Interdisziplinäre Zeitschrift für Südasienforschung

ISSN: 2510-2621 IZSAF 06 / 2020

Interdisziplinäre Zeitschrift für Südasienforschung

Herausgeberin / Editors
Dr. Maria Framke (Berlin)
Nicole Merkel-Hilf (Heidelberg)

Anschrift / Address
CATS Bibliothek / Abt. Südasien
Voßstr. 2 | Gebäude 4110
69115 Heidelberg

Mail: IZSAF-SAI@LISTSERV.UNI-HEIDELBERG.DE
Website : https://crossasia-journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/izsa
ISSN (online) : 2510-2621

Konzept / Concept

Die *Interdisziplinäre Zeitschrift für Südasienforschung* (IZSAF) ist eine elektronische, peer-reviewed Zeitschrift, die vor allem Nachwuchswissenschaftler:innen, deren Forschungsarbeit einen Bezug zu Südasien aufweist, eine Plattform zur Veröffentlichung ihrer Forschungsergebnisse in deutscher und englischer Sprache bietet. IZSAF ist offen für neue Formate und publiziert auch Fotoessays, um Themen der Südasienforschung auf visuelle Weise zu präsentieren.

The *Interdisziplinäre Zeitschrift für Südasienforschung* (IZSAF) is an electronic peer-reviewed journal that seeks to provide a platform for young researchers with a research focus on South Asia to publish their findings. The intention of IZSAF is to bring together young scholars from a variety of disciplines and to enter into interdisciplinary discussion regarding issues surrounding the study of South Asia. IZSAF is open to new formats and also publishes photo essays to present topics in South Asia studies visually.

INTERDISZIPLINÄRE ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR SÜDASIENFORSCHUNG
BAND 6 DEZEMBER 2020

Table of Contents

Articles

Essay

Vegetarianism and *Ahiṃsā* in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*

Anna Scarabel

Abstract: The *adhyāyas* 114 to 117 of the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (the 13th book of the *Mahābhārata*) introduce the topic of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and its relation to vegetarianism. All in all, the text enjoins that following a vegetarian diet is the greatest non-violent practice. However, several verses of this section allow practices related to Vedic sacrifice, which include meat offerings. In view of the principles of non-violence, such an "exception" to the *ahiṃsā* rule may be seen by some as a logical inconsistency. Instead, I argue that such apparent contradiction can be resolved if we consider that the *Mahābhārata* addresses different audiences. On one side, there are those leading a contemplative life (*nivṛtti*), aiming at spiritual upliftment, who follow the path of *ahiṃsā* and maintain a vegetarian diet. On the other side, those engaged in an active life (*pravṛtti*) perform Vedic rituals in view of worldly objects and relish the animals sacrificed to the gods. As a result of their class duty, Hindu warriors may also hunt and eat animals. In this article, I further implement my arguments and investigate the relation between non-violence and vegetarianism in the *Mahābhārata*.

INTRODUCTION

The main plot of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh) narrates the epic war between the Pāṇḍava and the Kaurava brothers. This narrative, together with the many episodes of warriors engaged in hunting trips, do not form a logical background to the discourse of non-violence and vegetarianism, as it figures prominently in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (AP), the 13th book of the epic.[1] How is it possible that the *adhyāya*s 114 to 117 of this book provide us with a eulogy to the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*? It is unanimously accepted that the MBh is the result of centuries of epos production. Dandekar (2009) speaks of the MBh as the outcome of contin-

[1] This article draws on research for my M.A. thesis, "Vegetarianism and *Ahiṃsā* in the Anuśāsanaparvan of the Mahābhārata (XIII.114–117)" submitted on the 18th of April 2018. The thesis was written under the invaluable supervision of Prof. Dr. Ute Hüsken and Dr. Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi. I am also thankful to Simon Cubelic and Kush Depala for their contribution in the revision of this article. All translations are mine, except where indicated otherwise.

uous literary activity stretching over many centuries. He dates the epic's composition in a time frame that ranges from 800 BCE to 200 CE. This period, also known as the early post-Vedic age, appears as an era of transition from the old Vedic society to new normative realms. The gradual decay of the Brahmanical order offers room for new reflections and re-interpretations of the ritualistic world. Dandekar argues: "Just as the *Mahābhārata* reflects the clear emergence of these forces of social and political change which transformed the later Vedic-society into the society of *Arthaśāstra* and the *Manusmṛti*, similarly the *Mahābhārata* also shows the beginning of that criticism and reinterpretations of orthodoxy […]" (Dandekar 2009: 57). Against this background, Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of the god Dharma, plays the role of a hero constantly searching to define the right way of conduct. The Pāṇḍava's conflict between various moral and social issues finds its central stage in the 12th and 13th books of the epic, the *Śāntiparvan* (ŚP) and the AP respectively. The hero asks Bhīṣma to clarify the ethical problem of meat eating, which, at the time of the MBh's redaction, was an unresolved dilemma:

> The doubt regarding the act of avoiding meat is arisen in us. What will be the crime of the one who eats and what the merit of the one who does not eat meat?[2]

The whole of the section XIII.114–117 deals with the relation between *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism. Alsdorf (2010) refers to this set of verses as the longest Hindu textual source on *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism known to us thus far. He describes these passages as a "squalid text", an "entangled mess with contradictions" and "literal repetitions" (Alsdorf 2010: 34). He also mentions that this section is probably a very late addition to the MBh corpus. Analysing the oldest extant list of the MBh's *parvan*s, Schlingloff (1969) notices that the AP is not included there. For this reason, he also consents to the assumption that this set of verses was at that time unknown to the epos and that the entire book is probably a later addition. Kane (1968: 381) claims that the twenty-thousand verses contained in the ŚP and in the AP are inserted in the timeframe when Bhīṣma is wounded and near death. This, he argues, is a helpful camouflage for the later assimilation of additional textual material.

[2] MBh XIII.116.3: *jāto naḥ saṃśayo dharme māṃsasya parivarjane* | *doṣo bhakṣayataḥ kaḥ syāt kaścābhakṣayato guṇaḥ* ||

Both books XII and XIII do not seem to be directly linked to the main narration. It can be likely assumed that the discourse on vegetarianism is a section of a normative text inserted within the temporal hiatus created by Bhīṣma clinging to life. This juncture allows a narrative break introducing the two books containing the instructions of the great-uncle to his nephew Yudhiṣṭhira, namely the ŚP or "The Book of Peace" and the AP or "The Book of Instructions"[3]. Hence, we can assume that the section taken in account here is one of the most recent additions to the MBh's corpus. In the course of this article, I will analyse the apparent contradictions of the verses under consideration, and I will attempt to produce a plausible reading-key to this section of the AP.

THE AP AND THE MS

In many instances, the MBh quotes the legislators Manu, Āpastamba, Mārkaṇḍeya, Nārada and Bṛhaspati to demonstrate that the rules given by its *śloka*s are positions already authorised by an earlier Hindu tradition. It is therefore useful to understand the relation between the AP and these legal texts, in order to analyse their mutual contexts and uncover additional information that may offer an interpretation of the apparent contradictions found in the epos. With the only exception of Manu, the compiler of the *Manusmṛti* (MS), I could not find the original textual references that the MBh boasts. For example, the *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* (Āpśs) does not match any quotation from the AP. However, the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (2009) contains a section dealing with dietary customs, and passages XXIX.1–9; XXXI.31,49,58–59; XXXII.2–3 address the topic of meat-consumption. Although the MBh (XIII.116.36) lists the faults deriving form carnivorous habits as established by Mārkaṇḍeya, the verses from the *purāṇa* convey a few rules on which animals can or cannot be eaten, but they do not ban eating meat as such. The *Nāradapurāṇa* does not match the statement attributed by the epos to its namesake.[4] The same injunction is repeated in MBh XIII.116.34, but without

[3] After the great battle, Bhīṣma is seriously wounded by all the arrows that struck him. He received by his father the gift to be able to choose the moment of his death. Before leaving the earth, he decides to give the last teachings on *dharma*.

[4] MBh XIII.116.14: "Nārada, who has a righteous self, proclaimed that the one who desires to strengthen his own flesh by means of the flesh of another being perishes for sure" (*svamāṃsaṃ paramāṃsena yo vardhayitum icchati | nāradaḥ prāha dharmātmā niyataṃ so'vasīdati ||*).

the reference to Nārada. Furthermore, an equivalent rule is found in the MS V.52. The *Bṛhaspatismṛti* also does not match with the reference given in MBh XIII.116.15, where Bṛhaspati seems to declare the results of avoiding honey and meat.[5] While most of the early legal texts are not of help in understanding the positions of the MBh, Manu stands apart.

It is a well-known fact that the AP and the MS share similar sets of rules on the topic of vegetarianism and that they even present a few identical verses (e.g. MBh XIII.117.34 and MS V.55). Winternitz (2015: 489f.) claims that the earliest parts of the MBh are older than the MS, whereas later insertions to the MBh are quoting a text that was not very different from the actual MS. The editors of the didactic sections of both works have often drawn elements from the old oral knowledge. Oldenberg (1903: 187) argues that the MS dates from the same time as most sections of the MBh. Furthermore, Bühler (1886) concluded that both MBh and MS drew on the same stock of popular wisdom, and Alsdorf (2010: 31f.) agrees with this assumption. Olivelle (2005: 23) remains guarded on that matter and observes that – if at all – one text is quoting the other, it is more likely that the epic draws from expert *śāstra*s, rather than the opposite. Thus, we can hypothesise that the MBh's injunctions taken here into account either come from an oral patrimony that was also known to the compiler of the MS, or that they are directly quoted from the MS. Does the fact that the AP explicitly refers to Manu (XIII.116.12) date the AP as consecutive to Manu and, therefore, establishes the MS as the source of this portion of the MBh? Probably not. As a matter of fact, the MS itself quotes Manu (e.g. MS V.41). Olivelle (2012) explains that the authors of the *dharmaśāstra*s from the 4th century BCE up to the beginning of the 1st century CE, namely Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha, cite 17 earlier legislators as textual authorities. Nothing much is left to us about them, apart from their names; among these, there is also one Manu, which is probably the reason why, in some instances, even the MS itself seems to quote its own author.

[5] Although prior research on these references was unsuccessful, I am aware of the fact that, before stating that these quotes are simply arbitrary, a deeper study to locate these references should be done. Therefore, it would be advisable to make a deeper inquiry to establish whether these references find correspondence in the early literature.

Olivelle (2012) explains that the work of Manu is characterised by a complex architecture which organises chapters and sub-chapters under thematic areas. The third section of this legal text is dealing with "the *dharma* of the four *varṇas*" (MS II.25–XI.266). The sub-section MS II.26–VI.97 clusters the verses dealing with the "fourfold *dharma* of a *brāhmin*". The passages dealing with food regulations are located within the fifth chapter of the legal text, in the section devoted to the *dharma* of *brāhmin*s. This seems to point out that these injunctions are established only for the members of the first *varṇa*. Although the MBh and the MS give similar guidelines on alimentation, a comparison of these two shows one main difference: in fact, while Manu directs his injunctions only to *brāhmin*s, in the epos no specific *varṇa* is addressed. As a matter of fact, *adhyāya*s 114–117 do not enjoin *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism only to priests.

If we hold to the thesis that the MBh is quoting from the MS, or from a similar stock of popular wisdom, we could hypothesise that the rules of strict vegetarianism found in the epos are drawn from the rules specifically for *brāhmin*s. Such specifications on diet are however lost in *adhyāya*s 114–117. Moreover, it should be taken into account that these teachings are propounded by Bhīṣma, a *kṣatriya*, to Yudhiṣṭhira, another *kṣatriya;*[6] behavioural rules for kings and fighters would be expected here. However, if we look into Manu's sub-section MS VII–IX.325 (which follows the one on the "fourfold *dharma* of a *brāhmin*") on the "rules of action for a king", we find neither praise of *ahiṃsā*, nor prohibition on meat-consumption. In the AP, before the section on *ahiṃsā*, Yudhiṣṭhira had already asked his uncle about the *dharma* of the four *varṇa*s, and this subject was completed before *adhyāya*s 114–117. Therefore, it is highly improbable that this section is specifically addressing only to the first *varṇa* alone. Moreover, the fact that MBh XIII.113 introduces the importance of donations of food to *brāhmin*s*,* and that the following chapters (XIII.114–117) do not show any explicit change in terms of the recipient, makes it less likely that *brāhmin*s were formerly enjoined to gift themselves. While on one hand, the food rules established by Manu are guidelines for a well-defined group of people, on the other, the AP gives die-

[6] On this matter, Kane (1941: 780) says that the *kṣatriya* have been meat-eaters since ancient times.

tary dispositions to all, without marking any apparent distinction. If one accepts the hypothesis that the MBh and the MS independently draw material from a stock of popular wisdom, it is possible to suppose that such rules were simply framed in different contexts, or that they came from slightly different sources. However, if we accept Olivelle's statement and his hesitation in believing that an expert *śāstra* might have borrowed information from the epic, we can assume rather the opposite, namely that the AP has borrowed food regulations from the MS's Brahminical section, standardising them and making them applicable to all. Since the nature of the relationship of these two texts has not been established yet, we cannot state with certainty which of these two hypotheses resemble reality.

Kane (1941: 780) argues that the compiler of the MS is a clear upholder of *ahiṃsā*. In addition, Manu cannot ignore the ancient custom of Vedic rituals, which include animal sacrifices and a presumably ancient habit of meat-consumption. In fact, a great portion of the early legal literature does not ban meat, but rather gives restrictions on which animals can or cannot be eaten (see *Gautamasaṃhitā*, XVII). The consumption of meat consecrated in sacrifice according to Vedic rules is generally not only permitted, but even enjoined both in the MS (e.g. V.31) and in the MBh (e.g. XIII.116.50). In the MS, the *śloka*s permitting meat-consumption are followed by others which prohibit it, and that creates a number of apparent contradictions within this section. Kane (1941: 777) sees in these discrepancies the witness of three historical stages of "development" towards vegetarianism. These correspond to the ancient habits of consuming meat and its eventual restriction to the Vedic arena, with further call to vegetarianism. Olivelle (2005: 279) hypothesises that the MS exhibits a dialectic pattern arguing against the omnivorous diet. Manu first introduces a *pūrvapakṣa*, the positions of the "adversaries", which results in stating that the law of nature governs the world by means of a food chain, which lays down the rules between those who eat and those suitable for being eaten (MS V.30). The *uttarapakṣa*, receptacle of the correct doctrine, disagrees with that vision and contemplates only the consumption of meat within the boundaries of the sacrificial arena, or the absolute abstention from it.

The AP does not consider the idea that one may relish the flesh of other living beings outside the ritual context (XIII.116.50). *Adhyāya*s 114–117 allow and enjoin the partaking of sacrificed animals and, at the same time, strongly

recommend a vegetarian diet. In such instance, there is a coexistence of the Vedic sacrifice and strict vegetarianism, whereas the habit of arbitrary consumption of meat is not contemplated.

THE TEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF THE SECTION ON *AHIṂSĀ*

*Adhyāya*s 114 to 117 introduce the teachings on *ahiṃsā* and stress the importance of maintaining a vegetarian diet. *Adhyāya* 114 is introduced by Bṛhaspati, the teacher of the gods, who instructs Yudhiṣṭhira. He briefly explains the supreme relevance of the conduct based on non-violence. He emphasises the importance of *ahiṃsā*, but he never specifically comments upon diet. At the end of the first section (XIII.114.11), Bṛhaspati returns to heaven, and thus starts the dialogue between Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīṣma, which characterises *adhyāya*s 115, 116 and 117. The Pāṇḍava's uncle is supine, supported by several arrows keeping his body lifted above the ground. The Kurukṣetra war is now over and a few winners gather around Bhīṣma, who, before passing away, explains the rules of good conduct. *Adhyāya*s 115 to 117 transmit a eulogy of *ahiṃsā* and the consequent food regulations, with the contemplation of the illustrious exceptions of *brāhmin*s in the context of Vedic sacrifices and *kṣatriya* hunters. Overall, this section presents a dialogical structure dominated by Yudhiṣṭhira's questions to Bṛhaspati (XIII.114) and to Bhīṣma (XIII.114–117). Although the rhythm of the text is maintained by the conversation among these great warriors, the Pāṇḍava's doubts either remain unaddressed or are answered after long digressions. For example, one of the key inquiries introduced by Yudhiṣṭhira, which attempts at solving the dilemma generated by the coexistence of Vedic sacrifice and *ahiṃsā*, never reaches a proper answer:

> First, the rule of the *śrāddha* ceremony is said by you as [requiring] many sorts of meat. In this way, is meat contradictory with "not having killed"?[7]

[7] MBh XIII.116.2: *māṃsair bahuvidhaiḥ proktas tvayā śrāddhavidhiḥ purā | ahatvā ca kuto māṃsam evam etad virudhyate ||*

While translating *adhyāya*s 114–117, a few consistent topics have emerged.[8] First, *ahiṃsā* is established as the best *dharma* and the conditions for its performance are presented and explained. It is made clear that the achievement of a non-violent conduct comes from the practice of meat-abstention. In addition to that, the rewards deriving from vegetarianism are listed as a supplementary reason to the endurance of this habit. Nevertheless, as a deterrent, punishments in this life and the afterlife are established for those who persist in meat-consumption. A brief philosophical speculation on the grade of crime related to the refusal of *ahiṃsā* is also introduced. The topic of the Vedic ritual is widely debated; victims that are sacrificed to the gods according to the rules of the sacrificial science are eligible to be eaten as well as the animals hunted by *kṣatriya*s. The entire section concludes with five *śloka*s (XIII.117.37–41) standing as the *śrāvaṇaphala* of this whole section.

THE RIGHT PATH TO FOLLOW

The MBh introduces the dilemma of identifying the correct way of living. The following *śloka*s open the AP's discussion on the *dharma* of non-violence and abstention from meat:

> Yudhiṣṭhira said: what is better for a man? *Ahiṃsā*, Vedic ritual, meditation, restraint of senses, religious austerities or the service to the *guru*?[9] […] Look! I proclaim the highest and most excellent [*dharma*] of a human being. If somebody achieves the *dharma* based on *ahiṃsā*, he is indeed the true man.[10]

These verses not only highlight the importance of non-violence, but even state its supremacy over every other kind of action. For instance, ritual sacrifice and religious austerities are less relevant than *ahiṃsā*, which is here identified as a "way of conduct" (*dharma*). In line with this, the dialogue introduces the means and the requirements to achieve the performance of non-violence.

[8] The text into account is the Critical Edition of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute published in Poona in 1966.

[9] MBh XIII.114.1: *yudhiṣṭhira uvāca | ahiṃsā vaidikaṃ karma dhyānam indriyasaṃyamaḥ | tapo'tha guruśuśrūṣā kiṃ śreyaḥ puruṣaṃ prati ||*

[10] MBh XIII.114.3: *hanta niḥśreyasaṃ jantor ahaṃ vakṣyāmy anuttamam | ahiṃsāpāśrayaṃ dharmaṃ yaḥ sādhayati vai naraḥ ||*

HOW TO PERFORM *AHIṂSĀ*

Bṛhaspati explains in short how to practice *ahiṃsā* by achieving:

a. Restrainment of the three instruments (*doṣa*):
  i. *manas* ("mind")
  ii. *vacas* ("speech")
  iii. [*kāya*-]*karman* ("bodily action")
b. Control of action and repulsion
c. *Ātma-aupamya*, "identification of others as oneself"

a. The restrainment of the three doṣas

> A man, after having restraint the three instruments (*doṣa*s) towards all living beings and after having controlled attraction and repulsion, always attains perfection.[11]

What does Bṛhaspati mean with "restrainment" of the three *doṣa*s? Could these three be intended as the humours of the body, or rather as the three *guṇa*s, namely *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*, in relation to the qualities of food? Does that mean that a man should have a balanced diet in order to perform *ahiṃsā*? This seems unlikely. In fact, the apparatus of the Critical Edition informs us that instead of *doṣa*s, the Bombay Edition of the MBh reads "the three *loka*s, or places" (B3, *trīṃllokān*), while the Telugu, Grantha and Malayalam versions[12] speak of "the three *ḍaṇḍa*s, or triple control" (T2.3GM, *trīḍaṇḍaṃ*), and there appears to be no alternative naming as "the three *guṇa*s". The same term *doṣa* is found again in XIII.115.9-10, and, according to the Critical Edition, in these instances there is no alternative reading of the word. However, we can probably assume that *doṣa* keeps the same connotation in its occurrences along the body of the text. I believe that here *doṣa* has the meaning of "fault", or "badness" that sticks to the tools through which human beings engage with the world. One can perform *hiṃsā* ("violence") by means of mind, speech and bodily action, but as a consequence to that:

[11] MBh XIII.114.4: *trīn doṣān sarvabhūteṣu nidhāya puruṣaḥ sadā | kāmakrodhau ca saṃyamya tataḥ siddhim avāpnute ||*
[12] For a detailed study on the editions and versions of the MBh, see *Ādiparvan* LXXII–LXXIII.

> The living beings are tainted by action, speech and thought.[13]

The *doṣa*s are here the faults deriving from the bad activities of *manas*, *vacas* and [*kāya*-]*karman* which taint human beings with the bias of the filthy action. Accordingly, when Bṛhaspati enjoins to restrain the three *doṣa*s, he exhorts Yudhiṣṭira to exercise control over these three elements, that are those through which one engages in the world. The alternative reading "triple control" (*trīḍaṇḍaṃ*) found in the Telugu, Grantha and Malayalam versions endorses this hypothesis, since this could convey a similar meaning, referring to a "triple control" over mind, speech and bodily action.

As *doṣa*s, mind, speech and bodily action are the recipients and the tools responsible for tainting human beings, and it seems that in XIII.114.4 they are named after their contents, as in a synecdoche. Mind, speech and bodily action are able to operate violence: one could have bad thoughts, utter cruel words and perform evil deeds. As a particular kind of action, eating is also a possible instrument of violence:

> The *doṣa*s abide in mind and speech, as well as in taste. For this reason, the wise ones engaged in religious austerities do not partake of meat. But, o king, you should learn from me the *doṣa*s regarding eating meat. Stupid is the one who eats [it] knowing the simile of the flesh of the son.[14]

Dr. Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi[15] presumes that "stupid is the one who eats knowing the simile of the flesh of the son" might bear a reference to a popular Buddhist story from the *Saṃyuttanikāya* (SN II 97), narrating the story of a family of three that, travelling across the desert, runs out of supplies. The parents decide to passively kill their son by making him run around until death, in order to eat his flesh and survive the crossing of the desert. The moral of the story is that one may eat meat, but without any craving or enjoyment of its taste. This tale is quite baffling even from the Buddhist point of view, since the

[13] MBh XIII.115.7: *karmaṇā lipyate jantur vācā ca manasaiva ca* ||

[14] MBh XIII.115.9–10: *manovāci tathāsvāde doṣā hy eṣu pratiṣṭhitāḥ* | *na bhakṣayanty ato māṃsaṃ tapoyuktā manīṣiṇāḥ* || *doṣāṃs tu bhakṣaṇe rājan māṃsasyeha nibodha me* | *putramāṃsopamaṃ jānan khādate yo vicetanaḥ* ||

[15] Private conversation at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, in Heidelberg on 16.01.2018.

Vinayapiṭaka (VP I.218–220) prescribes to avoid ten kinds of meat, among which human flesh is the first mentioned. Nonetheless, the tale might also be intended as an extreme example of the demand of Buddha not to relish meat: in fact, the couple seems not to indulge in the taste of their son's meat, and not to perform any direct violent act, since the boy is passively killed.

The AP, whose orientation is mainly vegetarian, clearly mocks such tale and labels as fools those who appreciate it. Apart from the atrocity of eating one's own son, the whole argumentation of the importance of eating meat without relishing it is a nonsense in the MBh's perspective. Indeed, the tongue has its own realm of existence and therefore, it remembers the taste of flesh notwithstanding its source, and eventually demands for more:

> As in the union of a mother and a father arises the son-ship, in the same way, the knowledge of the tongue is produced in case of taste. According to the *śāstra*s, the desire will always arise from what has been enjoyed. As uncooked or cooked, salty or not-salty, in the same way, when the emotions appear, the mind gets fixed [on the desired objects].[16]

The AP apparently implies the existence of food's intrinsic qualities able to cause bewilderment in the eater's mind. "The knowledge of the tongue" reminds the relish of tasty food and, whenever it is stimulated, the desire of experiencing the same flavour arises. Therefore, those who believe in the story of the flesh of the son are fools twice. The MBh acknowledges that meat is the tastiest type of food and a delicacy hard to avoid:

> Bhīṣma said: O long-armed one, this is so as you say, O Bhārata. It is known on the earth that, according to the taste, here there is nothing better than meat.[17]

According to Bhīṣma (XIII.116.19), because of its flavour, flesh is easily craved for, and therefore becomes a receptacle for desire: this should be avoided, in order to be able to control the instruments (*doṣa*s) of one's own body. Taste has the power to perturb the mind's state of tranquillity:

---

[16] MBh XIII.115.11–12: *mātāpitṛsamāyoge putratvaṃ jāyate yathā* | *rasaṃ ca prati jihvāyāḥ prajñānaṃ jāyate tathā* | *tathā śāstreṣu niyataṃ rāgo hy āsvāditād bhavet* || *asaṃskṛtāḥ saṃskṛtāś ca lavaṇālavaṇās tathā* | *prajñāyante yathā bhāvās tathā cittaṃ nirudhyate* ||

[17] MBh XIII.117.6: *bhīṣma uvāca* | *evam etan mahābāho yathā vadasi bhārata* | *na māṃsāt param atrānyad rasato vidyate bhuvi* ||

> The act of avoiding meat is very difficult for the one who knows the taste. The best vow to keep is this gift of safety to all the sentient beings.[18]

Accordingly, the dietary Āyurveda advices gathered by Singh (2011: 134) place meat among the aliments of the rajasic diet, advised for kings and fighters because it causes excitement and confidence. Meat from big tamed animals is considered tamasic and therefore causes anger, stupidity and decreases the chances of spiritual progress. These two qualities, and the effects they bring about, do not fulfil the requirements of *ahiṃsā*; rather, they distance a person from the capacity of controlling one's own feelings and thoughts, speech and bodily actions.[19]

b. Control of attraction and repulsion

The second prerequisite to perform the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā* is to have control over one's own feelings (XIII.114.4). By controlling *kāma* and *krodha* ("desire" and "anger"), a person reaches equilibrium and does not act with interest, in view of love and hate.

c. Ātma-aupamya as prerequisite and driving force

Ātma-aupamya ("likeness to self", cf. MW, s.v. *ātmopama*) is the identification of oneself with another. I believe that in the AP this term has a double application: *ātma-aupamya* is a prerequisite to perform the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*, but, at the same time, it also stands as one of the reasons to pursue that rule. The former perspective on *ātma-aupamya* refers to a person who has the inner awareness that every living being is identical with one's own self and therefore can hardly act with egoistic purposes, without ever conflicting with the sphere of other individuals. The second definition, then, adduces that we are all equal and that, as one suffers, so do others. For this reason, a man should feel compassion for every being in discomfort, and therefore should not inflict additional pain by killing and eating any creature. The following verses illustrate the first type of *ātma-aupamya*:

---

[18] MBh XIII.116.19: *duṣkaraṃ hi rasajñena māṃsasya parivarjanam* | *cartuṃ vratam idaṃ śreṣṭhaṃ sarvaprāṇyabhayapradam* ||

[19] Also the *Bhagavadgītā* (XIV.7–8) describes the implication of the element *rajas* and *tamas*.

> The man who compares the living beings [with] himself, sets aside the stick and overcomes anger, prospers [in] happiness after death. Even the gods get confused on the way, while searching the footsteps of the one whose footsteps are invisible [because] he sees all the living beings [with the heart] in which all beings become his own [and, in this way, transcends the world].[20]

I believe that in this context, *ātma-aupamya* reveals a mental state deriving from the realization of oneness with all living beings. Here, there is no relation to the concept of compassion (*dayā*). There are indeed no emotional connotations when we consider the term as a prerequisite to *ahiṃsā*. Rather, it implies a sort of permanent awareness that does not leave room for any violent action whatsoever. Moreover, if one identifies himself with every being, he will not act in view of *kāma* and *krodha* and will not perform violence by means of mind, speech and bodily action. Thus, *ātma-aupamya*, although it is formally the last requirement to attain the greatest *dharma*, is one which also includes the prior two.

However, the following verses highlight *ātma-aupamya* as the reason and driving force for abstaining from violence:

> One should not bestow on another that which is disagreeable to oneself. This is the *dharma* in short. Everything else is as you wish. By comparing with oneself, one obtains harmony in rejection and acceptance, in happiness and unhappiness, in liking and disliking.[21] There is no gift superior to the gift of life, nor there will [ever] be. Nothing is dearer than one's own self. To every living being the death is indeed unwished, o Bhārata. In the moment of death, in that very moment, a tremor is born in the beings.[22]

[20] MBh XIII.114.6–7: *ātmopamaś ca bhūteṣu yo vai bhavati pūruṣaḥ | nyastadaṇḍo jitakrodhaḥ sa pretya sukham edhate || sarvabhūtātmabhūtasya sarvabhūtāni paśyataḥ | devā'pi mārge muhyanti apadasya padaiṣiṇaḥ ||*

[21] MBh XIII.114.8–9: *na tatparasya saṃdadyāt pratikūlaṃ yadātmanaḥ | eṣa saṁkṣepato dharmaḥ kāmādanyaḥ pravartate || pratyākhyāne ca dāne ca sukhaduḥkhe priyāpriye | ātmaupamyena pūruṣaḥ samādhim adhigacchati ||*

[22] MBh XIII.117.25–26: *prāṇadānāt paraṃ dānaṃ na bhūtaṃ na bhaviṣyati | na hy ātmanaḥ priyataraḥ kaścid astīti niścitam || aniṣṭaṃ sarvabhūtānāṃ maraṇaṃ nāma bhārata | mṛtyukāle hi bhūtānāṃ madyo jāyati vepathuḥ ||*

In this latter connotation, *ātma-aupamya* is matched with the value of life. Living beings hold their own life as the most precious good. The process of putting oneself in the others' shoes brings to the inevitable conclusion that every creature desires to live and fears to die. The awareness that all beings dread death should prevent anyone from being the cause of such distress. This is indeed the most outstanding reason to avoid the killing of sentient beings. In this context, *ātma-aupamya* implies the essential meaning of compassion. Alsdorf (2010: 35f.) translates *ātma-aupamya* as "to-respect-others-as-oneself" and introduces the term as the chief guiding principle of the MBh section on *ahiṃsā* as a whole. He does not consider the ambivalent meanings expressed within "likeness to one's self" and interprets the concept only from a moral-ethical perspective related to the precept that "one should not do to others what one abhors oneself".[23]

Ātma-aupamya is the fundamental understanding for the one who performs *ahiṃsā*, as well as the greatest emotional reason that should lead everyone to vegetarianism. In this light, "likeness to one's self" is both the prerequisite and the driving force to *ahiṃsā*.

THE "FOURFOLD *DHARMA*"

The AP states that *ahiṃsā* is a *dharma* having four characteristics. These four are all equally important to the point that, if one of them is missing, the whole concept collapses. A few *śloka*s repeatedly mention this fourfold structure, but none of them lists or explains them.

> Bhīṣma said: by the proclaimer of the Vedas *ahiṃsā* is defined as fourfold. If even only one of these is gone, o destroyer of the foes, there is no [*ahiṃsā*]. As every quadruped cannot stand by means of three feet, so, o guardian of the earth, in the same way is this [*ahiṃsā*]. That is explained by three causes.[24] […] O great king, in this manner, this [*ahiṃsā*] is provided with four causes.

[23] This is Alsdorf's translation of MBh 113.8 (MBh 114.8 in the edition used here): *na tatparasya saṃdadyātpratikūlaṃ yadātmanaḥ* ||

[24] MBh XIII.115.4–5: *bhīṣma uvāca* | *caturvidheyaṃ nirdiṣṭā ahiṃsā brahmavādibhiḥ* | *eṣaikato'pi vibhraṣṭā na bhavaty arisūdana* || *yathā sarvaś catuṣpādas tribhiḥ pādair na tiṣṭhati* | *tathaiveyaṃ mahīpāla procyate kāraṇair stribhiḥ* ||

> *Ahiṃsā* is enjoined by you as conformable to all sorts of *dharma*.[25]

I have searched for an explanation to this description in the canonical literature, but I could not find any reference. A great help came from the Southern Edition of *Śrīman Mahaṛṣi Vedavyāsa Mahābhārata*, which reports the same set of *śloka*s on the fourfold *dharma* and includes the above-mentioned verses, with correspondent Hindi translation by Paṇḍit Rāmanārayaṇadatta Śāstrī Pāṇḍeya "Rām". In rendering the term "fourfold *ahiṃsā*", Paṇḍit Śāstrī Pāṇḍeya opens parentheses and explains that *hiṃsā* is not to be performed by means of mind, speech, action and non-eating of meat (AP, Southern Edition, XIII.114.4). These points are all equally important, and, if somebody ignores one of the four, then he or she fails to practice *ahiṃsā*. Other verses common to both the Southern and the Critical edition (e.g. XIII.115.7) state that restraint of mind, speech and physical action is prerequisite and consequence to the performance of non-violence. The *śloka*s XIII.115.4–5 and 16 are not satisfied with this rule and put one more condition to the followers of *ahiṃsā*. In this way, "non-eating meat" is paired with the control of *manas*, *vacas* and [*kāya*-]*karman*. One could argue that a dietary rule is quite inconsistent with the restraint of the three faculties of the body. Indeed, the supplement of this fourth element could easily shine as a forcing temptation to include vegetarianism as one of the fundamentals of *ahiṃsā*. However, the *śloka* XIII.115.11 seems to support the explanation of the four pillars of *ahiṃsā* given by Paṇḍit Śāstrī Pāṇḍeya. Here, Bhīṣma uses the expression "knowledge of the tongue" (*jihvāyāḥ prajñānaṃ*) to express the independence of this muscle from the other means of action. The tongue has its own domain of action in reference to taste (*rasaṃ ca prati*), in the same way as the mind, for instance, has jurisdiction over thoughts. In this outlook, *jihvā* gains individual authority and can be paired with *manas*, *vacas* and [*kāya*-] *karman*. It is now relevant to recall the topic of the necessity to restrain the three means of action (see XIII.114.4): in order to maintain the status of equilibrium required for *ahiṃsā*, it appears clear that a person should restrain the tongue and should have control over it, in order not to commit any faulty action. Such control over the tongue is automatically rendered with "non-

[25] MBh XIII.115.16: *evam eṣā mahārāja caturbhiḥ kāraṇair vṛtā | ahiṃsā tava nirdiṣṭā sarvadharmārthasaṃhitā ||*

eating meat". In this way, the concept of "fourfold *dharma*" creates a strong link between *ahiṃsā* and vegetarianism and establishes the ban on meat-consumption. Vegetarianism becomes a *conditio sine qua non* for *ahiṃsā*. This attitude creates an apparent strong contradiction when, later on, the text enjoins to partake of the flesh of animals sacrificed according to the Vedic rules. I will now attempt to provide an explanation to this apparent contradiction by analysing the matter from a historical point of view, and by considering it in relation to the existence of two different addressees of the verses.

Examining the text from a diachronic perspective, we could claim that the discrepancy arisen from the initial presentation of three means of action (XIII.114.4), followed by the introduction of a fourth one, suggests different layers of composition. In this outlook, the control of mind, speech and bodily action are the means through which a person may have bad thoughts, insult, or harm someone. Vedic science is also very keen to swear the consequences of slaughtering animals. The pronunciation of magic formulas, together with the sprinkling of water over the offerings, pacifies the bad outcomes of a violent action, which is rendered devoid of its violent nature by this purification process. In this way, the Vedic sacrificer does not incur the sin of faulty actions and can still satisfy the three prerequisites to *ahiṃsā*. If *mantra*s and drops of water had the power to neutralise the killing of animals, and the partaking of sacrificial meat was a convenient custom, the slow decline of this science leads to the necessity of new means for self-defence from the outcomes of violent deeds. In this way, restrained bodily actions are again advised, and a ban on meat-consumption is enjoined. Indeed, if animal slaughtering is not accompanied by the Vedic science, then the flesh of the dead animal is a vehicle for bad influences, and its partaking is an unlawful action (XIII.116.45). Therefore, the concept of a "fourfold *dharma*" could arise from a society that has lost part of its bond with the Vedic ritual. The lack of an instrument capable of forswearing the outcomes of violent actions would create the necessity of a new stratagem for self-defence, such as the forgoing of meat-consumption. However, we could also consider the "fourfold *dharma*" as an instruction given to those aspiring to good conduct and religious uplifting. These are the people who have renounced the sacrificial science and engage themselves in a contemplative life. The latter hypothesis

better matches the words of the Śaṅkarācārya of Jyotirmaṭha and Dvārkā Maṭha, Svāmī Svarūpānanda Sarasvatī on the importance of food:

> There are three types of food: a sattvic one, a rajasic one, and the tamasic one. Aliments such as fruits, vegetables, rice and beans (*anna*) which are full of nutrients, less harmful for the health and tasty are the sattvic elements. Seasoned and chilly foods, very salty, sour and dry elements, without any juice are rajasic and may cause stomach-acid. The tamasic food is first of all the rotten food, the food prepared and then left for many days which has become rancid, as well as the smelly food such as eggs, meat and fish, and the so-called *jūṭha* food, that which has been contaminated by saliva or by something else.
>
> The food we are eating has three main effects on us. The solid parts of the food become our excretions, as faeces and urine are expelled from the body. The inner part of the food becomes liquid and it is mixed up in the blood, and the subtlest part of the food nourishes the mind. Thus, our mind is structured and works accordingly to what we eat. The mind of the one who eats pure food becomes pure. By eating pure food, our inner organs, mind and intellect are purified and that has an effect on our conduct. Pure food strengthens us and makes us steady on our path. Even our memory is fortified, and by strengthening that, the tangles of our mind open up and release.
>
> The first thing the one following a *sādhanā* has to engage with, is to eat pure food. If you want to walk on the dharmic path, the good path, first of all it is necessary to eat pure food.[26]

[26] A talk registered by me in December 2018 in the Narsinghpur District of Madhya Pradesh, India.

PRACTICAL REASONS NOT TO EAT MEAT

So far, we have analysed the right way of conduct established for those aiming at a good behaviour and spiritual upliftment. The AP's argumentation in support to meat-abstention, however, appears to take into account also those who are not driven by a sincere desire of *dharma*. *Ahiṃsā* is here presented as a very convenient path for everyone: a very pragmatic line of thinking lists the rewards and the punishments for those who eat and do not eat meat, and compares several ways of conduct in order to identify the most convenient behavioural choice.

a. The rewards of being vegetarian

The *śloka*s enumerating the advantages of avoiding meat are scattered all over *adhyāya*s 116 and 117. There are, all in all, 17 verses listing the rewards resulting from vegetarianism. Overall, by avoiding meat, one may obtain invincibility, credibility, esteem, absence of fear, wealth, glory, longevity, good fortune, intelligence, beauty and every happiness in life. Heaven (*svarga*) and *brahmaloka* are the rewards in the afterlife:

> The self-governed supreme seers proclaim that non-eating meat is a great thing bringing to wealth, leading to glory, giving longevity, granting heaven and causing good fortune.[27]

The non-consumption of meat throughout life is the most desirable condition, but it is not the only option contemplated in the text: the AP speculates also on the opportunity of undertaking periods of vegetarianism. For instance, during the month of *kārttika* (October–November), every type of meat should be avoided (XIII.116.60) in order to gain beauty, honour, splendour, and the company of a thousand women (XIII.116.71). With this system of karmic retribution, Bhīṣma provides a very pragmatic approach to the topic. Vegetarianism appears here to be a very convenient choice. Every sort of reward is granted to those who avoid meat even for small periods of time; this is probably stated to persuade even the most reluctant ones that renouncing animal flesh is in-

[27] MBh XIII.116.35: *dhanyaṃ yaśasyam āyuṣyaṃ svargyaṃ svastyayanaṃ mahat* | *māṃsasyābhakṣaṇaṃ prāhur niyatāḥ param ṛṣayaḥ* ||

deed an ever-rewarding practice. In fact, within these verses, there is no mention of compassion, nor allusion to ethical principles. Vegetarianism is here clearly presented as a practice leading to personal gain.

b. The results of ahiṃsā compared to Vedic ritual and tapas

The argument in favour of vegetarianism develops further when the avoidance of banned aliments is compared to Vedic rituals and religious austerities. In XIII.114.1, Bṛhaspati asserts that non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), Vedic ritual (*vaidika-karman*), meditation (*dhyāna*), restraint of the senses (*indriya-saṃyama*), religious austerities (*tapas*) and service to the *guru* (*guru-śuśūṣā*) are all valid doors to *dharma*, but, among them, *ahiṃsā* is the best one. A few verses scattered in *adhyāya*s 16 and 17 compare the results deriving from the practice of non-violence/meat-abstention with those gained by Vedic sacrifices and religious austerities. The abstention from meat and honey is first said to be equal to the monthly performance of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice (XIII.116.10), and then, the only abstention from meat would be equal to the monthly performance of the horse sacrifice for a hundred years:

> The one who will sacrifice by means of the *aśvamedha* every month for a hundred years and the one who does not eat meat, that [i.e. the two actions] is considered equal by me.[28]

And again, in XIII.116.18, vegetarianism is a practice more rewarding than the study of the Vedas and the ritual sacrifices:

> [The study of] the entire Vedas and all the ritual sacrifices will not accomplish the same result of the one who, after having eaten meat, turns away from it.[29]

The AP compares profits of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice[30], one of the most complex and expensive rituals of the Vedic culture, to the vow of non-consump-

[28] MBh XIII.116.16: *māsi māsyaśvamedhena yo yajeta śataṃ samāḥ | na khādati ca yo māṃsaṃ samam etan mataṃ mama ||*

[29] MBh XIII.116.18: *sarve vedā na tatkuryuḥ sarvayajñāś ca bhārata | yo bhakṣayitvā māṃsāni paścād api nivartate ||*

[30] See Ranade 2006: 95: "The horse sacrifice, recorded in the RV [*Ṛgveda*, A.S.]1.162 and 163 to be performed by a sovereign (*sārvabhauma*) or a crowned king though not yet sovereign,

tion of meat. The MS (V.53) conveys the same concept and equates the abstention from meat with the sacrifice of the horse performed once a year for a hundred years.[31] Overall, the MBh first enhances the good effects of a vegetarian diet, equating it to the performance of 1200 horse sacrifices (XIII.116.16) and then, in XIII.116.10, to monthly *aśvamedha*s. Manu claims that the avoidance of meat and the performance of the *aśvamedha* every year for a hundred years are equally rewarding. Considering the extreme complexity and the huge cost of this Vedic sacrifice, together with the fact that its implementation lasts one full year and that only kings can undertake it, we can assume that the comparison proposed here is nothing but a hyperbolic euphemism to stress the wondrous outcomes deriving from the *ahiṃsā* rule. However, the proposed image seems strongly contradictory, because it puts on the same level the avoidance of meat and the killing of a great number of horses. Such inconsistency is highlighted also by Chakrabarti (1996: 261) and Framarin (2014). The former one attempts an explanation of this oxymoron by explaining that the two terms of comparison are probably directed to two different publics. In his view, abstention from meat is the path of those seeking liberation, while the example of the horse sacrifice addresses those pursuing material desires. Thus, the above mentioned *śloka*s not only illustrate the comparison between two *dharma*s, but also address two classes of people: those who want to withdraw from the world (followers of *ahiṃsā*) and those who are engaged in the world (performers of the *aśvamedha*). That would endorse the hypothesis of different rules enjoined to people having different life goals. However, within the common imaginary, the *aśvamedha* is one of the rituals *par excellence*, and comparing the outcomes of the horse sacrifice with the rewards deriving from vegetarianism could simply be a way to stress the extraordinariness of *ahiṃsā*.

Avoidance of meat is also matched with a hundred years of very hard religious austerities:

Āp. Śr [Āpśs, A.S.]10.1.1. It is a soma sacrifice with 3 pressing days (the core), but the preparatory rites are extended over a year or two. Actually, it is a combination of animal sacrifices, *soma* and various other popular features. Participants are, besides the king, his four wives, 400 attendants and several priests".

[31] MS V.53, transl. Olivelle 2005: "A man who abstains from meat and a man who offers the horse sacrifice every year for a hundred years—the reward for their meritorious acts is the same".

> The one who will perform for a hundred full years very hard religious austerities, and the one who will only give up on meat, I consider them as equals.[32]

Śloka XIII.116.17 equals abstention from honey and meat to the perpetual performance of *soma* sacrifice, the donation of riches and ascetic practices.

> By avoiding honey and meat, he continually sacrifices by means of a great soma sacrifice, he continually offers riches, he continually becomes an ascetic.[33]

It is interesting to note that *ahiṃsā* is compared to the ascetic practices. Schmidt (2010) contemplates the hypothesis that *ahiṃsā* was originally a rule addressed only towards ascetics. The renouncing stage implies the abandonment of rituals. This means that such person is deprived of the only instrument able to nullify the bad outcomes of the everyday life actions, which, of necessity, include even accidental violent deeds. Probably also for this reason, the last ritual of a renouncer-to-be consists in the declaration of safety to every living being. Meat and honey are aliments generally prohibited to the *saṃnyāsin*s (and also to the *brahmacārin*s). I believe that this is supported mainly by two points. The renouncer is supposed to dedicate his own self to the attainment of liberation and, therefore, he needs to maintain control over the senses; the consumption of honey and meat might stand as an obstacle to this aim, as their taste is able to bewilder minds. The second motivation is the refusal of sacrifice, which implies the loss of the only instrument capable to correct the accumulation of bad *karma*. In the same way, a *brahmacārin*, being a student, is supposed to remain focused on his studies. Thus, the aliments bewildering the mind are prohibited to him. Moreover, a young boy who still lacks a full knowledge of the Vedas and is still unmarried, is also unable to perform sacrifices. In both cases, the inability to neutralise impure actions and the need of mental clarity cause a ban on meat-consumption.

With these premises, a possible explanation in view of a historical development to vegetarianism is that the gradual disappearance of the Vedic ritual, accompanied by a contemporary rise of renouncing traditions, has led to

[32] MBh XIII.116.59: *yas tu varṣaśataṃ pūrṇaṃ tapas tapyet sudāruṇam | yaś caikaṃ varjayen māṃsam samam etan mataṃ mama ||*

[33] MBh XIII.116.17: *sadā yajati matreṇa sadā dānaṃ prayacchati | sadā tapasvī bhavati madhumāṃsasya varjanāt ||*

a universal appropriation of the *dharma* based on *ahiṃsā*,[34] as a refuge from actions leading to bad karmic consequences. In other words, when the instrument through which one erases the outcomes of offensive actions is not accessible anymore, the only remedy is the reduction, or the extinction, of such actions. In the same way, Schmidt (2010) believes that a society slowly forgetting the Vedic science needs to reduce the occasion for sinful deeds, such as the killing of living beings, and thus begins to foster the path toward vegetarianism.

I argue that the passages enumerating the benefits that derive from a vegetarian diet have the clear intention of persuading the listener/reader to follow that rule. However, if one of the crucial reasons to avoid meat is that of withdrawing from the jaws of desire and the bewilderment of senses, then why are all these verses encouraging vegetarianism and the performance of non-violence in view of a fulfilment of every worldly desire? Once again, the only plausible explanation to absolve the text from the charge of contradiction is that it addresses different audiences. On one side, there are high-minded individuals who desire to withdraw from the world of desire. They are the recipient of the first teaching, enjoining the restraint of the three *doṣa*s, the control over attraction and repulsion and the awareness of *ātmā-aupamya*. On the other side, there are those who are not naturally inclined to this path, but are persuaded to non-violence because of concrete compensations. In this view, those aiming at self-restraint and liberation are destined to the supreme worlds and follow the rules of a contemplative life (*nivṛtti*). While, those engaging in an active life (*pravṛtti*) do not have awareness of *ātma-aupamya* and need to be instructed and motivated by the description of the rewards and punishments following the rules of a karmic payback.[35]

[34] Similarly, Lubin (2005) argues that as response to the spreading of Buddhism and Jainism, the Brahminical tradition expanded and universalised itself around the 6th and 4th centuries BCE.

[35] MBh XIII.116.76: *etat te kathitaṃ rājan māṃsasya parivarjane* | *pravṛttau ca nivṛttau ca vidhānam ṛṣinirmitam* ||

c. The fault and the punishments

Besides the rewards resulting from a vegetarian diet, the MBh lists the punishments for those who instead eat meat. This postulation imposes a reflection on the different types of actions implied in the process of meat-production: the eater, the killer, the butcher, the cook, etc. are all participating in sinful actions.

THE FAULT

Buddha gave the rule that a monk may eat an animal if he has not previously seen it alive and if he believes that such animal was not killed specifically for him (VP II.171). Is it possible to identify a similar rule in the MBh's setting analysed here? Is the one who kills a living being guilty as much as the one who merely eats it, or buys it, or just cooks it? Yudhiṣṭhira expresses a need for solving this dilemma and asks about the different degrees of misconduct revolving around the consumption of meat:

> Is (the fault) of the one who, having killed, eats, or, of the one who is offered (meat) by another? Is it that a man may kill for the sake of another or is it that the one who, having bought meat, may eat it?[36]

After a short digression praising the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*, Bhīṣma affirms that killing and eating are equally sinful acts (XIII.116.37). However, the killer, performing the violent action, and the eater, who is the cause of the slaughter, are not the only sinners. Whoever promotes or supports the actions of these two main characters is guilty to the same degree because he or she tacitly allows such filthy action[37]:

> The one who fetches, the one who supports, the one who is cutting up, the one who buys and the one who

[36] MBh XIII.116.4: *hatvā bhakṣayato vāpi pareṇopahṛtasya vā | hanyād vā yaḥ parasyārthe krītvā vā bhakṣayen naraḥ ||*

[37] Manu reports the same opinion: "The man who authorizes, the man who butchers, the man who slaughters, the man who buys or sells, the man who cooks, the man who serves, and the man who eats–these are all killers" (MS V.51, transl. Olivelle 2005).

> sells, the one who cooks, the one who eats and the one who kills, they are all the same.[38]

In addition to this, in XIII.116.44, Bhīṣma considers the possibility of different grades of fault, according to the role of those engaged in meat-consumption and meat-production: the promoter of the killing is guiltier than the one who actually kills (XIII.116.44). This leads to strongly ethical implications in the definition of guilt. It is not just the factual action that leads to karmic consequences, but also the intention and the circumstances play a role in the degree of sin a person incurs in, while engaged in the process of meat-production/consumption. In this regard, Srinivasan (2014: 34f.) reflects on the idea of fault conveyed by the MBh's *śloka*s and remarks that ethical concepts are always characterised by the impossibility of empirical validation. However, it may appear controversial that the AP (together with the MS) places a deed of killing and the action of cooking a non-vegetarian meal on the same footing (XIII.116.47). It is perhaps easier to share the view that, if someone kills an animal because someone else has required it, the promoter of the action is more responsible, and therefore guiltier, than the killer. Nonetheless, one should keep in mind that vegetarianism is a fundamental expression of the *dharma* of non-violence, assuming here a universal value. For this reason, it is not startling to read here that whoever participates in the production of meat breaks the rule of *ahiṃsā* and shares the guilt of the killing.

THE KARMIC CONSEQUENCES OF EATING MEAT

The MBh's list of the gain deriving from meat-abstention has the clear aim to persuade the audience to vegetarianism. A further incentive to follow this prescription is found in the description of the bad outcomes following the transgression of *ahiṃsā*. The AP repeatedly states that the man who eats meat and does not follow the fourfold *dharma* will suffer without chances of releasing from sorrow (XIII.116.33, XIII.117.29). The fine resulting from violent deeds follows some sort of "poetic justice", similar to a law of *contrapasso*, presiding over the criteria turning into motion the mechanisms of the

[38] MBh XIII.116.47: *āhartā cānumantā ca viśastā krayavikrayī | saṃskartā copabhoktā ca ghātakāḥ sarva eva te ||*

punishment. Following the line of this assumption, the next verse introduces an interesting etymology of the word *māṃsa*:

> As he eats me, I will eat him too. Here, you are the meat of the meat. Hence, o Bhārata, be aware of that![39]

Even if the English translation cannot convey the same wordplay, the original Sanskrit structure aims at revealing the reading key of the word meat. *Māmsa* is composed of *māṃ* ("me", in accusative) and *sa* (as *saḥ*, "he"). The first half of the verse, *māṃ sa bhakṣayate*, explains that "the one who eats me" *māṃ sa*, is the meat-to-be, *māṃ-sa*. Similarly, the same English word "meat" can be read backwards as "eat-me". Manu (MS V.55, transl. Olivelle 2005) introduces the same wordplay: "Me, he (*māṃ sa*) will eat in the next world, whose meat (*māṃsa*) I eat in this world—this, the wise declare, is what gave the name to and discloses the true nature of meat (*māṃsa*)". This etymology of the term "meat" is a clue to understand the inner workings of a sanction system, called *karma*. Lipner (2012) refers to *karma* as a generator of a "chain of lives" which are regulated by the adage, "as one sows, so one reaps". Accordingly, Bhīṣma explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction:

> The killer is always killed, as well as the tier is tied. The one who has abused is abused, o king, the one who eats undergoes odiousness. With whatever body whatever action one makes, with that very body that very result he obtains.[40]

A very similar image is found already in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (XII.9.1, transl. Eggeling 1900): "Verily, from this sacrifice the man is born and whatever food a man consumes in this world, that (food), in return, consumes him in yonder worlds [...]". Both the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (XI.6.1–12) and the *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa* (I,42–44) report the story of the young *brāhmin* Bhṛgu. This tale illustrates the karmic results of eating that reap in the yonder world. The core of the story's teaching is that the results of one's own actions always

[39] MBh XIII.117.34: *māṃ sa bhakṣayate yasmād bhakṣayiṣye tam apy aham | etanmāṃsasya māṃsatvam ato budhyasva bhārata ||*

[40] MBh XIII.117.35–36: *ghātako vadhyate nityaṃ tathā vadhyeta bandhakaḥ | ākroṣṭākruśyate rājandveṣṭā dveṣyatvam āpnute || yena yena śarīreṇa yadyatkarma karoti yaḥ | tena tena śarīreṇa tat tat phalam upāśnute ||*

come back. For instance, the one who cuts the limbs of the cattle is eventually going to be cut by the very same cattle, in the very same manner. Accordingly, a lumberjack cutting a tree will be cut by that very tree in the next life. Bodewitz (1990: 99–102) does not understand Bhṛgu's story as a depiction of a doctrine of re-birth, but only gives it a symbolic value, teaching the fundamentals of action and its indissoluble link with the supreme law of karmic retribution. There is no moral judgement, but a clear verification that a deed brings to its correspondent result. The fact that Bhṛgu asks for an atonement which may prevent a person from such destiny is, according to Bodewitz, the proof that there is no "matter of principle" here, but only a pragmatic issue. This tale and the AP clearly share the same point of view on the matter of "turning back actions". Moreover, the above reported section of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* provides the only instrument of atonement which may grant safety even to those who "cut up the limbs of the animals": the Vedic sacrifice. The AP fully acknowledges that instrument.

THE EXCEPTIONS TO THE *DHARMA* OF *AHIṂSĀ*

a. Ahiṃsā and meat-consumption in the Vedic ritual

*Adhyāya*s 114–117 establish a link with the Vedic world and restrict the whole discourse of the guilt and the punishments related to meat-consumption to the outside of the sacrificial arena. The Vedic ritual is described as a positive-connotated instrument that provides for the prosperity of the world and permits one to feed forefathers. Bhīṣma explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that ritual offerings are of primary importance, as they ensure the proper functioning of the inner processes of the world:

> By the high-minded Agastya, desiderous of benefitting people, with religious austerity, wild animals are sprinkled and addressed to all deities. The sacrificial acts devoted to the forefathers and deities are not abandoned in this way. The forefathers are indeed pleased as they are satisfied with meat according to rule.[41]

[41] MBh XIII.116.56–57: *prajānāṃ hitakāmena tvagastyena mahātmanā | āraṇyāḥ sarvadaivatyāḥ prokṣitās tapasā mṛgāḥ || kriyā hyevaṃ na hīyante pitṛdaivatasaṃśritāḥ | prīyante pitaraś caiva nyāyato māṃsatarpitāḥ ||*

If we relate the contents of these verses with the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*, we face a number of controversies. Heesterman (1984: 119) writes about the coexistence of the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā* and the Vedic sacrifice as an unresolved conflict within the normative scriptural tradition itself. It appears that the completion of animal sacrifices leads to beneficial effects, even if such performance implies violent actions. The arbitrary act of slaughtering an animal brings indeed negative consequences, which can be cancelled by *mantra*s and other apotropaic gestures used by the Vedic science to pacify the outcomes of cruel deeds. Yudhiṣṭhira expresses the need of explanation about the apparent contradictions between killing in the sacrificial arena and the exhortation to *ahiṃsā* (XIII.116.2). Along the text, Bhīṣma never answers his nephew's question. The only words he spends on the matter reveal that eating the meat that is consecrated to the forefathers according to the rule is not a sin:

> It is said that, after having eaten that oblation which is sprinkled in the sacrifices to the forefathers, with the formula approved by the Vedas, [a man] does not commit sin.[42]

The solicitude in sprinkling and pronouncing the correct formulas during the offerings suggests a certain concern in neutralising the act of killing through a set of acts intended to appease bad influences (Schmidt 2010: 118). As regards to the controversies between *ahiṃsā* and Vedic sacrifice, the AP speculates only about meat-consumption and does not deal with the problems of killing living beings. Here, the whole argumentation focuses on the explanation that the consumption of animal flesh is the righteous concluding act of a sacrifice. Although, at the very beginning of *adhyāya* 114, *ahiṃsā* was established as the best *dharma*, whose performance is linked to the act of non-eating meat, the Vedic sacrifice bends that rule of non-violence. The logic authorising this exception lies within the belief that the negative karmic results of partaking meat are "neutralized" by the sacrificial science. In particular, it appears that the sprinkling of water and the recitation of the proper *mantra*s are able to dispel the inauspicious outcomes that naturally derive from killing and eating meat. Moreover, it is believed that the animals offered to gods and ancestors are reborn in higher existences and therefore

[42] MBh XIII.117.14: *pitṛdaivatayajñeṣu prokṣitaṃ havir ucyate | vidhinā vedadṛṣṭena tadbhuktveha na duṣyati ||*

their slaughter is considered beneficial to them too (Schmidt 2010: 117–121). The main idea is that through the sacrificial fire, the victim acquires great merits and, at the same time, the sacrificer is able to pursue his desired fruits and eat meat without committing sin. For this reason, the ritual action of killing is indeed described as a non-violent slaughter. Manu explains (MS V.39–40, transl. Olivelle 2005) that "the Self-existent One himself created domestic animals for sacrifice, and the sacrifice is for the prosperity of this whole world. Within the sacrifice, therefore, killing is not killing. When plants, domestic animals, trees, beasts, and birds die for the sake of a sacrifice, they will in turn earn superior births." Accordingly, Bhīṣma affirms that animals exist for the sake of the sacrifice and implicitly advises to kill and eat only according to the Vedic rules:

> The cattle/animals are created for the sacrifice. In this way, the sacred knowledge is heard. The rule says that the demons are among those who engage in a manner different than this.[43]

Heesterman (1984: 122) highlights the Vedic "overwhelming concern with the technical-ritualistic means to take away the stigma of sacrificial death and to undo the injury". In this light, it is interesting to notice that, when Bhṛgu asks about the atonement for killing living beings, Varuṇa enjoins the ritual performances that imply specific actions (*prāyaścitta*) devoted to expiate the outcomes of violent procedures. Following this line of thought, the AP stresses very much the importance of sprinkling (*prokṣa*) the flesh of immolated animals as *sine qua non* for its consumption. This act, aided by the pronunciation of the proper *mantra*s, is believed to extinguish the bad influences deriving from the animal slaughtering:

> One may make an oblation in the fire perfected by *mantra*s and sprinkled and besprinkled according to the standards proclaimed in the Veda for the forefathers also in the ceremonies. In a manner different than that, meat is not to be eaten at will. Manu said that.[44]

[43] MBh XIII.117.15: *yajñārthe paśavaḥ sṛṣṭā ity api śrūyate śrutiḥ | ato'nyathā pravṛttānāṃ rākṣaso vidhir ucyate ||*

[44] MBh XIII.116.50: *haviryat saṃskṛtaṃ mantraiḥ prokṣitābhyukṣitaṃ suci | vedoktena pramāṇena pitṛṇāṃ prakriyāsu ca | ato'nyathā vṛthāmāṃsam abhakśyaṃ manur abravīt ||*

However, a priest engaging in sacrifices because of a meat desire will be tainted by a small fault (XIII.116.43). Besides the egoistic nature of his actions, if he offers according to the Vedic rule, sprinkling the victims with water and pronouncing the right *mantra*s, the major sin of killing a living being is tamed by the sacrificial science and only a *peccadillo* of intention is added to his "karmic baggage". That shows a total disregard for whatsoever ethical principle and proves the pragmatic nature of the discourse of the Vedic science.

It appears that the consumption of meat within the ritual arena is a natural custom and that even the animals' existence is strictly related to their role in the sacrifice (XIII.117.15). What if these statements were valid in a time when consecrated meat was unanimously allowed for consumption? That would validate Kane's theory on the different historical stages of development towards vegetarianism. However, this assumption is contradicted when Bhīṣma explains that, formerly, men did not eat meat:

> As demons who do not belong to heaven and who are bringing infamy, o best among the Bharatas, according to rule, formerly, men did not eat meat, o king.[45]

Instead, they did sacrifices by means of animals made of rice:

> It is heard that in the former age, among men, the sacrificial animal was made of rice. By means of that, the sacrificers who were absorbed [in the desire of going to] heaven, made sacrifices.[46]

These verses cannot clearly solve the issue whether the AP testifies ancient vegetarian habits, or, if it rather states reasons for the avoidance of animal-eating by means of a fabrication of history. Could it be the case here that ancient vegetarianism customs are recalled to mind in order to accredit the offering of cereals and vegetables over the killing of living beings?

Moreover, is the discourse on the Vedic rituals contradicting the whole concept of the "knowledge of the tongue"? There is no such mention of ritual actions able to dispel the meat's power to bewilder minds. Once again, it is only the hypothesis of the two types of recipients, namely the ones seeking

[45] MBh XIII.116.51: *asvargyam ayaśasyaṃ ca rakṣovad bharataṛṣabha* | *vidhinā hi narāḥ pūrvaṃ māṃsaṃ rājan na bhakṣayan* ||

[46] MBh XIII.116.53: *śrūyate hi purākalpe nṛṇāṃ vrīhimayaḥ paśuḥ* | *yenāyajanta yajvānaḥ puṇyalokaparāyaṇāḥ* ||

spiritual liberation and the lay people, that can explain what otherwise seems an unresolvable discrepancy in the subject of the text. Those not aiming at the spiritual path, who are engaged in the active life, may eat meat sacrificed to the gods and the forefathers. In this way, they nourish their ancestors and dispel the karmic consequences of killing an animal through the Vedic science. Alternatively, those engaged in the contemplative life, having put aside the ritual science, follow the rule of the "four-fold *dharma*".

b. The exception of the kṣatriyas

Vegetarianism is enjoined outside the sacrificial arena, but one more exception is given to this rule. Bhīṣma claims that a *kṣatriya* hunting in the forest does not commit sin by eating meat gained by his strength:

> Without giving up yourself, there is no hunting. Being in the same condition, one may kill an animal or not, o king. Hence, all the royal seers go hunting, o Bhārata. They are not tainted with sin and they do not consider that as a crime.[47]

In order to comprehend this statement, we shall try to pursue an ethical understanding of the concept of "wrong action". The connotation of "bad" and "wrong" derives from an unequal relation of power between a subject and an object. For instance, two equally strong individuals who confront each other are not tainted by sin, as they fight on equal terms. Instead, the employment of power in a situation of conscious predominance is what defines an act as "violent" and "wrong". For instance, a man with a sword will easily kill a cow. That is because the cow does not have any chance of defending itself from the slaughterer, a cow is not provided with means that enable it to do so. An individual who is conscious of being able to overcome another individual and still approaches him or her with bad intentions does commit a punishable act of violence. Yet, when a man fights against a tiger, the outcome of the battle is unpredictable and, for this reason, none of the two are practicing violence upon the other. However, this is probably not the meaning portrayed by the epos here, as I believe that a MBh's expert warrior with

[47] MBh XIII.117.18–19: *nātmānam aparityajya mṛgayā nāma vidyate | samatām upasaṃgamya rūpaṃ hanyātra vā nṛpa || ato rājaṛṣayāḥ sarve mṛgayāṃ yānti bhārata | lipyante na hi doṣeṇa na caitatpātakaṃ viduḥ ||*

bow and arrow pointing from far away to a deer does not count as fair fight. The Sanskrit term to designate "animal" in XIII.117.18, *mṛga*, does not generally point to wild and dangerous animals. The MW (s.v. *mṛga*) translates the term as "a forest animal or a wild beast" and, very commonly, this word is used to denominate a "deer". I believe that the only possible explanation for the above verses is that the *kṣatriya*s have the license to kill as a consequence of their *svadharma*. I believe that these *śloka*s (XIII.117.16,18,19) recall to the special duties of the *kṣatriya*s, who cannot possibly follow the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā*. The main task of a warrior is to protect the world (MS VI.2), and that implies the occasional necessity to resort to arms. The license to fight, hunt and kill without committing sin is necessary for a *kṣatriya* who fulfils his duties. In addition to that, the textual context in which the AP is inserted cannot be ignored: in fact, the MBh depicts perhaps the most epic war within Indian mythology, where numerous *kṣatriya*s fight and kill each other. It is a dying Bhīṣma who pronounces these verses, just after the conclusion of the Kurukṣetra grand battle. How could he extend the injunction of *ahiṃsā* to all those warriors?

CONCLUSION

The AP seems to reveal the coexistence of two apparently incompatible religious practices: animal sacrifices and strict vegetarianism. The AP may stand here as a mirror of the conflicts between strong upholders of meat-abstention and Vedic religious exponents. An evidence of the social urgency to answer this dilemma is given by Yudhiṣṭhira who, claiming to be confused about the right path to follow, namely violent Vedic rituals or *ahiṃsā*, asks about the apparent contradictions between these two *dharma*s (XIII.116.2). There appears to be no direct answer to that. However, this text might lead us to a plausible solution to this problem. I believe that Bhīṣma addresses two different audiences in his teachings: on one side, there are those engaged in a contemplative life, who wish to restrain their senses and follow the "fourfold *dharma*". They aim at the spiritual liberation and, thus, do not indulge in the performance of Vedic sacrifices for the desire of worldly or after-worldly results. On the other side, one finds those engaged in the active life, who aspire to riches and prizes and can either follow the *dharma* of *ahiṃsā* with the

intention of karmic rewards, or perform Vedic sacrifices with the aim of feeding their forefathers and getting desired objects.

The issue regarding the *kṣatriya*s, who may partake of meat, irrespectively of the "fourfold *dharma*", is of a different kind. That is because such exception is not made on the ground of religious practices, but it rather mirrors the needs of a particular social group. Outside the Vedic arena, *kṣatriya*s are warriors whose duty is to fight and kill when necessary: as fighters, they cannot follow the rule of *ahiṃsā*, as it is here described, because that would go against their social duty as good soldiers.

ABBREVIATIONS

AP	*Anuśāsanaparvan*
Āpśs	*Āpastambaśrautasūtra*
MBh	*Mahābhārata*
MS	*Manusmṛti*
MW	Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*
ŚP	*Śāntiparvan*
VP	*Vinayapiṭaka*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

Ādiparvan: Sukthankar, V. S. (ed.) 1933. *The Mahābhārata*. Vol. 1: *The Ādiparvan.* 2 parts. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Anuśāsanaparvan: Sukthankar, V. S. (ed.) 1933. *The Mahābhārata*. Vol. 17: *The Anuśāsanaparvan*. 2 parts. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Anuśāsanaparvan, Southern Edition: Pāṇḍeya, Rāmanārayaṇa Datta (ed.) 2009. *Mahābhārata: Sacitra, Saral Hindī Anuvādasahit*. Vol. 6: *Anuśāsana, Āśvamedhika, Āśramavāsika, Mausala, Mahāprasthānika Svargārohaṇaparvan.* Gorakhpur: Gita Press.

Āpastambaśrautasūtra: Thite, G. U. (ed.) 2004. *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra: Text with English Translation and Notes*. Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corp.

Bhagavadgītā: Mahadeva Sastry, Alladi (ed.) 1977. *The Bhagavad Gita with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*. Madras: Samata Books.

Gautamasaṃhitā: Das, H. C. (ed.) 1908. *The Dharma Śastra and the Hindu Law Codes.* Vol. 2. Calcutta: Elysium Press.

Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa: Vira, Raghu (ed.) 1986. *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa of the Sāmaveda*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Manusmṛti: Olivelle, Patrick (ed.) 2005. *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa: Jośī, K. (ed.) & Pargiter, F.E. (transl.) 2009. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. Delhi: Parimal Publications.

Nāradapurāṇa: Tagare, Ganesh (ed.) 1999. *The Nārada Purāṇa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Nāradasmṛti: Jośī, K. (ed.) 2006. *Sixteen Minor Smṛtis*. Delhi: Parimal Publications.

Saṃyuttanikāya: Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.) 1999. *The Connected Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Śatapathabrāhmaṇa: Deshpande, Maitreyee (ed.) & Eggeling, Julius (transl.) 2008 [1985]. *The Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*. Repr., Delhi: New Bharatiya Book.

Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣad: Olivelle, Patrick (ed.) 1992. *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣads: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vinayapiṭaka: Horner, I.B. (ed.) 1949. *The Book of the Discipline*. London: Luzac & Company LTD. Published for the Pali Text Society.

Secondary literature

Alsdorf, Ludwig 2010. *The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*. London: Routledge.

Bodewitz, Hendrik W. 1990. *The Jyotiṣṭoma Ritual: Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*. Leiden: Brill.

Bühler, G. 1886. *The Laws of Manu*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chakrabarti, Arindam 1996. "Meat and Morality in the Mahabharata", in: *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 (2): 259–268.

Dandekar, R. N. 2009. "The Human Universal in the Mahabharata", in: Sharma T. R. S. (ed.): *Reflections and Variations on the Mahābhārata*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 38–45.

Framarin, Christopher G. 2014. *Hinduism and Environmental Ethics: Law, Literature, and Philosophy*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Heesterman, Johannes Cornelius 1984. "Non-Violence and Sacrifice", in*: Indological Taurinensia* 12: 119–27.

Kane, Pandurang Vaman 1941. *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval, Religious and Civil Law*. Vol. 2,2. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Kane, Pandurang Vaman 1968. *History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval, Religious and Civil Law*. Vol. 1,1. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Lipner, Julius 2012. “Karman”, in: Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (eds): *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism.* Leiden: Brill.

(<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2050150>, accessed on March 30, 2018).

Lubin, Timothy 2005. “The Transmission, Patronage, and Prestige of Brahmanical Piety from the Mauryas to the Guptas”, in: Federico Squarcini (ed.): *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 77–103.

Monier-Williams, M. 1960. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Oldenberg, Hermann 1903. *Die Literatur des alten Indien*. Stuttgart: Cotta.

Olivelle, Patrick 2005. *Manu’s Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava- Dharmaśāstra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olivelle, Patrick 2012. “Dharmaśāstra”, in: Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (eds): *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Leiden: Brill.

(<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2020030>, accessed on March 10, 2018).

Ranade, H. G. 2006. *Illustrated Dictionary of Vedic Rituals*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

Schlingloff, Dieter 1969. “The Oldest Extant Parvan-List of the Mahābhārata”, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (2): 334–338.

Schmidt, H. P. 2010 “Appendix III”, in: Ludwig Alsdorf: *The History of Vegetarianism and Cow-Veneration in India*. London: Routledge, 128–159.

Singh, R. B. et al. 2011. “Ancient Concepts of Nutrition and the Diet in Hunter-Gatherers”, in: *The Open Nutraceuticals Journa*l 4: 130–135.

Srinivasan, S. A. 2014. *Hinduismus und ökologische Ethik: einige Bemerkungen*. Wien: De Nobili Research Library.

Winternitz, Moriz 2015. *History of Indian Literature*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Bronze *Bhūta* Masks: An Analysis of the Collection of the DakshinaChitra Museum

Sandra Jasmin Schlage[1]

Abstract: The term *bhūta* (also spelled as *būta* or anglicised "bhuta") refers, among others, to a multi-layered phenomenon including a complex belief system, elaborate rituals, animal sacrifice, state of trance, and oracles. These aspects find their expression in various visual and performing arts such as music, dance, dialogue, masks, facial make-up, and decorations made of natural materials. This article analyses the so far unpublished collection of contemporary *bhūta* masks as well as one *bhūta* figurine displayed at the DakshinaChitra heritage museum at Muttukadu near Chennai in South India. The museum exhibits 18 heritage houses from the four southernmost states of India. Inside the Ilkal House at the Karnataka section, ritual objects of the *bhūta* worship from Tulunadu are displayed. This collection of *bhūta* artefacts is typical for numerous collections of *bhūta* masks and objects, recently manufactured for international museums. They cater to the increased demand for those items based on their appreciation as folk art or fine art. The brief introduction to the *bhūta* cult will be followed by a description of the eminent features of *bhūta* masks in general. The main part of this article is an art historical description of the collection of *bhūta* masks and other related metal objects at the DakshinaChitra museum. The collection consists of a Jumādi/Dhūmāvatī[2] mask, along with a breastplate and a backdrop, called *aṇi*. In addition, there are masks of Pilichāmuṇḍi, Viṣṇumūrti and Pañjurli as well as a Pañjurli figurine. The collection is completed by another unidentified *bhūta* mask. The investigation of these masks leads, among others, to the question whether there exists a specific style for *bhūta* masks and figurines. Another crucial question is how such ritual objects get into museum collections. Furthermore, we need to consider how these exhibitions contribute to the public perception of *bhūta* cult objects. These questions are discussed at the end of this article.

[1] I am grateful to the staff of the DakshinaChitra museum for kindly supporting this examination.

[2] The mythological background of each *bhūta* as well as the iconographic features represented by the masks will be described in the respective sections.

INTRODUCTION

Bhūta worship is one of the so-called folk-beliefs[3] which exist besides the Sanskrit tradition of the brahmanical Hinduism especially in the rural areas of India. This religious practice is mainly followed by the rural population, especially by lower classes as for example members of Scheduled Castes (Beltz 2009a: 11). In contrast to the puranic gods which are worshipped as remote deities often in the form of icons, *bhūta* spirits are personalised deities who are believed to interact with their devotees during ritual ceremonies, referred to as *kōla* (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: vii). *Bhūta* spirits require propitiation from their devotees and offer protection and blessings in return as well as they punish misdoing (Rai 1996: 172). In general, phenomena of folk religion often do not exist in isolation from brahmanical Hinduism; they frequently influence each other (Horstmann 1993b: 103). The name *bhūta* itself might originate from the Sanskrit word *bhūta*, meaning "deceased person", "spirit" or "ghost" (Rond 2010a: 8). In Tuḷu, the word *bhūta* or *būta* refers to a male or female deity (Nambiar 2009: 22). *Bhūta* worship is a multi-layered phenomenon which encompasses a complex belief system, elaborate rituals, animal sacrifice, state of trance, and oracles. These aspects find their expression in various visual and performing arts such as music, dance, dialogue, masks, facial make-up, and decorations made of natural materials.

The investigation of the material culture of *bhūta* worship in general and *bhūta* masks in particular is associated with the theoretical discourse on dance/performance iconography which arose amongst European and American scholars in the 1990s and has recently been transferred to Asian contexts, for example by Jukka O. Miettinen who worked on material from mainland Southeast Asia (Miettinen 2008). Dance/performance iconography systematically studies all visual material related to (dance-)performances (Smith 1999: 113). Obvious examples are pictures, reliefs or sculptures which represent dance, drama, etc. (Seebass 1991: 34). I argue that in a wider usage of

[3] This form of religiosity is characterised by an easier accessibility for common people through rituals which include dance, music, dramatic elements but also possession ceremonies. The rituals aim in most cases at the immediate well-being of their devotees in the form of agricultural fertility and the continuity of the family (Brückner 1993: 143).

the term, visual objects related to performances (not only their visual representations), such as costumes, headdresses, props, and masks, are also relevant for this area of research. However, there is an obvious need for the study of material culture related to performances as art objects in their own rights. Their systematic analysis has been neglected for most of the 20th century and dance and drama images and objects related to performances have rather been used as ancillary illustrations for publications of different genres (Heck 1999: 1). The art historical approach towards dance/performance iconography[4] follows the general iconographic approach which comprises of a descriptive analysis of the art objects. This methodology had been systematised by Panofsky in 1939 (Seebass 1991: 33). In a first step, the constitutive elements of the object are described. This is followed by the second step which encompasses the discussion of the meaning of the art work including the examination of the cultural context and comparison to similar examples (Seebass 1991: 33f.).[5] Both elements will be combined in the analysis of the *bhūta* masks at DakshinaChitra to provide a consistent representation and interpretation of those masks. Besides the theoretical framework for this investigation, the information available on *bhūta* masks and the availability of published research on this topic needs to be considered, too.

Bhūta worship has gained international attention since the mid-19th century due to its documentation by the Basel mission, which supported Christian missionary stations in the Tulunadu region (Nithesh n.d.). Since then, research has mainly been conducted by either cultural anthropologists or linguists. Therefore, the focus has been on the rituals of the *bhūta* cult and their (regulative) role in the society or the orally transmitted legends of the *bhūtas.* While those studies often considered the performative dimension of the *bhūta* worship, they neglected visual aspects, such as masks, figurines, costumes, etc. The earliest publication which gave importance to the art historical study of *bhūta* masks is Heidrun Brückner's article "Zu Kult und Ikonografie von Tulu-

[4] According to Tilman Seebass, there are two different approaches towards dance iconography: the choreological approach studies the visual material to obtain information on dance technique. The art-historical approach considers the visual material related to dance as art works in their own right with literal and symbolic meanings attached (Seebass 1991: 33).

[5] My investigation will to some extend also discuss the third level, called iconology, that investigates the symbolic dimension of the art work under consideration of the influence of artist, patron, and audience (Seebass 1991: 34).

Volksgottheiten an der Westküste Südindiens", published in 1993 in an anthology about non-brahmanical deities in India: "Die anderen Götter. Volks- und Stammesbronzen aus Indien". Three pages discuss the masks' iconography, and the article is accompanied by seven photographs (Brückner 1993: 145ff.). *Bhūta* masks became also popular as art objects, for instance, through the exhibition "Wenn Masken tanzen – Rituelles Theater und Bronzekunst aus Südwestindien" at the Museum Rietberg, Zurich, in 2009. The catalogue edited by Johannes Beltz includes a general introduction and two scholarly articles along with photographs and descriptions of the masks and figurines which were on display. The most relevant article from this publication for the present essay is "Ritual, Mythos und Kunsthandwerk" by Balan Nambiar. The text provides general information on *bhūta* worship, discusses typology and iconography of the masks, and describes the creation process. The growing popularity of *bhūta* masks on the art market is reflected in the publication of short articles by gallery owners, such as Frédéric Rond's (see Rond 2010a and b), published shortly after the major exhibition at the Museum Rietberg in 2009. The latest article by Subhashini Aryan and B. N. Aryan seems to consist mainly of information obtained from those earlier publications with a focus on typology and iconography as well as on the creation process. The small number of research projects and publications on *bhūta* masks points out the need for further investigations of this topic.

Hence, this article analyses the so far unpublished collection of contemporary *bhūta* masks as well as one *bhūta* figurine displayed at the DakshinaChitra heritage museum at Muttukadu near Chennai in South India.[6] The museum exhibits 18 heritage houses from the four southernmost states of India (DakshinaChitra 2014). Inside the Ilkal House at the Karnataka section, ritual objects of the *bhūta* worship from Tulunadu are displayed. This collection of *bhūta* artefacts is typical for numerous collections of recently created *bhūta* masks and objects, purchased or even ordered by international museums and art galleries. They cater to the increased demand for those items based on their appreciation as folk art or fine art. Doubtlessly, also the discussion of contemporary *bhūta* masks, which were obtained for a museum

[6] The collection consists of a Jumādi/Dhūmāvati mask, along with a breastplate and a backdrop, called *aṇi*. Furthermore, there are masks of Pilichāmuṇḍi, Viṣṇumūrti and Pañjurli as well as a Pañjurli figurine. The collection is completed by another unidentified *bhūta* mask. The iconography of these *bhūta*s will be described and contextualised in the respective sections on these objects.

presentation, challenges the traditional art historical preference of historical material and questions the erstwhile exclusive religious association of *bhūta* masks. Following an introduction to the *bhūta* cult which is based on secondary sources, such as anthropological studies, there will be a brief description of the eminent features of *bhūta* masks in general. Those sections shall explain the usage and ritual significance of the *bhūta* masks. The main part of this article is an art historical investigation of the collection of *bhūta* masks and other related metal objects at the DakshinaChitra museum. The examination of these masks leads to the question whether there exists a specific style for *bhūta* masks and figurines. Furthermore, the display of ritual masks demands a debate on how such ritual objects come into museum collections as well as how these exhibitions contribute to the public perception of *bhūta* cult objects. These aspects are discussed at the end of the article.

THE *BHŪTA* CULT

The regions, which are mainly associated with *bhūta* worship are located at the south-west coast of India. They consist of the Dakshina Kannada district, which is the southernmost part of the state Karnataka with the urban centres Udupi and Puttur, and the Kasaragod district, which comprises the northern tip of Kerala (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 111). This region is also known as Tulunadu or Tulava region named after the language Tuḷu, spoken by the majority of its inhabitants. There is a great variety of oral literature in Tuḷu, which is an expression of the folk culture, and therefore, intricately linked and intertwined with the *bhūta* worship. Of special significance are Tuḷu oral epics and the shorter narrations of the legends of different *bhūta*s, called *pāḍḍana*s[7] (Rai 1996: 163). Interestingly, these legends are considered as evidence for the old-age tradition of the *bhūta* cult, since they refer to historical personalities, e.g. King Buthala Pandya who lived approximately in the first century CE (Rond 2010a: 8). However, seemingly, *bhūta* worship is an indigenous belief system of this area, predating the migration of Indo-Aryan language speakers more than 2000 years ago. Elements as the totemistic origin of certain *bhūta*s and the usage of natural materials such as palm leaves for dresses are also believed to have derived from these ancient practices (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 4).

[7] According to Marine Carrin, the name *pāḍḍana* is derived from *pardū* = "sung" (Carrin 1999: 109).

According to several scholars, there are 300 to 500 different *bhūta*s who are actively worshipped in Tulunadu.[8] Naturally, not all *bhūta*s are worshipped by everyone, and only about 25 *bhūta*s can be found throughout the whole region.[9] The other *bhūta*s are of special local significance or receive worship only by members of a particular community or caste (Gowda 2005: 18). Scholars divide *bhūta*s into different categories according to their origin. Uliyar Padmanabha Upadhyaya and Susheela Upadhyaya mention the following categories: 1. *bhūta*s with totemistic origin, 2. those associated with puranic deities, such as Viṣṇu, Śiva or different forms of the mother goddess, 3. heroes who became spirits after a heroic or tragic death[10], 4. ferocious spirits of persons who died due to social injustice, and 5. serpent spirits (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 3f.).[11] Throughout the year, *bhūta*s receive worship on family altars or shrines where they are installed. The presence of the *bhūta* is symbolised by his/her weapons, shield, bell, flywhisk, jewels, and lamps (Nambiar 2009: 22). Furthermore, the mask of the *bhūta* may be kept there as well as small *bhūta* figurines made of metal or painted jack wood as the one depicted in figure 1.[12]

[8] According to the census in 1971, 356 were counted (Nambiar 2009: 50), while Rai even suggested that there are 400 to 500 *bhūta*s (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1996: 4).

[9] For a list of the most popular *bhūta*s and their characteristics see Dusche (2016: 15).

[10] This *bhūta* category has to be clearly demarcated from the *preta* ("ghost") concept. The spirits of those who died a heroic death (e.g. suicide caused by social injustice) might become *bhūta*s. They are worshipped in shrines and return in the form of mediums to impart justice. In contrast, those who experience an untimely death (e.g. suicide without noble reason) might become *preta*s ("ghosts") whose presence is feared by the community (Carrin 2018: 109f.).

[11] Other categories would be *bhūta*s of human birth, mythic birth, or animal form (Carrin 2018: 109). These categories correspond largely to the three types of *bhūta* masks.

[12] The photos in figures 1 and 4 to 27 were taken by the author at the Ilkal House, DakshinaChitra museum, Muttukadu, India, in August 2014. All the depicted objects in figures 4 to 24 were made by Rajesh Acharya, Udupi, Tulunadu (Karnataka): Jumādi mask, breastplate and *aṇi* (fig. 4–10) in 2007; Pilichāmuṇḍi mask (fig. 11–14) in 2007–2008; Viṣṇumūrti mask (fig. 15–17) in 2006; Pañjurli mask (fig. 18–20) in 2007 and the Pañjurli figurine (fig. 21–24) in 2007. Figures 25–27 show an unidentified *bhūta* mask of an unknown artist from Tulunadu (Karnataka) which cannot be precisely dated. The information on those details is obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation. Figures 2 and 3 were taken by the author in Udupi, India, in 2017.

Fig. 1: Wooden figurine of a standing female *bhūta*, painted with different colours.

The most elaborate ritual of the *bhūta* cult is the annual worship ritual which is often conducted after the harvest and can last between three to seven days (Brückner 1993: 143ff.). It follows a basic structure with some minor variations in different regions or communities. There is a broad distinction

between cults which involve the entire village, called *bhūta kōla* or *bhūta nēma*, and cults of kinship groups or households named *bhūta agel* or *tambila*[13] (Claus 1975: 55). The following description focuses on the village cult but can also vary according to the specific ritual requirements of each cult. It has many similarities with other folk rituals, such as the Thira and Theyyam (also called Theyāṭṭam) ceremonies in Kerala[14] (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 13). The main protagonists in those rituals are the impersonator, who usually belongs to one amongst four communities of the Scheduled Castes, and the *pujāri* (ritual specialist) who conducts the rituals and offerings. He normally also belongs to a non-brahminical caste, for instance, the Pambada (Brückner 1993: 143).

On the day of the main ritual, the insignia, and figurines of the *bhūta* are brought in a procession to the place designated for the ritual performance and are installed on a temporary altar. Additionally, a *maṇḍala* (a ritual diagram) is drawn in front of this altar. The impersonator prepares himself for the ritual by doing his make-up. These preparations are accompanied by women, who sing the *pāḍḍana* (oral epic) of the *bhūta*.[15] Thereafter, the impersonator dances before and after tying the anklets (*gaggara*) and falls into trance several times. After worshipping the guardians of the eight directions and the village deity, the impersonator retreats to the changing room (Gowda 2005: 33f.). In some cases, there is an intermediate stage during which the *pujāri* carries attributes of the *bhūta*, such as sword and belt, and might also fall into trance (Brückner 1993: 145). During the second part of the *kōla* ritual, the impersonator wears the full costume with *aṇi* (a semi-circular backdrop tied to his back) and mask. The devotees as well as the impersonator invoke the spirit of the *bhūta*. Dances performed during this part of the ritual might last for hours. As soon as the impersonator gets possessed

[13] The term *agel* or *agelu* is derived from ancestor worship, while *tambila* refers to family deities (Brückner 1993: 144).

[14] Mutual influence also exists between the *bhūta* worship and Yakṣagāna, the semi-classical folk theatre of Karnataka (Aryan 2012: 111).

[15] In some cases, the *pāḍḍana* is recited by the impersonator himself before he does his make-up and wears the costume (Brückner 1993: 145).

by the *bhūta*, he functions as an oracle, settles disputes, and accepts offerings of the devotees in the place of the *bhūta*. Finally, *prasādam*[16] is distributed, the *bhūta* blesses the devotees through the impersonator and leaves again. At the end of the *kōla* the objects of worship are taken back to the shrine[17] or place where they are normally kept (Gowda 2005: 33f.).

The social function of the *bhūta* worship is of major importance to the community. On the one hand, the hierarchy[18] of the *bhūta*s reflects the stratified social system and even the administrative order of this region (Gowda 2005: 30). Furthermore, ritual functions within the *bhūta* ceremony make visible and justify the social order within the community (Dusche 2016: 21). On the other hand, those rituals have a regulatory function, too (Claus 1975: 56). The *bhūta* ritual itself creates a temporary inversion of social realities: the privilege to perform a certain *bhūta* is a hereditary right of the male members of selected families. They embody male as well as female *bhūta*s. The impersonators usually belong to Scheduled Castes, such as the Parava, Pambada, Kopala, Nalke, and Panara castes (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 13). While possessed by the *bhūta*, the impersonator is regarded as the entity itself and receives the worship of upper caste members, for instance, by wealthy landlords or Brahmin priests, even though in daily life he belongs to a lower caste. Furthermore, incidents of oppression and discrimination are also preserved and narrated through the *pāḍḍana*s. Therefore, the *bhūta* worship is the exception to the rule, which contributes to the stabilisation of the social system since injustice is addressed in a ritualistic world of illusion (Gowda 2005: 36). In addition, the *bhūta* worship unites the village population. All communities, even members of other religions, such as Jains and Muslims, participate in the ritual and have their respective tasks. *Bhūta* worship is not monopolised by a single community and is also not dominated by Brahmins. It is a joint affair which requires the participation of all castes and communities (Gowda 2005: 25).

[16] Food which is presented to a deity (in this case the *bhūta*) and is returned to the devotees as a material blessing.

[17] These shrines can be clearly distinguished from those of the brahmanical Hinduism. They are referred to by specialised local terms, such as *garōdi* (Carrin 2018: 115).

[18] In the brahmanical worldview, *bhūta*s are considered lower in status than puranic deities. Amid *bhūta*s, *rājandaiva*s who are perceived as warriors or nobility have the highest rank (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 113f.).

BHŪTA MASKS AND METAL OBJECTS

As mentioned before, metal *bhūta* masks, called *muga* ("face"), play an important role in *bhūta* worship, for example, as the mask which is worn by the impersonator (Brückner 1993: 145). They can also become objects of worship, being considered as *bhāṇḍāra* (ritual treasure of a deity). *Bhūta* masks are supposed to function as a vessel for the spirit of the *bhūta* during specific rituals. Therefore, only perfectly maintained masks can receive worship (Nambiar 2009: 50f.). According to the believers, the mask attracts the *bhūta*'s spirit so that the mask can have its specific power even outside the ritual. During the ritual *kōla* performances, *bhūta* masks can be used in three different ways: some masks are worn by the impersonator for a certain time of the *bhūta* ceremony. They cover the whole face including the facial make-up at that time. This is the common usage in the northern parts of Kerala (Brückner 2009: 57f.). In contrast, the masks in southern Karnataka are usually fixed on top of the *aṇi*. In rare cases, masks can be also carried in the hand of the impersonator, such as the boar mask of Jumādi's attendant Baṇṭe (Nambiar 2009: 51).[19]

Bhūta masks can be divided into three broad categories which overlap with the general categories of *bhūta*s described in the introduction. To the first category belong *bhūta* masks of totemistic origin, which are normally depicted with animal heads. The second category consists of masks of *bhūta*s derived from the brahmanical Hindu pantheon, usually shown with auspicious marks on their foreheads. The third category contains *bhūta* masks of humans whose spirits receive worship after their death (Rond 2010a: 9). Those categories overlap in practice, and each *bhūta* has a variety of forms and regional variations. Furthermore, the same mask can depict one or another *bhūta*, depending on the context or temple where it is kept (Nambiar 2009: 45). Facial stylisation and common ornamental details complicate a clear identification of many *bhūta*s based on the appearance of the masks (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 114). Other important metal objects are breastplates

[19] According to Brückner, carrying the mask instead of wearing it is a sign of the lower status of that *bhūta* (Brückner 1993: 149).

made of bronze or silver, called *mirèkaṭṭu* (Brückner 1993: 145).[20] The half-male half-female deity Jumādi is often represented in shrines by her breastplate alone. Breastplates are usually decorated with jewels and serpent motives. Small *bhūta* figurines are crafted with their weapons and insignia riding specific *vāhana*s ("vehicles"). As figurines, *bhūta*s of totemistic origin are often depicted in a human form with their totem animal as *vāhana*. Since *bhūta* masks and figurines are objects of folk art, they exhibit sometimes disproportionate body parts. The heads of the figurines might be too tall in comparison with the body, and limbs can be tubular. In general, the iconographic features of these objects vary from region to region (Aryan and Aryan: 115).

Bronze casting has a long tradition[21] in Karnataka. According to Subashini Aryan and B. N. Aryan, the oldest preserved *bhūta* mask can be dated to the 18th century (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 111). Brass and bronze are the most common material for *bhūta* masks, but there are also masks carved of wood, and in rare cases they are made of gold or silver. The masks are cast in high relief and are 30 to 40 cm high or even taller (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 114), and their weight comes up to 10 kg (Nambiar 2009: 50). Originally, bronze casting of *bhūta* masks was a seasonal occupation of people in rural areas who were otherwise mainly engaged in agriculture. The masks were created for the *bhūta kōla*s and sold at the festivals (Ranjan and Ranjan 2007: 378). Today, the main centres for bronze casting in Karnataka are Udupi and Puttur. *Bhūta* masks and figurines are sold in craft shops in Udupi, predominantly located close to the central Śrī Kṛṣṇa Maṭha (see fig. 2). The other objects for *bhūta* worship (wooden idols and metal objects) are created by the craftsmen community called *viśvakarma*. The creation of those objects for worship is considered as a holy task and the craftsmen refer to *śilpaśāstra*s[22] as basis for their work (Nambiar 2009: 51). The fact that the creation of a *bhūta* mask is even described in the *pāḍḍana* on the *bhūta* called Maisandaye underlines the huge importance of this work (Brückner 2009: 60–63).

[20] Besides masks (*muga*) and breastplates (*mirèkattu*), silver belts (voḍyanè), swords (*kaḍsalè*, *kartalè*), flywhisks made of yak-tails (*cāvala*, *cāmara*), bells (*maṇi*, *gaṇṭè*), and small figurines are also paraphernalia of the *bhūta*s (Brückner 1993: 145).

[21] The oldest bronze sculpture of this region can be dated to the 7th century CE (Rond 2010: 8).

[22] *Śilpaśāstra*s are manuals which discuss general rules for the creation of artworks, such as statues and paintings.

Fig. 2: *Bhūta* figurines on display in a handicraft shop in Udupi, India.

The traditional smiths use different methods to cast bronze objects for *bhūta* worship. Breastplates and flat facial masks can be cast with sand moulds. Small *bhūta* figurines are usually cast massive, which makes them heavy for their comparably small size. A relatively new method which came in usage for the past 40 years has been the embossing of metal *aṇi*s created from metal plates (Nambiar 2009: 52 & 54). The most complicated technique is the casting of hollow objects using the lost-wax technique, also known as *cire perdue*. The mask is formed out of wax on a fire-resistant base and is covered with different layers of a mixture of mud, sand, and cow dung. A hollow mould for the mask is created by heating the object, causing the melting of the wax which will run out of the openings (see fig. 3). The metal alloy, prepared for the mask, is poured into the mould. The metal solidifies after a few seconds and once it is cooled down, the cover of the

bronze mask is broken and removed. Finally, the mask is polished, and details are engraved manually (Plattner 2012 [video]: 08:50 min).

Fig. 3: Lost-wax technique in a traditional workshop in Udupi, India.

BHŪTA MASKS AND ACCESSORIES AT THE DAKSHINACHITRA MUSEUM

The DakshinaChitra heritage museum displays a collection of five *bhūta* masks and some other metal objects related to *bhūta* worship. The masks are kept in two rooms of the Ilkal House at the Karnataka section of the museum. They shall be described in the following passages. Four out of five masks at DakshinaChitra were created by the craftsman Rajesh T. Acharya who currently runs a family workshop and a showroom for metal craft in Udupi. He is an internationally acclaimed artist who has received awards, such as the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award, and participated in various festivals and craft and art exhibitions, such as "Wenn Masken tanzen" at the Museum Rietberg (Zurich/Switzerland).[23]

[23] Details obtained from the information board at the Ilkal House, DakshinaChitra, August 2014.

Jumādi/Dhūmāvatī

Jumādi is a ferocious form of the mother goddess Devī who is well known for her thirst which has to be satisfied with non-vegetarian offerings (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 53). She is connected to the brahmanical Hindu pantheon and is also known by the Sanskrit name Dhūmāvatī. The assumed relationship to the brahmanical Hindu gods supports her status as a *rājandaiva* (a *bhūta* of highest rank, visualised as a royal warrior); therefore, she is a protector deity of the higher castes (Nambiar 2009: 36). However, the following discussion will show that there are also striking differences to the brahmanical conception of Dhūmāvatī.[24] Jumādi is worshipped in all parts of Tulunadu but in different forms. Usually she is accompanied by Baṇṭe, a dumb assistant who entertains the assembled audience (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 53).[25]

Fig. 4: Jumādi *bhūta* costume, containing bell metal cast facial mask, metal breastplate, *aṇi,* waist-gear, shirt of red fabric, palm-leaf skirt, metal sword and flywhisk.

As reflected in the costume (fig. 4), through the facial mask with moustache and by the breastplate, Jumādi is considered as half-male and half-female and can also be addressed in both ways (Nambiar 2009: 36). According to the most popular legend, Jumādi is Pārvatī's child. Starting from her birth, her thirst could not be quenched. So, she approached Viṣṇu. After she gained his favour by returning the jewels which had been stolen by Brahmā, Viṣṇu tried to quench her thirst. But she could neither be satisfied with water nor with blood.

[24] In tantric traditions, Dhūmāvati belongs to the group of the ten Mahāvidyā's: Kālī, Tārā, Tripurasundarī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Chinnamastā, Bhairavī, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalāmukhī, Mātaṅgī, and Kamalā (Zeiler 2008: 43).

[25] Baṇṭe's characteristic mask is a boar mask which he carries in his hands. The Baṇṭe masks are similar to or sometimes identical with Pañjurli masks, such as the one described below, in the section on Pañjurli.

Finally, she was sent to earth where *bhūta* Babbu quenched her thirst with coconut water. After this incidence, people began to worship Jumādi and she feels satisfied by their offerings. In return, she fulfils wishes and maintains justice and harmony (Nambiar 2009: 36). Another legend suggests a different mythological origin of Jumādi and provides an explanation why she has a female body and a male head: Śiva and Pārvatī wanted to kill a demon called Dhūmāsura who could only be killed by someone who is male and female at the same time. At one point, when Pārvatī got hungry, Śiva could not provide her with enough food and finally told her to eat him. In this way, both merged into Jumādi and were able to kill the demon (Rond 2010a: 11). The legend partially resembles one of Dhūmāvatī's myths of origin[26]: according to this Sanskrit narrative, Satī was overcome by hunger, and when Śiva refused to provide food to her she consumed him. Śiva persuaded her to disgorge him and, in the end, cursed her to become a widow (Kinsley 1997: 181). A comparison between both myths shows that in the *bhūta* version the swallowing of Śiva was suggested by himself and has a desirable result which is lacking in the Sanskrit narrative. This might explain the positive connotations of this *bhūta.*

Fig. 5: Jumādi *bhūta* mask (bell metal cast facial mask).

[26] According to the other myth of origin, Dhūmāvati emerged from the smoke of Satī's burning body on her father's sacrificial fire (Kinsley 1997: 181).

The Jumādi mask in figure 5 is made of bell metal. The mask has been cast by Rajesh Acharya in Udupi in 2007.[27] The face shows typical features of *bhūta* masks: the eyes are almond-shaped and seem to be protruding out of the head. There is a hole in the centre of each eye so that the mask can be worn by the impersonator during a *bhūta kōla*. The mask has a sharp, triangular nose. The grinning mouth stretches from corner to corner of the mask and is slightly opened, displaying the teeth, as well as fangs at both upper corners. The eyebrows are curved and continue from one side to the other side of the face. These features create the ferocious expression of the mask. A typical feature of the Jumādi mask is the curved beard over the upper lip. Twirling beards are common for male as well as female *bhūta* masks (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 114). The Sanskritisation of Jumādi as Dhūmāvatī is also reflected in this mask. Amidst the forehead, there is a sun on top of a crescent moon which can be seen in figure 6. Sun and moon are *śaiva* symbols which link this *bhūta* to the Hindu god Śiva. The mask also has the traditional ornaments common to all *bhūta* masks. There is a collar-like extension under the chin. Furthermore, the ears are decorated with disc shaped earrings with a flower design. Those earrings are topped with a triple cobra head. The mask is adorned with a semi-circular *nāga* crown ("snake" crown), starting over the ears. There is a row of elongated ornaments close to the face, and on top of these, the crown is surmounted by seven cobra hoods with conical ornaments filling the gaps in between.

Fig. 6: Sun and moon on the forehead of the Jumādi mask in fig. 5.

[27] Information on the artist as well as place and date of purchase were obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation.

A comparison of the features of this mask with Sanskrit narratives reveals several similarities and differences to the most common iconographic descriptions: Dhūmāvatī is supposed to be ugly, with fearsome eyes, a long nose (resembling a crow), and grey, dishevelled hair as well as long, crooked, or missing teeth. Her body is decorated with ornaments made of snakes (Kinsley 1997: 176 & 180). This is in accordance with the facial features and ornaments of the *bhūta* mask. However, typical elements of Dhūmāvatī's description are missing, such as her appearance as an old widow who is riding a chariot without draught animal, the crow banner, and her attributes – the winnowing basket, skull bowl and garland, Yama's buffalo horn and spear (cf. Kinsley 1997: 176 & 180 and Zeiler 2008: 44). The following descriptions of other *bhūta* masks will demonstrate that the above-mentioned facial features and ornaments are common to many *bhūta* masks and cannot be exclusively assigned to Dhūmāvatī's iconography. However, the auspicious marks on her forehead which underline her connection to the brahmanical pantheon are even contradicting the textual descriptions of Dhūmāvatī as a widow.[28] Therefore, the above-mentioned similarities seem to be largely owed to general stylistic features of *bhūta* masks while typical iconographic elements of Dhūmāvatī are absent.

Breastplate (mirèkaṭṭu) and Backdrop (aṇi)

Jumādi's breastplate depicted in figure 7 has voluminous breasts with a flower design in centre and a round belly with a big navel, accentuated with a flower design. A triple cobra hood rises above each shoulder. The bodies of these thick snakes covered with a scurf design extend downwards, curve around the breasts and end below the navel. This snake decoration is a common iconographic feature of Jumādi breastplates. The upper body is decorated with three successive short and thin necklaces. The last one contains a half-moon shaped pendant in its centre. From that pendant, an ornamental band runs down to the navel, interrupted by a pad that resembles three petals, which connects both breasts. The breastplate is of special significance for

[28] David Kinsley assumes that there is another tradition, which is depicting Dhūmāvatī in a positive way, beautifully adorned with garlands and ornaments, giving joy and being attractive and seductive. This version of the goddess has been depicted in a small number of paintings (Kinsley 1997: 190).

Jumādi's worship. The presence of this goddess is often symbolised by a breastplate in the shrine, which can be the main object of veneration (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 114). The representation of Jumādi in the form of a breastplate with voluminous, round breasts again contradicts the Sanskrit description of Dhūmāvatī who is supposed to have dry, withered and hanging breasts (Kinsley 1997: 176).

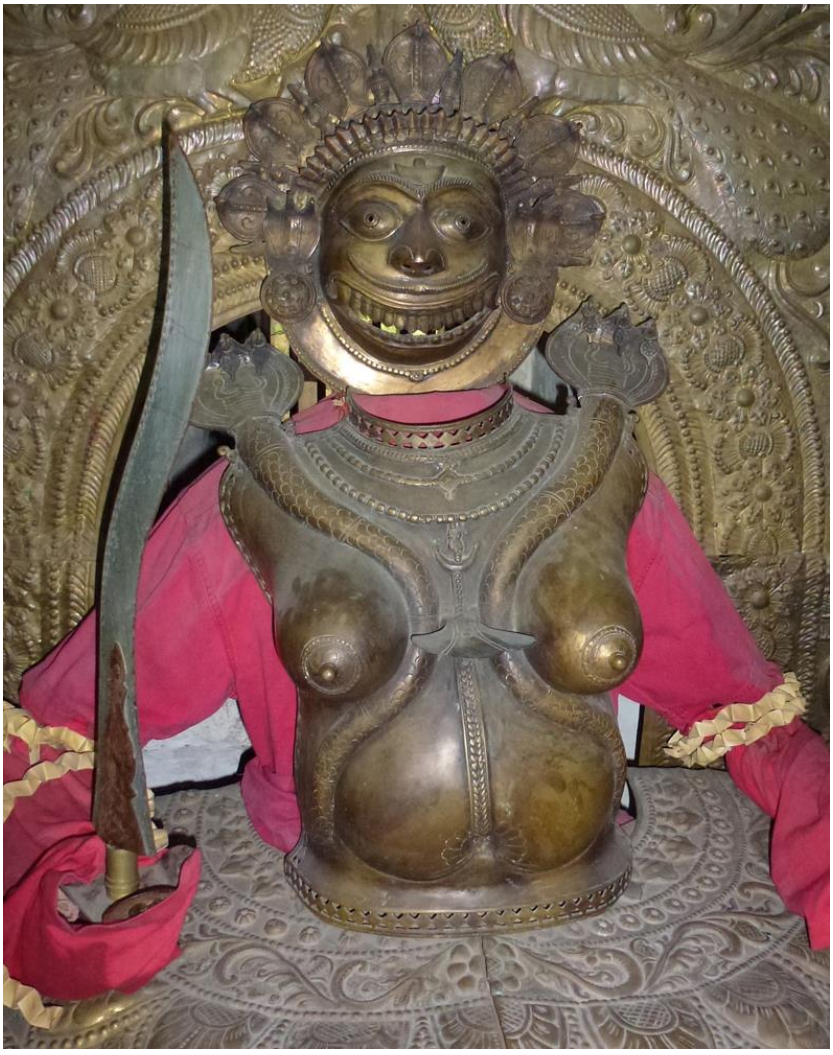

Fig. 7: Breastplate portion of the Jumādi costume.

The Jumādi set is completed by a metal backdrop, the *aṇi*. Originally, a soft, pliable and pale coloured palm frond was used to create the *aṇi* (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 13). *Aṇi*s made of metal are a recent innovation and have been in use only for the last 40 years (Nambiar 2009: 52 & 54). With their straight side and the curved top, they resemble the *prabhāvalī* of Cōḷa bronzes. Both lower corners of the *aṇi* are decorated with a similar depiction of the two-headed eagle Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa (fig. 8). Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa is perceived as the embodiment of the destructive energy of Viṣṇu in his incarnation as Nārasiṃha and is therefore used as a symbol of power. This motif is popular particularly in Karnataka, where it has been the royal emblem of the Wodeyar dynasty. It is frequently found as decoration on temples, and today it is the state symbol of Karnataka (Sastri n.d.). Floral bands run around the *aṇi*'s inner border. On top of them are two peacocks facing each other, heads turned backwards (fig. 9). Peacocks are common in Indian mythology (e.g. as *vāhana* of Murukaṉ) and are an auspicious symbol for rain. Two further broad bands with floral motifs are found below the upper border of the *aṇi*, separated by two smaller ornamental bands. In the centre on top of the *aṇi* is a *kīrtimukha*, shown in figure 10. *Kīrtimukha* literally means "face of glory"[29]. It is a ferocious mask found as a motif above openings, such as doors. According to the philosophy to treat equal with equal, it is supposed to ward off evil (Nambiar 2009: 33). The usage of decorative motifs of the Hindu mythology also shows the Sanskritisation of Jumādi/Dhūmāvatī, and the introduction of metal *aṇi*s mirrors the increasing integration of pan-Indian elements.

[29] Sanskrit: *kīrti* "fame", "glory"; *mukha* "face".

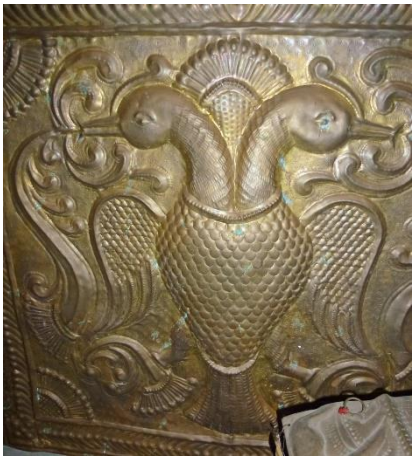

Fig. 8: Detail of Jumādi's *aṇi*: Gaṇḍabheruṇḍa.

Fig. 9: Detail of Jumādi's *aṇi*: peacock.

Fig. 10: Detail of Jumādi's *aṇi*: *kīrthimukha*.

At the DakshinaChitra museum, the Jumādi mask, breastplate (*mirèkaṭṭu*), and *aṇi* are presented with further accessories on a dummy. Jumādi's weapon, a curved sword, called *kaḍsalè* or *kartalè*, is in the right hand, and the left hand is holding a flywhisk, known as *cāvala* or *cāmara* (Brückner 1993: 145). Those attributes hint at important characteristics of Jumādi. For example, Michael Dusche interprets the swords which are carried by some *bhūta*s as a symbol of their juridical powers (Dusche 2016: 21). However, these attributes are again different from Dhūmāvatī's hand-attributes according to Sanskrit tradition (winnowing basket, skull bowl, buffalo horn, spear), which were mentioned above. The dummy figure wears an elaborate apron-like metal waist gear (*jakkelu aṇi*), decorated with floral motifs similar to the *aṇi* on top of a skirt made of palm leaves. Those objects along with the make-up of the impersonator and personal ornaments made of natural materials or metal are considered to form the complete manifestation of the *bhūta* called *iḍi rūpa* (Brückner 1993: 145). However, this *iḍi rūpa* of the *bhūta* Dhūmāvatī is independent of the iconography of the brahmanical Dhūmāvatī. The connection between the two might solely be owed to the similarities of their myths of origin. And this seems to be rather a stylistic device that promotes the acceptance of Jumādi/Dhūmāvatī as *rājandaiva*.

Pilichāmuṇḍi

The Tuḷu name Pilichāmuṇḍi[30] derives from the words *pili*, which means "tiger", and Chāmuṇḍi who is another ferocious form of Devī. This *bhūta* is most likely of totemistic origin. When villagers suffered from the attacks of tigers from the jungles that fed on their domestic animals, they might have tried to appease the tigers' spirits. But Pilichāmuṇḍi became also linked to the brahmanical Hindu pantheon by a common legend about her origin. According to this narration, Pilichāmuṇḍi was born from a bird's egg and gifted to Śiva and Pārvatī. Pārvatī made the tiger her pet and told her to look after the cattle. But Pilichāmuṇḍi could not resist killing one cow each day. When she finally killed even Śiva's favourite cow, she was sent to earth to protect the cattle and crops there (Rond 2010a: 10).

[30] Variations can be Pilichandi or Pilicaundi.

Fig. 11: Pilichāmuṇḍi *bhūta* mask (bell metal cast facial mask).

The Pilichāmuṇḍi mask (fig. 11) of the collection at DakshinaChitra was cast from bell metal by Rajesh Acharya in Udupi between 2007 and 2008.[31] The mask on top of an arch-shaped stand has an almost square-cut face. The lower part of the face forms a snout, but the centre is merged with a sharp human nose with accentuated nostrils. A prominent feature of the face is a twirling beard consisting of four strands of hair on each side, visible in figure 12. Therefore, Pilichāmuṇḍi is another example of a female *bhūta* depicted with beard. Under this beard stretches the mouth from one side of the face to the other. It is slightly opened so that the teeth and four sharp fangs are exposed. Those elements should underline the ferocious nature of the tiger

[31] Name of the artist, place and date of purchase were obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation.

bhūta, who needs to be satisfied with offerings and is said to kill people who commit errors during sacrifices[32] (Nambiar 2009: 40). The almond shaped eyes have round eyeballs engraved in their middle, but they contain no holes. Since the mask is fixed on a stand it is likely that it was either meant to be kept on an altar for worship or created as an art object from the beginning. Between the eyes, there is also the auspicious mark which shows the link to the brahmanical Hindu pantheon.

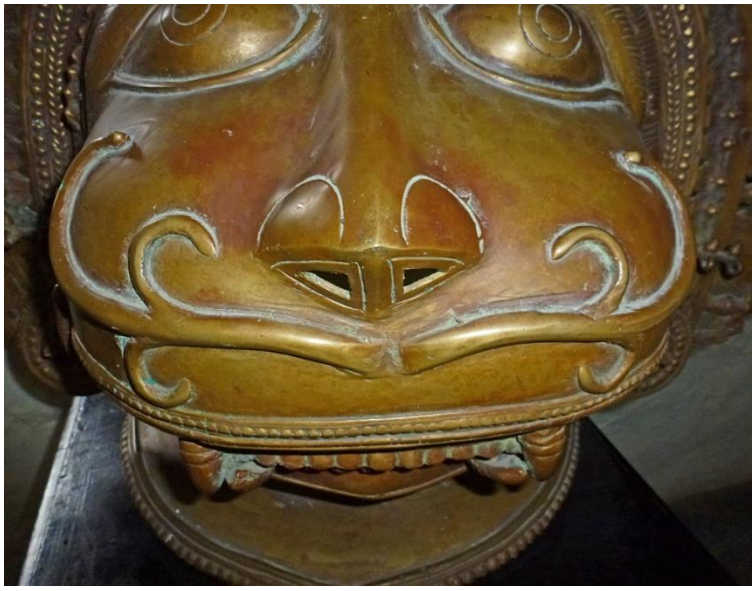

Fig. 12: Mouth and beard (Pilichāmuṇḍi mask in fig. 11).

The Pilichāmuṇḍi mask is decorated with a *nāga* crown and snake earrings. The semi-circular crown runs around the head. The bottom side has four ornamental bands of which the first two are part of the forehead. The lowest line might depict stylised cobra hoods. On top of all four bands is a row of small cobra hoods. The crown is finalised by 13 big cobra hoods alternated with conical ornaments having engraved small symbols of the sun and the moon, as depicted in figure 13.

[32] Even the impersonator has to look ferocious, and the face is painted with a tiger make-up, consisting of white stripes on a yellow foundation and red *nāma* on the forehead (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 53).

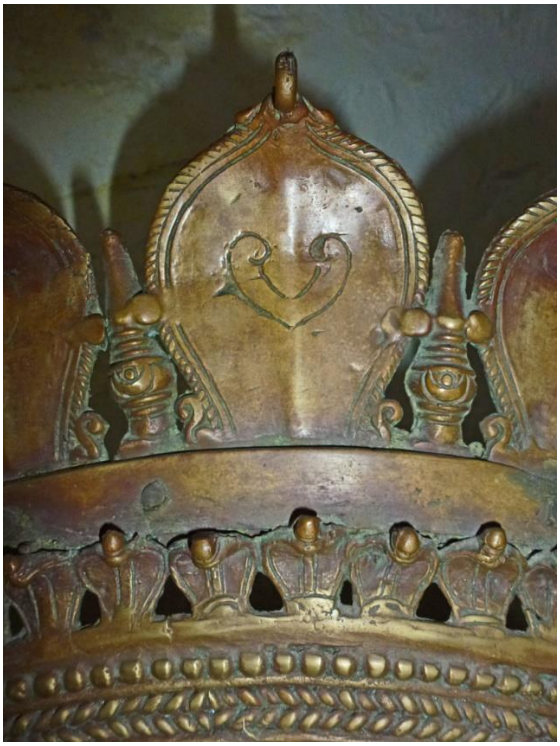

Fig. 13: Detail of the *nāga* crown (Pilichāmuṇḍi mask in fig. 11).

Interesting features are the disc-shaped ornaments below the ears shown in figure 14. Two joined human palms emerge from the centre of these ornaments, and there is also a human head visible above them. These discs are surmounted by triple cobra heads. Different Pilichāmuṇḍi masks as well as some Pañjurli[33] masks contain figures emerging from the earrings. There are two different figure combinations which can be found on these masks: man and elephant, or man and cattle. Considering the totemistic origin of the *bhūta* masks which contain these elements, the figures might stand for men and animals that should be protected in exchange for worship and offerings.

[33] This *bhūta* is described in the sections on the Pañjurli mask and figurine.

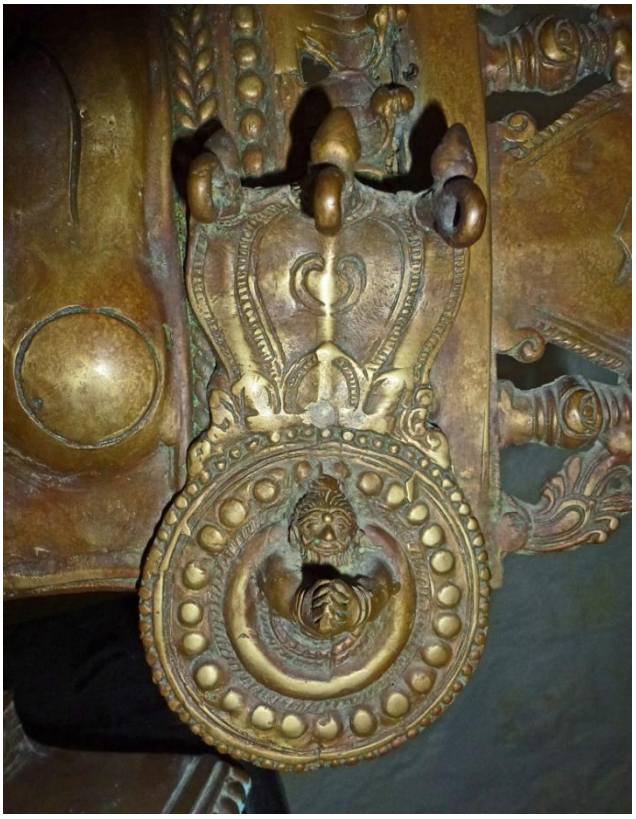

Fig. 14: Ear ornament with human figurine (Pilichāmuṇḍi mask in fig. 11).

A comparison with the previously discussed Jumādi/Dhūmāvatī mask shows that both are depicted with similar facial features, irrespective of the human or animal nature of the mask. Decorative elements, such as the snake ornaments are also common to both masks. Therefore, they seem to be general features of *bhūta* masks, and parallels to specific iconographies of brahmanical deities as the goddess Dhūmāvatī might be accidentally.

Viṣṇumūrti

The *bhūta* Viṣṇumurti has been imported from the Malayāḷam speaking communities. Accordingly, Viṣṇumūrti is popular in the southern parts of Tulunadu, which belong to Kerala or are close to the border (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 57f.). The name Viṣṇumūrti contains the Sanskrit word *mūrti* which is the

term for the different forms of a god. Viṣṇu is supposed to have ten different incarnations, called *daśāvātara*[34], which appear each time when the human world is close to destruction. The *avatāra* concept is a common tool to link local gods or heroes to puranic deities (Horstmann 1993a: 90).[35] In the *bhūta* cult, all incarnations are mentioned, but Viṣṇu's fourth incarnation, Nārasiṁha, is the most prominent. In his incarnation as Nārasiṁha, Viṣṇu took the form of a man-lion to defeat the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu and save his son Prahlāda. Different episodes of this legend are also reflected in the *bhūta kōla* through narration in songs and dances. For example, Nārasiṁha breaking out of a pillar is denoted by a common trance or the remedy for killing the demon by firewalking and the impersonator falling into the burning charcoal. Nārasiṁha's ferocious nature is depicted by the impersonator through red face make-up with black stripes (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 57f.).

Fig. 15: Viṣṇumūrti *bhūta* mask (bell metal cast facial mask).

[34] The *daśāvātaras*: Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nārasiṁha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Kalki. According to different traditions, the list can vary and for example include Buddha instead of Balarāma (Horstmann 1993a: 91).

[35] Monika Horstmann mentions three different developments which lead to the incorporation of local deities into brahmanical Hinduism through the *avatāra* concept: the adaptation of a local or tribal deity, the deification of deceased heroes as well as the deification of charismatic, living personalities (Horstmann 1993a: 103).

As a *bhūta* mask, Viṣṇumūrti is depicted as a lion which is supposed to be Nārasiṃha, the man-lion. Even though the mask has an animal face, Viṣṇumūrti is not categorised as a *bhūta* of totemistic origin but rather as a *bhūta* derived from the Hindu pantheon since all legends are found in Sanskrit texts. The Viṣṇumūrti *bhūta* mask at DakshinaChitra, depicted in figure 15, is made of brass, almost entirely coloured golden. It was created in 2006, also by the artist Rajesh Acharya in Udupi.[36] The face of the Viṣṇumūrti mask is dominated by a huge, protruding, oval snout. The open mouth is extending from one end of the snout to the other. It is open so that the sharp, knife-like teeth are displayed. On top of the mouth is the typical twirling moustache, consisting of one big and two small strands of hair. In the top view of the mask in figure 16, the big, pear-shaped nose of the mask, decorated with an engraved nose ring beneath it, is clearly visible. A prominent feature of this mask is a pair of huge, round eyes, almost popping out of the face. In contrast to the golden colour of the rest of the mask, they have a dark brass colour. The eyes are subdivided into concentric circles and there is no hole in their middle. Since the eyes are facing upward they would not have provided any sight from inside the mask in any way. If the mask should be worn in front of the face, the performer could probably see through the open mouth of the mask. The curved eyebrows of the mask consist of engraved hair which is separated by an auspicious mark in centre. This conical ornament ending in a point is an allusion of the *vaiṣṇava tilaka* which denotes the *vaiṣṇava* origin of the *bhūta*. It distinguishes masks with a *vaiṣṇava* affiliation, such as the Viṣṇumūrti mask, from those masks which are of *śaiva* origin. The *vaiṣṇava* influence in this region and the respective visual codes can be traced back to the philosopher Madhvācārya who established the Udupi Śrī Kṛṣṇa Maṭha in the 13th century (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 113). Furthermore, the eyebrows are enhanced by a line on the upper side and small dots on top of it. These ornaments can also be found on *vaiṣṇava* idols or as face make-up of devotees, especially of the ISKCON[37] denomination.

[36] Name of the artist, place and date of purchase were obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation.

[37] The abbreviation ISKCON stands for "International Society for Krishna Consciousness", popularly known as "Hare Krishna Movement".

Fig. 16: Top view of the Viṣṇumūrti mask in fig. 15.

The huge *nāga* crown of this mask resembles a mane around the face. As visible in figure 17, it contains more decorative details than the previously described *bhūta* crowns. The first of the four ornamental bands consists of stylised snakes, followed by a row of small cobra hoods. The next bands contain flowers and ornaments respectively. The crown is topped by eleven cobra hoods, separated by conical ornaments. Further elements of the Viṣṇumūrti mask are the disc-shaped ear ornaments with a flower design, which are surmounted by a triple cobra hood and an ornamented collar with a zigzag border similar to those of the Jumādi mask. Viṣṇumūrti and Pilichāmuṇḍi are both depicted as big cats and the masks have similar facial features (except for the eyes). However, the auspicious mark on the Viṣṇumūrti mask's forehead and its crown are more elaborate than in the case of the Pilichāmuṇḍi mask. Maybe this can be explained by Viṣṇumūrti's strong association with puranic deities.

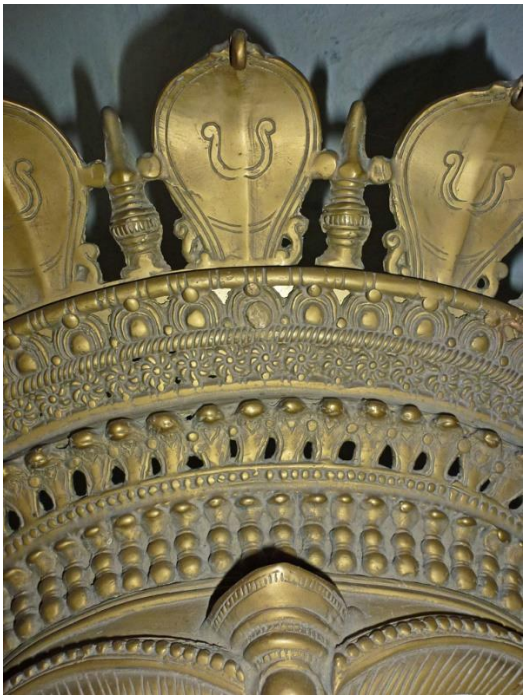

Fig. 17: Detail of Viṣṇumūrti's *nāga* crown (Viṣṇumūrti mask in fig. 15).

Pañjurli

Pañjurli[38], the boar *bhūta*, is popular all over Tulunadu. He is considered as one of the most powerful *bhūta*s and is worshipped as a family deity as well as in public shrines. Pañjurli has many different local forms, male as well as female, and respectively, there are numerous local legends and *pāḍḍanas* which have been collected in the so-called "Pañjurli epic" (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 52). Pañjurli is another *bhūta* of totemistic origin. In ancient times, wild boars that destroyed the crops might have inspired villagers to start worshipping Pañjurli to appease the spirits of the boars. Until today, members of the Scheduled Tribe Malekudia worship a clan deity in the form of a boar. Therefore, Pañjurli might have been originally a tribal deity (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 115). A further indication for Pañjurli's non-brahminical

[38] The name is derived from *pañj* which is the Tuḷu word for "boar".

origin is the fact that he receives non-vegetarian offerings (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 53). As many other popular *bhūta*s, Pañjurli was connected to the brahmanical Hindu pantheon posterior. According to a legend, Pārvatī had a boar (or even several) as a pet. Since the boar Pañjurli frequently destroyed the garden Śiva got angry and killed him. On Pārvatī's request, he was brought back to life and sent to earth to protect truth and righteousness (Rond 2010a: 10). He is considered to be the protector of *dharma* who does not tolerate wrong behaviour of his devotees. Another legend connects Pañjurli to Viṣṇu, as he is supposed to be born from the sweat of Viṣṇu. Even though Pañjurli is also depicted as a boar, he should not be confused with Viṣṇu's Varāha *avatāra*. Both are totally different in origin and function (Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya 1984: 58).[39] This differentiates Pañjurli as a *bhūta* of totemistic origin from the previously discussed Viṣṇumūrti who is identified with Viṣṇu's Narasiṃha *avatāra* and thus directly connected to pan-Indian, puranic deities.

Fig. 18: Pañjurli *bhūta* mask (bell metal cast facial mask).

[39] Nevertheless, Brückner assumes that Viṣṇu's Varāha *avatāra* roots in beliefs similar to the legends around Pañjurli's origin (Brückner 1993: 146).

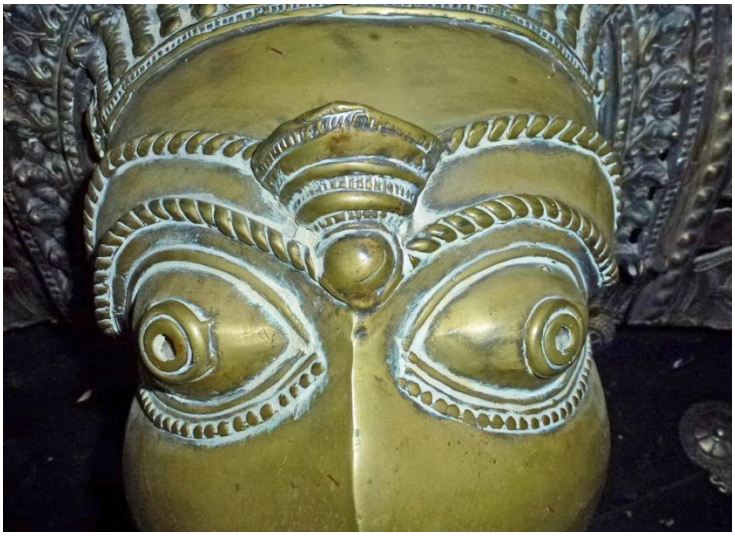

Fig. 19: Eyes of the Pañjurli mask (fig. 18).

There are simple as well as highly ornate boar masks, and Pañjurli figurines are crafted of different materials as brass or bronze. The Pañjurli mask at the DakshinaChitra museum shown in figure 18 is a brass mask, also created by Rajesh Acharya in 2007.[40] The long, cone-shaped boar's face ends in a trunk, which is decorated with two small ornamental bands around the rostral plate. The almond shaped eyes are slightly protruding and have a hole in the centre of the pupil, as it is visible in figure 19. Therefore, it would be possible for an impersonator to see through the eyes while wearing this mask. The Pañjurli mask has the same auspicious mark on the forehead as the Viṣṇumūrti mask. Despite the totemistic origin, a connection of Pañjurli to the brahmanical Hindu pantheon, in this case probably to Viṣṇu, is visualised. The eyebrows are curved and their design resembles a rope. There is a second parallel band with the inverted design which starts in line with the upper border of the mark on the forehead. The Pañjurli mask has a typical three-stepped *nāga* crown, visible in figure 20. The first row consists of stylised snake hoods. The second row displays a rare motif. It consists of small snakes, depicted fully, with their hoods erected and the rest of the snake curled in s-

[40] Name of the artist and date of purchase were obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation.

shape. The crown is topped by eleven cobra hoods with engraved details on a small band with dots. In the gaps between the cobra hoods are spear-like ornaments.

Fig. 20: Detail of Pañjurli's *nāga* crown (Pañjurli mask in fig. 18).

In contrast to some masks which are mainly used on altars to denote the presence of the *bhūta*, the Pañjurli mask plays an important role during the *kōla* ritual. The impersonator wears it for certain parts of the ritual along with a circular *aṇi* and a palm-leaf skirt. The mask can be attached to the top of the *aṇi* or fixed in front of the face. A unique method is applied by an impersonator at the Pañjurli *nēma*[41] at Padangady (Dakshina Kannada district): he holds the lower border of the mask with his mouth while the top is attached to his crown (Bhat 2015 [video]: 19:11 min). A notable feature of the boar mask is its multifunctionality. It can become a 'vessel' for different *bhūta*s according to the context and manner of its usage: for example, the boar masks can represent the *bhūta* Baṇṭe who is Jumādi's assistant. In this case, the mask will get carried in front of the body to denote the lower status (Brückner 1993: 149).

[41] Here, the usage of the term *nēma* is ambiguous because the description explains that the ritual happened at a family house. Usually the term *nēma* is reserved for community cults, while rituals on family level are called *bhūta agel* or *tambala*. It is possible that the terms are nowadays used interchangeably by the practitioners.

Pañjurli Figurine

The small *bhūta* figurines which are used as objects of worship in *bhūta* shrines or during the *bhūta kōla* are normally cast solid. *Bhūta* figurines usually hold the *bhuta*'s insignias, such as weapons, bell, flowers, and flywhisk in their hands. Gods derived from the brahmanical Hindu pantheon and those *bhūta*s of human origin are often shown on a *vāhana* (Nambiar 2009: 51). This way of depiction is even adopted for *bhūta*s of totemistic origin. They are portrayed as human warriors, and their totemistic origin can only be deduced from the respective animal that they use as *vāhana*, e.g. the boar for Pañjurli. Through this way of depiction as warriors, they undergo a change of status and become equivalent to the *rājandaiva*s (Brückner 2009: 59).[42] There are different types of Pañjurli figurines, which exist of course for other *bhūta*s as well. Pañjurli can be depicted simply as a boar (top row in fig. 2). There are female Pañjurlis with human faces and a breastplate, Pañjurlis with a boar's face riding a horse or boar, and male Pañjurlis with human faces riding a boar (fig. 2, bottom)[43]. The male Pañjurli riding a boar has his origin most probably at the Malarbar coast of Kerala and is today the most widespread type. From this region, male Pañjurli figures from the 16th or 17th century have been preserved (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 115f.).[44] Today, this type of *bhūta* figurines is also cast in Karnataka.

[42] These iconographic features of a royal warrior are also reflected at some festivals in a ritual in which the impersonator is pulled on a wooden *vāhana* around the temple (Brückner 1993: 146).
[43] *Bhūta*s derived from the brahmanical Hindu pantheon or of human origin also get depicted as standing figure with a human face and human body, dressed with a *dhoti.* Their faces are often similar to the mask of that *bhūta* (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 116).
[44] A comparison to the oldest dated *bhūta* mask which is from the 18th century (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 111) suggests that *bhūta* figurines might have been integrated into the *bhūta* worship prior to the masks.

Fig. 21: Pañjurli *bhūta* figurine made of brass.

The Pañjurli figurine at the DakshinaChitra museum shown in figure 21 is a male Pañjurli riding a boar. Although this type is supposed to have its origin in Kerala, this Pañjurli was cast by Rajesh Acharya in Udupi in 2007,[45] which shows that this type of Pañjurli is now also popular in Karnataka. The massive brass figurine is fixed on a rectangular pedestal. It consists of four parts: the boar mount, the male figure astride the boar, the *aṇi* fixed on his back, and the apron like waist-gear. The most prominent feature of the boar (see fig. 22) is its huge head with unnaturally big eyes. The mouth is open, showing two tusks. A vertical ornamental band divides the boar's head into two halves. The boar is decorated with a collar containing bells around its neck and is wearing anklets on all four legs, which are similar to those used by human impersonators.

Fig. 22: Boar mount of the Pañjurli figurine in fig. 21.

[45] Name of the artist, place and date of purchase were obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation.

Fig. 23: Close-up of the human cavalier (Pañjurli *bhūta* figurine in fig. 21).

The human figure (see fig. 23) has a male face with a moustache and a round mark on his forehead. On the sides of the face, there are snake earrings, consisting of huge discs with a flower design, topped by a second smaller disc close to the face and a stylised cobra hood. In contrast to the previously described *bhūta* masks, the crown does not contain any snakes but is a semi-circular, openwork crown. Further ornaments of the human cavalier are a v-shaped short necklace, ending on the chest, and a long necklace, ending below the chest, which resembles the boar's collar. The man is holding a sword in the right hand and a bell in the left hand. He is wearing a round skirt-plate (*jakkelu aṇi*) which is decorated with huge metal pearls and a flower design at the border. The back of the figure is covered by the *aṇi* which has straight sides extending to the double height of the person, ending in a curved top. As decoration, there is one line of small and one line of big pearls, and the *aṇi*'s border has a zigzag design. As also seen on Jumādi's *aṇi*, there is a *kīrthimukha* in the centre of the top, shown in figure 24. Above this *kīrthimukha* is a crescent moon with a pinnacle in the centre. This pinnacle might suggest a support for an umbrella, which is a royal symbol (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 115). Therefore, it can be assumed that this Pañjurli has the status of a *rājandaiva.*

Fig. 24: Kīrthimukha of the Pañjurli figurine in fig. 21.

Unidentified Bhūta Mask

The last mask of the collection at the DakshinaChitra museum (fig. 25) has not been assigned to any particular *bhūta* yet. The mask is made of copper and it is 59.7 cm high, 50.8 cm wide and 27.9 cm deep. Considering the patina and the slightly damaged condition of the mask, it seems to be older than the other masks of the collection, but the exact period of crafting and the creator of the mask are unknown. The *bhūta* mask has an almost rectangular shape with both cheeks slightly bent inwards and a round chin. The open mouth with rectangular teeth and fangs (see fig. 26) faces downwards and extends from one side of the mask to the other. A long tongue with parallel sides and a round tip is protruding downwards. The lower half of the face is

dominated by a big drop-shaped nose with a moustache beneath, which consists of three parallel lines forming two curves. The almond shaped eyes are near the sides of the face, and they neither contain an engraved pupil nor a hole for vision. Therefore, the mask might have been kept on a *bhūta* altar or was fixed on top of an *aṇi,* instead of being worn in front of the face during a *kōla* ceremony. Instead of eyebrows, three v-shaped ornamental bands run down the forehead and end on the nose. There is also a longish *tilaka* mark in the centre of the forehead. The mask is decorated with a basket-shaped *nāga* crown. The lower end consists of two ornamental bands topped by two rows of cobra hoods. The cobra hoods of the first row are slightly smaller than the ones of the second row which are in the latter case also separated by ornaments. All cobra hoods are slightly bent forward and the tips of the lower row are fixed on the back of the upper row. Both rows are very fragile. The earrings, shown in figure 27, are each consisting of two discs surmounted by a single cobra hood. Both discs have a spare ornamental decoration, the lower one being slightly bigger than the upper one. The ornaments follow the side-line of the face and crown. There is also a round collar around the neck, ending below the earrings. It is enclosed with a zigzag border. The design of the earrings with the two discs, the basket-shaped crown, the v-shaped bands on the face as well as the collar resemble the decorative elements of a Pañjurli figurine rather than other *bhūta* masks. While all previously discussed *bhūta* masks have been cast by the same artist, this mask appears to belong to a different artistic tradition or regional school.

Fig. 25: Unidentified *bhūta* mask (copper facial mask).

Fig. 26: Mouth and tongue of the unidentified bhūta mask in fig. 25.

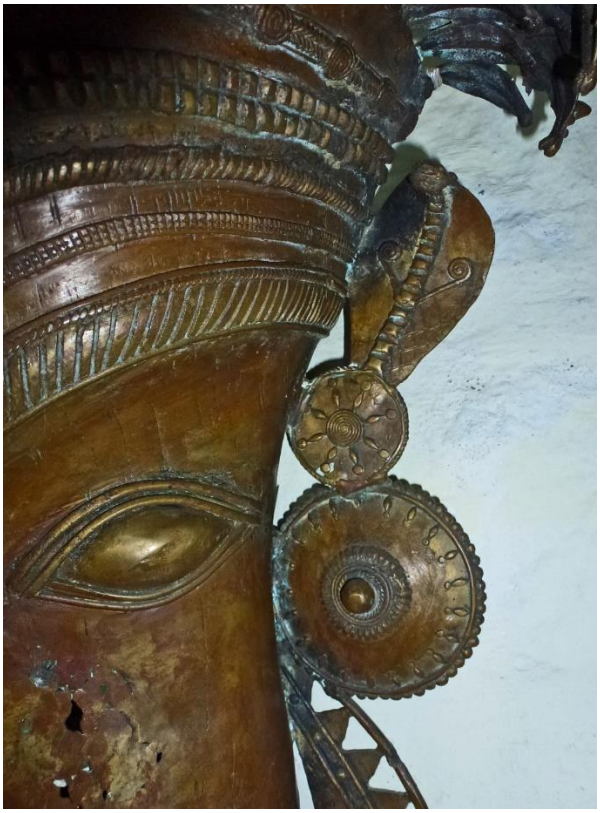

Fig. 27: Ear ornaments with two discs (unidentified *bhūta* mask in fig. 25).

As already mentioned, this *bhūta* mask is slightly damaged. On the left side (from the onlooker's point of view) is a hole near the end of the moustache. The metal has been ripped off at several parts of the right cheek and there is a big hole in the centre under the crown. Additionally, the centre of the *nāga* crown's border is bent downwards. Since this *bhūta* mask has no explicit iconographic elements, such as an overall animal shape or special ornaments, it is difficult to identify the depicted *bhūta*. Female *bhūta*s are often depicted with tongues sticking out of the face, resembling the tongue sticking out of the face of the pan-Indian Hindu goddess Kālī (Aryan and Aryan 2012: 114). Above all,

there are also forms of male *bhūta*s portrayed with a protruding tongue, so we cannot even safely assume that this mask depicts a female *bhūta*.[46]

CONCLUSION

After examining these *bhūta* masks the question arises how masks meant to be ritual objects, either to be worshipped on altars or used in *kōla* ceremonies, find their way into museum collections. Traditionally, objects meant for worship (figurines and masks) undergo a final ritual at the end of the manufacturing process during which the spirit of the deity is infused into the mask (*prāṅa pratiṣṭha*). The craftsman performs a ritual, in some cases accompanied by the sacrifice of a cock. Then he engraves the eyeballs of the mask. Therefore, the ceremony is also referred to as "opening of the eyes". Finally, the mask undergoes a ritual ablution, called *abhiṣeka*, with coconut water or palm juice. After this ritual, the mask is said to contain the power of the depicted *bhūta* and is supposed to effect people who come in contact with the mask (i.e. carriers fall into trance, for example). Without this ritual, masks and figurines are considered lifeless (Nambiar 2009: 55). If the masks have not been ordered by a temple, they might never undergo this ritual and can therefore be easily sold as art objects. The Pañjurli figurine as well as the *bhūta* masks, except for the unidentified one at the DakshinaChitra museum, have all been purchased from the artist Rajesh Acharya directly. It seems likely that they were never meant for worship in a temple and have not undergone the *prāṅa pratiṣṭha* ceremony. As already mentioned, the Pilichāmuṇḍi mask even lacks holes in the middle of the eyeballs and therefore could not be worn in any ritual. Hence, these masks exemplify the visual objects of the *bhūta* cult and represent the artistic quality of these objects in the museum.

According to the *bhūta* belief system, if an image or mask gets damaged, it loses its spiritual qualities and cannot be worshipped any more. Ideally, *bhūta* masks would be used in *bhūta kōla*s only once and kept and worshipped in shrines thereafter. Since these masks are very costly they are

[46] See Beltz (2009b: 71). Figure 7 shows the female *bhūta* Jumādi with a protruding tongue. The mask has great similarities to the mask of the male *bhūta* Baṇṭe (fig. 9), who is also depicted with his tongue sticking out (Beltz 2009b: 71). Baṇṭe normally functions as Jumādi assistant and can also be represented by a boar mask (Brückner 1993: 149).

sometimes reused and repaired to extend their lifespan. Damage, as for example seen on the unidentified *bhūta* mask in figure 25, can happen easily, especially to fragile elements of the objects. The metal alloy used as material for the masks is only resistant in thick parts, while thin parts break or rub off easily. Theoretically, damaged masks must be removed from the shrines and discharged into the sea. In practice, they might end only in temple ponds or get sold to collectors or art dealers. Maybe the unidentified *bhūta* mask has been sold after its ritual usage to the "Oriental Arts & Crafts Exporters" where it was purchased for the DakshinaChitra museum.[47] However, a threat to *bhūta* masks kept in shrines comes from their recent popularity. After the European exhibitions "Wenn Masken tanzen" at the Museum Rietberg in 2009 and "Autres Maîtres de l'Inde" at the Musée du Quai Branly in 2010, the art community has become aware of this artistic tradition. Therefore, masks in good condition have been robbed from the shrines to sell them for high prizes (Rond 2010b: 1f.).

Another consideration is whether it is meaningful to designate a specific "*bhūta* style" displayed in all metal objects related to *bhūta* worship. Elements as accentuated, bulging eyes, the mouth stretching from one side of the face to the other, often displaying teeth, and moustaches for male and female *bhūtas* as well as snake ornaments are typical features of most masks and *bhūta* figurines. Therefore, they cannot be considered as iconographic markers of a specific *bhūta*. As the comparison between the Viṣṇumurti mask and Pilichāmuṇḍi mask has shown, they are both resembling wild cats with minor differences in the ornamentation. Similarly, a boar mask is used for the popular *bhūta* Pañjurli, but also for Jumādi's assistant Baṇṭe. Thus, the initially quoted differentiation between three categories for *bhūta* masks seems to be based solely on their mythological origin and not on their visual appearance.[48] Although the mythology of the *bhūta* is the most important criteria for the attribution of the mask, it is not depicted in the form of individual iconographic elements. Coming back to the comparison of the animal masks, the formation of an art-historical categorisation of masks based on,

[47] Information obtained from the accession-catalogue of DakshinaChitra/the Madras Craft Foundation.

[48] Masks of *bhūta*s with totemistic origin, *bhūta*s derived from the brahmanical Hindu pantheon, and *bhūta* masks of humans whose spirit received worship after their death (Rond 2010a: 9).

for example, specific animal characteristics shared by a group of masks would be one option. However, those types are not congruent with the three categories deduced from the mythological origin since Pilichāmuṇḍi is counted as a *bhūta* of totemistic origin, while Viṣṇumurti is linked to Viṣṇu's Nārasiṃha *avatāra* and counted as *bhūta* derived from the brahmanical Hindu pantheon. While categories based on the appearance are appealing for an art historical study, they seem to be irrelevant for practitioners since no anthropological study has ever mentioned such a differentiation based on the visual appearance of masks.

There are also notable stylistic differences in the execution of masks and figurines of different periods, as we have seen while comparing the contemporary *bhūta* masks by Rajesh Acharya with the unidentified mask. The creation of *bhūta* masks is still executed by hereditary craftsmen who cast the masks according to their family traditions. These traditions might determine the work process and iconographic and stylistic features (Nambiar 2009: 52). Furthermore, there are stylistic differences between the *bhūta* figurines from Northern Kerala and the Karnataka part of Tulunadu. Therefore, it seems likely that variations in the appearance of *bhūta* masks are also owed to different regional traditions.

Even though they most probably exist for several hundred years, metal objects, such as masks and figurines, are a later addition to the *bhūta* cult. The other visual art material related to the *bhūta* cult, for instance, facial make-up, costumes and the original *aṇi*s are made of natural materials such as palm leaves. They are typical examples of tribal or other local traditions, while the metal objects show the influence of the brahmanical Hindu tradition on *bhūta* worship. They frequently incorporate iconographic elements of the Hindu mythology too, such as marks on the forehead and decorative motifs, for example, the *kīrtimukha*. Therefore, the special aesthetic of the *bhūta* masks and figurines was achieved by the combination of typical iconographic elements of the *bhūta* cult and the influences of brahmanical Hinduism. This leads to the question whether *bhūta* masks and figurines might also indirectly provide information on the relationship between local traditions and brahmanical Hinduism in Tulunadu. In his mode as a *rajandaiva* Pañjurli is depicted as a royal warrior who is seated on a boar *vāhana*. Here, seemingly, the boar face or mask of the *bhūta* has been transformed into a

boar mount. As described earlier, Brückner interprets this configuration of the iconography as a positive change of status achieved by using iconographic markers of brahmanical deities. However, an alternative reading might also be possible. For instance, during the struggle for religious superiority between brahmanical Hinduism and Buddhism in Orissa in the 11th century, the depiction of brahmanical Hindu deities as *vāhana*[49] was a visual device to annihilate the deity which serves as a mount (Donaldson 2001: 424).[50] Could Pañjurli as *rajandaiva* on a boar *vāhana* in this regard be also considered as an attempt of brahmanical Hinduism to dominate the local belief? But an answer to this question would require a multidisciplinary study of *bhūta* iconography in comparison to brahmanical Hindu iconography from the same region as well as an investigation of the differing ritual functions of *bhūta* masks and figurines under consideration of textual material such as *pāḍḍana*s or temple inscriptions.

[49] For example, Viṣṇu as well as his *vāhana* Garuḍa and a lion are depicted as *vāhana*s of Buddhist deities (Donaldson 2001: 424).

[50] As Gudrun Bühnemann explained in her lecture "Crushed Underfoot: Patterns of Subjugation and Extreme Dependency in the Buddhist Iconography of Nepal" at Bonn on 13th January 2020, the same principle can be observed in Nepal. Some Buddhist deities use brahmanical Hindu gods as *vāhana*s as a sign of superiority in an environment of religious rivalry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aryan, Subashini and Aryan, B. N. 2012. "Metal *Bhūta* Masks", in: George Michell (ed.): *Kanara a Land Apart – The Artistic Heritage of Coastal Karnataka*. Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 111–119.

Beltz, Johannes 2009a. "Einleitung", in: Johannes Beltz (ed.): *Wenn Masken tanzen – Rituelles Theater und Bronzekunst aus Südwestindien*. Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 7–14.

Beltz, Johannes 2009b. "Katalog", in: Johannes Beltz (ed.): *Wenn Masken tanzen – Rituelles Theater und Bronzekunst aus Südwestindien*. Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 65–93.

Bhat, Nagaraj 2015. "Panjurli yenne Boolya & Nema, Mujoor", on: *YouTube* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT3hO5CAeNk>, accessed on August 19, 2020).

Brückner, Heidrun 1993. "Zu Kult und Ikonografie von Tulu-Volksgottheiten an der Westküste Südindiens", in: Cornelia Mallebrein (ed.): *Die anderen Götter: Volks- und Stammesbronzen aus Indien.* Köln: Edition Braus, 142–151.

Brückner, Heidrun 2009. "Der Gesang der Büffelgottheit", in: Johannes Beltz (ed.): *Wenn Masken tanzen – Rituelles Theater und Bronzekunst aus Südwestindien*. Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 57–64.

Carrin, Marine 2018. "When Fearful Ghosts are Married in Tulunadu", in: *IQAS (International Quarterly for Asian Studies)* 49 (3–4): 103–122.

Claus, Peter J. 1975. "The Siri Myth and Ritual: A Mass Possession Cult of South India", in: *Ethnology* 14 (1): 47–58.

DakshinaChitra 2014. (<http://www.dakshinachitra.net>, accessed January 22, 2020).

Donaldson, Thomas Eugene 2001. *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa, Vol. 1 (Text).* New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Abhinav Publications.

Dusche, Michael 2016. "Bhutas and Daivas as Justices in Tulu Nadu: Implications for the Philosophy of Law", in: *Südasien-Chronik – South Asia Chronical* 6: 11–36.

Gowda, K. Chinnappa 2005. “Bhuta Worship: Structure and Dynamics”, in: *The Mask and the Message*. Mangalore: Mangalagothri.

Heck, Thomas F. 1999. “Introduction”, in: Thomas F. Heck (ed.): *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1–6.

Horstmann, Monika 1993a. “Die gestalthaften Manifestationen (*avatāra)* von Gott Viṣṇu”, in: Cornelia Mallebrein (ed.): *Die anderen Götter. Volks- und Stammesbronzen aus Indien.* Köln: Edition Braus, 90–102.

Horstmann, Monika 1993b. “Hochkulturliche Rezeption lokaler Gottheiten nach dem *avatāra*-Konzept: Ausgewählte Typen”, in: Cornelia Mallebrein (ed.): *Die anderen Götter. Volks- und Stammesbronzen aus Indien.* Köln: Edition Braus, 103–111.

Kinsley, David 1997. *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Miettinen, Jukka O. 2008. *Dance Images in Temples of Mainland Southeast Asia.* Helsinki: Theater Academy.

Nambiar, Balan 2009. “Ritual, Mythos und Kunsthandwerk”, in: Johannes Beltz (ed.): *Wenn Masken tanzen – Rituelles Theater und Bronzekunst aus Südwestindien*. Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 19–55.

Nithesh, Kuntady [n.d.]. “About Project”, on: *Bhūta Worship*.
(<https://bhootaradhane.ruthumana.com/en/about-project_en/>, accessed on January 12, 2020).

Plattner, Jean Claude 2012. “Cast a Bhuta Bronze Mask [with Rajesh Acharya at the Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 2011]”.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzqUSn4gDQk>, accessed on October 5, 2020).

Rai, B. A. Viveka 1996. “Epics in the Oral Genre System of Tulunadu”, in: *Oral Tradition* 11 (1): 163–172.

Ranjan, M. P. and Aditi Ranjan 2007. *Crafts of India – Handmade in India*. New Delhi: Council of Handicraft Development Corporations, Crafts of India Series.

Rond, Frédéric 2010a. “Masques Bhuta”, on: *Détours des Mondes*. (<https://detoursdesmondes.typepad.com/files/bhuta.pdf>, accessed January 29, 2020).

Rond, Frédéric 2010b. “Bhūta Masks, from shrines to Pedestals”, on: *Indian Heritage*. (<http://www.indianheritage.biz/files/Bhuta-FSTP-EN.pdf>, accessed January 29, 2020).

Sastri, S. Srikanta [n.d.]. “Evolution of Gaṇḍabhēruṇḍa”, on: *Dr. S. Srikanta Sastri*. (<https://www.srikanta-sastri.org/evolution-of-the-ganda-bherunda/4576393366>, accessed on December 12, 2019).

Seebass, Tilman 1991. “Iconography and Dance Research”, in: *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 23: 33–51. DOI: 10.2307/768395.

Singh, Eswar K R 2010. “A Quiet 500th Year for ‘Gandaberunda’”, on: *Deccan Herald* (October 22, 2010). (<https://www.deccanherald.com/content/106688/a-quiet-500th-year-gandaberunda.html>, accessed October 5, 2020).

Smith, A. William 1999. “Dance Iconography: Traditions, Techniques, and Trends”, in: Thomas F. Heck (ed.): *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 113–131.

Upadhyaya, Susheela P. and Uliyar Padmanabha Upadhyaya 1984. *Bhūta Worship, Aspects of a Ritualistic Theatre*. Udupi: The Regional Resources Center for Performing Arts.

Zeiler, Xenia 2011: *Die Göttin Dhumavati: Vom tantrischen Ursprung zur Gottheit eines Stadtviertels von Benares*. Saarbrücken: Verlag deutscher Hochschulschriften.

Votes, Voters and Voter Lists: The Electoral Rolls in Barak Valley, Assam

Shabnam Surita

Abstract: Electoral rolls, or voter lists, as they are popularly called, are an integral part of the democratic setup of the Indian state. Along with their role in the electoral process, these lists have surfaced in the politics of Assam time and again. Especially since the 1970s, claims of non-citizens becoming enlisted voters, incorrect voter lists and the phenomenon of a 'clean' voter list have dominated electoral politics in Assam. The institutional acknowledgement of these issues culminated in the Assam Accord of 1985, establishing the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a political party founded with the goal of 'cleaning up' the electoral rolls 'polluted with foreign nationals'. Moreover, the Assam Agitation, between 1979 and 1985, changed the public discourse on the validity of electoral rolls and turned the rolls into a major focus of political contestation; this resulted in new terms of citizenship being set. However, following this shift, a prolonged era of politicisation of these rolls continued which has lasted to this day. Recently, discussions around the electoral rolls have come to popular and academic attention in light of the updating of the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act. With the updating of the Register, the goal was to achieve a fair register of voters (or citizens) without outsiders. On the other hand, the Act seeks to modify the notion of Indian citizenship with respect to specific religious identities, thereby legitimising exclusion. As of now, both the processes remain on functionally unclear and stagnant grounds, but the process of using electoral rolls as a tool for both electoral gain and the organised exclusion of a section of the population continues to haunt popular perceptions. In this article, I analyse the major junctures at which the rolls have been politicised in the course of time and also put forward current popular perceptions of these rolls among the voters in Barak Valley, the predominantly Bengali speaking region in Assam.

INTRODUCTION

After a day of fieldwork in December 2017 in Silchar, Assam, I took an auto rickshaw back home. Casually chatting with the driver, I found out that, like many of the locals in the town, he was not particularly happy with the ongoing procedure of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC hereafter).

Not only was his unhappiness quite blatant, but when asked about the validity of the process, the driver nonchalantly responded, 'if people like us, the voters, become marked as illegals from tomorrow, then shouldn't the ones enjoying power because of our votes also be marked illegal?'[1] This statement from a lower-middle-class Bengali speaker from Assam points to the prolonged history of the electoral rolls, or voter lists, as they are colloquially known, and their interconnection to politics in Assam. This statement made me think about what he possibly meant; my mind wandered about what the people actually thought of these lists and I wondered if they indeed thought in similar terms. A second question also sprung to me: why were these lists so important to them? Was there something I was missing? My doctoral research on the making of Bengali identity among the young Bengali speakers in Barak Valley[2] in Assam had brought me to Silchar – a town where I grew up and which is now the centre of my research. Silchar also happens to be the largest town in Barak Valley and the capital of the Cachar district.

Cut to 2019, when a village near Assam's border town Karimganj, not too far from Silchar – two hours by road – burned down. I read about the incident on the Internet version of a local Bengali daily newspaper that I frequently turn to. Surprisingly, instead of mourning the massive loss of property and most of all, roofs over their heads, the victims of the fire reported sighs of relief that they had saved copies of the voter lists from the fire, with their names or those of their relatives. This meant that even though they were now practically homeless and had a life of great uncertainty awaiting them, what 'saved' them, according to the victims, was the fact that they possessed documentary evidence of their relationship with the state. Even though they were 'homeless', they were not without proven paper ties to a 'homeland'. Voter lists (officially: electoral rolls) have of late occupied an immensely important position in the everyday lives of the residents of Assam. An inquiry about the possible origin of this hyper-prioritisation of these lists reveals a

[1] All Bengali quotes – from written sources and her interviews – are translated by the author.
[2] The three districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj taken together are known as Barak Valley, as the river Barak and its tributaries cross the region. This region is populated by Bengali speakers, who form the ethnolinguistic majority, along with members of other ethnolinguistic groups such as the Assamese, Meitei, Bishnupriya Manipuris, Nagas, Nepalis and so on.

continued process of politicisation, exclusion and inclusion which has led to the writing of this article.[3]

Since the late 1970s, inclusion in the electoral rolls has become an important symbol of citizenship in Assam, both at the state and district level, as well as being a tool to control the narrative of Indian citizenship in Northeast India. In more recent times, the issue of 'cleaning' the electoral rolls and deleting the names of suspected illegals began to be discussed when, in 2014, the Supreme Court of India ordered the Government of Assam to update the 1951 NRC, in response to a petition filed by Sarbananda Sonowal, who became the Chief Minister of Assam in the same year. Beginning in 2014, the year of the general elections, and continuing even after the subsequent elections in 2019, the electoral rolls assumed great importance in the politics of Assam, in a manner uncannily reminiscent of the state's most politically turbulent times between 1979 and 1985.

In this article, I identify the major, decisive junctures of this politicisation process and try to understand what popular perceptions of the electoral rolls have developed in Barak Valley. In doing so, I explore the relationship between the state, its citizens, their identity and the electoral rolls through responses gathered during my visits to Silchar and Karimganj between 2017 and 2019.[4] I do not delve into the role of the voter lists in politics outside of Barak Valley, the main region of my doctoral research, as that would be beyond my expertise. Moreover, there is ample literature on the politics of identity and electoral politics in Assam, emphasising Brahmaputra Valley and other regions apart from Barak Valley (Misra 1999; Baruah 1986 & 1999; Dutta 2012; Hussain 2000; Srikanth 2000; Taher 1993; Weiner 1978 & 1983). However, the same cannot be said for Barak Valley. Until recently, this linguistically and religiously heterogeneous region within the Bengali language

[3] This article is a result of several field visits I made to Barak Valley in Assam in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and telephone interviews with respondents in 2020. While trying to access literature on the electoral rolls in Assam, I realised that there was very little to analyse. For that reason, the article might sometimes feel rather packed with information, but that is unavoidable owing to the lacuna in scholarly work on the subject. I am deeply indebted to Chitrankana Bhowmik and Soumili Dev for their constant support in helping organise my field visits, accessing respondents and providing additional relevant material.

[4] I do not have any responses from Hailkandi, the third major town of Barak Valley, as I had planned to gather these in 2020; the Covid-19 pandemic thwarted my plans, like those of many others.

continuum has remained underexplored in Bengal related academic pursuits. Barak Valley is also important for research as the Bengalis today form an ethnolinguistic minority in a region that is part of the Bengali language continuum. Despite this, in pursuit of my doctoral research, I experienced the absence of any comparable volume of scholarly work on Barak Valley and its relationship with the electoral rolls. With this article, I intend to add the case of Barak Valley to ongoing academic discussions on electoral rolls and voters' and citizens' relationship with them and in turn, to initiate a discourse on the politics of voting in that region.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of conducting elections in India for the resident population goes back to the early 1900s. In the colonial period, the notion of popular representation was obviously very different to today. Prior to the Morley Minto Reforms of 1909, the native population's interests in policy matters received no institutional recognition. However, after India's independence in 1947, the then Constituent Assembly urged that elections be conducted according to universal adult franchise. After India formally became a republic in 1950, the first general elections in the country took place in the years 1951–1952. The country's first ever Election Commission was set up with Sukumar Sen, a civil servant, as its only member. The scale and mood of the first elections can be guessed from Shabdita Pareek's piece, where she describes India's first general elections as nothing less 'than a festival' (Pareek 2016). Nonetheless, one of the major hindrances faced by the organisers of this 'festival' was found to be the electoral rolls (ibid.). Although more than 173 million people out of the then population of 360 million were registered on the electoral roll, there were still inconsistencies. Issues and hurdles were expected to arise, but the problems caused by the largely illiterate electorate, which led to incorrectly enumerated voters and faulty or missing documentation, were rampant then and continue to be so even today, almost seventy years after.

ELECTORAL ROLLS AND VOICES FROM THE GROUND

It is government elections – at the local, federal and central levels – that safeguard the democratic foundations of the Indian Republic. First and foremost, deciding who can take part in these elections is the primary function of the electoral rolls or voter lists. Second, in many cases, the electoral rolls are considered to be valid documentary proof of citizenship in India, though this practice is dwindling in the context of Assam, as I will discuss further later in the article. Third, these rolls also serve as the primary document to prove that an individual's place of ordinary residence is within the Indian Territory. Responsibility to create and publish the electoral rolls falls centrally on the Election Commission of India,[5] on the respective federal state election commissions and chief electoral officers.

On the ground level, the task of verifying and updating these rolls falls on employees of the state governments. Quite often, the enumerators in the case of Assam are teachers employed by several primary and secondary schools, and their role as an enumerator in the process of updating the electoral list is a temporary one. This information was provided to me by Mr. Arijit Aditya, a renowned journalist from Silchar, who has written extensively on local issues based on years of field observations. This trend was also noted by many of the other respondents, who reported either being interviewed by one such school teacher as part of the voter list updating process, having served as an enumerator themselves (if they held the job of a school teacher) or knowing someone who did. The process of counting eligible voters and subsequently updating the voter lists continues to be completed with a door-to-door physical verification approach. Even though, in recent years, the publication of the draft and final versions of the rolls, as well as the filing of claims and objections, can be accessed online, a large part of the process of being placed on these rolls still depends on the enumerators' visits to the houses listed under a particular constituency.

Additionally, for a brief period in 2015, the Election Commission launched the nationwide '[…] National Electoral Roll Purification and Authentication Programme (NERPAP) from March to August with the objective of producing

[5] See the website of the Election Commission of India (https://eci.gov.in/electoral-roll/electoral-roll/) for more information on the function of the electoral rolls.

an errorless, authenticated electoral roll. […] During this programme, the electors were offered extended facilities: web services for online registration or the chance to call "1950", a toll–free number at state call centres, to discover the status of their applications for enrolment, correct/modify or delete entries in/from electoral roll or make other related queries' (Election Commission of India 2016: 10). However, at the lowest rung of the pyramid of India's electoral set-up lie the huge numbers of enumerators or, as they are officially known, Booth Level Officers (BLOs hereafter), who perform the initial tasks of voter registration and list updating on the ground.

But, according to one of my interviewees, a female insurance employee who also served as the presiding polling officer in 2014 and in 2019 in Barak Valley, the BLOs do not seem to perform their tasks properly. Speaking from her personal experience, she mentions one of her acquaintances who passed away in 2010 or 2011. Although several appeals have been made to the BLOs with ample documentary evidence proving the aforementioned person's death, his name remained on the voter lists in 2014 and 2019. In this context, she asks, 'how can one accept documents which are based on the voter lists? Given the current resurgence of the importance of voter lists and their role in proving citizenship for people in Barak Valley, how can one accept such faulty voter lists as the basis of facts?'

I also spoke to a number of other people in Silchar and Karimganj who had, in varying capacities, fulfilled election duties during the elections in 2014 and 2019. In contrast to the first respondent, who rejects the infallibility of the voter lists, a male interviewee from Silchar has a different view. According to him, having served as a presiding officer in the elections in 2019, mistakes in voter lists have been rectified over time, though the lists are not yet 100% flawless. On the other hand, he points out that, in his experience, the voter card[6] contains more mistakes than the voter list on average. Another respondent, a man from Karimganj, mentions that on the two occasions that he served as an election officer, he 'found that the electoral rolls are almost

[6] The voter identity card issued by the Election Commission of India is an identity document for adult citizens of India who have reached the age of 18. It also serves as proof of identity for Indian citizens to cast their ballot in the elections. It provides proof of the holder's general identity, address and age and is also known as the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC).

correct'. However, whatever the accuracy of the electoral rolls, they are considered to be of utmost importance to the voting process by all the respondents. Another interviewee from Karimganj went on to call the voter list the 'most important document in a democratic country', in order to emphasise the centrality of a foolproof voter list in the journey of an Indian citizen.

Although everyone I spoke to agrees that mistakes remain in electoral rolls to various degrees, election workers disagree on what kinds of mistakes are commonly found in the voter lists. Four of the seven election workers I spoke to in detail mentioned mistakes with given names and surnames as common occurrences. Others pointed out mistakes regarding the holding number, address, birthdate and so on. But there are other methods of verifying a voter's identity apart from the voter list and the voter identity card (which eases the polling process). For instance, an app was used to verify the identity of voters who, on the day of voting, did not carry with them any photographic identity documents as approved by the Election Commission. Furthermore, one election worker I spoke to mentioned the presence of representatives of the contesting political parties inside the polling station; they also help the polling officer identify the voter. Another election worker who served during elections in a rural centre shared his experiences with me: 'Nowadays, each voter has an EPIC [Electoral Photo Identity Card]. One of the polling officers in a polling station is entrusted with the responsibility to match the photo with the electoral roll. Further, VDPs [Village Defence Party, i.e., a volunteer group comprised of local people] are deployed in the polling stations, to assist polling officers in case of identification of voters who do not have EPIC. *Gāobuṛhās* [heads of the villages] are also attached officially in a polling station for such help.'

As attested by the election workers, there are multiple ways and people involved in ensuring the voters' identity. They need to be either recognised by local political representatives, offer evidence through accepted paper trails such as the voter ID, Aadhaar (national ID), passport, driving license, etc., or be recognised by the Booth App that the polling staff use to verify the voters' identity. Why, in this case, despite so many layers of verification and an emphasis on corrected electoral lists, are the names of so called 'foreigners' and 'illegal migrants' included in the electoral rolls? Why are the electoral rolls still not free from 'doubtful voters'? Before getting into who these

doubtful voters are, I will discuss how the abovementioned problem is interrelated with inherent features of bureaucracy in the region, and how inclusion and exclusion in these rolls are often manufactured by manufacturing identities on paper.

MAKING IT INTO THE ELECTORAL ROLLS: BUREAUCRACY AND DOCUMENTS

To understand the status of documents, such as the voter lists, in society and also the relationship between the citizens and these documents, postcolonial India's obsession with bureaucracy and documents in the context of its democratic practice needs to be discussed. This feature has been aptly captured by the Dutch photographer Jan Banning. Over the years, mainly from 2008 to 2016, Banning shot various scenes from Indian bureaucratic scenarios and presented them in his book and travelling exhibition cheekily titled *Bureaucratics* (Banning 2008). This brilliant photo series not only captures the bureaucrat in his or her natural habitat, but also displays the central role of papers, in different shapes, sizes or colours, amidst a certain chaos within the hierarchies.

One of the photographs which caught my eye shows a bureaucratic officer at his work desk, with his hands folded on top of a file on his table.[7] On the wall, there is a window, between the broken panes of which one can see peeking the curious eyes of men who seem to be subjects of the state, separated from the papers by a wall and a few iron bars. This photograph seems to be a representation of the distance that subjects must keep from the state, so as to be 'in order'. Along with other determining factors, class plays a major role in determining how far from the state citizens find themselves to be located in contemporary India. In the case of Barak Valley in Assam, I observed the vitality of this aspect of bureaucracy, the extent of absolute dependency on documents and its relationship to socioeconomic identity. But let us first understand what the purpose of a document is under the citizenship regime, and thus automatically in identity making. Kamal Sadiq, in his book *Paper Citizens,* explores the link between documents and citizenship, and says:

[7] I refer here to the photo titled "India, bureaucracy, Bihar, 2003. India-21/2003" on Jan Banning's website (<https://www.janbanning.com/gallery/bureaucratics/>).

> [D]ocuments have come to embody individual identity in developing countries. The documentation of individual identity is part of a larger infrastructure of citizenship meant to identify members of the polity, thus creating a "citizenship from above" – from the state.
> (Sadiq 2009: 102)

Entering the polity at the correct stage in life is a crucial point that needs attention. Beginning with the birth certificate, there are a number of documents which are used by the bureaucratic state to distinguish its citizens from foreigners. Depending on the possession of these distinguishing documents, a person can or cannot be deemed a citizen of that state. The earliest document that ensures sufficient negotiating potential over a person's claim to citizenship is the certificate of birth. In South Asia, irrespective of the entry and exit of the colonial rulers, the practice of legally registering the birth of a child has been a practice marred with considerable discrepancies. Even though Article 7 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ascribes every child the right to be registered at birth (UNICEF 2005: 1), the birth certificate is important but not mandatory in contemporary India to enter the state's infrastructure, e.g., the education (Sadiq 2009: 80) or health system. This is compounded by the commonplace practice of giving birth at home, away from the clutches of the state medical agencies, and the fact that low rates of literacy and awareness do not do much to ensure the mass registration of births.

This complex has come to influence, in turn, the discrepant nature of the electoral rolls (as pointed out by the electoral workers I interviewed), as discrepancies often occur in probable dates and places of birth, along with the names of children. For instance, during my field interactions, many interviewees admitted, almost with nonchalance, to having discrepant information on their birth certificates, which offers further documentary support for the plausibility of false information being recorded in the electoral rolls. Some of them also mentioned that rectifying these mistakes was 'too troublesome' for them. On the other hand, forged documents such as ration cards or birth certificates are easily available in the illegal markets in India, making illegal access to citizenship documents not too difficult (Sadiq 2009: 122ff.) for outsiders, but a matter of mere economic power.

In my field interviews, one of the two recent immigrants[8] from Bangladesh to Assam whom I interviewed admitted to possessing a ration card issued by the Government of India even before she had entered India. She came to Silchar[9] and found work as a domestic help[10]. It was not hard for her to get on the voter list or open a bank account as she had already 'bought' a ration card. On further pressing, she revealed that there is a network comprising illegal immigrants residing in Assam, local middlemen and aspiring immigrants on the other side of the barbed fences. The local middlemen do not only include low level players such as unorganised labourers in the border area, border security force personnel or local police; they even include bigger political leaders, too. I found that local authorities were not only studiously ignoring illegal immigration, but also carefully controlling the kind of people to be admitted to India. Most members of these networks, as I observed, were Hindus, and the level of entry within the citizenship system is decided depending on the amount of cash an aspiring immigrant is willing to spend.

I visited a certain neighbourhood in Silchar (*Dāsˈpārā* to other locals) known to be built by so called illegally immigrated Bangladeshis, but nobody I spoke to admitted to this claim on my visit. These 'ghettoes' of supposed immigrants – whose residents are mostly lower caste Hindus – are, according to the last elections, strong political voter strongholds of the Hindu right. One of my respondents described how he was actively involved in campaigning in these neighbourhoods during the 2014 elections, urging people to vote in favour of a particular party that promised them legitimate residence, if not citizenship, on the basis of their religion as an after effect of the newly passed CAA. This respondent refuses to be named, but associates himself with a

[8] The person in question is 52 years old, female, Hindu, belonging to the Kaibarta caste. Due to ethical considerations and the lack of her consent to using the name, I have withheld it. However, she consented to my using the information she provided, given the fact that it could not be used to jeopardise her position.

[9] The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) was proposed at the Lok Sabha, the Indian lower house, in 2016, to amend the existing Citizenship of India Act, 1955, which was later passed in the Parliament, after which it came to be known as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019. This act decrees that persons from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh residing in India, belonging to Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, Christian, Parsi or Sikh communities are not to be treated as illegal migrants. For the complete act see: http://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2019/214646.pdf.

[10] She did not mention when, as that would further jeopardise her claim over Indian citizenship in the light of the new Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016.

prominent Hindu organisation in the region, which hints at the complicities of formal organisations and institutions in maintaining these chains of clientelism. In this context of existing immigrant networks, Sadiq looks at similar scenarios and defines how 'documentary citizenship' comes to be (Sadiq 2009: 102), something that I see happening in Barak Valley too.

Along with the certificate of birth, another aspect of the documentary regime in India that is often overlooked is the privilege that comes with being able to provide documentary evidence of an address of residence. Growing up in Silchar in the 1990s, I remember our house not having a specific house number. Because of the relatively small nature of the town, it was assumed that houses did not need a number and could be identified just by the name of the street (which was also not very long). It was much later, in the mid to late 2000s, that the local municipality started assigning numbers to houses for ease of access. However, the fact that we lived in an unnumbered house on a street did not impact our postal packages; we got our passports and documents with mostly correct particulars and people could find their way to our house for dinner with no difficulty. But that was primarily because our neighbourhood was small and our family privileged, well known and socioeconomically elite.

This is not the case for hundreds and thousands of people who have been living in Barak Valley for years in both unnumbered and numbered houses, but perhaps still feeling the lack of the privilege that comes with possessing documentary evidence of their residential address. Not only this: for a large section of the population living in a region that is highly prone to floods and torrential rain, preserving documents is the last concern for many. I remember as a child how both our household helps – Nirmalāmāsi and Tarumāsi – used to pack all their belongings every monsoon and come to live with us in our house along with their families. Needless to say, their makeshift houses made out of tarpaulin and/or tin sheets would invariably wash away with the rains. These same two people took an active part in discussions over whom to vote for during the elections, and I vividly remember my Communist grandmother sketching a hammer and sickle trying very hard to win their votes in favour of her favourite candidate. Nirmalāmāsi and Tarumāsi were voters, like many others in Barak Valley, with a place of 'ordinary residence' that is washed away by the floods every time, although they possess an offi-

cial address on their respective voter cards. Voters such as them would frequently register a neighbour's house or a local grocery store as the permanent contact address, as there would be less risk of a *pākā* house being torn down by the floods. This trend has also been noted by Tarangini Sriraman in her study on the slums in New Delhi (Sriraman 2018: 166). These, by contrast, were legal citizens of India with inadequate means to possess a durable place of ordinary residence, not recent illegal entrants to India from Bangladesh.

There is no doubt that illegal immigrants from Bangladesh to Barak Valley have permeated into the local polity; all the parties involved have a vested interest in their gaining membership within the polity. However, through my observations, I discovered that, as most of my respondents pointed out, Bengali speaking Hindus crossed over the borders to India illegally more frequently than Muslims. The added bait of the 'Hindu Rāṣṭra' (common "Hindu nation"), as propagated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP hereafter), which is today in power on the local, state and national level, has contributed further to this. The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 has also added fuel to the fire and will be discussed later. In my understanding, separating the illegal immigration factor from a particular religious group could be a means of attempting to manipulate the demographic character of the electorate. This not only disturbs the natural communal balance but creates a clientelist political order at the micro level. The current political party in power plays a big role in maintaining this status quo (Gillan 2002).

However, at the macro level, the state finds it increasingly harder to distinguish between legal citizens and illegal citizens because of the way geopolitical borders run between India and Bangladesh (Sadiq 2009: 108). On the other hand, we need to ask: Why do a group of people willingly migrate to another country? What is the motive or attraction behind this trend? Is it merely the attraction of membership in a supposedly 'better state'? Or is it the lucrative chance of being counted as a member of the majority, the Hindus, in India and not a minority in Bangladesh? Scholars have often attributed the large-scale illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India to a variety of reasons. Some blame it on the search for socioeconomic advancement (Lin and Paul 1995: 4–6) or even environmental causes (Ahmed 1996: 142–144; Swain 1996: 189–204). However, the question that this paper asks focuses on the result of this complex conundrum on the psyche of the common man.

What is the function of the electoral rolls in maintaining this status quo? What is it that makes these rolls such an integral part of everyday life in Assam even for those who are completely new to this polity? A look back at Assam's history of voting and classification of the electorate is thus pertinent at this juncture.

MANIPULATING THE ELECTORATE OF ASSAM

After 1947, residents of Assam participated in the first general elections of 1951–52 and witnessed its first federal elections, also in 1952. It was also in 1951 that the first NRC was compiled. The purpose of the first ever NRC was to outline the number of households that fell within the newly formed contours of the sovereign Indian state. It was also its purpose to count the residents to ease preparations for the first census, also conducted in 1951, and the subsequent electoral rolls. During the enumeration process for the first census, problems of categorising the population vis à vis identity politics started to show, marking the beginning of Assam's relationship with politics of language, religion and numbers for decades to come.

The 1951 Census of India, which was hailed as highly fantastical by many[11] owing to its grossly faulty estimates of Bengali and Assamese speakers in Assam, has its own story to tell in this regard. It must be noted here that the 1951 Census had considerable influence on its successors, doing very little to depoliticise the recording of data, and often obfuscating the public narrative on the number and proportion of Bengalis (and *de facto*, illegal Bengalis).

[11] Mr R. B. Vaghaiwalla, the Superintendent of census operations in Assam in 1951, noted gross violations of procedure and the tweaking of findings owing to the falsification of linguistic records in his report. This report by Mr Vaghaiwalla has since been discussed by many scholars, notably in the works of Sujit Choudhury (1986, 2006 & 2007), Nabanipa Bhattacharjee (2013a & 2013b), Sukalpa Bhattacharjee (2006) and Anindita Dasgupta (2008).

Table 1: Census data and linguistic demography of Assam (in percentage) (Source: Government of India 1957: 413f).

Language	1931	1951
Assamese	31.4	56.7
Bengali	26.8	16.5
Hindi	7.6	3.8
Others	11.1	6.47

Table 1 shows the recorded percentages of Assamese, Bengali and Hindi speakers along with speakers of other languages in Assam, as per the 1931 and 1951 Census data. It is well known that Bengalis migrated to Assam, albeit in varying numbers, as a consequence of the impending Partition and bouts of communal violence. The fact that the Partition of 1947 simply pushed this movement of Bengalis to higher rates is also noted by some scholars, such as K. M. Sharma. He persuasively notes the possible justification for this movement:

> Between 1931 and partition, there was a further influx of Muslims from East Bengal and this was specially encouraged by the ministry headed by Saadulla which administered Assam after 1937. At the time of partition we would also expect a steep rise in the Bengali speaking part of the population as lakhs of Hindus from East Pakistan fled into various parts of India, especially into West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. During and after the 1950 riots (Hindu-Muslim) all over India and East Pakistan, there was another steep rise in the refugee influx. (Sharma 1980: 1322)

Despite there being many logical explanations for the increasing number of Bengali speakers in Assam, the numbers mentioned in the 1951 Census tell a different story. Apart from Assamese speakers, no other linguistic group grew in size. The cause given in the Census of 1951 itself is that certain groups of people had been coerced into declaring Assamese as their mother tongue, even though their knowledge of the Assamese language was inadequate (Government of India 1957: 414). Not only did the number of Assamese speakers include a lot of Bengali Muslims who declared Assamese as their

mother tongue, faced by threats to their livelihood and existence from the aggressive Assamese nationalism (Weiner 1978: 124), but some linguistic groups who did not agree to being listed as Assamese speakers were also recorded as speaking the language. The then state government categorically refused to acknowledge the smaller languages that existed in Assam and manoeuvred them into forming the corpus of the Assamese speaking population. This fallacious action is seen to be noted even in the same census document of 1951 by Mr Vaghaiwalla, the Superintendent of census operations in Assam (Government of India 1957). The problem of wrongly estimating the design of the population of Assam did not stop with the 1951 Census itself. Instead, it was the rapidly changing demographic design of Assam that engendered an atmosphere of instability and violence in the 1970s – especially as an aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and its impending bouts of migration to India – at the heart of which was the 'insider outsider' quarrel.

Table 2: Linguistic Profile of Assam, 1911–2011
(Source: Miśra 2018: 4).

Considering Assam's contemporary political geography; all figures in lakhs (one hundred thousand)				
Census	**Assamese speakers**	**Bengali speakers**	**Others**	**Total population**
1911	8.35	17.58	12.56	38.49
1931	17.47	14.90	23.24	55.61
1951	49.71	17.17	13.41	80.29
1971	89.05	28.82	28.38	146.25
1991	129.58	48.56	46.00	224.14
2011	150.96	90.24	70.86	312.06

Table 2 illustrates how, between the years 1951 and 1971, the recorded number of Assamese speakers almost doubled – with little or no connection with the average growth potential of the rest of the population. On the other hand, the number of Bengali speakers did not increase proportionately. This could be understood as a highly fallacious representation, keeping in mind that this was the very same period of unwarranted migration of Bengali

speakers from East Pakistan and the influx of migrants during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Moreover, it must be noted here that between 1951 and 1971 the territory of Assam changed drastically as the new states of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh broke away from it. These regions were also home to a large number of Assamese speakers. The question that now arises is: Why and how did these numbers then come into being?

A large section of the originally Bengali speaking Muslim population – most of whom were agricultural labourers on the *car*s (marshy lands) of Assam – were coerced into declaring Assamese as their mother tongue for the 1971 Census, which inflated the percentage of Assamese speakers from 31.49% in 1931 to a colossal 60.89% in 1971 (Āditya 2018: 8) and manipulated the linguistic nature of the electorate. The true number of Bengali speakers was underreported while the Assamese population was overreported. This section of the population coerced into accepting Assamese as their official mother tongue has come to be known as the *Na–Asamiyā* or the "new(ly) Assamese". Between 1960 and the early 1970s, a prolonged bout of geopolitical fragmentation on the basis of linguistic self-determination in Assam took place which further changed the political and demographic contours of Assam drastically. However, it was the by-elections of Assam's Mangaldoi constituency that ushered in the phase of placing unprecedented levels of political importance on the voter lists in Assam.

MANGALDOI BY-ELECTIONS: WHERE IT ALL STARTED

In Assam, discussions and rumours about the mass inclusion of non-citizens in the electoral rolls reached its peak post 1971, specifically as the task of updating the rolls began. The narrative that illegal Bangladeshi immigrants had crept into the electoral rolls – a space strictly restricted to legitimate citizens – gained impetus when the All Assam Students' Union (AASU hereafter) took up the cause and launched a fierce campaign to cleanse the rolls of these non-citizens, disenfranchise these aliens and demand their detention and subsequent deportation (Barooah Pisharoty 2019). During these developments, the sitting Member of Parliament (MP) from the Mangaldoi Lok Sabha constituency, Hiralal Patwari, passed away in 1978, requiring by-elections to be held. When the electoral rolls of Mangaldoi were updated, it was noted by government officials that the number of registered voters had risen

dramatically and of these, around 45,000 voters were non-citizens (Chadha 2005: 238; Sinha 2007: 162).

AASU activists took this cause further, protesting against this recent inclusion of the illegal immigrants within the rolls and demanding that the by-election be called off until the rolls had been cleansed and the non-citizens identified and deported. This set in motion demands for the 'detection, deletion and deportation' of non–citizens who had found their way into the electoral rolls (Gupta 2019). The agitations gained popularity and soon turned extremely violent, as a consequence of which the by-election was called off and subsequently, the process of updating the national census was also aborted in the state of Assam.

Between the years 1979 and 1985, Assam witnessed violent clashes between supporters of the AASU and members of the population who the AASU considered to be in favour of illegal immigrants. Members of political and social organisations who came out against the AASU's stance were also allegedly killed by AASU activists (Chopra 1982). The extent of violence reached its peak when, on the 18th of February 1983, more than 2,000 suspected illegal immigrants (unofficial numbers are about 10,000) were killed across 14 villages in the Nagaon district of Assam (Kimura 2013). These killings are often described as a direct consequence of the decision by the national government, then under Indira Gandhi, to hold state elections in Assam and allow the refugees from war-torn, newly formed Bangladesh to vote in the state elections of 1983 (Weiner 1983: 280).

1983 ASSAM ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS: ADDING FUEL TO THE FIRE

In 1979, fresh elections became the need of the hour. Assam, which was almost under the control of the agitating activists at that time (Dasgupta and Guha 1985), became a hotspot for clashes between agitators and the common people. As the agitation grew more aggressive, the elections could not be conducted in 10 out of 14 constituencies, despite the electoral rolls having undergone scrutiny and rectification. In December 1979, a corrected roll was published, but the changes bore little relation to the protesters' complaints (Sinha 2007: 162). In an attempt to restore law and order, multiple talks were initiated between the government and the agitators, but with no clear success.

In 1982, it was finally time for the State Legislative Assembly to be dissolved, which meant that the period of president's rule[12] was also nearing its end. Some oppositional forces went so far as to demand a constitutional amendment enabling the president's rule to be extended and elections to the assembly avoided for as long as possible. However, the Supreme Court ruled that the 1979 electoral rolls were valid for the elections which would now take place in 1983. This sparked another charged round of organised protests from the AASU, demanding that the poll be cancelled, and the elections completely boycotted. As noted by Dasgupta and Guha, the electoral process for the 1983 poll was chaotic and violent and created an atmosphere of fear among those against agitation (Dasgupta and Guha 1985: 844). Moral support for the public violence that ensued from the agitators' side came from various sections of society – citizens, bureaucrats who refused to follow the electoral code of conduct, leading mass media outlets, etc. As a consequence, the results of the polls met everyone's expectations, and there were very low voter turnouts. With cracks forming in the unity of the agitators, and the movement weakening due to further differences in demands, Congress succeeded in winning the support of the Assamese speakers.

Now that the other ethnic and ethnolinguistic minority groups started to express their dismay over the prevalent Assamese nationalism, it became easier to break the unity of the agitators. Early traces of this trend were also reflected in the regional variations of the results of the election (Dasgupta and Guha 1985). It was finally on 15 August 1985, actively pursued by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, that the historic Assam Accord was signed between the Government of India and the agitating AASU, thus bringing an end to the Assam Agitation. Although some scholars view the Accord as a formal end to the agitations (Gosselink 1994; Baruah 1986), behind the façade of the Accord, the residents of Assam were classified within a new 'citizenship timeline' which disenfranchised a large section of the population. Thus, this was not much of a permanent solution, but marked the formalisation of citizenship politics in Assam with many scopes for future politicisation.

[12] According to Article 356 of the Indian Constitution, president's rule can be imposed in a federal state of India, whereupon the state government is suspended and the governing powers lie directly at the discretion of the President of India.

Additionally, the formalisation of 1971 as the cut-off year[13] now provided a demarcator of legitimate citizenship for the residents and the need to prove a lineage going back to pre 1971 Assam became one of the key factors behind the illegal document market. Misleading campaigns on the size of the so called 'non-citizen Bangladeshi' population were also noted, making the journey of the electoral rolls in the post 1985 period an important one.

ASSAM AFTER THE ACCORD: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ELECTORAL ROLLS?

At the end of the agitation, a significant number of leading faces of the Assam Agitation formed a political party named Asom Gana Parishad (hereafter the AGP) in October 1985. Elections to the state assembly were due in December of the same year and the AGP fielded candidates. Sweeping the elections, securing 67 out of 126 seats, the AGP formed the government of Assam and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the student leader of the AASU, became Chief Minister. Voters for the AGP believed that finally the 'Bangladeshi' thorn would be removed from their side and a full revamp of the electoral rolls would now not be too distant. In reality, that was not quite what happened.

Electorally, Assam witnessed bouts of instability from the 1970s until the late 1980s. The instance of the Panchayat elections provides a good example in this regard. Between 1973 and 1992, no elections to any of the Panchayat (village council) bodies had taken place in Assam, meaning that the lowest strata of democracy had been at a standstill for almost two decades. Much of this was due to the controversy over what constituted an 'acceptable electoral roll' (Mathew 1995). Apart from this, issues that occupied attention in Assam politics were also gradually changing in the 1990s compared with the 1980s. Following the signing of the Assam Accord, the biggest electoral year for Assam was 1991. In 1991, elections to both the state legislative assembly and the national Lok Sabha elections were due to take place. However, there was no updating of the electoral rolls, hence the electoral rolls prepared in December of 1978 were used to conduct the 1991 elections.

My father was one of the voters from Silchar who was set to cast his first vote in 1991 but was denied his voting rights. Born in 1963, my father was

[13] As set by the Assam Accord of 1985, 1971 is regarded as the cut-off year for granting Indian citizenship to those having crossed over to India. More on this is elaborated in later sections.

seventeen years of age in 1978 and so could not vote for the 1991 elections, even though by then he had reached the age of twenty-eight and was married with a child on the way. The elections of 1991 followed the list of adult residents as entered in the voter lists of 1978, even though thirteen years had passed in between and a whole new generation had become of legitimate voting age. It will thus not be unrealistic to surmise that many young voters remained disenfranchised during this decisive period in the electoral history of Assam. It was finally in 1996, when the next general elections were held, that the electoral rolls were updated, and my father could exercise his right to vote. Almost two decades had passed and the young voters' grudges against the reluctant government in the state were starting to show.

Prior to this, Lok Sabha elections for the year 1989 could not be held in Assam owing to electoral abnormalities (Andersen 1990: 529). With the AGP turning soft on finding immediate remedies for the immigration problem, popular support started to wane and instead, the BJP benefited from this disillusionment. Promises of curbing illegal infiltration and detecting and deporting existing illegals started to be raised by the BJP, and it was in 1998 that the BJP gave their word to the public to renew the NRC, clean up the electoral rolls and offer identity cards to legal citizens. The 1990s were predominantly the time for the electoral rolls to rise to relevance once again. At times, there was mention of the 'burden' of illegal immigration from multiple political sides. Nevertheless, no constructive legislation, popular movement or social drive was noted during this period (Sarma 2014; Fernandes 2005). Rather, these were the years that rendered Assam virtually helpless in the face of extreme militant extremism, separatism and clashes between the Assamese and tribal groups, such as the Bodos. It was only much later, in 2005, when the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) or IM (DT) Act of 1983 was repealed, that the immigration issue got a fresh political jumpstart.

'DOUBTING' THE ELECTORATE

In the public interest litigation case that was filed against the IM (DT) Act, there was mention of another crucial point in the history of politicised electoral rolls in Assam. As a consequence of the Assam Accord in 1985, through an amendment made to the Citizenship of India Act, 1955, a new section 6A was inserted. It set a cut-off date of 25 March 1971, one day before Bangladesh's liberation,

to determine the nature of people's immigration into the territory of Assam. Anyone entering Assam on or after 25 March 1971 without valid travel documents, visas or legal authority to do so from 'specified territories' (Bangladesh) is deemed illegal. A further subsection adds:

> [A]ll persons of Indian origin who came before the 1st day of January, 1966[14] to Assam from the specified territory […] and who have been ordinarily resident in Assam since the dates of their entry into Assam shall be deemed to be citizens of India as from the 1st day of January, 1966. Subject to the provisions of subsections (6) and (7), every person of Indian origin who (a) came to Assam on or after the 1st day of January, 1966 but before the 25th day of March, 1971 from the specified territory; and (b) has, since the date of his entry into Assam, been ordinarily resident in Assam; and (c) has been detected to be a foreigner, shall register himself in accordance with the rules made by the Central Government in this behalf under section 18 with such authority […] as may be specified in such rules and if his name is included in any electoral roll for any Assembly or Parliamentary constituency in force on the date of such detection, his name shall be deleted therefrom. […] A person registered under subsection (3) shall have, as from the date on which he has been detected to be a foreigner and till the expiry of a period of ten years from that date, the same rights and obligations as a citizen of India (including the right to obtain a passport under the Passports Act, 1967 (15 of 1967) and the obligations connected therewith), but shall not be entitled to have his name included in any electoral roll for any Assembly or Parliamentary constituency at any time before the expiry of the said period of ten years. (India Code 2020: 7)

As Walter Fernandes has rightly pointed out, '(t)he rest of India has the Foreigners' Act 1946 which puts the onus on the accused to prove his/her Indian nationality. The IMDT defines foreigners as those who settled down in Assam after March 25, 1971 and puts the onus on the one who denounces a person of proving that he/she is a foreigner' (Fernandes 2005: 3237). This onus was

[14] This date was taken into consideration bearing in mind the preparation of electoral rolls for 1967, said two of my respondents. For the purpose of preparing the electoral rolls for the 1967 elections, the cut-off date of 1 January 1966 was set.

taken away from the accuser and was reinstated on the accused. This not only harmed the ongoing process of detection and trial of the alleged foreigners, but made the importance of documents, especially those that proved land and blood linkages, extremely vital. In the case of illiterate, rural residents of Assam who often did not possess land or regularly follow methods of registering births and/or deaths, this scrapping of IM (DT) became their immediate enemy.

This would then go on to have severe consequences in 2014, when the Supreme Court instructed the Government of Assam to update the NRC of 1951. Following this, work began on updating the National Register of Citizens of 1951, opening up new avenues for politicising the electoral rolls further. Also, as mentioned in the abovementioned section of the act, residents of Assam who had entered the territory from Bangladesh between 1 January 1966 and 25 March 1971 were not included in the electoral rolls *prima facie*. Even though they theoretically enjoyed all the other privileges of an ordinary Indian citizen, they were barred from exercising their voting rights for a period of ten years. The introduction of this section pioneered an era of disenfranchising people depending on their time of arrival. This can be seen from the unique case of the 'doubtful' or 'D-voters' in Assam that ensued in the late 1990s.

After 1996, the biggest revamp of the electoral lists began in 1997 when the Election Commission of India instructed the Government of Assam to clean up the electoral rolls and identify and remove non-citizens. As a result, an intensive cleaning up of the rolls began in order to enlist only the 'genuine' citizens. During this process, it was noted that many enlisted persons could not provide sufficient evidence of their citizenship. These enlisted persons were then marked as 'D' or 'doubtful' voters but included in the rolls nonetheless. Along with them, those persons who were absent from home during the door-to-door survey were also marked as 'D'. After the manoeuvre was completed, the Election Commission of India declared around 370,000 persons (Bhattacharya 2005) as 'doubtful voters'.

In an article published in *The Telegraph*, Rajeev Bhattacharya, a renowned journalist from Assam, noted the sudden disappearance of a large number of D-voters in the electoral rolls of 2004, as compared to its counterpart from seven years previously. While the draft rolls that were to form the electoral base in the then upcoming 2006 Assembly elections were being prepared,

Bhattacharya noted that a large number of the previously reported D-voters were now unaccounted for. He noted:

> The general impression was that the commission had detected 3.7 lakh[15] "D" voters during the intensive revision of electoral rolls in 1997. But only 1,99,631 [sic] such cases were referred to the tribunals for verification. After investigation, 3,686 voters were found to be foreigners and their names were struck off the list. (Bhattacharya 2005)

Even though the number of proven foreigners having gained access to the electoral rolls was around 3,686 – a number that is relatively small compared to the general assumption of 370,000 – the fear of exclusion through the 'D' phenomena became infectious; so much so that numerous cases of absconding D-voters became unremarkable. Furthermore, cases in which D-voters who were declared foreigners by one of the 36 foreigners' tribunals in the state were forcibly pushed back into Bangladeshi territory by the Indian border forces were also not unheard of (Saha 2018). At the same time, to stop the marked 'D-voters' from absconding, those whose cases were under trial in the tribunals were to be sent to detention camps until the cases were dealt with.

This judgement of 2004 created new ruckus, as at that time there were only two functioning detention camps. Once those two had been overfilled with detainees, the new location for the detained was then the jails, where the treatment offered to them was nothing but inhumane (Āditya 2018). In totality, the dread of the 'D voter' continued to haunt the electorate in Assam even after the elections in 2011. Moreover, since 2014, with the renewed nationwide focus on electoral rolls, the NRC, new amendment to the Citizenship of India Act and overall status of citizenship in Assam, the many instances of exclusion, harassment of suspected foreigners and politicisation of the rolls have been given fresh fuel. In this regard, I would like to return to my field interactions and the comments by a voter from Silchar. He recollected one specific incident:

[15] One lakh is 100,000 in Indian English. Accordingly, ten lakh is the Indian equivalent to a million.

> In case of Assam, it is often seen that some people are marked as (D) against their names. These D-voters cannot take part in electoral process. They are valid citizens but taking the advantages of certain provisions of Assam Accord 1985, anybody can register complaint against anybody [often driven by personal rivalry] claiming the later as an illegal migrant or foreigner. In many cases, the accused even do not know about the complaint against him/her; he or she come to know that he/she is marked as 'D' only when she/he enters the polling station to caste vote [sic].

To ease this situation, over the period of 2014 to 2019, many strategies were undertaken by the government as an attempt firstly to end the speculations regarding the size of the legitimate electorate, and secondly to set parameters of inclusion and exclusion within the electoral rolls once and for all.

2014 TO 2019: SOLUTIONS AND POLITICISATIONS

In 2014, the Supreme Court of India directed the government of Assam to begin the process of updating the 1951 NRC, following a public interest litigation case filed by Sarbananda Sonowal. The purpose of the original NRC was to count the number of households in India, but the current updating process in Assam is of a different nature. It not only records and counts the number of households, but also records the number of people who are not legitimate citizens of Assam, following a detailed process of application and verification. Being registered on the NRC is indeed a long process. On the process of application for inclusion in the NRC, Rafiul Ahmed rightly notes:

> First, applicants have to identify themselves or their ancestors in the 'legacy data' — the master roll of names of households based on census returns, to prove their claim for inclusion in the register. In order to prove that a person's relatives had lived in the state before the cut-off date they need to submit supportive evidence of their name appearing in the pre 1971 electoral rolls or the 1951 NRC. Second, the applicants are required to submit 'link documents' certifying their relationship with the said relative. This entire bureaucratic probe makes a massive demand on the part of the applicants for submission of documents including copies of the

> 1951 NRC; electoral rolls before 1971; refugee registration certificate; permanent residential certificate or citizenship certificate; tenancy records; ration cards and so on, to establish one's citizenship status beyond the reasonable doubt of NRC officials. (Ahmed 2018)

Along with this, the sudden need to procure, protect and produce documents which are admissible in court as proof of inclusion in genealogical 'legacy data' brings to the foreground the importance of social, economic and political capital in gaining access to citizenship. One of the major documents for establishing this proof was the electoral rolls.

During my field visit, I noticed that many people had submitted copies of the electoral rolls from 1952, 1957, 1962, 1967 and 1971 as valid proof of their Indian citizenship, as was evident from their names being included in the partial draft NRC, published on 31 December 2017. There were also many mishaps during this process, as applicants who did not possess the necessary documents often resorted to illegal ways of obtaining documents establishing a link with the legacy data. For example, multiple applications linked with a person named 'Mohammad Akbar' were received by the officials, some of which were of a fraudulent nature. This 'Mohammad Akbar' had his name included in both the 1952 and the 1971 electoral rolls, proving his genuine Indian citizenship. However, taking advantage of the fact that 'Mohammad Akbar' is a common name among South Asian Muslims, many *dālāl* ("agents") tried to link persons related to a different 'Mohammad Akbar' using the legacy document of the original, real 'Mohammad Akbar'. This process 'by which illegal immigrants gain citizenship through the acquisition of fraudulent documents' is what Kamal Sadiq views as an integral part of the documentary citizenship regime in South Asia (Sadiq 2009: 102).

Because of the difficulty to distinguish between legal citizens and illegal citizens because of the way geopolitical borders run between India and Bangladesh (Sadiq 2009: 108), the agenda of preparing foolproof electoral rolls, and even the NRC, thus appears to be a farce. The aim of updating the NRC was to ensure that the confusion and controversy over the illegal immigrants creeping into the citizenship system was solved. It was also expected that, with the updating process now sorted, a realistic number could then be assigned to the illegal population residing in Assam. Moreover, a complete and updated NRC would not only honour the terms of the Assam Accord but also pave way

for further legislation on the fate of the illegal immigrants. However, none of those expectations has been fully satisfied, primarily because of the several strategies aimed at politicising the electoral rolls and the way the ruling forces have manipulated the illegal immigrant narrative in the last couple of years.

More or less at the same time the updating of the NRC began in 2014, the BJP – the party now at both central and state level – initiated talks of amending the Citizenship of India Act, 1955. In 2016, the BJP's Rajnath Singh presented the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB hereafter) in the Lok Sabha. This aimed not to treat people who were fleeing from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to India, and belonged to Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Christian, Parsi or Buddhist communities, as illegal migrants. In addition, these persons would be eligible for Indian citizenship through naturalisation after a registered stay of six years, instead of the usual eleven.[16] After prolonged debates, discussions and public demonstrations for and against this bill, it was passed into the legislature and became the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA hereafter), 2019.

While all illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Hindus and Muslims alike, were considered 'foreigners', this new bill paves the way for 'foreign' Bengali Hindus to become citizens, undermining one of the main agendas of Assamese nationalism. This scenario presented a direct violation of the terms of the Accord and introduced an unforeseen religious character into the process of inclusion in the Indian citizenship regime. This bill and its subsequent passing into a binding act came at a time when Assam, and a large section of the country, was rife with disgruntlement against the NRC. Moreover, the public promises made by several leaders of the BJP to the people of Assam with regard to ridding Assam of *ghusʲpeṭhiẏe* (literally, in Hindi, "intruders") fall flat when placed in context of the CAB and CAA. The majority of the Assamese public, who had earlier demonstrated their support for the AGP-BJP coalition that formed the government in the state in 2014, now felt cheated.

Sonowal, the recent leader of the anti-foreigner crusade, has been caught between two tricky choices. First, the BJP's fixation on making India into a homeland for the Hindus – something that the CAA allows – is antithetical to the Assam Agitation's promises in the 1980s. The demands of cleaning out electoral rolls and the process of expelling foreigners become farcical as the

[16] For the complete bill see: https://www.prsindia.org/sites/default/files/bill_files/Citizenship_%28A%29_bill%2C_2016_0.pdf for details.

very notion of a 'foreigner' within the supposed 'Hindu Rāṣṭra' automatically includes a large section of these *ghusʲpeṭhiẏe*. Second, popular support for the NRC has also started to wane, as four million people were left out of the final list that was published in September 2019, much to the discomfort of certain BJP and AGP leaders who had earlier claimed the number of illegal immigrants residing in Assam to be anywhere between five and nine million, if not more.

In this context, one cannot overlook the fact that there has been no trustworthy statistical basis to determine the exact or approximate number of illegal immigrants in Assam. Even though different numbers have been concocted by different parties at various points in time, a recent RTI enquiry (under the Right to Information Act) revealed that even the authorities have no idea about the exact or even approximate size of the illegal population. While conducting my first visit to the field, I expected to return with an approximate number of illegal immigrants residing in Barak Valley (if not Assam), or at least an approximate estimate. However, no two persons I interacted with provided me with the same numbers. Most importantly, no one had any hard evidence to support the claims that they were making. Some persons I interviewed, depending on their ideological background, had very specific figures for me. Back in 2017, the spokesperson of the BJP gave me a speculated number for the Bengali speaking Muslims only, while remaining sketchy when asked about the number of illegal Hindu immigrants.

In conversation with Dipayan Chakraborty, President of the BJP's Silchar Mandal Committee,[17] I was given a stunning figure of three million Bengali Muslims in Assam. According to Chakraborty, three million Bengali Muslims residing here in Assam were illegal and needed to be expelled. He did not provide any number of legally residing Bengali Muslims. When asked about the number of illegal Hindus, Chakraborty simply refuted the possibility, citing the argument that Hindus can under no circumstances be deemed illegal in India, as it was what he called 'their homeland'. Chakraborty's argument about Hindus finding their legitimate homeland in India resonates with the foundational reasons given by Rajnath Singh while proposing the Citizenship

[17] According to BJP's party constitution, a "Mandal Committee" is something like an "area committee" that falls between the "District Committee" and "Gram or Village or Panchayat Committee". For the BJP constitution on the website of Election Commission of India see: https://eci.gov.in/files/file/4929-bharatiya-janata-party/.

Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2016. Again, Upamanyu Hazarika, founder of the Prabajan Virodhi Manch, stated that around twenty to twenty-five percent of Assam's total population were illegal immigrants (mostly Muslims) (Saberin 2017). If these figures are considered, it would mean that around six to eight million people, out of Assam's total population of 30.94 million, are illegal.[18]

Adding to this confusion, the deep-rooted, large scale reach of the forgery economy that the politicisation of citizenship has helped cultivate in Assam for decades made it even more difficult to say with surety that all four million excluded from the final NRC were truly illegal, or similarly, that all those included in the list were truly legitimate Indian voters. Journalist Arijit Aditya mentioned one of his friends, a Bengali speaker from the Hindu community who had come to India from Bangladesh via Tripura in 1979, with members of his family still living there. While the whole state was getting tense about procuring documents for NRC, Aditya mentions, his friend simply went to Agartala and purchased fake identity documents and a fake voter list with his name on it for 5000 Indian Rupees. He later found his name included in the final NRC. In this way, the demand for a 'clean roll' continues to be lost amidst the on-the-ground reality of the process itself.

These complex circumstances bring us to a summary of the actual importance that the electoral roll possesses in the current situation, and therefore turn our attention to what perceptions this repeated emphasis of the importance of voter lists have formed among the potential voters themselves.

ELECTORAL ROLLS THROUGH POPULAR PERCEPTION

During the course of my fieldwork in Silchar, I encountered a wide range of responses from the people, the majority of whom spoke Bengali as their first language. Depending on their political, religious, economic and other social circumstances, these responses varied from individual to individual, including in terms of what was discussed. The prolonged strategic and organised politicisation of the electoral rolls that I have discussed until now as being linked with Assam's political history culminates in a hyper-prioritisation of the electoral rolls, among other documents, by the residents of Assam, and

[18] According to the 2011 Census of India, the total population of Assam is 30.94 million.

specifically those who come from certain marginal sections of the society, economy or polity. The recently increased interest in the NRC and the CAA among scholars and activists has not included the position of the electoral rolls, as perceived and projected. In this section, I point out key excerpts of popular perspectives on this topic.

While discussing the elections, almost everyone I spoke to hinted, in some form or another, at the erroneous nature of the electoral rolls and admitted to the difficulties it often tends to entail. A young man whose landowning family in Borkhola, a town just outside of Silchar, had lived in the region for generations, spoke to me about his and his family's experience. On moving to the city later, his family had their records included in the electoral lists in Silchar and Borkhola as well. Despite making several attempts at deleting their names from the Borkhola list, his mother and *jeṭhi* (wife of father's elder brother) were both summoned by the foreigner's tribunal on grounds of being doubtful voters of the region. It took them multiple visits to the court and vehement campaigning to get out of this sticky situation.

But not every voter enjoys the same social capital. Arjit Aditya mentioned in his interview with me that most D-voters, in his experience, belong to the marginal groups of society. Mostly hailing from the *Namaśūdra* or *Kaibarta* caste or having a Muslim background, these D-voters also come from lower socioeconomic strata. Social capital is also linked to the gender of the voter: women counted as voters in both their marital and paternal homes are more susceptible to being termed D-voters than women registered under just one address. Often, the process of deleting names or correcting the changed surnames of female list members is of lower priority, as I understood during my field interactions, which leads to potential exclusion from the voter lists, if not erroneous inclusion that leads to being termed a 'D-voter'.

Some of my respondents who self-identified as belonging to the middle class demonstrated a sense of pride in being included in the electoral rolls. Their role as an active participant in keeping Indian democracy running made them proud. But at the same time, as a voter in Assam, almost everyone admitted to their bittersweet relationship with the roll, owing largely to the history it represented. Some reminisced about the 1970s and 1980s, as they had heard their parents' stories and feared what might happen to them if some new measures were introduced overnight by the state, as took place at that

time. I understood them to be referring to the Assam Accord, the repealing of the IMDT Act and the subsequent introduction of the D-voter category. However, the responses do not necessarily always reflect fear and worry. Some also expressed disappointment combined with pride and enthusiasm.

Speaking about the status of the electoral roll in his mind, Subhasish Choudhury, a young student identifying himself as a member of the Hindu Chhatra Sangha, said that he felt immense pride in being a voter. When asked about the precarious status of the rolls within the NRC structure, he said:

> Here the only thing that makes me sad is that this [voter ID] which the government has given us, my voting right, through which this government has come to power, is being rendered inadequate in proving my citizenship during the NRC. This is really a sad situation showing that my presence on the voter list is also not enough.

Even if it is not enough to prove citizenship, the voter card does guarantee the holder's right to elect a government. The voter card is proof that the holder's name is included in the rolls. But, like electoral rolls, forged voter IDs are also rampantly available in the market, as mentioned before.

When asked about her earliest voting experiences, Sumona Rahman Choudhury from Karimganj also expressed excitement at seeing her name on the list for the first time, as many of the other respondents did. But her excitement waned as soon as she found out that her vote had already been cast long before she could do it herself. But as she nears her 30s now, in her words, her relationship with the voter list is:

> […] almost like a one-sided love story, where no matter how much I love someone, the fate of this relationship hangs on the fact if the other person finds me worthy of being taken seriously. As if my whole identity is related to that one nod of the lover saying yes and including me in his life.

Another young journalist Taha Amin Mazumdar also recounted how a voter list immediately reminds him of funny spelling mistakes of people's names. The mistaken spelling of the voters' names is not just something that can be attributed to the enumerators' ability to note them down, but also reflects a cultural distancing of sorts, as Arijit Aditya pointed out. Due to the fact that members of two major religious communities, the Hindus and Muslims, can

cohabit in Assam without feeling the need to know in detail about the fundamentals of the respective 'other' way of life, there is often widespread ignorance among Hindus of the ways of a Muslim life and vice versa. Often, Aditya notes, local Muslims returning from Hajj[19] tend to add "Haji" as a prefix or first name of choice. Enumerators who are not aware of this tradition simply assume this is a misnomer and proceed with their tasks, thus opening future possibilities of confusion and even exclusion.

Apart from the respondents named here, there were also a few others who provided their thoughts on the importance of the voter lists in their lives, but I do not go into those details individually. Instead, I would rather point out a trend I noticed among all my respondents: not one of the respondents considered the voter list to be unimportant, or irrelevant to their daily life. When prodded on the cause of this prioritisation, nobody had any distinctly private or individual justification for it. Rather, they believed that the voter list is important to their individual lives because of the larger meaning it holds for the collective with which they associate themselves, and thus does not need to carry any essentially individualistic impact. All of my respondents acknowledged the special circumstances that they, as voters of Assam, find themselves in. According to them, that make their prioritisation, and often hyper-prioritisation, of these rolls nothing but obvious.

Even though the collective view which assigns the voter lists great importance is a common thread, what distinguishes popular perception from one person to the other depends on the specific socioeconomic identities of the respondents and, consequently, on their lived experiences. That is why the reason cited by a self-identified member of the Hindu Chhatra Sangh for prioritising the voter list differs drastically from that of a journalist working amidst the 'D-voters'. Like the majority of my respondents, both consider the voter list to be intrinsic to Indian democratic practices, agree to the fallacious nature of the list itself, and express disappointment about the process, but they do all of that for completely different reasons. This brings me to sum up my thoughts on the prolonged politicisation of the electoral rolls and resultant perceptions of them and argue that they play a 'double-layered' function.

[19] Hajj is the annual Islamic pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia and is one of the crucial duties and pillars of Islam.

CONCLUSION

This article focuses on the electoral rolls – an entity that has been otherwise ignored in the contemporary discussions on NRC and CAA – using first-hand field observations from Barak Valley, a region which is also under-represented among academic discussions. At a time when most scholarly attention on citizenship is limited to northern and western Assam, this article focuses on the mostly Bengali-speaking region of Barak Valley, which has also borne the brunt of the NRC, much like its northern and western counterparts. However, the history of the electoral rolls in Barak Valley is conjoined with that of the rest of Assam – and closer examination reveals a pattern, especially since the late 1970s.

First, the electoral rolls in Barak Valley have functioned as lucrative bait for those crossing over the borders. The existing networks involved in the forgery trade help maintain the lucrativeness, which in turn has also led to the electoral rolls being prioritised as a vital tool for gaining state recognition. That is why, using several methods such as subterfuge and forgery, non-citizens have tried to get themselves included in the Indian electoral rolls. In doing so, they also receive a diverse range of formal and informal support. As a matter of fact, I personally know of a few Bangladeshi Hindus residing in Sylhet, the district in Bangladesh bordering Barak Valley in India, who currently live in Bangladesh, but are in possession of Indian ration cards, such is the level of ease for foreigners to buy their way into the Indian documentary citizenship regime. Further, the fact that documents can be 'bought' means that the authorities related to the issuance of the documents may be to some extent aware of, if not complicit in, this 'buying and selling' of identities. The lack of sufficient ethnographic scholarly work on this[20] has made it difficult for me to draw on past cases and calls for more academic attention. However, my interactions reveal that, despite multiple phases of increased investment in smarter and updated border fencing techniques, the political leaders still complain of unbridled illegal immigration. This also hints at the role of the border security forces on both sides of the border. These fuzzy complicities of the state, informal *dālāl* circuit, border security forces, local

[20] There is a lack of ethnographic work based in Barak Valley or Assam, but similar ethnographic work has been done by Sahana Ghosh (Ghosh 2019) in the border regions in West Bengal and Kamal Sadiq (Sadiq 2009).

and national political leaders, and other vested interests make sure that the status of the electoral roll as an end to a successful journey across the border remains intact. Moreover, the various stakeholders play their parts in ensuring that, no matter what policies are passed by the legislature, this chain remains almost unbroken. So much so, that the fear of not being included in the voter lists (and consequently the NRC) has claimed the lives of sixty people (as of July 2019) (Mujibi 2020), with the first NRC-related suicide, by Arjun Namasudra, taking place in Silchar. Voter lists, which were originally intended to perform the task of identifying a person's original place of residence and giving a legitimate citizen a secured national identity, now appear to be manipulated because of a twisted economy of documents and a related polity.

Second, as a corollary to the first point, the electoral rolls in the context of Assam have assumed the status of not just an end to this fuzzy politicisation, but also a means of achieving the process. Using the electoral rolls 'infiltrated' by the ineligible voters, elections have been won and lost. On the promise of cleaning up the same electoral rolls, political parties have successfully gained momentum and succeeded in fulfilling their own definite agenda. The parties who use the demand for a clean roll have been on the winning side of the popular mandate since the 1970s. And in the 2000s, following a changed political climate, faces from the same winning group are now demanding clean rolls on one hand, while on the other hand ensuring that a significant number of illegals are included in the rolls through the CAA because of their religious identity. This shift in the demand for 'clean rolls' by those advocating Hindutva ("Hindu-ness") demonstrates effectively how the two-staged, double-layered politicisation of the electoral rolls has worked in recent times.

As I have already demonstrated, the status of the electoral rolls in Assam, where they occupy the centre stage in defining the course of local politics, is undeniable. New political parties and organisations have been formed over reclaiming the rolls from prolonged foreign infiltration. But all of this politicking has reduced the rolls' legitimacy in determining the democracy quotient, as indicated by popular perception and voter trust in the infallible nature of the rolls. In addition, election officers point out how the rolls are of utmost importance, but also require additional documentary evidence to confirm the voters' citizenship. Thus, the electoral rolls are of utmost importance yet not fully trustworthy. Again, the rolls are at once active sites for forging cross-

border complicities as well as a means to modify the demographic nature of the electorate. The fallible nature of the electoral rolls in Assam casts doubt not only on the 'fairness' of the election process, but also on other stakeholders who are squarely involved in the process of drafting, checking and publishing these rolls. Electoral rolls are undoubtedly one of the most important signifiers of a resident's suffrage rights and tampering with them automatically also means tampering with democratic participation.

In addition, it cannot be said that the electorate itself is unaware of this politicisation and is thus aloof and/or oblivious. The lower-class Bengali speaker from Silchar I quoted at the beginning of this paper not only admitted to being aware of this, but also questioned the legitimacy of it all. Nonetheless, the electorate of Assam continues to be engulfed by the haunting spectre of the infiltrating *ghusˈpeṭhiẏe*, allowing stakeholders to reap benefits out of the chaotic situation. The way these rolls have been continuously politicised, played with and usurped for decades is simply an expression of their ever-rising centrality in determining the political future of Assam. Moreover, the reluctant process of cleaning up the rolls, despite strong popular support for it, indicates that there is currently no foreseeable end to the two-pronged politicisation of the rolls. Rather, the multifaceted discourse of illegal immigration and the inclusion of foreign illegals in the voter lists meant for genuine Indian citizens is what keeps the electoral politicking in Assam alive. And the part played by the electoral rolls in all of this is that of both an integral means and a lucrative end, but not a trusted entity, in the existing popular perception.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Āditya, Arijit 2018. *Ḍi: Rāṣṭrai yakhan nipīṛak.* Śilˡcar: Prāsaṃgik Prakāśanī.

Ahmed, Imtiaz 1996. "Refugees and Security: The Experience of Bangladesh", in: Muni, S.D. & Baral, Lok Raj (eds): *Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 121–151.

Ahmed, Rafiul 2018. "The NRC as 'Truth Machine' in Assam", on: *blogs.lse.ac.uk* (December 19, 2019) (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2019/12/19/from-the-archive-the-nrc-as-truth-machine-in-assam/>, accessed January 29, 2020).

Andersen, Walter K. 1990. "Election 1989 in India: The Dawn of Coalition Politics?", in: *Asian Survey* 30 (6): 527–540.

(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2644904>, accessed January 25, 2020).

Banning, Jan 2008. *Bureaucratics*. Portland, Oregon: Nazreali Press.

Barooah Pisharoty, Sangeeta 2019. *Assam: The Accord, the Discord*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Baruah, Sanjib 1986. "Lessons of Assam", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 21 (7): 282–284.

Baruah, Sanjib 1999. *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bhattacharjee, Nabanipa 2013a. "Negotiating Marginality: The Bangla–Speakers of Assam", in: *Mainstream Weekly* 12 (34).

(<http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article4378.html>, accessed December 10, 2020).

Bhattacharjee, Nabanipa 2013b. "'We Are With Culture But Without Geography': Locating Sylheti Identity in Contemporary India", in: Fazal, Tanveer (ed.): *Minority Nationalisms in South Asia*. London & New York: Routledge, 53–73.

Bhattacharjee, Sukalpa 2006. "Sylheti Narratives: Memory to Identity", in: Sukalpa Bhattacharjee & Rajesh Dev (eds): *Ethno-Narratives: Identity and Experience in North East India*. New Delhi: Anshah Publishing House, 153–164.

Bhattacharya, Rajeev 2005. "Assam 'D' Voters in Vanishing Act", in: *The Telegraph* (July 15, 2005).
(<https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/assam-d-voters-in-vanishing-act/cid/872446>, accessed January 29, 2020).

Chadha, Vivek 2005. *Low Intensity Conflicts in India: An Analysis*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Chopra, Suneet 1982. "The Assam Movement and the Left: A Reply to Hiren Gohain", in: *Social Scientist* 10 (11): 63–70.

Choudhury, Sujit 1986. "Assam: Quest for Homogeneity", in: *Mainstream* 25 (7): 11–14.

Choudhury, Sujit 2006. *Śrīhaṭṭa–kāchāṛer prācīn itihās*. Śilˈcar: Dinkāl Press.

Choudhury, Sujit 2007. *Barāk upatyakār samāj o rājˈnīti*. Karimˈgaṅj: Yugaśakti.

Dasgupta, Anindita 2008. "Remembering Sylhet: A Forgotten Story of India's 1947 Partition", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 43 (31): 18–22.

Dasgupta, Keya & Guha, Amalendu 1985. "1983 Assembly Polls in Assam: An Analysis of Its Background and Implications", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 20 (19): 843–853.

Dutta, Nandana 2012. *Questions of Identity in Assam: Location, Migration, Hybridity*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Election Commission of India 2016. *Manual on Electoral Rolls: October 2016. Document 10 – Edition 1*. New Delhi: Election Commission of India. (<https://eci.gov.in/files/file/5476-manual-on-electoral-roll/>, accessed June 19, 2020).

Fernandes, Walter 2005. "IMDT Act and Immigration in North–Eastern India", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 40 (30): 3237–3240.

Government of India 1957. *Census of India 1951; Volume XII: Assam, Manipur and Tripura.* New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Office of the Registrar General of India.

Ghosh, Sahana 2019. "Everything Must Match: Detection, Deception and Migrant Illegality in an Indian Borderland", in: *American Anthropologist* 121 (4): 870–883. (<https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13313>, accessed December 10, 2020).

Gillan, Michael 2002. “Refugees or Infiltrators? The Bhartiya Janata Party and ‘Illegal’ Migration from Bangladesh”, in: *Asian Studies Review* 26 (1): 73–95.

Gosselink, Robert G. 1994. “Minority Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Assam”, in: *Boston College Third World Journal* 14 (1): 83–116.

Gupta, Kanchan 2019. “Beyond the Poll Rhetoric of BJP’s Contentious Citizenship Amendment Bill”, in: *ORF Special Report* 89.

(<https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ORF_SpecialReport_89_BJP-CAB_NEW.pdf>, accessed January 18, 2020).

Hussain, Monirul 2000. “State, Identity Movements and Internal Displacements in the North East”, in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 35 (51): 4519–4523.

India Code 2020. “6A. Special Provisions as to Citizenship of Persons Covered by the Assam Accord”, in: *The Citizenship Act, 1955*, 6–8. (<https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/1522/1/a1955-57.pdf>, accessed December 10, 2020).

Kimura, Makiko 2013. *The Nellie Massacre of 1983: Agency of Rioters*. New Delhi: Sage.

Lin, Sharat G. & Paul, Madan C. 1995. “Bangladeshi Migrants in Delhi: Social Insecurity, State Power, and Captive Vote Banks”, in: *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 27 (1): 3–20

(<https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1995.10413070>, accessed September 19, 2020).

Mathew, George 1995. *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States of India*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

Miśra, Bānīprasanna 2018. “Dui bigatayaubanā satiner galˈpa”, in: *Dainik Sāmaẏik Prasaṅga*, (July 19, 2018): 4.

Misra, Udayon 1999. “Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam”, in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 34 (21): 1264–1271.

Mujibi, Talha 2020. *Suicides over the NRC: Trend Analysis*, in: *The Citizen* (March 7, 2020). (<https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/15/18425/Suicides-over-the-NRC--Trend-Analysis>, accessed September 16, 2020).

Pareek, Shabdita 2016. "This is how the First General Elections were Held in Independent India", on: *Scoopwhoop* (January 25, 2016). (<https://www.scoopwhoop.com/This-Is-How-The-First-General-Elections-Were-Held-In-Independent-India/>, accessed August 19, 2020).

Saberin, Zeenat 2017. "Muslims in India's Assam Anxious over Citizen List", on: *Al Jazeera* (December 31, 2017). (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/31/muslims-in-indias-assam-anxious-over-citizen-list>, accessed July 20, 2018).

Sadiq, K. 2009. *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Saha, Soumyajit 2018. "Detained Until Deported: Thousands Declared 'Foreigners' in Assam Wait in Limbo", on: *The Wire* (February 10, 2018). (<https://thewire.in/politics/detained-deported-thousands-declared-foreigners-assam-wait-limbo>, accessed March 19, 2020).

Sarma, Sanghamitra 2014. "Reflections on the Politics of Immigration Problem in Assam: A Historical Perspective", in: *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19 (11): 38–44.

Sharma, K. M. 1980. "The Assam Question: A Historical Perspective", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 15 (31): 1321–1324.

Sinha, S. P. 2007. *Lost Opportunities: 50 Years of Insurgency in the North-East and India's Response*. New Delhi: Lancer.

Sisson, Richard 1990. "India in 1989: A Year of Elections in a Culture of Change", in: *Asian Survey* 30 (2): 111–125. (<https://doi.org/10.2307/2644889>, accessed January 25, 2020).

Srikanth H. 2000. "Militancy and Identity Politics in Assam", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 35 (47): 4117–4119 & 4121–4124.

Sriraman, Tarangini 2018. *In Pursuit of Proof: A History of Identification Documents in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Swain, Ashok 1996. "Displacing the Conflict: Environmental Destruction in Bangladesh and Ethnic Conflict in India", in: *Journal of Peace Research* 33 (2): 189–204. (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343396033002005>, accessed September 19, 2020).

Taher, Mohammad 1993. “The People of Assam and Contemporary Social Structure”, in: Ahmed, Aijazuddin (ed.): *Social Structure and Regional Development: A Social Geography Perspective; Essays in Honour of Professor Moonis Raza*. Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications: 201–219.

UNICEF 2005. *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*. New York: UNICEF. (<https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2006_English_Report_rev(1).pdf>, accessed May 5, 2020).

Weiner, Myron 1978. *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Weiner, Myron 1983. “The Political Demography of Assam’s Anti-Immigration Movement”, in: *Population and Development Review* 9 (2): 279–292. (<https://doi.org/10.2307/1973053>, accessed December 10, 2020).

Sahˈdharmiṇī and more: *Rāṣṭra Sevikā Samiti*, the Familial Hindu Nationalist

Aastha Tyagi

Abstract: *Sevikā Prakāśan*, the publication unit of the *Rāṣṭra Sevikā Samiti* (National Women's Committee; hereon, Samiti), was constructed as a mechanism to further its ideology as a parallel Hindu nationalist organisation. As the Samiti's *sevikā*s (members) seldom come into the limelight (unlike the RSS' *svayaṃsevak*s), these texts become important materials for a cohesive description of the doctrine among women of the Hindu nationalist organisations. This article examines the role that the Hindu nationalist discourse and the Samiti ascribe to women of the Hindu nation. In doing so, it also analyses, how historical changes are reflected in the textual ideology of the organisation. By furthering the ideology of colonial-era Hindu reformers, Hindu nationalist women lay claim on the larger hegemonic Hindu nationalist ideology by hailing the private as the main space of patriotism and nation building. By envisioning a specific kind of religious nationalism different from the hegemonic Hindu nationalist vision, the Samiti outlines an everyday way of being a Hindu and a woman.

Sahˈdharmiṇī and more: *Rāṣṭra Sevikā Samiti*, the Familial Hindu Nationalist

The electoral party leading the coalition of the current national government in India is the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party; BJP). It derives its ideological roots from the *Saṅgh Parivār* (Sangh Family or the Sangh Combine), a group or family of Hindu nationalist organisations. The *Rāṣṭrīya Svayaṃsevak Saṅgh* (National Volunteer Organisation; RSS) is the largest Hindu nationalist organisation in India and functions as the ideological center of the *Saṅgh Parivār*. It was founded in 1925 by Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940) and has affiliate organisations that cater to 'every aspect of the Hindu social life' (Mathur 2008: 8). The RSS follows the ideology of *Hindutva* as initially conceptualised by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883–1966) in his influential essay '*Hindutva*! Who is a Hindu?' (1923) and the ideology has dynamically adapted itself to the decades that have followed. The *Rāṣṭra Sevikā Samiti* (National Women Volunteers Committee; Samiti) is the parallel

women's group that was founded in 1936 by Lakshmibai Kelkar (1905–1978). It is the oldest organisation affiliated to the RSS. The Samiti performs the same ideological functions as the RSS, but for women who are associated with Hindu nationalism in India.

The aim of the Hindu nationalist movement in India (as interpreted by the *Saṅgh Parivār*) is to restore the glory of the *Tejasvī Hindū Rāṣṭra* (glorious Hindu nation) before the impact of the Muslim and British colonial rulers, as delineated in the writings of its ideologues. The *Saṅgh Parivār* recruits new members through home-to-home meetings, member networks, in residential camps (15-day camps held annually in the summer, and other 2–3 day camps peppered throughout the year), in local temples and most importantly, local neighbourhood *śākhā*s (meetings that are held daily/weekly, depending upon the membership). The format of the *śākhā*s involves physical training (yoga, march-past, exercises and games) and *bauddhik* (intellectual/ideology) training. *Bauddhik* training involves storytelling, spiritual and religious advice and an explanation of a topic that has been pre-decided by the national *bauddhik* chief and implemented by the *bauddhik* chief of the district. The training models of the Samiti to induct new members and provide ideological training is similar to those of the RSS and other affiliate organisations. Regional and district chiefs work under the *bauddhik* chief are to follow the schedule. Many a times, *śākhā* in-charges consult Samiti books to elaborate on the topics given. Since the training model and externalities of the ideology of the *Saṅgh Parivār* are guided by the RSS, to understand the specificities of the role(s) expected of women in the Samiti and the larger *Hindutva* movement, the publications of the Samiti become an important source.

In 1953, *Sevikā Prakāśan*, the publication unit of the Samiti, began publishing booklets for women who wanted to know more about the Samiti and its founder, Lakshmibai Kelkar. The need to begin writing their own literature, the Samiti states, was due to the lack of 'national literature' and the comparative popularity of English literature. An introductory Samiti manual claims that after the Indian independence in 1947, there was very little material on traditional Hindu norms and scriptures. Keeping its goal of preserving traditional duties of 'Hindu womanhood', the Samiti reasoned, 'to spread

the message of the Samiti far and wide, there was a need for textual resources' (Sādhˈnā Karˈtī Chaleṃ 2005: 35).[1] As the only resource for the written ideology of the Samiti, *Sevikā Prakāśan* books are sold during Samiti events and camps and are also distributed in local *śākhā*s at the behest of members.[2] The pricing of the books is highly economical, ranging from rupees 20 to rupees 150 (20 cents to 1.50 euros). Seasoned Samiti members encourage new aspirant members to get to know more about the Samiti through these books.

The *Saṅgh Parivār* has outlined specific gendered roles for its members and the Samiti has attracted women who could contribute to the *Hindutva* movement of nation building. Without disrupting their duties as wives, mothers, daughters, and daughters-in-law, the Samiti provides a platform where women can discuss and ideate on the ideals that their male family members hold so dear and, in a way, make it their own. Both the ideological organisations, RSS and Samiti, have asserted the autonomy of the Samiti. While the hegemonic RSS vision outlines specific roles for women in the task of nation building, do RSS ideologues take any account of the Samiti's specific vision of the nation? Are women seen as more than just *sahˈdharmiṇī*s (appendages to the patriotic men) and how are Samiti women redefining this term for their own brand of Hindutva?

The article examines major themes that emerge from the books published by *Sevikā Prakāśan* that are used by the Samiti to supplement the oral pedagogy during *bauddhik* classes, meetings and annual camps (*varg*). For this, three Samiti books, originally in Hindi, have been translated and will be contextualized within the larger Hindu-nationalist discourse. The books are: *Mr̥tyuṃjay: Ham Hiṃdū Haiṃ* (Lectures of Pramila Tai Apte – Second Sanchalika) (2003), *Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā* (Vision for the Hindu Family) (2005) and *Sādhˈnā Karˈtī Chaleṃ* (Keep Striving On) (2005). By using religios-

[1] The author has done all translations. Two of the Samiti books examined in this article have no author and will thus be referenced in the text with their title. In the bibliography, they are referenced beginning with 'No author'.

[2] I would like to point out in my experience in Delhi no Samiti publication was sold in RSS bookshops and during RSS stalls at book fairs. Samiti books were exclusively sold or are in stock at the *kāryālaya* (headquarters) or during Samiti camps.

ity as the main anchor of the gendered vision of the ideology, the article attempts to understand the complexity of situating agency of the Samiti within the larger vision of Hindu nationalism.

STORY OF THE SAMITI IN ITS OWN WORDS: PUBLICATION MATERIALS AND DISSEMINATION OF IDEOLOGY

The cover of *Sādhᶦnā Karᶦtī Chaleṃ* (from hereon, SKC) is representative of the way the Samiti wishes to be perceived in the larger scheme of Hindutva. The *sevikā*s are protecting the territorial boundary, which is a radical departure from the hegemonic *Saṅgh* discourse that seeks to posit the Samiti as an organisation that works behind the scenes. Such a depiction is noteworthy because it counters male nationalist claims over the protection of *Bhārat Mātā* (Mother India).

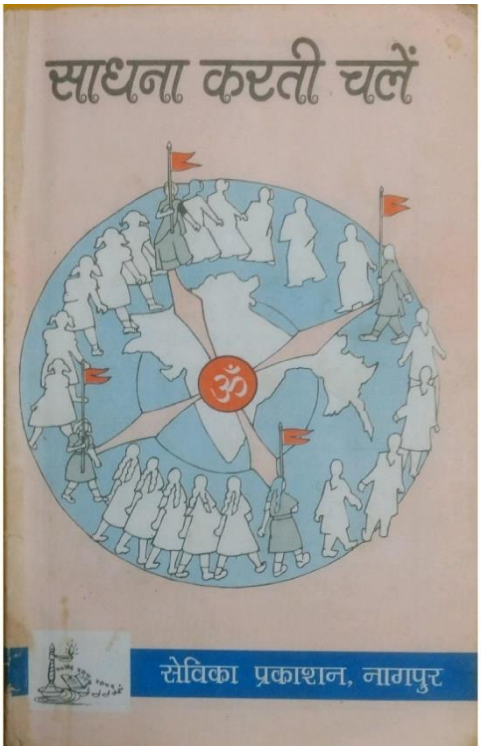

Fig. 1: Cover of *Sādhᶦnā Karᶦtī Chaleṃ* (Keep Striving On), 2005.

The Samiti on its book cover sees the entire gamut of women, from young to old, as being an active part of the organisation and participating in its ideology. Though symbolically the Samiti seems to seek a departure from the traditional discourse of the Hindu nationalist vision (Golwalkar 1966), the focus in verbal communications remains on the reproductive years of women as those that need attention and moulding. Further, roles such as a young daughter or an old mother are recognised and seen as important shareholders in the cycle of being part of various aspects of the Samiti.[3] The cover of the book is on a light saffron background. A large blue circle encompasses the map of *Akhaṇḍ Bhārat*, the undivided map of *Bhārat* or *Hindū Rāṣṭra* (Hindu nation) that includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal. Surrounding the map are figures that denote women. Four figures in the circle are grey in colour (a woman in a saree and one in a *qamīz-cūṛīdār* (Indian tunic with trousers), a girl with pigtails and a girl with ponytails (both in frocks). The four figures are holding the *Bhagˈvā Dhvaj* (the revered saffron flag of the movement; addressed as a *Guru Bhagˈvā Dhvaj* (teacher)) and they are leading similarly framed figures in white – members of their own demographic group as denoted by their dress. There is an *Oṃ* symbol, slightly south of the map's centre. The *Oṃ* symbol is enclosed inside a saffron circle and is emanating lightening-shaped arrows towards the leading grey figures. Both insides of the cover have Samiti songs and prayers, which are performed as a part of the *śākhā* proceedings.

SKC was published in Nagpur, the headquarters of Samiti *Prakāśan* in November 2005 and is priced at 25 Rupees (25 cents). The book was conceptualised as a succinct introduction to the Samiti and its workings, and its front cover is telling in a lot of ways. The book's title translates into the mantra of the Samiti and directs *sevikā*s to keep striving on their path to create a *Tejasvī Hindū Rāṣṭra*. The idea of *Akhaṇḍ Bhārat* is the crystallisation of the ultimate goal of Hindu nationalism. It stands for a geographical unit where the subcontinent is envisioned without present political boundaries. *Akhaṇḍ Bhārat*

[3] I would like to point out here that while the focus of the discourses among the Sangh organisations are on young women that have possibilities for reproducing for the Hindu nation, the pre-pubescent and post-menopausal women are prized for their energy and wisdom, respectively. The older women are especially revered in *Bauddhik* approaches because of the value placed in age hierarchy within the organisation.

is a dream that is want of realisation of unification of parts of *Bhārat* (India) that include present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Starting from Abanindranath Tagore's depiction of *Bhārat Mātā* in his painting to Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's poem 'Bande Mātaram' in his Bangla novel *Ānandmaṭh* (1882), the figure of *Bhārat Mātā* has predominantly been addressed through the male gaze – the trope of the goddess in need of protection from her virile sons (Kovacs 2004).[4] Gupta writes, '*Bharat Mata* is not a distinct personality in her own right but a metaphor for a fixed, bounded space' (Gupta 2001: 4291). The 'fixed bounded space' is the *Akhaṇḍ Bhārat*, the territory embodying the spirituality of its populace en masse. While the Samiti discourse itself elaborates at length about the need of mothers to produce sons who would protect *Bhārat Mātā*, the image on the SKC cover could be read as the strategic point of divergence from the larger Hindu nationalist discourse that is structured around this patriarchal language. Further, the various ages of women depicted, from little girls in dresses to women in sarees, are all denoted to be carrying the Samiti mantle. This is indicative of the fact that leadership roles will emerge from common *sevikā*s.

The divergence from the male Hindutva ideology is clearly present – that it is not only mothers who wish to be associated with the cause of establishing the *Tejasvī Hindū Rāṣṭra* – it is also young girls, young women and older women – all those demographics that receive no mention at all in the writings of the RSS ideologues. While the image on the cover denotes absolute equality and no sign of an ageist bias, the constant refrain in the Samiti discourse is about the recognition of the authority of older persons. In the Samiti texts discussed later on, it will be shown how age is leveraged because of assumed wisdom and experiences. Hierarchy based on age is thus established, and often goes unquestioned. Further, assigning of leadership positions is not as simple as just hierarchy – a very complex set-up is in place to ensure that only the loyal (which can be read as mainly upper-caste Hindus with an allegiance to the RSS) are holding the mantle.

[4] Bacchetta (2005) has noted that the figure of *Bhārat Mātā* functions as a third relation between two *Svayaṃsevak*s (members of the RSS) to 'mediate their homosociality' (Bacchetta 2005: 138).

The aims of the organisation outlined in SKC are: to enable women with self-defence and independence by developing their intellectual and physical capabilities; to prepare them to protect their religion and culture; and lastly, to remind the women of *Bhārat* of their familial and national responsibilities (Sādhᴵnā Karᴵtī Chaleṃ 2005: 1).[5] According to the Samiti, women have to be inspired to reclaim their confidence 'despite external attacks like foreign education and a general disregard for responsibilities' (ibid.: 5). A recurring theme in the Samiti primers is the way the organisation describes itself as the sole women's group functioning in the society before Indian independence, and it makes a very clear demarcation between itself and other women's movements of the time. For this purpose, the booklet outlines the historical evolution of the Samiti, which will be described in the following subsection.

Founding of the organisation and initial years

Established in 1936, eleven years after the RSS on *Vijay Daśᴵmī* (*Daśᴵharā* day of the Hindu mythology), the Samiti was founded by 'vandanīya Mausiji' (revered aunt) Lakshmibai Kelkar (1905–1978). At the age of 31, Kelkar had founded an organisation specifically for Hindu women who were suffering at the hands of the (British) ruling powers and the society. The Samiti manual explains the reasons for the necessity of the organisation:

> Patriotism as a responsibility was getting sidelined. There had been a decline in the status of the woman. Therefore, it is natural that the value system in the society will go down. There were some people in the society who began to work to re-awaken this aspect. It was at this time that vandanīya Lakshmibai Kelkar laid the founding stone for an all India women's organisation (Sādhᴵnā Karᴵtī Chaleṃ 2005: 4).

The next section of the booklet introduces readers to the organizational structure of the Samiti. It lays emphasis on the site of the *śākhā* as the primary meeting place of the members. *Śākhā*s, literally translated as branches

[5] I would like to point out here that there is a slight apprehension here to use 'tradition' as a word that is replaceable to 'culture'. The politics of using culture/tradition arise from the organisation's roots in Hindu revivalist discourses that focused on reviving Hindu customs and traditions in consonance with the scriptures (Vedas, Upanishads etc). Mani (1989) voices the same concerns during the formation of the official discourse in the colonial era.

of a tree, are the smallest unit of training for the *Saṅgh* cadre. They are held daily and/or weekly, according to the needs of the demographic group. For example, a young boys' RSS *śākhā* might meet daily in the evening or morning, whereas, the married women's group might convene once a week. The booklet explains that it is here that *sevikās* develop their physical and intellectual abilities and 'obtain a confidence boost' (ibid.: 4). In the *śākhā*s special emphasis is given to self-defence training.

Three years after it was established in Wardha, Maharashtra, the organisation had *śākhā*s across Maharashtra. The first *pracārikā* (full-time celibate worker) was Sindhu*taī* (*taī* = sister; Marathi) from Akola in Maharashtra, who began her work in 1938. The first core level meeting was held in Poona, where Kaku Paranjpe (an influential Samiti leader) was appointed the head of Nagpur region and Pramila Apte was appointed the head of Pune region. Apte later went on to become the second *pramukh saṃcālikā* (highest office held by a Samiti member) of the Samiti. By 1947, the Samiti claims to have had active *śākhā*s in all parts of the country, with 240 places seeing daily *śākhā*s and overall, 13,000 members in attendance (Sādhʲnā Karʲtī Chaleṃ 2005). The first full-fledged *varg* was held in Nasik in 1958.[6]

Women who relocated to other parts of India due to marriage established most of the *śākhā*s outside Maharashtra. The first *śākhā* of this kind was set-up in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh in 1938, followed by *śākhā*s in Delhi and Odisha. Marriage acquired and performed the purpose of mobility for the Samiti message and thus, has upturned the traditional understanding of marriage where the woman is bound by the home. Hence, the Samiti has utilised the space of the family to expand the presence of the organisation, and thereby it finds marriage liberating for its cause. The Samiti manual, when discussing its territorial spread (the years are not mentioned clearly), makes a special mention of states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar where they claim to have faced resistance and problems while convincing guardians to let their daughters join the Samiti or be part of the *śākhā*. A *sevikā* who surveyed Gujarat reported to the higher authorities that the local language

[6] The *varg* camp is a site where large groups of women from different age groups and adjacent districts come together to learn about the Hindutva ideology. The camps held by the Sangh are usually held in Saraswati Shishu Mandirs or RSS schools. The longest camps are held in the summer months for the duration of 15–20 days. In the camp, the day is divided to include various forms of physical śākhā and ideology lessons.

needed to be used for the Samiti to gain ground. Hence, a similar strategy of learning the local language was applied in states like Karnataka (first *śākhā* in Belgaum, 1947), Kerala (around 1975), West Bengal (around 1970s; the manual cites the Naxal movement as a factor that deterred Samiti activity in the region).[7]

The Samiti booklet enlists that the organisation has since its inception established hostels, libraries (*vācanālay*s), sewing centres, toy banks, teacher training centres, family counselling centres and vocational training centres. Mentioned in the books are four women's hostels in Thane, Nasik, Nagpur, and Dhule (Maharashtra) that are run by the Samiti. There are two hostels specifically mentioned in the text that house young women from the North-east region of India – in Nanded (Maharashtra) and Haflong (Assam) (Sādhᴵnā Karᴵtī Chaleṃ 2005: 8).[8]

*Śākhā*s, as Sen (2007) has shown, have become the feminine place outside of the home for Hindu nationalist women. By including physical education and yoga, the Samiti advocates for a self-dependent body that is resilient and does not need the protection of men thereby protecting their virtue.[9]

A fine balance? Erasure and assertion in the Samiti ideology

The figure of the Samiti founder, Lakshmibai Kelkar, is important to emphasize as her role corresponded with the need of a Hindu nationalist organisation that focused on traditional womanhood. Focusing on Kelkar's representation in Samiti and *Saṅgh* literature, there are two points that are worth dealing with. First, the RSS' founder, K. B. Hedgewar, is reverently referred to a 'Doctor*jī*'. Likewise, RSS members fondly remember Madhao Sadashiv Golwalkar as 'Guru*jī*' (revered teacher), as he taught biology at the Benaras Hindu University (Varanasi). Unlike the male ideologues who are addressed

[7] The 'Left' and 'Right' aligned organisations in India have been at loggerheads with each other. While the Left organisations talk about the communal agenda of the Right, the Right is especially distrustful of any social movements (such as Naxalism as invoked above, for example) that arise inspired by the ideology of the Left.

[8] RSS' Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA), the wing that deals with tribal affairs mentions the presence of the Haflong hostel to counter 'the threat of conversion', along with hostels in Shillong and Imphal (Sādhᴵnā Karᴵtī Chaleṃ 2005).

[9] 'Virtue' is a desired nationalist value.

in ways that retain a separate identity as scholars and teachers, Kelkar is circumscribed within the kinship framework as *Mausījī*, the mother's sister. 'Mausī', literally translated from Hindi, is understood as mother-like ('ma-sī' – like a mother). What is worth noting is that Kelkar's position, as the founder of the organisation does not automatically make her the mother figure of the Samiti. Instead, she is conveniently, maybe even strategically, given a place subservient to the mother figure of Hindu nationalist imagination, *Bhārat Mātā*. Thus, the overall Hindu nationalist subservience to the *Bhārat Mātā* image is retained. In this manner, the reverence for Kelkar does not threaten the overall hegemonic discourse of *Bhārat Mātā* for Hindutva men and women. It also allows the figure of the aunt to become a facilitator of Hindutva women, rather than the symbolic creator of women's Hindutva. Thus, while Kelkar as an aunt will nourish and raise the children of the celibate mother *Bhārat Mātā*, she will not be given the position of the mother and is conveniently retained within the kinship bounds of the imagined Hindu nation.

Secondly, Kelkar founded the organisation at the age of 31. Curiously, Kelkar has always been presented as an old woman (in pictures and text) – a matronly figure that organised the younger, often directionless women around her, according to the Samiti texts.[10] Remembering Kelkar as an old woman and devoid of any form of sexuality, does serve the same purpose as imagining *Bhārat Mātā* as celibate. There is very little in these introductory texts that account for her struggles as a woman who negotiated her roles as a mother and a young woman without a partner.[11] Instead, she is presented in a patriotic framework and Kelkar as an old woman becomes a role model for women around her. In a male Hindu nationalist framework that seems to only value women for their labour and reproductive roles, it is thus poignant that we can imagine Kelkar as a once-married, now-old woman, fulfilling her familial duties so silently, to the point of erasure. But by keeping patriotism

[10] Kelkar's succinct biography *Life Sketch of Vandaneeya Mausiji* (1996) notes that Kelkar was married at the age of 14 and became a stepmother to two young girls as soon as she was married. She was widowed at the age of 27 (Rai 1996).

[11] There are other offerings from the organisation that detail a longer life journey of the founder. For example, see 'Life Sketch of Vandaneeya Mausiji Smt. Lakshmibai Kelkar: Founder & Adya Pramukh Sanchalika of Rashtra Sevika Samiti' by Rajani Rai (Sanghamitra Seva Pratishthan, Sevika Prakashan, Nagpur 1996 (second edition 2012)).

at the heart of her story, the Samiti moves away from the traditional Hindu nationalist discourse and gives place to women who single-handedly imagine a nationalist ideology from within the household.

Who constitutes Bhārat: the ideal Hindu Family

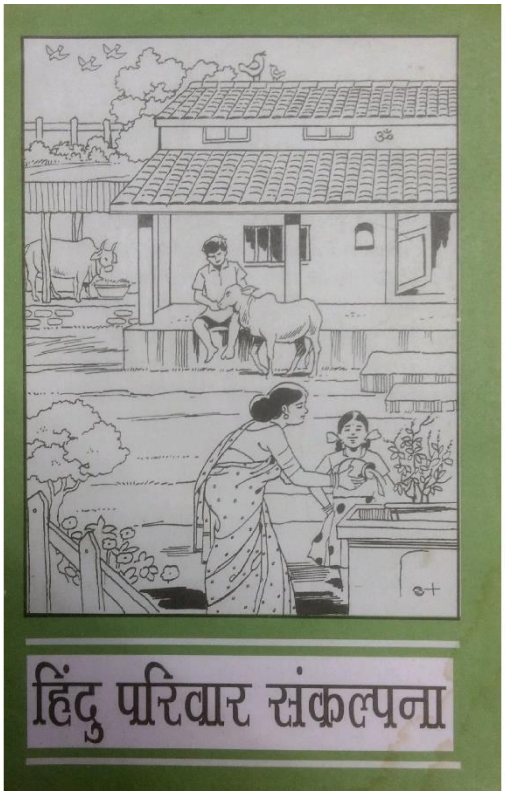

Fig. 2: Cover of *Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā* (Vision for the Hindu Family), 2005.

Another important Samiti publication is *Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā* (Pledging for a Hindu Family, HPS) (2005), which is a text that discusses the foundational aspect of the Hindu nation – the family. The book cover image depicts a humble *pakkā* structure (building made of brick) within a fenced boundary. There is a prominent *Oṃ* symbol on the side of the house that is facing the viewer. There are birds, trees, plants, and two cows. The first cow is eating hay in its shed and the other is playing with the young boy who is feeding grass to it. The boy, wearing shorts and a collared shirt, is shown sitting on a raised platform of the house. An older woman, presumably the mother, wearing a saree is watering a plant, which might be holy basil or *tulsī*, a plant that is revered among Hindus. A girl is standing next to her. Wearing a blouse and skirt, her hair is neatly tied in two ponytails.

The cover describes the ideal setup of a Hindu home, as imagined by the Samiti. A fertile cow that supplies milk is imperative for the economy of the home. Cows also assume significance as their presence symbolises prosperity. The house is a modest structure and the family remains within the confines of the fence.[12] Assuming the fence represents the *lakṣmaṇ rekhā* or the inviolable boundary of tradition, the mother is diligently performing her duties of preserving the Hindu traditions while the daughter looks on.[13] The daughter, it is implied, will learn from the mother how to build and maintain her own home in the future. The man of the house, the father, is undoubtedly outside the sphere of the home, working for his family and the nation, and his omnipresence can be inferred through the order of the home, thereby allocating the public sphere to the father (male) and the private sphere to the mother (female). The book contains a description of the utopian family that is worth quoting at length:

> This is a description of an Indian home. It is here that the child bathes in the tender love of the mother. He learns to walk with his father. He finds heaven-like bliss in the arms of his grandmother (paternal). In the stories that are told to him by his grandfather, he is invigorated by the stories of valour from the nation's history. It is in the family that the child develops affection for his parents, a sacrificial nature, the ability to serve without a bias and the feeling of kinship. A family provides a feeling of security and it is this security that is the endearing uniqueness of Bharat (Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā 2005: 3).

[12] It should be noted here that the members of the RSS and Samiti take pride in a modest and austere way of living, which is true for many members I encountered. Modest living is a virtue that is prized in both organisations and is a way that the members gain respect among communities that they work with. Living with moderate means also allows for the selfless service aspect of the membership, with ideal members not deriving any personal gains from the association.

[13] *Lakṣmaṇ rekhā* is a metaphor that comes from Tulsidas' epic *Rāmˈcaritˈmānas*. In some of the folklore and myths around the Ramayana, while in exile, Laxman would draw a safety line of sorts around the home that he shared with his brother Ram and sister-in-law, Sita. The line acted as a protective boundary, beyond which Sita would be exposed to all types of dangers, lest she toe the line. It is interesting to note that the reason why Sita had to toe the line was to give alms to a Sadhu (Ravana, the disguised Demon King of Lanka), who abducted her when she went beyond the protection of the boundary. The *lakṣmaṇ rekhā* is used as a metaphor to warn people (especially women and girls) against transgression of any kind.

The pronoun used in the description to refer to the child is male – reinforcing the belief that the young, pre-pubescent girl is perhaps not a category that is under the purview of Hindutva.[14] The girl only becomes relevant when she enters the realm of fertility and is at the risk of an unapproved union that would not be conducive to the cause of the *Hindū Rāṣṭra*.[15] Crucial here is also the recognition that family is a socialisation unit that fosters development of certain characteristics that are conducive to the maintaining of the structures of the family and the nation. The above quote stresses the importance of socialisation into the correct role(s) for the nation, where adopting the child into the larger society through the route of the family is important. '[Family as a structure, *A.T.*] is a system that has been perfected by our ancestors and now finds itself under decline. It is a grave matter of concern for the entire world', writes the Samiti in *Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā* (2005: 1). HPS aims to provide the picture of an ideal family set-up and hopes to revive the practice again. Hence, while there is a 'brotherhood of saffron' (Anderson & Damle 1987) and there is also a network of *sevikā*s working together as a Hindutva family for the nation, the prime aim is the maintenance and sustenance of the smallest unit of the nation – the family, as mentioned in the book, 'family is the essence of the nation' (Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā 2005: 3).

The text valourises the kinship set-up and subsequently laments the clash between family and modernity. The importance of kinship networks can be illustrated from the introduction to the section on marriage. HPS notes that marriage alliances of a 'bygone age' (*pahᴵle samay*) required knowledge of the genealogy of seven generations of family members. In fact, the Samiti gives a very clear definition of what makes a family/home: 'A family consists of the people, relatives, friends, plants and animals who live in the home' (ibid.: 3).

[14] This inference is being derived from the description written in Hindi in the original text. The original text uses the male-female forms of address towards *baccā* (male) and not, *baccī* (female). The entire description only refers to the male child and never to the female or plural (*bacce*).

[15] See the next section for substantiation.

Motherhood and Family: Crux of the Hindu nation

> *If a nation of true mothers can be built, the true sons will abound in every household* –
> Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Sarkar 2001: 258)

As mentioned in the introduction, the Samiti regards the institution of the family as the crux of its project. Within the family, motherhood is considered the most powerful role in influencing the developmental direction of the Hindu nation. The Samiti evokes three Hindu women from history as an aspirational ideal for its members to embody, each representing a specific quality required of a *sevikā*: *mātṛtva, kṛtatva* and *netṛtva* (maternal duties, work ethics, and leadership, respectively). To illustrate the qualities they seek for *mātṛtva*, ideal maternal duties, the *sevikā*s look to *Rāṣtramātā* (mother of the nation), Jijabai Bhonsle (1598–1674), the mother of Shivaji Bhonsle (1627/1630–1680; popularly addressed by the royal title king or 'Chhatrapati' Shivaji), ruler of the Maratha Kingdom from 1674–1680. For her work ethic and crystallizing the ideas of *kṛtatva*, the Samiti idolises Queen Ahilyabai Holkar (1725–1795) from the Holkar dynasty (1731–1948), who ruled the Malwa region from 1767–1795. The Samiti asserts that Ahilyabai, despite her status as a widow, ruled the kingdom both administratively and militarily. Similarly, for her fight against the British the Samiti regards Lakshmibai Newalkar (1828–1858), queen of Jhansi (popularly called *Rani* of Jhansi or *Rani* Lakshmi*bāī*), as an inspiring leader and the one embodying exemplary *netṛtva*.

Like the RSS, the Samiti upholds the iconic influence of king Shivaji to create a glorious Hindu nation. But the Samiti does so by always mentioning him as an ideal son who internalised the teachings of his mother and thus, transferring agency and vision of the ideal Hindu nation (as envisioned by Savarkar for Shivaji) to Jijabai. By referring to Jijabai as the mother of the nation (*Rāṣtramātā*, not *Bhārat Mātā*), which makes Shivaji the ideal son of the nation, the Samiti envisions a very distinct identity for the nation. In its vision, it would be the woman in the form of the mother who will first and foremost, inspire her son to devote his life to the nation. She would perform multiple roles as the inspiring, nurturing force, and it is through motherhood that she would bring her own vision into action. By endowing within herself the power to positively manipulate her child's devotion to herself for the bigger cause

of the nation, the Samiti reclaims and magnifies the 'mother's role' in the project of Hindutva nation building.

I see this as a way of re-claiming the influence of motherhood as a strategic intervention of the Samiti ideology that cuts at the heart of Hindutva ideas on subservient motherhood. Motherhood, as shown from the example, is the key role through which Samiti women seek to make an active intervention and contribution to the task of building their own vision of the nation based on Hindutva ideals. In the Samiti schema (and the larger *Saṅgh* ideas), the woman performs the role of the 'moral mother' (Chodorow 1978: 5) – as a facilitator-nurturer to the children and unstinting support to the husband. But differing from the RSS ideology, in the Samiti ideology, the mother in the family provides an additional function of socialising the entire unit of the family into the Hindutva ideology.

The Hindu way of life

> *Due to the incomplete understanding of religion, secularism is on the rise and the Hindu way of life is being posited as regressive, anti-women and unjust [...]*
> (Āpṭe 2003: 2).

In opposition to the lack of familial networks that are attributed to 'western cultures', there is the *Hindutva* theorisation of the 'Hindu way of life' – the way of living among Hindu society that upholds tradition and enters in a symbiotic relationship with nature. A specific organisation of society, the family, and the nation constitutes the 'Hindu way of life', since all the elements of nature and culture are working together to realise the dream of the glorious Hindu nation. It is a significant parameter that controls and guides the Samiti's, as well as the Hindu nationalist activities in India. In the book that contains a collection of her speeches, Pramila Apte, the second *pramukh saṃcālikā* draws a link between the Hindu society, nationhood, and nature. She writes: 'The Hindu way of life has the ability to accept everything as its own. *Jāti* (sub-castes), different groups, language, geography transcend to give way to a feeling of affection and sacrifice' (Āpṭe 2003: 41). One of the characteristics that emerges regarding the 'Hindu way of life' is the symbiotic way of living with one's surroundings. Therefore, nature and society are in perfect harmony with the individual. In her speech at the 'Africa *Varg*' in Durban, South Africa (2002), Apte suggests that all the problems

that plague the world today have only one solution: adherence to the Hindu way of life. Referring to it as the *rāmbāṇ* (the arrow from the bow of Lord Ram, synonymous with the panacea), there is an implication that the complexities of current issues give way to a simple solution – what emerges from the discourse around the 'Hindu way of life' for our argument is the direct connection made between the discourse and women. And this is where the Samiti borrows from the revivalist movement and adds to the homilies on women glorified in Hindu society.

Sarkar (2001) maintains that the coinage of the authentic 'Hindu way of life' was formulated during the colonial era. The 'Hindu way of life' was located in the space that was protected from the 'imposed modernity' and was 'inviolate and autonomous' (ibid.: 36). Thus, the traditions that were being practiced away from the colonial eye, in the private sphere came to represent the 'Hindu way of life'. For example, Apte blames colonial incursion for the unequal status of women, something that was hitherto absent in the 'Hindu way of life' (Āpṭe 2003). She notes in her keynote speech at a national camp in Bhopal (year not mentioned),

> In the Hindu view of life, men and women are not thought of in different contexts […]. Unfortunately; there is a lot of despair, sadness and misunderstanding about the Indian way of life. We are lost because we are looking at this culture through the Western lens. If women throw away this lens, the way of life will become much clearer (ibid.: 2).

Further she says, 'A nation's strength lies in its values and character. On it lies the foundation of the nation. A woman with ideal qualities becomes an inspiration to such a society […]. Respect of such a woman is the Hindu view of life' (ibid.: 3). Thus, the Samiti envisions that it is women who preserve the domestic sphere in a way that is in line with Hindutva ideals, and thereby maintain and propagate the Hindu view of life.

Love's labour lost: Women and housework in the home

> *The homemaker (Grahini) is understood to be the home… The character of the homemaker reflects the character and atmosphere of the home.* (Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā 2005: 5).

> *A family that has one source of income is the most prosperous* (ibid.: 21).

The seat of socialisation into the patriotic *Hindutva* set-up is the family/household, and the Samiti places the entire onus on the Hindu woman to make use of the familial setup in the service of the nation. Consequently, it claims that it is the lack of the family system that has created nations which 'despite their intellectual prowess, lack in inner peace' (Sādhᴵnā Karᴵtī Chaleṃ 2005: 3). In *Bhārat* (as opposed to India),[16] on the other hand, the Samiti claims, the system of the family is still intact, in spite of aggression against it. As the quotes above illustrate, the foundation of the Indian family in *Bhārat* is the homemaker. For the Samiti, the woman represents the home and the home represents the family, and as shown earlier, the family is the smallest and most essential unit of the nation. Therefore, for women, performing ideal wife and motherhood is performing the nation. The Samiti's ideology asserts that it is the woman who internalises and then spreads the *saṃskār*s (values) among the members of the household. 'She is the epitome of creation and security. She has the Saraswati, Durga and Lakshmi in her' (ibid.: 3). Borrowing from the religious aspect of Hindutva, the Samiti seamlessly merges the scriptures and myths to imagine the desirable qualities in the *sevikā*. Physical training is justified with the myths of Hindu gods and goddesses' resorting to violence when under external attack. SKC quotes:

> The Hindu way of life is very diverse. We learn self-protection not to attack but to protect ourselves. This is the reason that our Gods are adept in using their hands to impart blessings as well as defense. Protection of the

[16] In Sangh narratives (verbal and textual), there is a difference in the usage of *Bhārat* (the Hindi name of the subcontinent) and India, a name that is not claimed and used as often by the organisation. *Bhārat* could denote the undivided subcontinent, the imagined pristine land before its corruption by foreign invaders and to differentiate the values between a 'Hindu' *Bhārat* and a secular India.

> saints and punishment of evil is the message given in [the] Gita (ibid.: 4).

Thus, the need emerges for an organisation like the Samiti, which sees itself as empowering women in the direction of leading a household towards the realisation of a *Hindū Rāṣṭra*. Therefore, as indicated by the quote from the text, the Samiti works to revive the sense of responsibilities that would contribute to restoring India's glory from the private sphere. Thereby, the goals of the Samiti are clearly laid out: 'women had to be prepared physically, mentally, and intellectually, be made independent and united' (ibid.: 5). Samiti, thus, locates the homemaker (gṛhiṇī; denotes necessarily a woman) at the heart of the *Hindutva* nation and therein lies her agency. Palriwala writes that the household is not just the space for 'co-residence, consumption, and reproduction' (Palriwala 1990: 15) but also an economic and productive unit. And the Samiti lays claim to the domain of the household as the site that would enable the most radical change in their vision of *Hindutva*. The site of the family thus becomes the site for the appropriation of gendered nationalist dreams of the Samiti women, the degree of influence of which is much more than what the larger hegemonic RSS ideology can give it credit for.

The private is political: The Indian women's movement, the Samiti, and elements of the ideal nation

> *The position of women in the West was always lacking. That is why they needed to fight for their rights* (Āpṭe 2003: 5).

The Samiti's view of marital connections sheds light on the women's role in relationship and how to make marriage a function of the larger Hindutva aspiration. The husband and wife are treated as one single unit, performing different functions for the *Hindū Rāṣṭra*. 'The couple should not have individual aspirations – they are inseparable' (ibid.: 14). Since for the Samiti, the largest potentialities of power and agency lie in each member's assigned role in the family, the Hindutva nation has always been imagined as a family, with the role of the parents being paramount. Since the project of the nation is heavily dependent on socialisation in the home, the Samiti sees the importance of the domestic sphere within the larger unit of the family as being imperative to the process of nation building. A woman, without her family,

cannot contribute fully to the cause of the nation. This lies at odds with certain parts of the women's movement, especially those aligning with feminist ideologies, which locate the root of subjugation of women in the structure of the family. This brings me to discuss an aspect that I raised earlier about the Samiti's discord with the Indian women's movement.

In a section called 'Gaṅgotrī' (in *Sādhˈnā Karˈtī Chaleṃ*), the Samiti claims to be the unifying force that brought various groups of women in 'Wardha, Bhandara, Satara, Pune' together during the freedom struggle, a claim to illustrate the Samiti's presence and contribution to the Indian independence movement. At the present moment, the Samiti sees itself fulfilling a role that women's groups have fought for for years, at the same time it seeks to position itself outside of other women's movements. In *Mr̥tyuṃjay: Ham Hiṃdū Haiṃ*, Apte raises the issue during a speech at the *Viśva Vibhāg Samiti Śikṣā Varg* in 2002. She asserts,

> The process of becoming pro-Hindutva [...] needs to be starting in the home. That is why an organised women's group is important. The groups asking only for women's liberation and the rights are merely causing discord in the society. Samiti is not pro-women. We don't want women empowerment at the cost of a power struggle (Āpṭe 2003: 38).

Similar assertions of difference to feminism are also made in other instances. In *Vasuṃdharā Parivār Hamārā* (Our earth's family), Apte makes a statement portraying feminism as antithetical to 'the Indian way of life' (ibid.: xx). According to Apte, the way of life is based on the feeling of *Vasudeva Kuṭuṃb* (world being one family) and Hinduism as having the ability to accept everyone as their own. According to her, feminism implies protest and demands radical change, which the Samiti styles as selfish. As stated earlier, the women's movement and the Hindu nationalist women have found it very difficult to find some overlapping issues. Banerjee has observed that there is an overarching strain between the Hindu nationalist women's groups and the feminist movement in India, because of the former's involvement in the masculine Hindu nationalist discourse, a tension between 'feminine nationalist activism and feminist nationalism' (Banerjee 2005: 17). Bachhetta (2004) has pointed to the divisions between the Indian feminist movement and the Samiti, and throughout the Samiti primers significant portions address this

issue. One of the main topics of contention is 'family'. While various fractions of the Indian women's movement sought to democratize the family through legal intervention, and demand equal access for women to the public sphere, the Samiti sees the traditional family as an enabling instrument that guarantees women's claims of power in the domestic sphere. Motherhood is seen as a role that has the potential to bring about positive change (also noted by Shaheed 1999), and the Samiti goes beyond the vision of the RSS by imagining motherhood as a site of active mobilization. The prominent thought that emerges in the Samiti texts is of a universal family. At various places in the text, the family is not just the residents of the home – the idea is to transcend external boundaries and accept everyone as one's own (Sādhˈnā Karˈtī Chaleṃ 2005: 5). This idea, on the face of it, might seem to resonate with universalist ideas of compassion and love. It is even reminiscent of the RSS motto of *Vasudeva Kuṭuṃb* or the world is my home. But there is a stark difference in the former ideas and the vision of the Hindu nationalist ideologies. Family becomes the site where there is 'no space for egotistical tendencies' (ibid). Hence, a familial pursuit of the nation will be given priority over an individual's pursuit of subjectivity or subjective truth. Therefore, housework and labour do not form part of the framework because they are just part of the larger project of nation building. Hence, the fractions of the Indian women's movement that demand better working conditions and access to and in public sphere, are seen as a digression from the task of nation building.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to provide a comprehensive view of the ideology of the *Rāṣṭra Sevikā Samiti* and the way it finds implementation in textual sources, which would be later used as pedagogic tools. While language becomes a means of access, most material is directed at women and young women who lean towards traditional Hindu ideas of womanhood. A sense of the family is given a priority over personhood; a sense of one's immediate community is given less prominence over the imagined idea of *Akhaṇḍ Bhārat* and finally, being an active mobiliser of women in the Hindu nationalist movement is preferable to overtly fighting and destabilizing gender norms. Among the themes that emerged from the analysis of the primers, a

common factor was the way they inextricably linked religion, virtuous womanhood, nationhood and motherhood to one another: womanhood finds its ideal realisation when the nation finds its voice in the value system provided by the mother – the value system being based completely on Hindu rituals and norms.

By linking patriotism to religion and responsibility, the Samiti combines the gamut of ideal values and duties that a *sevikā* needs to embody, which ultimately leads to her serving the *Hindū Rāṣṭra*. Mothers, due to their position as influencers, become the custodians of *Hindutva* in the home. Some values one is born into while others need to be inculcated. The Samiti believes that the values required for an ideal Hindu nation will be transmitted only through the community and when everyone aspires to embody the gendered prescribed values (in the case of the Samiti: *māṭṛtva*, *kṛtatva* and *neṭṛtva*). These values need to be created and imagined – through fables and stories. This is where Samiti finds its role – through the creation of literature, various cultural programmes, intellectual discussions, and services that promote these ideals. The Samiti books analysed in this paper are peppered with examples from myth and reality to illustrate the desired qualities of the ideal *sevikā*. To begin with, the ideal *sevikā* is someone who is proficient in taking care of the home and, hence, is the ideal *gṛhiṇī*. In the private sphere the male figurehead remains the head of the household. Yet she is to be the force that keeps it conducive to the progression of the Hindu nationalist thought.

There are the tensions that make this project's conclusion a little difficult to resolve. At the first impression, one can dismiss women's presence in the Hindu nationalist discourses as an internalisation of the patriarchy inherent within this discourse, but women's participation in nationalist discourses establish more complex reasons for joining. While the Hindu nationalist consciousness attributes spirituality to women, Samiti discourses show that women have developed their own version of religiosity. They have made claims over their roles as *sahˈdharmiṇī*s of their partners and are now appropriating that to gain mobility and status in the public sphere. According to Kristeva nationalist frameworks 'reduce women to the identification needs of their originary groups, imprisoning them in impregnable aloofness of a weird primal paradise: family, ethnicity, nation, and race' (Kristeva 1993 in Menon 1999:

31). On the other hand, Sen has theoretically identified how women within masculine nationalist frameworks express their ideology: first, as 'permissive', where they offer their support from the 'margins' by performing duties that are considered supportive and secondary. Secondly, they express it as 'active agency' by staging overt displays of allegiance to the ideology (Sen 2007: 3). In the case of the Samiti, we see an exhibition of both types of agency. Through its texts, the Samiti establishes its own identity (separate from the RSS and the larger *Saṅgh Parivār*). Sarkar writes, '[Samiti] supplements Sangh's activity as a householder', through schools, *śākhā*s, and ideology classes, by emphasizing the active role of the mother 'a related but subordinated' position (Sarkar 1991: 2059). She further notes, 'Much of the Samiti's activity is then informal and directed at constructing an ideal, totalitarian RSS family' (ibid.: 2061). And thus, the agency of the organisation is realized through the analysis of the Samiti texts and its ideological interventions to assert women's role in the Hindu nationalist ideology. To empirically show how this agency translates on field is difficult but would help enable an understanding of how the ideology finds its place in the hegemonic Hindu nationalist framework.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andersen, Walter 1972. "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: III: Participation in Politics", in: *Economic and Political Weekly* 7: 673–682.

Anderson, Walter K., & Damle, Shridhar D. 1987. *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism.* New Delhi: Vistaar Publications.

Apoorvanand 2017. "The BJP's Communal Strategy Failed in Bihar: So Why are Modi and Shah Repeating it in Uttar Pradesh?", in: *Scroll.in* (22. February 2017) (<https://scroll.in/article/829964/the-bjps-communal-strategy-failed-in-bihar-so-why-are-modi-and-shah-repeating-it-in-uttar-pradesh>, Accessed: 27. February 2018).

Āpṭe, Pramilā 2003. *Mṛtyuṃjay: Ham Hiṃdū Haiṃ*. Nagpur: Sevikā Prakāśan.

Bacchetta, Paola 2005. “Hindu Nationalist Women as Ideologues: The Sangh, the Samiti and their Differential Concepts of the Hindu Nation”, in: Christophe Jaffrelot (Ed.): *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 108–147.

Banerjee, Sikata 2005. *Make Me a Man: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Basu, Amrita 1999. “Resisting the Sacred and the Secular”, in: Amrita Basu & Patricia Jeffery (Eds.): *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women’s Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia.* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 3–14.

Chodorow, Nancy 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender.* Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.

Golwalkar, Madhao Sadashiv 1966. *Bunch of Thoughts*. Bangalore: Vikrama Prakashan.

Gupta, Charu 2001. “The Icon of Mother India in Late Colonial North India: ‘Bharat Mata’, ‘Matri Bhasha’ and ‘Gau Mata’”, in: *Economic & Political Weekly* 56 (45): 4291–4299.

Kovacs, Anja 2004. “You Don’t Understand, We are at War! Refashioning Durga in the Service of Hindu Nationalism”, in: *Contemporary South Asia* 13 (4): 373–388.

Kristeva, Julia 1993. *Nations without Nationalism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Mahmood, Saba 2003. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. New Haven: Princeton University Press.

Mathur, Shubh 2008. *Everyday Life of Hindu Nationalism: An Ethnographic Account*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective.

Menon, Ritu 1999. “Reproducing the Legitimate Community: Secularity, Sexuality and the State in Postpartition India”, in: Patricia Jeffery & Amrita Basu (Eds.): *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women’s Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 15–32.

Metcalfe, Barbara 1999. “Women and Men in a Contemporary Pietist Movement: The Case of Tablighi Jamaat”, in: Patricia Jeffery & Amrita Basu

(Eds.): *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 107–122.

Palriwala, Rajni 1990. "Introduction," in: Leela Dube & Rajni Palriwala (Eds.): *Structures and Strategies*. Thousand Oaks; New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 15–56.

Rai, Rashmi 1996. *Life Sketch of Vandaneeya Mausiji: Smt. Lakshmibai Kelkar – Founder and Adya Pramukh Sanchalika of Rashtra Sevika Samiti*. 2012 edition. Nagpur: Sevika Prakashan.

Rao, Mohan 2011. "Love Jihad and Demographic Fears", in: *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 18 (3): 425–430.

[R. S. Samiti] 2005. *Sādhʲnā Karʲtī Chaleṃ*. Nagpur: Sevikā Prakāśan.

[R. S. Samiti] 2005. *Hiṃdu Parivār Saṃkalpanā.* Nagpur: Sevikā Prakāśan.

Sarkar, Tanika 2005. "Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organization in Hindutva Politics", in: Christophe Jaffrelot (Ed.): *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 148–177.

Sarkar, Tanika 2001. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Sarkar, Tanika 1999. "Woman, Community and Nation: A Historical Trajectory for Hindu Identity Politics", in: Patricia Jeffery & Amrita Basu (Eds.): *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 89–104.

Sarkar, Tanika 1991. "The Woman as Communal Subject: Rashtrasevika Samiti and Ram Janmabhoomi Movement", in: *Economic & Political Weekly* 26 (35): 2057–2062.

Sen, Atreyee 2007. *Shiv Sena Women: Violence and Communalism in a Bombay Slum*. New Delhi: Zubaan, Kali for Women.

Sen, Samita 1993. "Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal", in: *Gender & History* 5 (2): 231–243.

Shaheed, Farida 1999. "The Other Side of Discourse: Women's Experiences of Identity, Religion and Activism in Pakistan," in: Patricia Jeffery & Amrita Basu (Eds.): *Resisting the Sacred and the Secular: Women's Activism and Politicized Religion in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 143–164.

Die Mumbai Riots in Rahman Abbas' Roman *Rohzin*

Almuth Degener

Abstract: In dem Roman *Rohzin* (Die Stadt, das Meer, die Liebe) von Rahman Abbas sind die gewaltsamen hindu-muslimischen Ausschreitungen von 1992–3 in Mumbai ein wiederkehrendes Thema, obwohl die Handlung erst etwa 10 Jahre danach situiert ist. Der Artikel untersucht, wie Strategien der literarischen Darstellung in einem belletristischen Kontext die Wahrnehmung der historischen Ereignisse beeinflussen.

Rahman Abbas ist ein erfolgreicher Urdu-Schriftsteller der jüngeren Generation. Geboren 1972, veröffentlichte er seinen ersten Roman im Jahr 2004 (Degener 2018). Dieser und zwei weitere Werke wurden mit kleinen Änderungen in einer Trilogie von 2013 nachgedruckt (Abbas 2013). 2016 wurde der vierte Roman, *Rohzin* publiziert (Abbas 2016), 2018 erschien die deutsche Übersetzung (aus dem Urdu von Almuth Degener) unter dem Titel *Die Stadt, das Meer, die Liebe* (Abbas 2018), im selben Jahr wurde er mit dem höchsten indischen Literaturpreis für Urdu-Literatur, dem Sahitya Akademi Award, ausgezeichnet.

Den Inhalt des Romans in wenigen Sätzen zusammenzufassen, ist schwierig, weil er einerseits in mehrfacher Hinsicht nicht den Kategorien des klassischen Romans entspricht, andererseits verschiedene Themen anspricht, deren jedes als wesentlich verstanden werden kann.

Da ist zunächst die Geschichte einer Liebe, oder eher eine Geschichte der Liebe. Es ist die Geschichte zweier junger Leute, zugleich eine Auslotung unterschiedlichster Spielarten von Liebe, von der außerehelichen Beziehung über Sex als therapeutisches Mittel bis zur bedingungslosen, erst in der völligen Selbstaufgabe sich erfüllenden Liebe der klassischen Urdu-Poesie. Zugleich ist *Rohzin* ein Porträt der Megacity Mumbai, ein Großstadtroman, dessen Protagonisten, Schauplätze und Handlungsstränge dadurch geformt und zusammengehalten werden, dass sie die vielfältigen Facetten einer der faszinierendsten Großstädte der Welt abbilden. Schließlich spricht *Rohzin* verschiedene Probleme der jüngeren Vergangenheit an, vor allem den zunehmenden religiösen Fundamentalismus.

Im Mittelpunkt des Romans steht die Figur des jungen Asrar. Bis auf ein erstes Kapitel, in dem wichtige Motive wie das Erwachen der Sexualität des Jugendlichen und die Gewalt des Meeres vorweggenommen werden, spielt sich die Handlung innerhalb eines relativ kurzen Zeitraums ab, von Anfang Mai 2003 bis Ende Juli 2004. Durch Einschübe und Rückblenden wird die zeitliche Perspektive um etwa zehn Jahre in die Vergangenheit und Zukunft erweitert, dazu ergibt sich durch die wiederkehrende Präsenz von übernatürlichen Wesen wie Göttern und Dämonen eine außerzeitliche Dimension.

In dem Roman herrscht die Perspektive des auktorialen Erzählers vor. Zusammen mit wechselnder Fokalisierung ermöglicht sie eine Überschau verschiedener Schauplätze, Zeiten und Personen und qualifiziert in ihrer Fülle und Vielfalt die Erzählung als multiperspektivische Darstellung der sich jeder einschichtigen Beschreibung entziehenden Megacity. Der Leser identifiziert sich vor allem mit dem Protagonisten Asrar, der in weiten Teilen des Romans die Rolle eines Flaneurs einnimmt. In einigen Teilen des Buches wird der Blickwinkel anderer Personen eingenommen, etwa der von Asrars Freundin Hina und deren Vater, aber auch von nicht-menschlichen Personen wie Geistern, Tieren oder Bäumen. In diesen Passagen entsteht zwischen Erzähler, den Figuren und dem Leser in wesentlich geringerem Maße ein Wertekonsens, die Identifizierung mit anderen Personen als Asrar fällt schwerer. Die zentrale Figur ist also nicht nur wegen ihrer stärkeren Präsenz von Anfang bis Ende des Romans, sondern auch wegen ihres höheren Identifikationspotentials Asrar.

Der Roman beginnt mit Asrars Reise aus einem Dorf an der Küste des Arabischen Meeres nach Mumbai, um dort Arbeit zu suchen. Noch bevor er die Großstadt erreicht, hat Asrar ein mentales Bild von Mumbai, das vor allem vom Film geprägt ist. Ausdrücklich erwähnt wird *Bombay* (Mani Ratnam 1995), der, obwohl im Roman an der Oberfläche durch Zitieren des bekannten Songs *„tu hi re“* nur die Liebesgeschichte des Films angesprochen wird, auch die anderen großen Themen des Romans vorwegnimmt und zu ihnen hinführt. Der Titel verweist auf die Stadt Mumbai/ Bombay, dabei ist die Handlung des Films maßgeblich von Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Hindus und Muslimen geprägt, insbesondere den sogenannten *Bombay Riots* der frühen 90er Jahre, bei denen mehrere Hundert Menschen ums Leben kamen (Masselos 1994; Masselos 2007: 363–84).

Der Roman spielt im Jahr 2003, also gut zehn Jahre nach den *Bombay Riots*. Die Hetzjagden aber auf Angehörige bestimmter Religionsgemeinschaften, die Morde, Vergewaltigungen und Misshandlungen, die Angst und der Hass der Tage und Monate, die unter dieser Überschrift zusammengefasst werden, die Passivität oder Verwicklung staatlicher Behörden in die Ausschreitungen, die Nachwirkung der traumatischen Ereignisse bis in die Erzählgegenwart, all das ist in *Rohzin* ein Teil des vielschichtigen und überzeitlichen Bildes der Stadt Mumbai, wie es sich dem Protagonisten und mit ihm den Lesern nach und nach erschließt.

An insgesamt vier Stellen werden die Geschehnisse von 1992–3 thematisiert. Alle stehen in der ersten Hälfte des Romans, im zweiten, dritten und fünften Kapitel des Buches. Das fünfte Kapitel, das ziemlich genau die Mitte des Romans ausmacht (Seite 136–190 von insgesamt 354 Seiten im Urdu-Original), ist als einziges der acht Kapitel des Romans im Original (nicht aber in der Übersetzung) auch optisch zweigeteilt: ab Seite 145 wird der Text mit einem vom ersten Teil des Kapitels abweichenden bildlichen Element gegliedert. Von hier ab geht es neben der sich entwickelnden Beziehung der beiden jungen Leute um Liebe in ganz unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen, darüber hinaus spielt Dichtung eine maßgebliche Rolle, kaum mehr aber die Politik.

In diesem Artikel geht es nur um die Gestaltung der *Bombay Riots* und der nachfolgenden Bombenanschläge. Die folgende Analyse stellt dar, welche historischen Ereignisse im Roman thematisiert werden und wie der Autor sie literarisch verarbeitet.

Der erste Abschnitt aus dem zweiten Kapitel des Romans steht im Kontext einer ersten Stadtbesichtigung, die der Protagonist mit einer kleinen Gruppe von jungen Männern unternimmt. Auf der Muhammad Ali Road bleiben sie vor der Minara-Moschee stehen, die wenigen Minuten, in denen der Protagonist die Moschee bewundert, eröffnen die Gelegenheit zur Einführung des Themas *Bombay Riots*.

Erzählt wird in Form eines Berichts. Größere Lebendigkeit sowie eine Doppelung des Wahrnehmungsfeldes, aber auch größere Distanz des Lesers zum Geschehen, wird dadurch erreicht, dass der auktoriale Erzähler abwechselnd Asrars und die Innensicht der Minarette einer Moschee als Zeugen vergangener Geschehnisse darstellt. Distanz wird auch durch die Zeitstruktur ge-

schaffen, die zwischen der Gegenwart des Erzählten, der nur aus dem Blickwinkel der Minarette sichtbaren Vergangenheit und mythischer Außerzeitlichkeit eine Verbindung herstellt, die dem Protagonisten selbst nicht bekannt ist, die aber für den Leser auch eine Brücke zur politischen Gegenwart schlagen kann. Mehrere politische Ereignisse kommen in dem kurzen Absatz zur Sprache:

> Diese Minarette [...] waren Zeugen von Kämpfen um Religionen und Doktrinen. Die Minarette hatten auch die Personen gesehen, die Anfang 1993 während der antimuslimischen Ausschreitungen, in Polizeiuniformen gekleidet, in der „Umar Ali Usman Lungi Cut-Bäckerei" ein Blutbad angerichtet hatten, denen später vom Gericht aber kein Vergehen nachgewiesen werden konnte. Die Minarette der Minara-Moschee hatten ebenfalls beobachtet, wie einige Monate nach den Unruhen spät in der Nacht, oder vielmehr kurz vor Tagesanbruch, der Imam Mahjur al-Bukhari, bekannt als Hijr Ghilman, durch seine Anhänger eine Kiste mit RDX-Sprengstoff auf einer Straße in der Nähe deponieren ließ. Niemand konnte ahnen, auf wessen Wink hin Imam Mahjur al-Bukhari alias Hijr Ghilman das tat. Es wurde viel darüber spekuliert, und man hatte das Geheimnis noch nicht gelüftet, als er einige Jahre danach wenige Kilometer von der Moschee entfernt brutal ermordet wurde.

Das Blutbad in der „Umar Ali Usman Lungi Cut-Bäckerei" bezieht sich auf einen Vorfall am 9. Januar 1993. Nachdem vom Dach des Süßwarenladens Suleman Usman Bakery gleich neben der Minara-Moschee angeblich Schüsse abgegeben worden waren, stürmte die Polizei die Bäckerei, es gab ein Gefecht und zahlreiche Tote unter Muslimen in der Bäckerei und außerhalb. Danach wurden mehrere Polizisten angeklagt, acht unbewaffnete Personen getötet zu haben, der Fall ist bis heute nicht abgeschlossen (Shantha 2019). Der Text spricht ironisch von „in Polizeiuniformen gekleideten" Personen und der Unfähigkeit, trotz dem offensichtlichen Gemetzel den Angreifern ein Verbrechen nachzuweisen. Er kritisiert damit das Vorgehen der Polizei und der staatlichen Behörden als unprofessionell und parteiisch. Die Polizei erscheint als Ausführende des Angriffs nicht nur auf bestimmte Personen oder Personengruppen, sondern durch den mythologisierenden Teil des Absatzes auf die Stadt Mumbai selbst. Der Sprengstoffanschlag des Imams bezieht sich auf

den Fall des Maulana Ziauddin Bukhari, eines prominenten, zeitweise radikalmuslimischen, Lokalpolitikers, der unter ungeklärten Umständen ermordet wurde (Zakaria 2004: 271). Dagegen ist Salman Rushdie, gegen dessen Darstellung des Islam junge Muslime protestieren, auch für westliche Leser leicht zu identifizieren:

> Die Minarette hatten auch den Tag gesehen, als Tausende von Muslimen im Protest gegen Salman Valad Mansur al-Hallaj alias Kitab al-Tavasin hierher gekommen waren und die Polizei auf einmal das Feuer eröffnet hatte. Dutzende junger Leute, die gegen die blasphemischen Darstellungen des Islam, des Propheten und des Koran demonstriert hatten, waren in den dunklen Tunnel des Todes gefallen.

Der Passus bezieht sich auf Demonstrationen in Mumbai im Februar 1989, bei denen die Polizei das Feuer eröffnete und zahlreiche Tote und Verwundete zurückließ.

Passend für die Minarette einer Moschee als Augenzeugen richtet sich der Blick in allen Fällen auf Personen muslimischer Religionszugehörigkeit. Mit ungefähr 20% (Census of India 2011) liegt der muslimische Bevölkerungsanteil der Stadt Mumbai etwas höher als der Landesdurchschnitt. Die muslimische Bevölkerung der Stadt ist weder ethnisch-linguistisch noch nach Konfession gleichartig. Neben den bekannten Sunniten und Schiiten gibt es zahlreiche, nach religiöser Überzeugung, Kleidung und Gewohnheiten unterschiedene, teilweise kastenähnliche Gruppen, die oft nur wenig Kontakt zu anderen Gruppierungen pflegen. Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu sind die wichtigsten, aber nicht die einzigen Sprachen, die von muslimischen Bürgern Mumbais gesprochen werden.

Die Muslime in *Die Stadt, das Meer, die Liebe* erscheinen als Opfer wie als Täter, als aufgehetzte junge Demonstranten wie als zufällige Passanten, die von fanatischen Hindus und Polizisten angegriffen werden. Fiktive Namen geben Auskunft über die Zugehörigkeit zur muslimischen Minderheit (Mansur, Muhammad usw.), nicht aber über die Zugehörigkeit zu bestimmten Konfessionen und Gruppierungen, obwohl dies in anderen Teilen des Buches eine gewisse Rolle spielt. Einige Namen enthalten darüber hinaus Hinweise auf weitere Merkmale. Dass etwa die Figur Imam Bukhari „Ghilman" genannt

wird, deutet auf mögliche päderastische Aktivitäten, dies spielt im Zusammenhang der politischen Gewalttaten jedoch keine Rolle, ebenso wenig wie die Anspielung auf den berühmten Mystiker Mustafa al-Hallaj, der 922 unter dem Vorwurf der Ketzerei hingerichtet wurde.

Im selben Kapitel etwa 20 Seiten später wird berichtet, wie die jungen Männer im Stadtteil Mandvi unter einem Baum rasten, dies liefert dem Erzähler einen Anlass, die Verwicklung des Gangsterbosses Dawood Ibrahim in die Terroranschläge (Masselos 1994: 90) aus Sicht dieses Baumes darzustellen. Dawood wird in Form der Erinnerung des Baumes an ein Gespräch eingeführt, das mit einem Div (Dämon) zu einer Zeit stattgefunden hat, als Dawood als noch unbekannter junger Mann sich an diesem Ort mit seinen Freunden zu treffen pflegte. Die Beteiligung Dawoods an den Bombenanschlägen von 1993 wird an keiner Stelle direkt zur Sprache gebracht, muss im Kontext aber als Kernaussage interpretiert werden:

> Ein Div, der auf den Bäumen gegenüber von Mumba Devis Tempel wohnte, hatte vor Jahren schon, als er einmal auf diesem Baum gegenüber dem Postamt saß, ein Geheimnis verraten: dieser Dawood Kokani, der unter dem Baum seine Freunde um sich scharte und im Dialekt von Mumbai sagte: „Bin ich vielleicht ein Idiot, ey?“, würde eines Tages der Gangsterboss im Stadtteil Dongri und „Pate von Mumbai“ werden und dann im Handumdrehen die ganze Welt mit Terror überziehen. Achtunddreißig Sonnenfinsternisse vor Beginn des neuen Jahrhunderts würde er aus Mumbai fliehen und über eine andere Insel herrschen. Danach würde er zum fanatischen Anhänger und Unterstützer eines Geheimdienstes werden und aus Zorn – einige Leute würden es auch Rachegelüste nennen – Terroranschläge auf Mumbai verüben. Er würde von Geheimagenten aus aller Welt gesucht, aber sein eigener Geheimdienst würde ihm in einer Höhle Zuflucht gewähren.

Die Augenzeugenschaft des Baumes bezieht sich lediglich auf eine Zeit vor der kriminellen Karriere des Gangsterbosses, alles Übrige erscheint in Form von Vorausdeutungen. Diese treten einerseits als zukunftsgewiss auf, weil sie von einer über übermenschliche Fähigkeiten verfügenden Quelle beglaubigt werden und weil sie Informationen über jenseits der erzählten Zeit liegende,

aus Sicht des Lesers aber historische Geschehnisse enthalten. Sie sind andererseits für den Leser zukunftsungewiss, weil sie einen Zeitraum umfassen, der teilweise jenseits des Erscheinungsdatums des Romans liegt, und weil sie zwar großenteils mit der Stimme des Erzählers, aber dies nur als Sprachrohr fiktiver, märchenhafter Gestalten geäußert werden. Die „Gewissheit" göttlicher Vorausschau wird weiter dadurch relativiert, dass der berichtende Div nicht an dem Gespräch zwischen Göttin und Engel beteiligt war, sondern es nur mitgehört hat:

> Ein Engel, der einem Sufi am Schrein von Haji Ali zugeordnet war, hat nach dessen Tod vor einiger Zeit ein paar Tage oder Wochen im Tempel von Mumba Devi verbracht. Mumba Devi nannte diesen Engel Michael Singh. Das Geheimnis, was aus Dawood Konkani wird und welche Auswirkungen das auf Mumbai hat, das hat Michael Singh während seines Aufenthalts Mumba verraten. Michael hat Mumba auch verraten, wie Dawood sterben wird, aber er hat es geflüstert, so leise, dass ich es nicht hören konnte.

Rahman Abbas verbindet geschickt Strategien der Fokalisierung, Rückblende und Vorausdeutung sowie berichtende und szenische Darbietungsformen. Während die Protagonisten sich ausruhen, führt er den Leser auf eine hochdramatische Reise durch die Geschichte. Das Gespräch endet mit einem kurzen szenischen Austausch, der die Distanz zwischen Leser und Figuren stark reduziert:

> Nachdem er die ganze Geschichte erzählt hatte, schloss der Dämon mit den Worten: „Als Michael Singh und Mumba Devi miteinander über Gott und die Welt sprachen, stand ich am Fenster des Tempels. Als die Rede auf die Bombenanschläge in Mumbai kam, wurden Mumba Devis Augen feucht." Der Baum trauerte lange still. Schließlich sagte er: „Es ist Mumba Devis Pflicht, zur Rettung der Stadt vor dem Unglück Brahma um Hilfe anzurufen." Der Div lachte laut auf und flog fort nach Chor Bazaar.

Die Vorausdeutungen erscheinen nicht als unverbindliche Mutmaßungen, sondern als bedrohlich und unmittelbar relevant für die menschlichen Protagonisten der erzählten Zeit, die sich, ohne etwas von den Erinnerungen des

Baumes zu ahnen, in seinem Schatten aufhalten, wie auch für die Stadt Mumbai der Gegenwart des Lesers. Der Baum beschwört mit den Wörtern „Unglück“, „Rettung“ und „Pflicht“ eine vermeintliche Weltordnung, die durch das Lachen des Divs sogleich als hohl entlarvt wird.

Im dritten Kapitel des Romans findet sich die szenische Schilderung eines Besuchs von Asrar und seinem Freund Muhammad Ali bei ihrem gemeinsamen Arbeitgeber. Während der Leser schon in den beiden vorangehenden Passagen Ausblicke auf die antimuslimischen Ausschreitungen und die Bombenanschläge erhalten hat, erfährt der Protagonist erstmals an dieser Stelle davon. Durch externe Fokalisierung bleibt dem Leser wie Asrar der Kontext der gehörten Bemerkung über Yaqub („Musa Patel brachte sie bis zur Tür. Bevor er die Tür schloss, sagte er zu Ali: „Was für ein großartiger Mensch Yaqub doch einmal war, aber jetzt ...“ Damit brach er ab. Auf seinem Gesicht zeichnete sich Frustration ab. Er schwieg, dann sagte er seufzend: „Allah sei uns gnädig.“) zunächst unklar. Dies ändert sich nur teilweise, als der Text in auktorialer Perspektive fortfährt: „Durch Musa Patel hatte Muhammad Ali auch einiges erfahren, was nur Angehörige und enge Freunde von Yaqub wussten.“ Die Informationen, die Asrar schließlich erhält, stammen von Muhammad Ali, der seinerseits das wiedergibt, was ihm erzählt worden ist oder was er gehört hat, ohne es kontextuell verankern zu können. Die Stimme, die die Informationen im Roman mitteilt, ist dagegen die des Erzählers, damit entsteht eine mehrfach gestaffelte Distanz:

> Trotz dem Prasseln des Regens und dem Lärm der vorbeisausenden Autos konnte Asrar alles gut hören. Unter anderem, dass in den Unruhen von 1992-93 über 1000 Menschen umgebracht und über 3000 verletzt worden waren. Die Polizei hatte oft tatenlos zugesehen. Yaqub hatte dieser gezielte Massenmord an Muslimen das Herz gebrochen, und wer weiß, was ein gebrochenes Herz aus einem Menschen machen kann. Überall brannte es damals. An bestimmten Häusern brachte man spät in der Nacht gezielt Vorhängeschlösser an und gab sie dann dem Feuer preis.

Ein Gegengewicht dazu bildet die körperliche Nähe der beiden Figuren: zuerst befinden sie sich durch den strömenden Regen und den sie umbrausenden Verkehr gleichsam in einem abgeschlossenen Raum, der durch Schirm

und den Baum bezeichnet wird, unter dem sie stehen, anschließend sind sie im Taxi wiederum von der Umwelt abgegrenzt.

Die berichtende Darstellungsform erleichtert den Sprung in den mythologischen Einschub und damit verbunden den Perspektivwechsel:

> Auch Mumba Devi hatte das schamlose Treiben von Feuer, Blut und religiösem Fanatismus angesehen. Es war in jenen Tagen von Gewalt und Hass, als Mumba Devi mit anhörte, wie die Seele eines Rishi oder altindischen Sehers, die auf dem Neembaum vor dem linken Tempelfenster wohnte, zu einem Rakshasa-Dämon sagte: „Gewalt bringt wieder Gewalt hervor. Rache bringt wieder Rache hervor." Der Rakshasa behauptete, die Seele dieses Weisen sei in Wahrheit die Seele eines tapferen und heldenmütigen Soldaten, der in der Armee des großen Marathenführers Shivaji Maharaj im 17. Jahrhundert berühmt für seine Taten gewesen war. Derselbe Rishi hatte auch die Meinung geäußert, dass Shivaji Maharaj ein bedeutender Mensch gewesen sei, der sich dadurch ausgezeichnet hatte, dass unter dessen Banner Hindus und Muslime gemeinsam gegen den äußeren Feind gekämpft hatten.

Im Anschluss an diese kurze Passage referiert zunächst der Erzähler Muhammad Alis weiteren Bericht, dann kommt dieser selbst zu Wort („Musa Bhai, mein Verwandter und ich […]"), schließlich nimmt wieder der Erzähler den Faden auf („Dann erzählte ihm Ali […]"). Der Absatz endet mit einem kurzen Austausch, in dem durch die zweifelnde Aussage Asrars erneut Distanz zum erzählten Geschehen geschaffen wird: „Aber es ist doch unrecht, Unschuldige zu töten." Was es mit der Person namens Yaqub Umar ibn Muqallab Mahiyat auf sich hat, erschließt sich dem Leser wie dem Protagonisten erst allmählich. Es geht um die Verwicklung mehrerer Mitglieder der Familie Memon in die Bombenanschläge von 1993. Damals wurden, angestiftet von Dawood Ibrahim, an mehreren Orten in Mumbai Anschläge mit Autobomben verübt. Als Haupttäter gelten Tiger Memon und sein Bruder Yakub Memon, als Drahtzieher der vom Ausland aus operierende Dawood Ibrahim. Gullu, mit vollem Namen Gul Noor Mohammad Sheikh, war einer der Handlanger von Tiger Memon. Er wurde drei Tage vor den Anschlägen am 9. März 1993 festgenommen und verriet unter dem Druck der

Polizei die Pläne der Gruppe, ohne dass die Polizei ihm Glauben schenkte. Wegen der Verhaftung Gullus wurden die Anschläge früher ausgeführt als ursprünglich geplant (Zaidi 2002: 77–9).

In dieser Passage wechseln mehrfach Distanz und Nähe zwischen Erzähler, Figuren und Leser sowie die Haltung von Erzähler und Leser zum Inhalt der in Rückblende wiedergegebenen Ereignisse. Während in den beiden vorangehenden Abschnitten mehr noch als Einzelpersonen die Stadt Mumbai als Opfer der Gewalt erscheint, geht es im folgenden Absatz um die gezielte Gewalt gegen die muslimische Minderheit. Das Herzstück aber ist der Satz „Gewalt bringt wieder Gewalt hervor. Rache bringt wieder Rache hervor."

Die vierte relevante Passage stammt aus dem fünften Kapitel. Asrar und Muhammad Ali sind nach einem weiteren Besuch bei ihrem Chef Musa Patel auf dem Heimweg. Während die Stimme von Muhammad Ali unmerklich in die des auktorialen Erzählers übergeht, werden Ereignisse berichtet, die zwischen dem 6. und 8. Januar 1993 stattfanden. Dabei geht es sowohl um antimuslimische Ausschreitungen als auch um muslimische Terroranschläge und allgemein religiös motivierte Gewalt. Auch hier schließt der Absatz mit einer kurzen Szene, die die Reaktion Asrars auf das Gehörte zeigt, in Form seiner Unfähigkeit, sich verbal zu äußern: „Asrar sagte nichts. Er war verstummt." Der Schock, den Muhammad Alis Bericht über die Jagd auf Muslime und die Terroranschläge bei Asrar auslöst, wird vielmehr in Form eines Traumes verarbeitet, in dem die beiden großen Themen des Romans, Trauma und Liebe, ineinandergreifen. Die Liebe stellt sich als eine physisch wie psychisch heilende Kraft dar. Auch wenn der Protagonist sich später kaum an den Traum erinnert, ist für den Leser ab diesem Moment das Grauen der Ausschreitungen mit der Liebesbeziehung zwischen Asrar und Hina verknüpft. Der Absatz enthält zwei neue inhaltliche Akzente. Zum einen wird dargestellt, wie es neben von der Polizei tolerierten oder unterstützten Angriffen auf Muslime auch selbstlose Hilfe aus der nicht-muslimischen Bevölkerung gab. Zum zweiten wird die zerstörerische Macht von Gerüchten thematisiert. Ein Gerücht entsteht, es breitet sich in Windeseile aus, verselbständigt sich und zieht Blutvergießen auf allen Seiten und Verheerung von Heiligtümern unterschiedlicher Religionsgemeinschaften nach sich:

> Wie Musa Bhai Muhammad Ali erzählt hatte, ging damals das Gerücht um, in Jogeshwari sei in dem Wohnblock Anuradhabai Chawl Feuer gelegt worden, wobei nach Auskunft einiger Leute sechs Personen getötet worden waren. Auch ein behindertes Mädchen sollte in den Flammen umgekommen sein. Die Nachricht verbreitete sich wie ein Lauffeuer, und überall, wo sie ankam, brachte sie Feuer und Gewalt mit sich. In Pydhonie, Dongri, Jogeshwari, M.R.A. Marg, V.P. Road, D.B. Marg, Gamdevi, Nagpada, Agripada, Byculla, Kalachauk, Worli, Dadar, Mahim, Dharavi, Kurla, Nehru Nagar, Ghatkopar, Vikhroli, Oshiwara, D.N. Nagar feierten die Leute ein Holi-Fest, aber nicht mit bunten Farben, sondern mit Blut. In Pydhonie wurde ein muslimisches Heiligtum, in Jogeshwari ein Friedhof, in Byculla und Mahim wurden Hindu-Tempel verwüstet. In Pydhonie wurde eine hausgemachte Bombe auf den Polizeipräsidenten geworfen, er wurde zum Glück nicht getroffen. In jener Woche herrschte totales Chaos in der Stadt, Plünderung, Zerstörung, Mord.

Betrachten wir die vier Textstellen, zeigt sich eine Entwicklung in der Darstellung und Beurteilung der Ereignisse von 1992–3: von der Zeichnung der Polizei als Aggressor und der Darstellung der muslimischen Bevölkerung als Opfer über die allgemeingültige Aussage, dass Gewalt Gegengewalt erzeugt, bis zur Beschreibung der Ausschreitungen als Ausbruch einer kaum rational zu begründenden und nicht zu steuernden Gewalt. Erscheint schon im ersten Absatz die Stadt Mumbai in Gestalt der Stadtgöttin Mumba als Leidtragende, so wird dieses Motiv implizit durch Nennung verschiedener Stadtteile und religiöser Gemeinschaften wieder aufgenommen.

Die Ausschreitungen stehen im Roman in einem Kontext von wiederholten religiös etikettierten Kämpfen, die letztlich die Existenz der Stadt Mumbai bedrohen. Wann immer auf der Ebene geschichtlichen Geschehens Unschuldige getötet werden, triumphieren auf der mythologischen Ebene die dämonischen Gegner der Stadtgöttin Mumba Devi. Dass es um die Stadt als Ganzes und um ihre Zukunft geht, zeigt auch die Gestaltung der Örtlichkeiten. An keiner Stelle finden wir in den zitierten Passagen eine Beschreibung, wohl aber verweisen Orts- und Gebäudenamen (Mahim, Bandra, Mandvi, Minara-Moschee) auf Schauplätze der Stadt Mumbai. Die mythologischen

Einschübe sind keineswegs bloß illustrativ, sondern ein gestaltgebendes Prinzip des Romans, erkennbar schon an der klaren Gliederung durch einen Absatz, der dreimal, einmal am Anfang des ersten Kapitels und gleich zweimal im letzten Kapitel, in unverändertem Wortlaut erscheint. Darin erscheinen zwei Akteure in einem temporal unbestimmten Kampf: das anthropomorphe Meer, das die ihm abgerungenen Inseln der Stadt Mumbai zurückerobern will, und die Stadtgöttin Mumba Devi, die vor dem Hintergrund eines zyklisch gedachten Weltbildes um ihre Stadt gegen mächtige Dämonen kämpft:

> Das Meer bei Mumbai war in Aufruhr. Es wollte den Krieg gewinnen, der seit Jahrhunderten im Gange war, und die Insel einnehmen […]. Im Tempel von Mumba Devi im Herzen der Stadt herrschte eine unheimliche Stille. Die Göttin sah unendlich verzweifelt aus. 6000 Jahre vorher, einige Tage vor dem Kampf mit „Mumba-Raka", hatte Brahma in ihrem Gesicht dieselbe Verzweiflung gesehen […].

In den die erzählte Zeit sprengenden Einschüben gibt es keinen direkten Bezug zur Haupthandlung und zu ihren Figuren und nur teilweise zu dem Ort, an dem sich Asrar oder eine andere Figur befindet. Die erzählte Zeit steht während des Einschubs still, bleibt aber für den Leser präsent, da auf die Fortsetzung der unterbrochenen Handlung gewartet wird. Die Einschübe wirken nicht retardierend, sondern tragen zur Schaffung der Romanwelt maßgeblich bei.

Mythologische Passagen kommen im Roman nicht nur, aber oft im Zusammenhang mit politischem Trauma vor, ob es um zeitlich begrenzte Ereignisse wie anti-muslimische Ausschreitungen, um Polizeigewalt und Terrorismus oder um strukturelle Gewalt in Form von diskriminierendem Verhalten gegen Niederkastige und Ausbeutung von Frauen als Prostituierte geht. Die übernatürlichen Wesen beobachten das Geschehen und greifen gelegentlich ein, ohne dass die menschlichen Figuren des Romans sich dessen bewusst sind.

Den Verdacht, die Verwendung übernatürlicher Gestalten könnte darauf verweisen, dass angesichts der traumatisierenden Ereignisse menschliche Wahrnehmungs- und Deutungsmöglichkeiten an ihre Grenze stoßen, bestätigt auch der indirekte, fragmentarische Charakter von Informationen, die dem Protagonisten und dem Leser zuteilwerden. Was der Chef des Protagonisten, Musa Patel, erlebt hat, hört Asrar nicht von ihm, sondern vermittelt von seinem Freund Muhammad Ali. Als Augenzeugen erscheinen nicht-

menschliche Gestalten wie die Minarette einer Moschee und die Stadtgöttin Mumba Devi, und selbst ihre Erfahrungen sind nicht in direkte Rede gekleidet, sondern werden vom auktorialen Erzähler mitgeteilt. Weitere Figuren, die bruchstückweise Informationen über die Ausschreitungen und Anschläge beitragen, sind ein Baum, ein Dämon, ein Engel. Die Informationen des Baumes bleiben unvollständig, weil er dem Bericht des Dämons nur mit halbem Ohr zuhört. An die Stelle von Gewissheiten treten Hörensagen, Spekulation und der Versuch, aus Fragmenten einen zusammenhängenden Eindruck zu bilden. All dies ist nur an der Oberfläche dadurch begründet, dass Asrar erst 10 Jahre nach den Ereignissen nach Mumbai kommt. Es ist vor allem eine literarische Strategie, den auch über zwanzig Jahre später immer noch traumatischen Charakter der Ereignisse darzustellen.

Wir dürfen vermuten, dass die Art, wie Ereignisse oder Situationen in einem literarischen Werk reflektiert werden, durch die politische und kulturelle Wirklichkeit geprägt wird, in der das Werk entsteht. *Rohzin* erschien 2016 beim Verlag Arshia Publications Delhi und konnte mit einer Urdu-sprachigen Leserschaft rechnen, die verhältnismäßig gebildet und mit den politisch-sozialen Verhältnissen der indischen Gegenwart ebenso wie mit den geschilderten Ereignissen der 90er Jahre vertraut war. Der Autor selbst hat die Ereignisse als junger Mann erlebt, in einem rezenten Interview sagt er dazu:

> Nachts waren überall Feuer zu sehen. Randalierer hatten die muslimischen Viertel ins Visier genommen, Häuser wurden zerstört, Menschen getötet. Die Polizei unternahm nichts. Zum ersten Mal in meinem jungen Leben spürte ich, wie sich etwas zwischen mich und meine Hindu-Freunde schlich, mit denen ich aufgewachsen bin. Hindus und Muslime sahen sich als Gegner, überall in Bombay. Sie begannen, sich gegenseitig zu hassen. Erst viele Jahre später ließ das wieder nach (Müller 2019).

Die Kluft, die sich nach Einschätzung des Autors damals zwischen Muslimen und Nicht-Muslimen auftat, spiegelt sich auch darin, dass nach 1993 muslimische Einwohner Mumbais sich verstärkt auf Gebiete zurückzogen, die von Muslimen bewohnt werden (Hansen 2001: 160).

Die Geschehnisse von 1992 und 1993 wurden durch ein Ereignis ausgelöst, das international für Proteste sorgte und bis heute für die Schwächung des von der indischen Verfassung festgeschriebenen Säkularismus seit den 80er

Jahren steht (Jaffrelot 2019: 54): die Zerstörung der Babri-Moschee im nordindischen Ayodhya am 6. Dezember 1992. Begründet wurde die Zerstörung mit der Behauptung, die Moschee stehe auf einer den Hindus heiligen Stätte, dem Geburtsort des Gottes Rama – im November 2019 wurde vom Obersten Gerichtshof angeordnet, das umstrittene Stück Land einer Treuhandgesellschaft zu übergeben und damit den Weg für den Bau des umstrittenen Tempels freizumachen (Venkatesan 2019: 14–8). Vorbereitet und geplant worden war die Aktion von hindu-nationalistischen Organisationen, vor allem der Vishva Hindu Parishad (Jaffrelot 2007: 279–82). Es folgten teilweise blutige Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Hindus und Muslimen. Allein bei den *Mumbai Riots* zwischen Dezember 1992 und Januar 1993 sollen etwa 900 Menschen ums Leben gekommen sein. Die Angriffe auf Muslime wiederum waren ein wichtiges Motiv für die Täter der *Mumbai bombings* im März 1993 (Punwani 2003: 252–3).

Seit den 90er Jahren sind die religiösen und nationalistischen Bewegungen nicht schwächer geworden. Trotz der vielzitierten *Unity in Diversity* haben an der Religionszugehörigkeit orientierte kommunale Gewalttaten zugenommen (Telegraph 2019; Mallapur 2018). Die Erwähnung des Marathenführers Shivaji im Roman stellt einen Bezug zu der hindu-nationalistischen Bewegung her, nach deren Interpretation Shivaji ein antimuslimischer Held und ein Vorbild für den Aufbau eines rein hinduistischen Reiches gewesen sei (Masselos 1994: 82; Heuzé 2011: 13–4). Dass gerade mit diesem Namen die ganz anders geartete Aussage „Gewalt bringt wieder Gewalt hervor“ verbunden wird, muss als politische Meinungsäußerung verstanden werden, die auf die Gegenwart des Autors zielt, auch als vorausdeutende Warnung vor negativen Entwicklungen im heutigen Indien.

Es fällt auf, dass in den zitierten Abschnitten häufig das Nichteingreifen der Polizei oder ihre aktive Beteiligung an den Ausschreitungen thematisiert wird. Der Staat Indien stützt sich im Umgang mit Gewalttaten in starkem Maße auf die Polizei, deren Vorgehen jedoch oft nicht von Neutralität gegenüber unterschiedlichen Kommunitäten bestimmt wird. K. S. Subramanian (2007), der die negative Rolle von Polizeibeamten für mindestens teilweise strukturell bedingt hält, zitiert dazu eine Studie von 1998 von Vibhuti Narain Rai, in der dieser das Verhalten von Polizeikräften bei Hindu-muslimischen Ausschreitungen und deren Wahrnehmung in der Bevölkerung untersucht.

Demzufolge agierte die Polizei in Krawallen zwischen 1931–1993 meist als „Hindu force", was sich in Willkür und diskriminierendem Verhalten gegenüber Muslimen äußerte. Die Polizei wird von der Bevölkerung entsprechend als Beschützer von Hindus und als Feind von Muslimen wahrgenommen (Subramanian 2007: 49–50). Seit 1993 ist das Vertrauen zu Polizei und Staat unter den indischen Muslimen nicht gewachsen, vielmehr ist nach einer 2018 veröffentlichten Studie unter Muslimen das Gefühl weit verbreitet, aufgrund ihrer Religion von der Polizei diskriminiert zu werden (CHRI 2018: 24). Nach den gewalttätigen Unruhen von 1992–3 wurden mehrere Kommissionen gebildet, um die Umstände der Gewalt aufzuklären. Die wohl bekannteste war die Shrikrishna Commission, die von der Regierung des Bundesstaates Maharashtra eingesetzt wurde. Die Kommission kam zu dem Ergebnis, dass die Krawalle nicht spontan entstanden, sondern von der hindu-nationalen Partei Shiv Sena geplant waren und dass die Polizei in mehreren Fällen direkt an den antimuslimischen Ausschreitungen beteiligt war oder die Täter gewähren ließ (Masselos 1994: 82–7; Hansen 2001: 122). 1998 wurde der Bericht der Kommission veröffentlicht, aber die in ihm ausgesprochenen Empfehlungen wurden nie umgesetzt.

In dem Roman geht es nicht darum, die Hindu-Mehrheit und die muslimische Minderheit in Opposition zu setzen. Vielmehr wird deutlich, dass die Kette von Gewalt und Gegengewalt, Verletzung und Rache durch Mitwirkung aller Gruppierungen aufrechterhalten wird. Rahman Abbas widerspricht damit nicht explizit der Meinung (Masselos 2007: 369–73), die Ausschreitungen hätten das Konzept einer weltoffenen und toleranten Stadt zunichte gemacht. Aber seine Darstellung suggeriert die Unmöglichkeit, die Bewohner von Mumbai in ethnische oder religiöse Gruppen aufzuteilen. Als Ursache der Gewalt und als gefährlich für die Zukunft des Landes wird ein gemeinsames Drittes entlarvt: die Zunahme der Bedeutung von Religion im öffentlichen Leben sowie ihre Politisierung und Instrumentalisierung. Das Schicksal der Stadt wird im Roman zwar von Göttern vorausgesagt und beobachtet, wird letztlich aber doch von Menschen gestaltet und liegt in ihrer Verantwortung. Auch wenn die politischen Ereignisse von 1992–3 nur einen sehr kleinen Teil des Romans ausmachen (nicht mehr als 9 von insgesamt 354 Seiten im Urdu-Original), ist die Behandlung der *Mumbai Riots* nicht bloß historisches Beiwerk zum Porträt einer Großstadt. Vielmehr stellt sie einen Appell an den

Leser dar, an einer säkularen Deutung der Wirklichkeit festzuhalten, um die Schönheit und Freiheit, die die Stadt Mumbai ihren Bewohnern und Besuchern bietet, nicht aufs Spiel zu setzen.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbas, Rahman 2013. *Tīn nāval*. Delhi: Arshia Publications. (<https://www.rekhta.org/Authors/rahman-abbas/ebooks>, Zugriff: 26. September 2019).

Abbas, Rahman 2016. *Rūḥzin*. Delhi: Arshia Publications.

Abbas, Rahman 2018. *Die Stadt, das Meer, die Liebe*. Übersetzt von Almuth Degener. Heidelberg: Draupadi Verlag.

Census of India 2011. (<https://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/365-mumbai.html>, Zugriff: 03. April 2020).

CHRI (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative) 2018. *Muslim Voices: Perceptions of Policing in India.* By Devika Prasad, Aditi Datta, Ankur Otto and Fawaz Shaheen. Edited by Sanjoy Hazarika, Devika Prasad and Sharib Ali. (<https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/download/1548414445Muslim%20Voices%20Perceptions%20of%20Policing%20Jan%202019.pdf>, Zugriff: 03. April 2020).

Degener, Almuth 2018. „Rahman Abbas“, in: *Literaturforum Indien e. V.* (<http://www.literaturforum-indien.de/autoren_files/Rahman%20Abbas.pdf>, Zugriff: 26. September 2019).

Hansen, Thomas Blom 2001. *Wages of Violence. Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Heuzé, Djallal G. 2011. „Tej City. Protests in Mumbai, 1988–2008“, in: *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)* 5: 1–29. (DOI: 10.4000/samaj.3213, Zugriff: 07. September 2019).

Jaffrelot, Christophe (Hrsg.) 2007. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Jaffrelot, Christophe 2019. „The Fate of Secularism in India", in: Vaishnav, Milan (Hrsg.): *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Mallapur, Chaitanya 2018. „Communal violence up 28% under Modi govt but short of UPA's decadal high", in: *Business Standard* (09. Februar 2018) (<https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/communal-violence-increases-28-under-modi-govt-yet-short-of-upa-high-118020900128_1.html>, Zugriff: 10. Mai 2019).

Masselos, Jim 1994. „The Bombay Riots of January 1993: The Politics of Urban Conflagration", in: *South Asia. Journal of South Asian Studies*. Special Issue, Vol. XVII: 79–95.

Masselos, Jim 2007. *The City in Action. Bombay Struggles for Power*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Müller, Dominik 2019. „Die gesellschaftliche Spaltung überwinden. Interview mit dem indischen Schriftsteller Rahman Abbas", in: *Quantara.de* (06. Mai 2019) (<https://de.qantara.de/inhalt/interview-mit-dem-indischen-schriftsteller-rahman-abbas-die-gesellschaftliche-spaltung>, Zugriff: 11. Mai 2019).

Punwani, Jyoti 2003. „'My Area your Area': How Riots Changed the City", in: Sujata Patel & Jim Masselos (Hrsg.): *Bombay and Mumbai: the City in Transition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 235–264.

Shantha, Sukanya 2019. „With Weary Witnesses, Suleman Usman Bakery Case Goes to Trial after 26 Years", in: *The Wire* (04. März 2019) (<https://thewire.in/communalism/suleman-usman-bakery-case-trial-witnesses>, Zugriff: 25. September 2019).

Subramanian, K. S. 2007. *Political Violence and the Police in India*. Los Angeles, Delhi u. a.: Sage Publications.

Telegraph (special correspondent) 2019. „Govt reports 27% rise in communal clashes", in: *The Telegraph*, online edition (25. September 2019) (<https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/govt-reports-27-rise-in-communal-clashes/cid/1352345>, Zugriff: 10. Mai 2019).

Venkatesan, V. 2019. „Secularism at stake“, in: *Frontline* (06. Dezember 2019): 14–18.

Zaidi, S. Hussain 2002. *Black Friday: The True Story of the Bombay Bomb Blasts.* Reprint 2014. Gurgaon: Penguin Books.

Zakaria, Rafiq 2004. *Indian Muslims: Where Have They Gone Wrong?*. Mumbai: Popular Prakashan & Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

CONTRIBUTORS

Almuth Degener arbeitet als Indologin am Gutenberg-Institut für Weltliteratur und schriftorientierte Medien der Universität Mainz. Ihre Interessen richten sich auf wenig bekannte Sprachen Pakistans und Afghanistans, Urdu- und Hindi-Literatur sowie den Buddhismus im vorislamischen Zentralasien. Publikationsliste: https://www.indologie.uni-mainz.de/wir-uber-uns/mitarbeiter/.

Anna Scarabel completed her undergraduate studies at the University Ca' Foscari of Venice where she studied Hindi and Sanskrit, and then obtained a M.A. in South Asian Studies at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University. She is now a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Cultural and Religious History of South Asia at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University. In her doctoral dissertation, she is studying the intellectual debate on icon worship carried on by the Ārya Samāja and the Śaṅkarācārya lineages. In particular, she analyses the discourse revolving around the practice of icon worship. Her main research interests lie in the colonial and post-colonial studies, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta textual traditions.

Sandra Jasmin Schlage obtained her bachelor degree in "Asian Cultures and Societies – India" and "Cultural Anthropology" from the University of Cologne. During her master studies at the Department of Asian and Islamic Art History, University of Bonn, she specialised in South Asian art and wrote her master thesis on dance sculptures of the Cōḻa dynasty. This study forms the basis of her present doctoral research on dance reliefs of the Tamil region. Currently, Sandra Jasmin Schlage works as a research associate cum lecturer (wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin) at the Department for Asian and Islamic Art History at the University of Bonn. Throughout, she has combined her academic studies with intensive training in classical Indian dance (Bharatanāṭyam) in Germany and India.

Shabnam Surita has been employed as a lecturer and researcher (wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin) at the Department of South Asian Studies, University of Bonn, since April 2019. She has been pursuing her doctoral research at the same department since May 2017. She holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in political science and international relations from Jadavpur University, India, and took South Asian studies at Aarhus University, Denmark, as part of an Erasmus year. Her research interests include identity politics and conflicts, with a special focus on Bengaliness, diaspora identities and citizenship in South Asia. Apart from academia, she works as a freelance journalist at the Bengali editorial office of Deutsche Welle.

Aastha Tyagi is a doctoral student at the Göttinger Graduiertenschule Gesellschaftswissenschaften (GGG), Georg-August Universität, Göttingen. She has degrees in Literature, Media Studies and Sociology and is interested in gender, political anthropology and Hindu nationalism.