin of political elites in China, Pakistan is poised to play a decisive role in China's battle against Islamic terrorism in the future, even though the Chinese fear that their fight is not fully supported, even sabotaged by Pakistan and that unresolved terrorist problems in Xinjiang province might incite protests in other Chinese provinces as well. According to a Chinese expert (p. 90): "When we provide them [Pakistan] with intelligence on ETIM locations they give warnings before launching their attacks."

After having read the book, one cannot but conclude that despite stark differences in ideology and cultural understanding, a common enemy (India) and economic interests (predominantly Chinese) are enough to provide the basis for a lasting friendship between the two nation-states. How can one understand the underlying motives, the nature, the trajectory of the alliance that binds these two important states together? The answer: by reading this book. Small's insightful account is highly recommended for students, researchers, analysts and policy makers dealing with international relations and security in the Asia-Pacific. The wealth of information and data included, along with the hundreds of hours of (frank) interviews will make this a book of lasting relevance.

Arndt Michael

AMARNATH AMARASINGAM / DANIEL BASS (eds), *Sri Lanka. The Struggle for Peace in the Aftermath of War.* London: Hurst, 2016. 293 pages, £25.00. ISBN 978-18490-4573-5

The termination of Sri Lanka's civil war through the military defeat of the LTTE and the establishment of a victor's peace in 2009 offers a compelling case for those studying war-to-peace transitions and the transformation of violent intra-state conflicts; nonetheless, academic interest in Sri Lanka's protracted civil war and the underlying ethnic conflict has been waning since the war's end. The volume under review is thus a welcome exception to this tendency. Against the backdrop of the 10-year rule of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005–2015), who not only engineered and implemented the ruthless military campaign that ended the war, but moreover left an indelible mark on the country's post-war politics, the authors of this volume have set out to explore the manifold problems Sri Lanka's minorities have been facing since the war's end.

The first part of the book, entitled "Social and Legal Complexities", addresses questions relating to peacebuilding and reconciliation. Kumaravadivel Guruparan analyses the public discourse on reconciliation under the Rajapaksa regime. The concept of reconciliation is generally associated with transitional justice and accountability in post-war situations; however, the author contends that in the Sri Lankan context, the official agenda for reconciliation was directed rather towards the consolidation of the Sinhala-Buddhist nation-state, while Sri Lanka's minorities were implicitly expected to recognise and acknowledge the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan state with the Sinhala-Buddhist majority at its apex (p. 22). Consequently the reconciliation discourse has served as a legitimising tool for the ongoing structural violence exerted towards the Tamil minority in the former war areas. This important argument is further supported by the remaining three articles of this section, which deal with the legal and normative underpinnings of the Sri Lankan unitary state (Asanga Welikala); the question of how human rights abuses in Sri Lanka can be addressed (Sujith Xavier); and the influence of Sri Lanka's ethnically divided media on peacebuilding and reconciliation (Senthan Selvarajah).

The second part of the volume sheds light on "Ethnic and Religious Dynamics" in post-war Sri Lanka. Suren Raghavan examines the role of the Buddhist Sangha as a non-state actor from a historical perspective; Farzana Haniffa delineates the "newness" of the phenomenon of Islamophobia in post-war Sri Lanka, arguing that Sinhala triumphalism in the aftermath of the victor's peace not only reinforced the discrimination against the Tamil minority, but also laid the groundwork for the periodic outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence that Sri Lanka has been witnessing since 2012. The remainder of part II expounds upon the problems of the Up-country Tamil community vis-à-vis the Sinhalisation of both society and polity during the Rajapaksa era (Daniel Bass) and issues pertaining to trauma and memory in Sri Lanka's war-ridden North and East (Malathi de Alwis).

The third and final part of the volume is entirely dedicated to the analysis of Tamil nationalism both in Sri Lanka and among the Tamil diaspora abroad. Ravi Vaitheespara discusses the future prospects of the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka by examining the few sustained writings that have appeared in the Tamil media. Mark Whitaker explores Tamil attitudes towards the war's end among Tamils in Sri Lanka and abroad. He makes a compelling argument about how both the Rajapaksa government and the international community appeared to agree upon Tamil attitudes after the war, characterising the Tamil community as war-weary and thus having "abandoned militancy and nationalism in favour of pragmatism" (p. 184). Through the analysis of a number of interviews with Tamils in Sri Lanka and among the diasporic community in Canada, Whitaker dissects this simplistic assumption in order to show that the ethnic conflict and the war have created a complex epistemological legacy which ren-

ders comprehensive assertions about people's views extremely difficult (p. 187) – a point that cannot be stressed enough, considering that open expression was particularly constrained during the Rajapaksa years. In the volume's final chapter Amarnath Amarasingam calls for a more nuanced view of the influential Tamil diaspora, which is generally portrayed as "overly radical and fundamentally corrosive to the prospects of peace in Sri Lanka" (p. 203).

The volume offers a comprehensive overview of the social and political problems that were caused by the war and remain largely unresolved to this day. With its contributions from sociology, anthropology, history, religious studies, law and politics, the collection is well structured, as the chapters of each section are interrelated in their scope, thus rendering possible a comparative perspective on issues in post-war Sri Lanka. Beyond that, the "new" lines of religious conflict that have resulted directly from the war's end are also analysed in some depth.

The editors Amarnath Amarasingam and Daniel Bass stress that the articles should be read as a "cumulative critique […] of the policy-oriented 'lessons learnt' literature" (p. 6). This is an important contention, as transitions from war to peace are of a procedural nature and, as becomes increasingly clear throughout the book, Sri Lanka has yet to move from a post-war to a post-conflict situation. Hence, the reviewed volume proves to be a valuable point of departure for all those investigating violent intra-state conflicts and war-to-peace transitions in South Asia and beyond.

Katharina Frauenfeld

ANDREAS MARGARA, *Der Amerikanische Krieg. Erinnerungskultur in Vietnam*. Berlin: regiospectra, 2012. 154 pages, €19.90. ISBN 978-3-9401-3248-2

The book begins with the famous meeting between Robert McNamara and Vo Nguyen Giap in Hanoi in November of 1955, a scene which is also notable in the documentary "The Fog of War" from the American director Errol Morris. While McNamara is hoping for reconciliation through the meeting, Giap still considers the American attack, in the context of that period, as foreign "aggression". Therefore, he sees no reason for any critical discussion of Vietnam's wartime past.

Andreas Margara chooses this scene as the introduction to his monograph on the culture of remembrance in Vietnam. On the one hand, in the course of his analysis Margara considers the public representation of the so-called "American War". On the other hand, he analyses the private processing of

wartime experiences from the end of the war until the introduction of the Doi Moi programme of economic reform in 1986. The theoretical framework for this work comes from the French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*. Based on this concept, the author analyses, in the second chapter, the reassessment of the war through places of remembrance such as war memorials, military cemeteries, official memorials and state museums. In addition to spaces of remembrance, Andreas Margara also addresses practices of remembrance in the form of tributes and memorial days. In the third chapter, the author approaches remembrance in a private context. Because Andreas Margara was not able to conduct any personal interviews with war veterans, this work relies on secondary literature. However, through his clever inclusion of quotes from former soldiers, taken from secondary sources, the author successfully establishes a focus on individual perspectives and single destinies. He thoroughly describes the role of women during the war, as well as the difficulties they experienced in post-war society, particularly returning female fighters, who often faced problems starting a family due to the physical and health deprivations they had experienced during the war. The recurring theme of the waiting wife in Vietnamese literature and music also makes its way into this work. Naturally the author also takes the war trauma experienced by the Vietnamese population into account when discussing personal remembrance. While the term "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" was included in the American handbook for treating mental disorders found in returning veterans from Vietnam, there was no medical or psychological treatment for those similarly affected in Vietnam.

The author provides the reader with a historical and cultural perspective on the topic of death in order to better approach the individual methods of remembrance in a Vietnamese context. At the end of the third chapter he identifies problems of reprocessing experiences of the war in Vietnam, including the "marginalization of South Vietnam" (p. 93). The narrative promoted by the state takes into account only the combatants who fought on the side of the former Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and ignores the fate of the members of the army of the Republic of Vietnam, as well as the officials of the South Vietnamese regime. Andreas Margara also identifies the relationship between the USA and Vietnam as an additional problem. Though there has been both an economic as well as political rapprochement between the two states over the last two decades, the USA has not officially recognised the war crimes committed by American soldiers in Vietnam and has not paid any reparations to date.

In the fourth chapter, the author surveys the way in which the country has coped with the war since 1986. In his brief explanation of the Doi Moi reforms, the author also touches on the generational conflict in Vietnam. Over 50 per cent of the population of the country was born after the end of the war

and is familiar with the war only as it has been portrayed in stories, movies, literature, music and in official state representations. Methodologically, the author draws on analyses of film, literature and art from the post-reform era in this chapter. He briefly addresses the works of authors including Bao Ninh, Duong Thu Huong and Pham Thi Hoai, as well as the directors Dang Nhat Minh and Bui Thac Chuyen, all of whom have dealt with the American war and the post-war period in a critical manner. With regard to art, the author observes that "a meaningful transition" (p. 112) has taken place. While the works of artists such as Bui Xuan Phai, Duong Bich Lien, Nguyen Tu Nghiem and Nguyen Sang were considered counter-revolutionary during the revolution, these artists were honoured, partially posthumously, at the fourth Congress of the Arts Association in 1994. Following these analyses of the art scene in modern Vietnam, the author examines war tourism, differentiating between the several groups of actors and memorials. Margara observes that memorials like the Cu Chi tunnels have been commercialised to cater to the interests of tourist groups, for example by providing a seemingly authentic war experience for US-American tourists. In addition, the author notes that nostalgia for the war has resulted in an increasing commodification of wartime artefacts, such as guerrilla helmets or Zippo lighters used by American GIs.

In order to give a perspective on the process of the evolution of war remembrance, Andreas Margara points out the reworking of the war with the example of the exhibition on daily life in Vietnam during the subsidy period (1975–1986), an exhibit which was featured in 2006 at the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi.

As a conclusion to his analysis, Margara selects the term "fragmentation of remembrance", which Peter Steinbach used to shape the German discourse of the memory of World War II. By choosing this term, he seeks to describe the inconsistency between the narrative of the state and the public representation of the war, on the one hand, and the actual experience and daily practices of the population, on the other. In the case of Vietnam, Margara finds that the former completely neglects the experience of the population in the southern part of the country.

This work from Andreas Margara serves well as a general introduction to the topic of the culture of remembrance in Vietnam. With this book Margara provides an important contribution to German research on Vietnam.

Sandra Kurfürst

Monika Swasti Winarnita, *Dancing the Feminine. Gender and Identity Performances by Indonesian Migrant Women*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2016. 208 pages, £29.95. ISBN 978-1-84519-818-3 (pb)

For Indonesian migrant women who are married to Australian men, "dance provides a sense of well-being through socialisation, community engagement, the ability to express who they are and the opportunities it gives to them" (p. 131). With *Dancing the Feminine*, Monika Swasti Winarnita provides compelling insight into the endeavour of Indonesian migrant women to find their place within a heterogeneous migrant community in Perth, Australia. The author's analysis of dance performances as rituals of belonging shows "that in the diaspora, the meanings of the ritual are always open to contestation" (p. 31). Fissures between the performers and their audience reveal the political notions of cultural performances.

Throughout 2007, the author conducted fieldwork among Indonesian migrant women dancers in Perth, actively taking part in dance rehearsals and performances. Most of the research participants are married to Australian men who work in transnational companies in rural Indonesia, where they met their wives. The "amateur hobby housewife dancers" (p. 3) have to cope with stereotypical ascriptions as bar girls and lower class migrants, even though they are in fact relatively wealthy. Their counterparts in identity negotiations are other Indonesian migrants, in particular members of the Indonesian consulate and the consulate's branch of Dharma Wanita, an Indonesian women's organisation for state officials' wives, who frequently denounce the performances as inauthentic and *haram*.

In their struggle to represent "authentic", "traditional" Indonesian dances, the marriage migrants negotiate dominant discourses on authenticity and moral values and their own preferences for a mélange of different dance styles, including Arab belly dance and Western aerobics. Winarnita describes "how certain gendered and moral values are imposed on the performers by not only the audience, but also other parties with a vested interest […], who become arbiters of legitimacy and aesthetics" (p. 130). For the dancers, this means that they have to newly create "authentic" folk dances in order to gain acknowledgement. Winarnita argues that authenticity becomes a "strategic form of self-essentialising", which is "negotiated by subaltern groups" (p. 33). However, this strategic act is not detached from the joy of dancing, creativity and subversive acts. Recognition from officials, such as the Western Australian Premier, grants the dancers a higher status and scope of agency. Through humour and self-mockery, as well as controversial performances, the women embody resistance in a playful manner. They subvert certain "dominant sexual values" (p. 92), such as images of ideal Indonesian femininity (p. 24), by exploring

their sexual self-determination and enactment of different gender roles. The migrant women dancers negotiate "three interrelated gender discourses of *ibu* (housewife/mother), mail order bride and bar girl while strategizing with gendered performances of masculinity and femininity" (p. 77). In the "duel of recognition", the dancers' experiences vary from "embarrassing to empowering performance" (Chapter 2).

Winarnita includes analyses of age (Chapter 3), the experiences of Chinese Indonesians (Chapter 4) and representations of exotic Bali as a tourist destination (Chapter 5) in her ethnography. The varied cases shed light on the interrelation of gender, sexuality, class, age and ethnicity. Moreover, they indicate the significance of the historical circumstances of migration, such as the anti-Chinese riots of 1998.

The author follows an interpretative and phenomenological approach in studying the multi-layered meanings of migrants' dance performances in Perth. The uniqueness of this ethnography is its balanced representation of different emic and etic perspectives, embodied knowledge and sensitive reflection. Winarnita demonstrates that the reflection of the researcher's position is not only an ethical issue but also reveals insightful research data. Her role in the group provoked reactions and questions that she includes in her interpretation. As an example, her research participants' attempts to label her an insider or outsider to her research topic mirrored many migrants' difficulties of defining where they belong, dealing with demarcations by other migrants. Winarnita describes her own role as a "partial insider" (p. 8), hinting at the relativity of insider and outsider perspectives in anthropological research. The switching of perspectives enables her to provide a nuanced and close-grained ethnography.

Winarnita carefully distinguishes the role of Indonesian marriage migrants in Australia from Indonesian female labour migrants who work in other countries. However, she touches only marginally upon the relevance of the host country's social system. Here, her theoretical analysis of migrants' agency could have been expanded further. It would have been interesting to consider how the host country's attitude towards multiculturalism and Western discourses on sexuality influence the migrants' actions. All in all, *Dancing the Feminine* is a valuable empirical study on marriage migration from Indonesia to Australia. Its major strength is its ethnographic depth and methodological reflection. On the theoretical level, contributions to the understanding of migrants' agency are thought-provoking and can be juxtaposed with migrants' experiences in other countries, illuminating those conditions under which "their marginal status does not equate Indonesian women as fixed within subordination" (p. 139).

Mirjam Lücking

Thomas Kolnberger (ed.), *August Kohl. Ein Luxemburger Söldner im Indonesien des 19. Jahrhunderts. Kommentierte Edition der Reise- und Lebensbeschreibungen (1859–1865) des Soldaten August Kohl.* Mersch: Centre National de Littérature, 2015. 312 pages, €25.00. ISBN 978-2-919903-45-0

Thomas Kolnberger, a historian who has made a name for himself with his excellent historical and geographical dissertation on Phnom Penh, presents here as a publisher a work which is remarkable both in terms of its content as well as its decorative apparatus. His work deals with the transcription of a manuscript of 195 pages, one of two writings that differ slightly from one another. The manuscript, which was written in German cursive with the title *Reise, Abendtheueren, u. Soldatenleben eines Luxemburgers im Ost-indischen Arschipel*, was for several generations in possession of the author's family and was deposited in the national literature archive in Mersch only in 2011.

August-Nikolaus-Joseph Kohl was a horn maker by profession. He was born in 1834 in Luxembourg City and died there in 1921 at the age of 87. Fifty years after his return from Indonesia (a long period of time which undoubtedly influenced his memories, though to what extent we cannot know; what did he highlight, omit or invent?) he describes his time as a mercenary in the Dutch colonial army in Indonesia. His various exciting experiences during his six-year stay, and on his journey via Paris and Liège to present-day Indonesia, are recounted in an easy-to read language and include stories of diseases, mutinies, punishments, combat and much more. Unsurprisingly, like many of his contemporaries, he questions neither colonialism itself nor the racism of the time. The moral of his story is, to put it simply, that "home is still best".

The transcription, together with 339 footnotes, is elaborated very meticulously. Is this a work of literature or is it a contribution to historiography? That is the question the publisher poses at the beginning of his introduction, leaving it to the reader to decide. The second part of the publication contains four articles, which place the notes of August Kohl in a broader context. In the first article ("Einmal Ostindien und zurück. Die Reise- und Lebensbeschreibungen oder die 'kleine Heldenreise' des August Kohl") Thomas Kolnberger analyses the text as a "brief hero's journey", based on the ideal model of Campbell and Vogler, a cycle with twelve stages, adapted to the present work. The second article ("Luxemburger Söldner in Niederländisch-Indien während des 'langen 19. Jahrhunderts'. Ein Quellenbericht und eine statistische Auswertung im kolonialen Kontext"), also by Kolnberger, deals with a detailed description of sources and a critique of sources as well as, as the title implies, tables and graphs, among others describing the Luxembourg mercenaries and their military employers during the 19th century.

Helmut Lukas provides in a third article ("Die Kolonie Niederländisch-Indien im 19. Jahrhundert. Ein Überblick zur historischen Entwicklung mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zeit August Kohls") a very helpful, concentrated overview of the colony in the 19th century with a view to earlier times. In a final article ("Luxemburg im 19. Jahrhundert. Von der Festungs- und Garnisonsstadt zur offenen Stadt") Norbert Franz describes the political, economic and social development of Luxembourg in the 19th century and provides an introduction to the state- and nation-building as well as the development of the city of Luxembourg before and after the dismantling of the fortress from 1868 onwards. Although Luxembourg was not a colonial power, the presence of hundreds of Luxembourgers in foreign armies shows that the subject of colonialism should not be underestimated.

An article on the involvement of Luxembourgers in colonial endeavours would have been a useful addition to the book. Unfortunately, little research has been produced on this topic. Among the few pieces worth noting are that of Yvan Staus (Yvan Staus (2009): "The Luxembourgers in the Dutch-East-Indian Army from 1810 to 1913. A Case Study of Colonial Population Movements to South East Asia in the 19th century." *Hémecht – Zeitschrift für Luxemburger Geschichte / Revue d'histoire luxembourgeoise* 61(4), pp. 467–493), the printed version of the master thesis of Régis Moes on the Luxembourgers in the Congo (Régis Moes (2012): *Cette colonie qui nous appartient un peu. La communauté luxembourgeoise au Congo belge 1883–1960*. Luxembourg: Editions d'Lëtzeburger Land) or the work of Claude Wey, among others in his function as curator of the exhibition "Von Orchideen, Kakao und Kolibris – Naturforscher und Pflanzenjäger in Lateinamerika", which was presented in 2016 in the Luxembourg National Museum of Natural History. Another article covering this issue is forthcoming: Ulbe Bosma / Thomas Kolnberger: Military Migrants. In the Colonial Army of the Dutch East Indies. *Itinerario – International Journal of the European Expansion and Global Interaction* 2017(2) (in print).

In addition, the reception of Dutch colonial policy in Luxembourg remains unmentioned. The work in hand is an important contribution to global history from the point of view of a state without colonial power. It can also be seen as an illustration of a global curriculum vita from a bottom-up perspective, in the form of the life of a simple mercenary from the lower class, one of the more than 1,000 Luxembourgers who served during the period from the French Revolution until World War I in the colonial army of the Dutch East Indies (only 40 per cent of the colonial army was Dutch) and who were searching for an alternative livelihoods whereby the mercenary service was endorsed by the state. In this way August Kohl played a role in the conquest of today's Indonesia by the Dutch Colonial Army, whose rule extended over 40 years. In the course of his experiences, Kohl, like his European contemporaries, failed

to perceive the multicultural environment in the country around him, for example ignoring the five gender categories of Bugis people.

In conclusion, it should be highlighted that the volume is excellently illustrated and appeals to the reader through its very successful layout. It is thus a joy to read and to look at.

Jean-Paul Lehners

Conference Reports

Symposium 2016 "Thailands Rolle in ASEAN (Thailand's Role in ASEAN)"

Hamburg, 23 April 2016

On 24 April 2016, a symposium on the position of Thailand within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was held at the University of Hamburg's Asia-Africa Institute (AAI). More than 80 participants attended the symposium, which was jointly organized by the German-Thai Society (DTG, Deutsch-Thailändische Gesellschaft e.V.), founded in 1962 to deepen cultural relations between Germany and Thailand, and the Hamburg Society of Thai Studies (Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik e.V.), founded in 2011 to promote Thai Studies in Hamburg and beyond. The symposium was opened by HE Nongnuth Phetcharatana, ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand in Berlin, and Stefan Krohn, Royal Thai Honorary Consul in Hamburg. Prof. Dr. Frauke Kraas, President of the DTG, and Prof. Dr. Volker Grabowsky, head of the Thai Studies programme of the AAI and President of HGT, gave the participants a warm welcome.

The keynote address was delivered by Ambassador Nongnuth, who discussed the challenges and opportunities for Thailand posed by the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), founded in November 2015. The AEC is part of a long-term vision of the ASEAN countries to develop their association into a people-oriented community that by 2025 would complement the AEC with two additional pillars, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). With almost 640 million inhabitants (in 2016) ASEAN is even larger than the European Union and presently the seventh largest economy in the world, with a GDP of $2.4 trillion. With GDP growth rates of roughly 4.8 percent (average for the years 2015–16), ASEAN's economy is growing faster than the global average (3.3 percent for the same period) though lagging slightly behind India and China.

After discussing the challenges and opportunities for ASEAN within trade agreements with its Asian and Pacific neighbours as well as with the USA and the EU, the Royal Thai Ambassador analysed Thailand's economic outlook and its role as a centre of transport and a logistics hub linking China, India and ASEAN. With one quarter of its exports going to and one fifth of its imports coming from its Southeast Asian neighbours, Thailand's largest trade partners are indeed ASEAN countries. Thailand has become one of the most competitive and globally linked economies in Southeast Asia. Ambassador

Nongnuth placed particular emphasis on the creation of ten special economic zones from 2015/16 to intensify Thailand's economic and trade relations with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. Among the policy measures identified to enhance the economic capacities of Thailand, infrastructure development – notably with regard to the modernisation of road infrastructure, the rather backward railway transport system and air transport – were discussed, as well as the development of an advanced digital society and measures to develop alternative energies as part of Thailand's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2030 compared with the 2005 level.

The inspiring keynote address was followed by Dr. Gerhard Will's lecture "ASEAN/China and ASEAN/EU: Thailand in between two Areas of Conflict". Gerhard Will is a researcher associated with the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) in Berlin. In the first part of his presentation Will analysed ASEAN's relations with China and the European Union. Though the economic cooperation between China and ASEAN has grown considerably over the last two decades, this has not led to the development of close cooperation on political and security issues. Paradoxically, the opposite is the case. The speaker noted in particular ASEAN's increasing trade deficit with China and China's lack of readiness to cooperate in the exploitation of the resources of the Mekong River. Such behaviour tends to make China appear as the culprit behind many failed developments, in the eyes of many people in Southeast Asia. China's military build-up and occasional clashes in the South China Sea issue were further issues of concern. In contrast, relations between ASEAN and the EU would appear quite harmonious.

Though for a long time the EU was admired in Southeast Asia as a source of inspiration, the recent Euro crisis and the EU's exposure to serious security threats (armed conflicts in the Ukraine and the Middle East, massive waves of migration from outside Europe) are perceived as warning signals shaking the credibility of the EU as a serious player on the global stage. Therefore, Will concluded that an intensification of ASEAN-EU relations appears very unlikely, at least in the near future.

In the final part of his lecture Will explored the role of Thailand in these two areas of potential conflict. In spite of its economic success, Thailand has been caught in a "middle-income trap" for some time already and needs to create a new economic drive through technological innovations. Given its difficult internal situation before and after the last military coup d'état (in May 2014), it has become more difficult for Thailand to adopt a leading role in ASEAN with regard to the community's relations with China and the EU. There are even some indications that leading Thai politicians consider China not only as a powerful economic partner but also as a model of political order.

The third lecture, entitled "Thailand from the 'Land of Smile' to a Power Factor in ASEAN Related to Economic Policies", was delivered by Prof. Dr.

Andreas Stoffers from the European Institute for ASEAN Studies. Stoffers, the author of the most important reference work on the history of Thai-German relations, provided some crucial historical background much needed for a clear understanding of Thailand's current role in ASEAN. He pointed the attention of the audience to Thai-Vietnamese political rivalry in the nineteenth century, which had caused a number of conflicts in the heart of mainland Southeast Asia. Against this historical legacy the present-day economic and political cooperation between these two countries within ASEAN cannot be overstated. Stoffers emphasised that Europe is no longer the *Nabel der Welt* ("centre of the world"). ASEAN is increasing its global significance, having seen impressive economic development, reducing both poverty and social disparities.

Within the ASEAN economic system, Thailand plays a key role. No longer an agrarian society, Thailand has been transformed, now boasting one of the largest locations for automobile production and a thriving electronics industry. The country is a leading player in the production of electronic circuits and semiconductors. A diversified industrial sector, a strong private sector, a large population of almost 70 million potential consumers, and its prominent geo-strategic position constitute Thailand's great economic strengths. However, ongoing political and social tensions, dependence on oil and gas imports, the lack of sustainable environmental management and, last but not least, the already mentioned "middle-income trap" can be identified as the main weaknesses of the Thai economy. To complete his SWOT analysis, Stoffers looked also at the country's opportunities (e.g. to promote renewable energies, the internationalisation of Bangkok) and its threats (e. g. ethno-religious tensions in the South, an aging population). Political and social stability is certainly a key factor if Thailand is to consolidate its position in ASEAN and the world. Stoffers underlined that the way Thailand handles competition from within ASEAN, notably from Vietnam, is another crucial factor.

The relationship between Thailand and Vietnam was more deeply discussed in the short presentation by Dr. Michael Waibel, a geographer based at the University of Hamburg, that introduced the final panel discussion. Identifying various fields of cooperation and competition, Waibel demonstrated that with regard to foreign trade, both Thailand and Vietnam appear more integrated into the global economy than within the ASEAN economy. However, Thailand seems to be less an "extended workbench" than Vietnam. In many economic fields Thailand and Vietnam are direct rivals, such as in the tourist industry and in agribusiness. On the other hand, in sectors in which both countries have reached different levels of development, such as the car industry and the educational sector, Waibel saw some opportunities for cooperation.

In the vivid panel discussion, in which many participants from the audience were involved, the relations between Thailand and ASEAN on the one hand

and China and the EU on the other hand were examined once again. It became clear that issues of economic, political and social integration within ASEAN need deeper investigation. The EU may still serve as a model in some aspects while also providing warning examples which Thailand and ASEAN should take to heart.

Volker Grabowsky

32nd Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE)

ISLAMABAD, 13–15 DECEMBER 2016

"China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Regional Integration" was the topic of the 2016 annual meeting of the Pakistan Society of Development Economists (PSDE), the most prestigious social science conference in the country. The economic corridor under discussion is by far the largest development project ever begun here. The enormous publicity and enthusiasm that the project has created is not just because of its size, but even more because of its partner – the People's Republic of China. From the 1950s onwards the United States had been Pakistan's main economic, political and military partner, but whereas Pakistan became America's most loyal ally in the proxy war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and in the War on Terror after 9/11, the USA did not live up to expectations in Pakistan's wars against India and left Pakistan completely frustrated when the ongoing war in Afghanistan spilled over into its territory. Among all its allies, the USA is nowhere as unpopular as in Pakistan, which sees China, in contrast, as a reliable partner, whose friendship is praised as "higher than the highest mountains and deeper than the deepest seas".

Therefore, when China came up with a programme to be known as the Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with investments of USD46bn (and more), it was seen as a saviour from all ills. However, not many details of the project were known; news items in the media were inconsistent. It was therefore hoped that the conference would provide some clarity. Clarity was also needed with respect to regional integration, thus far mainly understood as the integration of the eight South Asian states – Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, the Maldives and Afghanistan. Like Afghanistan, Pakistan is also a member of the ten-nation Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which began with China and some of the newly independent Central Asian republics. Pakistan has no direct access to Central Asia, while Central Asia's land routes to the

Indian Ocean have been blocked for political reasons (Iran embargo) and war (Afghanistan). Pakistan, however, is one of only three neighbours that separate China from the Indian Ocean and the only one with close relations to China. The Great Game of the 21st century is over control of the Central Asian oil and gas reserves and of the transport and trade routes, commonly called the Silk Road.

Only after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the opening of China has the area been reintegrated into world travel, transport and trade. Trains from China cross Central Asia and reach German towns like Hamburg and Duisburg on a regular basis. An increasing portion of bilateral trade with China, Germany's major trading partner (2016: €170bn) is moved over land. Accordingly, there is considerable interest in China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative also outside Asia (note: The Belt refers to overland and the Road to maritime transport).

The Silk Road was a network rather than just one road linking China with the Mediterranean, and if we look at the many projects that come under the name of Silk Road today, we see that China is building railways, roads, pipelines and transmission lines in all directions. It is also building ports along the Maritime Silk Road, known as a "Ring of Pearls". China has 14 neighbours and almost all of them have become part of these plans. The New Silk Road is a network, built to guarantee that imports reach China and exports reach destinations, even if some of the connections become difficult or even impossible to use. The existence of various corridors (e.g. through Myanmar) implies that they compete with each other for traffic, investment and business: they are to be more than just transport arteries.

Of particular interest for China is the development of its western provinces/regions. With an area of 4.1 million square kilometres, the combined region of Xinjiang, Tibet, Quinghai and Gansu is as large as the subcontinent, but has just 56 million inhabitants, as compared to Pakistan's almost 200 million. Western China's GDP of USD315bn (2015) is only 2.8 per cent of that of the whole country, but still more than that of Pakistan (USD271bn). The most western parts of China are closer to Europe than to the Pacific; they are also closer to the Arabian Sea. The Chinese Pakistan Economic Corridor is thus especially important for China's own integration by aiming to reduce regional disparities within the country.

Pakistan, with its unhappy history of regional neglect, would greatly benefit from the Economic Corridor, as this would open up its western borderlands, i.e. the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The project would thus help to integrate not only Asia and China, but especially Pakistan. Regional development, however, is more than just building infrastructure. Investment is welcome, where it creates gainful employment for the local workforce. However, where locals lack qualification and have to fear that "better"

jobs go to outsiders, regional development is seen rather as a hostile intrusion, especially if natural resources (agricultural land, water) are concerned. Dozens of workers and guards have already lost their lives in terrorist attacks along the track in Balochistan. Regular skirmishes across the border with Iran have become so bad that this neighbour has set up fences and walls across hundreds of kilometres of open terrain, where traditionally the local population could move unrestricted. Officially, the Economic Corridor is also to benefit Pakistan's neighbours, thereby furthering Asian integration. But as fences have also been set up along the borders with Afghanistan and India, how then can CPEC become an instrument of regional integration? There is no doubt that China has the political will, the financial means and the technical capability to realise the grandest projects. But as Pakistan is not China's only option, one would expect comparative studies of competing projects.

The focus of the conference, however, was exclusively on the home country, in the plenary sessions as well as in the panels. After the inaugural sessions, well covered by TV, radio and newspapers, a new World Bank report with the title "South Asia's turn: Policies to boost competitiveness and create the next export powerhouse" was presented, but only those parts that dealt with Pakistan. This created an immediate reaction, first from the floor and later from the Pakistan Foreign Office, as a slide showed a map of Pakistan which included only the Pakistani-held part of Kashmir. By the afternoon, it was declared that the World Bank had offered their excuses and promised to withdraw the map. The message of the report, i.e. the loss of competitiveness in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, and the need to improve it in order to increase exports, got lost in the controversy.

The controversy very much reflects the priority of politics over economics: the Pakistan government holds that the fate of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (minus those parts that Pakistan ceded to China in a treaty in 1963) still remains to be decided, while the Indian government considers the entire state to be part of the Republic of India. International organisations and foreign governments consider the affair as a bilateral matter, to be sorted out by India and Pakistan. However, in the case of CPEC this is easier said than done, as the northernmost part of the Corridor runs over territory controlled by Pakistan, but claimed by India.

Further sessions were dedicated to various aspects of Pakistan-China trade, and regional and financial integration, all in light of the proposed economic corridor, yet surprisingly without active participation from the Chinese themselves. When asked why, one of the few Chinese present (and only on the first day), quipped: "Maybe they should have been invited."

Not only trade-related topics were discussed. The question of sovereign development was raised, as the Chinese make it clear that CPEC is a commercial undertaking, funded and executed, but not exclusively, by Chinese enter-

prises. It is not clear what kind of guarantees the Pakistan government has given or is expected and prepared to give to Chinese investors. Most investment will be in transport and energy. Some roads have already been built: the Karakoram Highway that links Xinjiang with the Indus valley was reopened, after it had been interrupted for two years by a landslide that created a 22km-long lake, submerging the road. At the other end of the country, a direct road between Quetta and Gwadar has been built in record time. This allows the "ordered disorder" of Karachi to be bypassed and will soon be linked to the Indus valley, bypassing unruly Quetta as well.

Ecological concerns were raised especially with respect to the string of new power plants to be built and operated by Chinese companies. Pakistan has large deposits of lignite (brown coal) in southern Sind, mined in open pits. With their high carbon dioxide emissions, however, coal-fired power plants are considered to be especially harmful to the environment. The papers presented will be published with the proceedings of the conference in the annual issue of the Pakistan Development Review.

Postscript: Upon returning to Pakistan the author reads that the Economic Advisor to the Planning Commission expects 4 per cent of global trade to pass through CPEC by 2020, generating USD6-8 billion in tolls and rental fees per year (*Business Recorder*, 11 May 2017). Such unbounded enthusiasm for CPEC is not shared by everyone, especially as Chinese plans have been leaked to the press, indicating an agenda extending far beyond transport and energy, and raising fears that CPEC might develop into another East India Company.

Wolfgang-Peter Zingel

7th Annual Conference of the Study Group South Asia of the German Geographical Society (DGfG)

AUGSBURG, 27–28 JANUARY 2017

The South Asia study group within the German Geographical Society (DGfG) has grown steadily in recent years and now has eighty members in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The majority of its members are employed in universities, but also include teachers and practical working geographers from consulting companies and development cooperation. At this year's meeting 33 members made their way to Augsburg, where they were welcomed by host Matthias Schmidt.

The highlight of the conference was the awarding of the research prize "Geographies of South Asia" for the best geographic thesis on South Asia. This year the award was given to two young scientists, Annabelle Jaggi and Marc Herter, both of whom presented their work at the conference. Annabelle Jaggi's master thesis is entitled "Affirmative Action Practices by Development Actors Targeting Dalits in Nepal. Shedding Light on Theory and Practice Using the Case Study of Helvetas' Employment Fund", and was supervised by Ulrike Müller-Böker and Miriam Wenner. The master thesis of Marc Herter with the title "Development as Spectacle: Understanding Post-war Urban Development in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Case of Arcade Independence Square" was supervised by Pia Hollenbach and Benedikt Korf. Both works were written at the University of Zurich and are released in the publication series of the South Asian study group (available free of charge at http://crossasia-books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/xasia/catalog/series/gsa). The award winners received a voucher from the publisher Franz Steiner Verlag and a one-year subscription to the magazine *Geographische Rundschau* of the Westermann Verlag.

The main idea of the study group is the generation of a platform for exchanging ideas and knowledge on current geographical research and practical reports concerning South Asia. This year the papers were subdivided into six thematic blocks: on Friday, "Migration", "Education" as well as "Consumption and Value Chains" were debated; on Saturday the topics of discussion were the sessions "Rural Worlds", "Urban Worlds" and also "Development Research and Tourism". Andreas Benz (Augsburg) opened the migration session with the results of his project on translocal networks of Ismailis from the Karakorum in Pakistan. Raphael Schwegmann (Münster) reported on his study on the life course of migrants who migrated to England during the colonial period and who told their life history in the 1980s. Carsten Butsch (Cologne) presented the results of his habilitation project on Indian migrants in Germany. He depicted the transnational networks that they possess and how they describe their transnational identities. In the session on "Education" Annika Seitz (Cologne) presented her work on the networks of Indian students, who were previously exchange students in Germany. Afterwards Tobias Aberle (Heidelberg) asked whether "Entrepreneurship Training" offers a future perspective for socially disadvantaged young people in rural Bihar (India). Basabi Khan Banerjee (Hanover) talked about the changes in geography as a school subject in India. Lutz Meyer-Ohlendorf (Potsdam/Cologne) opened the session "Consumption and Value Chains" with a discussion of the relationship between lifestyle, consumption dynamics and climate change, using the example of Hyderabad (India). Shantenou Abe and Amelie Bernzen (Cologne) presented their ongoing DFG (German Research Foundation) project on the livelihoods of small farmers in India involved in the production and trade of organic or fairtrade products.

The first presentation of the session "Rural Worlds" on Saturday was broadcasted via video chat from Nepal: Stephanie Leder (Kathmandu) could not be present in person but reported from a distance on her studies on the effects of emigration on the agricultural structures in the eastern Ganges Plain. This was followed by the presentation from Michael Spies, who studied the agricultural changes in the Pakistani Karakorum using the Actor-Network Theory. Afterwards Raphael Pinheiro Machado Rehm (Augsburg) presented the results of his investigations on the land-use-specific variability of soil characteristics in a headwater region in the West Ghats (India), which he worked on together with Christoph Bail, Peter Fiener (both Augsburg), M.S. Bhallamudi (Chennai) and S. Kumar (Pune).

Peter Dannenberg and Alexander Follmann (both Cologne) opened the session "Urban Worlds". They presented a study on the peri-urban area of Faridabad (India), where they linked methods of remote sensing with personal encounters and qualitative interviews. Afterwards Manisha Jain showed the results of her joint research with Xiaoping Xie (both Dresden) on informal urbanisation and the impact of urban planning. The changing food practices of urban middle classes in Bangalore were analysed by Mirka Erler (Göttingen). The session on "Development Research and Tourism" began with Markus Keck (Göttingen), who talked about the necessities and possibilities for realigning geographic development research. Finally Tatyana Thimm (Constance) gave a lecture on sustainable tourism in Kerala and asked whether this could serve as a model for other regions.

This year the general meeting focused on the debate about the future of the study group. The question was whether the study group should have a stronger internal structure and if therefore a registered association should be founded. But scepticism prevailed, and thus the study group remains in its present form. A further topic at the annual general meeting was the highly successful publication history of the study group, which will be continued through further jointly planned special issues in journals. Special thanks was given to Alexander Follmann for the redesign of the website (www.geographien-suedasiens.de). During the annual elections of the speakers' team, Carsten Butsch (Cologne), Alexander Follmann (Cologne), Martin Franz (Osnabrück), Markus Keck (Göttingen) and Julia Poerting (Heidelberg) were confirmed. Matthias Schmidt (Augsburg) left the team. The next and eighth annual conference of the study group South Asia will take place on 19 and 20 January 2018 at the Geographical Institute of the University of Cologne. Further information will be published as usual at www.geographien-suedasiens.de.

Markus Keck / Matthias Schmidt

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