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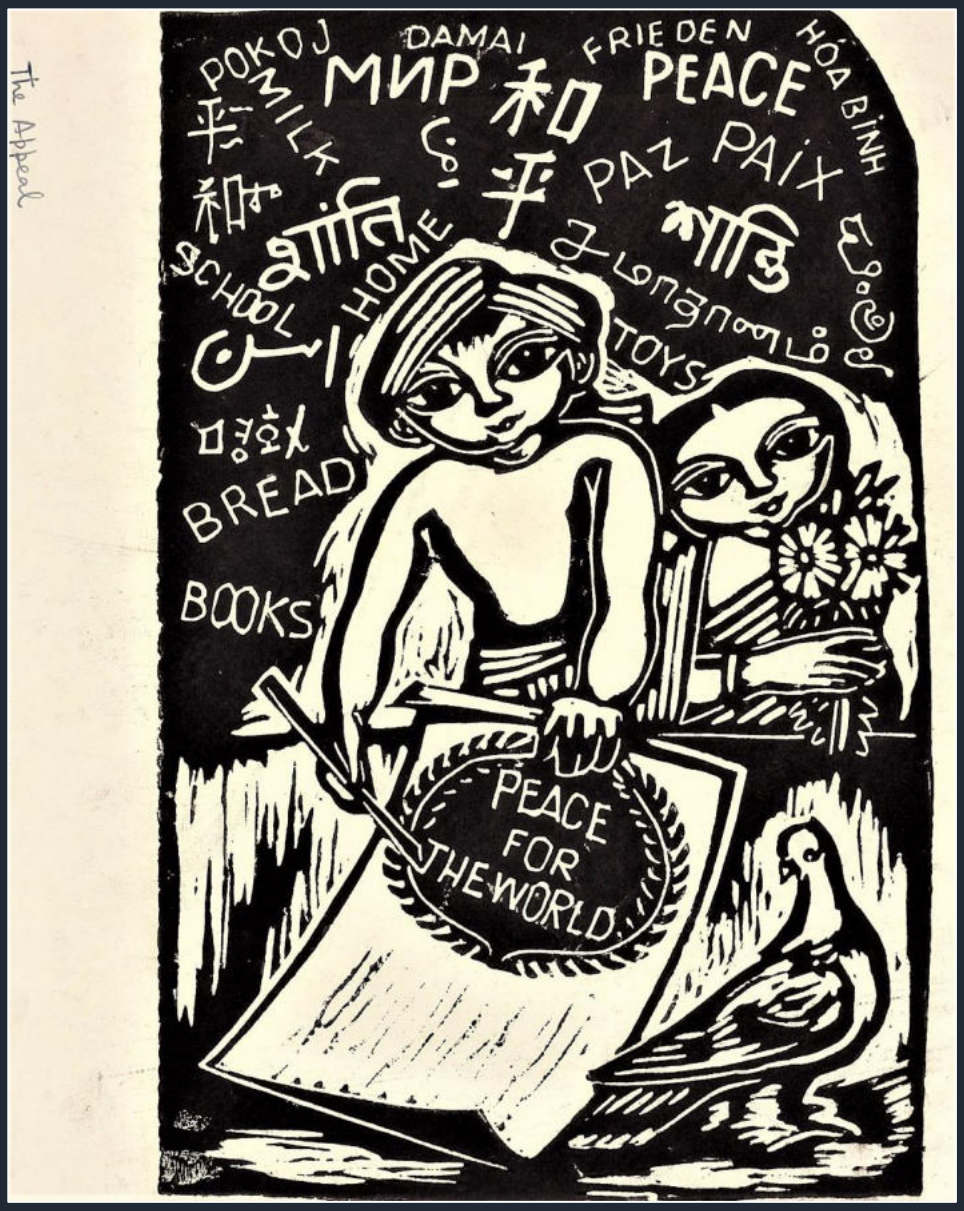

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Editorial

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Even as it gives me immense pleasure to write this editorial for the Nidān July 2022 issue, I cannot help but reflect on some of the changes of the last six months. While the pandemic was disorienting, I only belatedly realize how emotionally unprepared we may currently feel as we return to 'normalcy'. While we had no conception of how we would continue in the future, as wave after wave of Covid swept friends, colleagues, close acquaintances, neighbours, and family members away, we have plunged straight into a global climate-change crisis with record high temperatures and flooding in Asia. The suddenness of our physical lives post-pandemic, have left many of us feeling equally disoriented. We still need to reconfigure all the changes that have taken place in the meanwhile – changes that are now revealed in people having shifted homes, cities, countries, jobs, relationships, and sometimes even their professions. As the world awakens from lockdown slumber, life becomes chaotic once again, as we grapple with old commitments, new responsibilities, and hectic traveling. While reconfiguring post-pandemic changes may feel uncontrolled, this confusion is itself part of the speed with which we resume normalcy. The insistence that we return immediately to the pre-pandemic world of 2019, brings loss in its wake, as we realize just how much has changed in these past two years.

What has also significantly changed for Europeans and the Global North in the last few months is the catastrophic war in Ukraine that has caused tremendous havoc. It is as if the first thing we immediately did 'normally' after emerging from the pandemic, was to start a war of global proportions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine not just disturbed peace, increased radiation, and intensified climate-change; it has incurred a disproportionate human cost by cutting apart communities and brutally severing families and homes. Bringing global fuel and food shortage in its wake, the Ukraine crisis has increased the precarity of human life and dignity. Europe is facing another migration crisis of magnum proportions, as thousands become homeless and flee in agony, coping silently with trauma, and grief. We cannot, as yet estimate the extent of this trauma – a seemingly bottomless pit of mental-health burden that we will be forced to reckon with in the coming years. As many of us in Europe have begun to brood over what the winter of 2022, with reduced fuel and rationed heating may bring, this concern is not, completely grounded in privilege. Many hundreds of workers, at least those in Germany's industrial

sectors, completely dependent on Russian pipe gas, will run the risk of unemployment by year-end.

However tiring the last few months have been, we still look on the brighter side, hold on to our research projects, and solder on! The same holds true for Nidān. We have been working hard for the past few months and are delighted to present you with our July 2022 issue, hoping that you, our readers, will enjoy the line-up of brilliant research enterprise presented here. We have four fascinating research articles, beginning with Sangeetha Puthiyedath's feminist analysis of *Vadakkan Pattukal* folktales and folksongs from Kerala, that demonstrates the strength of feminine subversion in an otherwise patriarchal society. Locating the true oppression of women to lie in the enforcement of colonial, missionary morality, Puthiyedath argues that however violent or brutal precolonial feudal society in Kerala was, it still retained epistemic spaces for women's resistance that served to destabilize the patriarchal order.

Second in line, we are glad and proud to include a paper on Islam and Muslim society in this issue. Muhammad Niyas Ashraf brilliantly analyses the Arabic-Malayalam textual corpus of *Mappilapatt* and demonstrates how Arabic-Malayalam compositions were denigrated as folkish and 'impure' in the 19th century, due to their Arabic script, and their association with Mappila Muslims in Kerala. Ashraf argues that the systemic denigration of the *Mappilapatt* as non-standard folktales, produced anti-Muslim discrimination against the Mappilas, reflected in the way the *Mappilapatt* compositions were denied entry into the literary frame of standard Sanskritic Malayalam literature, imbued with the biases of Brahminism. Ashraf provides us with a detailed discussion of the *Mappilapatt* songs, their metres, content, intent, and genre that he argues, is historically associated with Tamil poetry and likened to Manipravalam.

The third article has Suganya Anandakichenin providing us with a delightful analysis of Tatipantan's story – a folktale of somewhat unknown origin, that gradually came to be absorbed into mainstream Srivaisnava literature. Anandakichenin's article has retained some of the sweetness and enchantment of Tatipantan's story that demonstrates the spiritual equality between castes groups irrespective of occupation. This spiritual equality in Srivaisnava theology is reflected in the equality between the animate and inanimate world in terms of their access to Vaikuntha. While Tatipantan's story revolves around how Krishna trying to escape his angry mother, allows the potter/ cowherd Tatipantan and his curd pot entry into Vaikuntha, in return of Tatipantan letting Krishna hide from his mother in that pot, Anandakichenin brings to light a parallel universe of Srivaisnava Bhakti that ameliorates and transcends social stratification through non-duality.

The last research article by Deeti Ray is yet another treat. Accompanied by vernacular poetic extracts, and images, Ray traces the development of the medieval myth or *vrata-katha* (a ritual text read/ recited collectively as part of a personal vow or wish-fulfilment) of the *Khudurukuni Osa* in Odisha through time. Ray's analysis comes to include modern renditions of the text that is still regularly performed, and she provides ethnographic details of the *vrata* celebrations in modern Odisha that is characterized by the worship of the goddess Mangala. Tracing the origin of the *Osa* to the maritime history of Odisha, Ray highlights the important role of brothers within women's narratives that stresses on the precarity of lives led by unmarried women in large clans, reflected in the story of the chief protagonist Tapoi. This destabilization, Ray argues, is produced by historical long-distance trade travel that entail many years of separation between men and their families,

generating vulnerability for the figure of the unmarried young sister. Ray demonstrates how the story, though not actively producing, nevertheless reflects the tensions between Brahmins and the caste/ community of overseas traveling traders. This tension further produces unmarried girls from non-Brahmin backgrounds as vulnerable, left as they are after the death of their parents, to the mercy of married clanswomen. While all research articles in this issue deal with texts, textual culture, and its anthropological afterlife, they simultaneously highlight discussions surrounding gender, power, caste, and the negotiation of mainstream Brahminical standardization through the epistemic category of folklore.

Nidān has, since the last two issues, begun commissioning special essays that focus on 'biography and intellectual history'. Though these are full-fledged research articles in their own right that undergo review, they focus specifically on intellectual leaders who contribute to the formation of modern India, and the production of Indians as global players in world history. This issue presents our readers with two brilliant research articles authored by Gautam Pemmaraju, and Nidhin Donald and Asha Singh, on Jayasurya Naidu, and Jahangir Edalji Sanjana respectively. Pemmaraju traces Naidu's life in Germany in the interwar years, between 1922 and 1934, based on archival documents – letters between Naidu family members, apart from other archival documents and secondary literature. Pemmaraju demonstrates how Naidu's life in Germany contributed to the formation of an international revolutionary period, characterized by intense emotions, political activism and unorthodox alliances – a time of personal and political relationships with nationalists, together with Comintern (Communist International) activists. Deeply rebellious and unorthodox himself, Naidu's stay in Germany and Berlin tragically ended in 1934, when he was arrested and assaulted by Nazi SA groups, after which he returned to India. Pemmaraju's evocative and sensitive depiction of Naidu, his vicissitudes and contributions, allows us to understand the emergence of Indians as national and European players of some significance in the mid-20th century.

The article on J.E. Sanjana by Donald and Singh, is equally inspiring, tracing the contribution of a Parsi intellectual in Bombay to the discourse of Dalit emancipation from Hinduism, accompanied by an alliance with Ambedkar. Being quite the firebrand young Dalit historian himself, Donald, accompanied by Singh, have based their analysis on archival documents that consist of newspaper collections of Sanjana's articles written during the interwar years, that spans the history of modern India and Independence, characterized by emerging debates on caste and 'untouchability'. Both articles in the 'biography and intellectual history' section in this July issue are internally linked, for they document the role of Indians as national and global thinkers, struggling for independence from colonialism and casteism back home, and from Nazism and Fascism abroad.

There are many interesting book reviews in this issue, that not only appreciate and outline the arguments of the various new books in the market, but also invite authors to push their own intellectual boundaries in order to improve their arguments. While Narasingha Sil reviews Renny Thomas's book on rationalism and the production of caste and religion among contemporary scientists, Kusumita Pedersen's review takes us back to the global, by discussing Catholic devotion in the writings of Abhishiktaananda. We also have an interesting and lively review from Westin Harris that explores the question of alcohol in ancient India in terms of an alternative paradigm compared to modern, contemporary ideas about drinking.

The last December 2021 issue of Nidān had two 'book presentation' by Jon Keune and Joel Lee that announced their monographs 'Shared Food, Shared Devotion' and 'Deceptive Majority' respectively. Just like Nidān had taken up reviews by and of Chad Bauman and Jason Fernandes's books in 2021, we decided to take up the reviews of Lee and Keune's books set in conversation with each other in our 2022 issues. While the 'review + interview' of Lee's book will be featured in the December 2022 issue, we already feature his 'review + interview' of Jon Keune's book in this July issue, accompanied by an edited transcript of a written conversation between them.

We have another special 'book review + interview' this issue that explores the subject of 'Gandhi and Architecture'. A cutting-edge monograph authored by Venugopal Maddipati, 'Gandhi and Architecture' explores how Gandhi's ideas on Hinduism and his pride in Kshatriya dharma (*varanashramadharma*) influenced the building of his house in Segaon in 1937. Maddipati demonstrates how Gandhi's ideas of finitude grounded within Hinduism influenced low-cost housing for the next seventy years in post-Independent India. Maddipati argues that Gandhian architecture is meaningful in keeping Gandhi alive as an eternal and universal figure of Hindu morality in modern India. Our 'review + interview' are interesting. Though ordinary book reviews constitute the normal mode of functioning for most journals, the 'review + interview' mode focuses more on transforming critical comments that are part and parcel of the review into a collaborative process that provides authors with an opportunity to respond, or explain and comment on critical concerns. While this helps readers to understand the book at a deeper, penetrative level; the questions asked, also serve to cover pre-existing queries. One-way critical harshness can sometimes do more harm than good, tending to aggrandize the reviewer at the expense of the author, and spreading demotivation in an academic sector that already teeters under the increasing pressure of systemic defunding.

Our 'book presentations' intensify the focus of the 'review + interview'. While it is authors themselves who present the main ideas of their books in the 'book presentation', this is an invitation to readers and subsequent reviewers to write reviews for these books after reading more about them in presentations than what is available on jacket cover blurbs and publisher web page previews. A 'book presentation' is more like a written version of an invited talk or book launch that allows audiences to engage more deeply with the author. We have four interesting 'book presentation' this time in our July issue. Sonja Thomas explores the category of Syrian Christians as a political minority that exercises all the systemic privileges of Brahminical communities, analysing their socio-political status in India from a critical race lens – a radical perspective. While Anirudh Deshpande and Muphid Mujawar give us a delightful micro-historical account of Kanhoji Angre from coastal Maharashtra, Adrija Roychowdhury provides us with an incandescent account of the many legends of Delhi. What is of significant interest in this time's 'book presentation' section is Renny Thomas's book on science, caste and religion among scientists. As a scholar interested in the anthropology and history of caste in India, I am in great awe of Renny's academic acumen, and hope that Nidān may play a small role in generating more curiosity and interest in Renny's research.

There are two special attributes of our 'Book Presentation' section. Nidān, as it goes forward with telling the story of modern India through our contributors, can hardly remain aloof from contemporary political questions of caste, gender and religion. These issues link India to global concerns of human rights, non-violence, democracy, and secularism. On the other hand, as scholars and publishers, we feel increasingly anxious about our

distribution, and popular readership and audience. Large and well-renowned publication houses today grapple with the same question, reflected in many of them initiating new 'mini-series' that has scholars writing long-essays that fall between the monograph and article format. Authors too, increasingly write for popular audiences, a trend grounded in two factors. Far more people read non-fictional, and journalistically-researched popular books today. Further, far more readers are linked to global and international politics today due to physical and professional mobility. They constitute an interested and opiniated reading base for us publishers and authors, demonstrating keenness to imaginatively reinvent their indigenous worlds through intellectual frames, as global citizens that evaluate India or Indians in relation to a larger vista of historical and social concerns.

In this sense, we cannot help but be critical and analytical ourself, in our approach to Indian culture and history that is ridden with many systemic inequalities. We cannot remain oblivious to the wider historical roots of these inequalities either and the sometimes-parochial knowledge production surrounding it. There are for example, quite a few discussions in this issue that highlight caste and gender inequalities from a critical race perspective. This focus will only intensify in the coming issues, as research on modern India can hardly afford to remain outside politics, even if researchers deliberately focus away from it – this defocussing itself constituting a political act. As my predecessor founder of this journal always emphasized to me, the study of religion constituted a political act, and I would reiterate this observation by going a step forward. No theme in modern Indian history, or global history today is outside the study of systemic inequality and a political framing that includes religion and caste. It would be naïve of us as historians, academics, and publishers to remain incognizant of this focus. Though we are not politicians ourselves, and remain wary of politically partisan research-writing that specifically targets persons or parties, we hope to take our mission of emphasizing equality, constitutional and human rights, and secularism forward, by focusing on a history of political and social systems that links India to the world.

Our academic-political perspective is reflected in Nidān's choice of a special image for its jacket cover for this, and our subsequent issues. The image on the jacket titled 'The Appeal' (11.0 x 7.0 in., DAG Museums) can be dated to the mid-20th century (paper-and-ink, print media). 'The Appeal' was made by radical Bengali revolutionary artist Chittaprosad Bhattacharya (1915 – 1978), at a time that was immediate to India's Independence. Having witnessed the Bengal famine first-hand, Chittaprosad was a self-made storyteller, and firebrand political activist and artist, who drew inspiration for his posters from village sculptors, artisans, and puppeteers. His brilliant visual testimony to modern India inspires Nidān to demonstrate our secular stand, dedicated to human and constitutional rights, peace, freedom, education, security, and equality. While this poster made by Chittaprosad poignantly evoked the travails of the Ukraine crisis when I saw it for the first time, Chittaprosad's poster also mirrors the modern concerns of India that were important during his own times, and remains resonant for the concerns of contemporary India as well. It is simultaneously a global and Indian image – a contribution to world peace emerging from India that reflects the universal hopes, rights, and dreams of every beleaguered individual and community facing disenfranchisement.

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Research Article

Unravelling an Alternative Sexual Ethic: A Study of *Vadakkan Pattukal*

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Abstract and Keywords

Sexual ethics in India are still heavily inscribed by colonial ideas that privileged Victorian morality and regional ethnopolitical compulsions. While the existence of a robust history of sexual ethics that celebrates sexuality is evident in India, in the sculptures in ancient temples and wall paintings, as well as in texts like *Kamasutra*, these parameters are commonly believed to have belonged to an ancient period. Today, patriarchal control over female sexuality is pervasive in India, and its legitimacy is drawn from tradition. This appears to be a travesty, and the truth is far from what is portrayed. While it is impossible to uncover practices and beliefs that have a Pan-Indian implication, it is possible to examine evidence at a regional level. This paper attempts to reveal early attitudes to sex and sexuality in Kerala based on an analysis of a genre of folksongs from the Malabar region of Kerala, *vadakkan pattukal* (literally "songs from the north"). Uncovering past cultural beliefs and attitudes to sexuality is imperative, especially in current times, when patriarchal backlash and right-wing ideologies seek to control female sexuality and reproductive rights under the pretext of assertive nationalism and cultural identity.

Folksong, Female, Sexuality, Ethics, Matrilineal, Ethnopolitics, Colonialism

Introduction

A study of *vadakkan pattukal*, a genre of folk songs from the northern part of Kerala, can be a rich and rewarding experience. These songs composed and sung by forest dwellers – *Panan* – a caste that is prevalent in Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu,[1] surprisingly has for its subject the actions and exploits of people who largely belong to the upper castes. The liberty enjoyed by the *Panan*, the subaltern, to sing about actions of valiant men and women is in itself astonishing. What is even more surprising is that these songs, locally referred to as *vadakkan pattukal* can attest to the existence of a largely forgotten record of sexual ethics. These folksongs from Malabar celebrate female desire and

[1] *Panan* in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and *Panar* in Karnataka

female sexuality, both inside and outside the boundaries established and policed by patriarchal society. These songs upend, not only imposed notions of sexual morality, but also describe the power of female sexuality. *Vadakkan pattukal* affirms the presence of an alternative sexual ethic that challenges the very concept of what is considered sexually normative. While studies in Anthropology, including Margaret Mead's celebrated study (1935) on female sexuality in Papua New Guinea, have unpacked the relation between sex and gender in many ethnic communities, the domain of folk songs remains largely unexplored. These songs can unlock and provide a rare insight into the prevalent sexual ethics within Kerala society, as well as provide us with crucial information on social attitudes towards sexuality from the precolonial past, before the time Victorian morality became a norm.

An Epistemic Premise of 'Sexuality' Studies

An excavation into the nature of sexuality is arguably a fraught exercise. It becomes all the more difficult when the subject of the study is an ethnic group far removed from what is designated as normative (the so-called mainstream). *Who* studies *whom* determines the nature of the study and the inferences and conclusions derived from it. When the subject under consideration is the sexuality of a historical period, the possibility of error is multiplied manifold not merely because of the lack of documentation, but also because of the real possibility of suppression of all behaviour that is considered unacceptable or reprehensible by gatekeepers of culture. For instance, in spite of sufficient documentation on Victorian sexuality, the existence of deviant sexual behaviour had to be wrested from suppressed evidence (Marcus 2017). The alternative to this is a revaluation of evidence; evidence that is available not only in numerous visual representations like murals and sculptures, but also the in eidetic images available in literary works, folk songs and other oral traditions.

Impediments can be magnified, however, when the researcher is from outside of the ethnic group that is being studied. The ethnopolitical affiliations of the author/ or researcher in this case, plays a significant role in colouring her perception, that inflects the subject under her scrutiny. This is amply evident even in studies that were carried out by reputed scientists in both the 19th and 20th centuries. Surveying images of 'primitive sexuality,' anthropologists Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons insightfully observe, "Where we might expect alternative approaches to sexuality to engender a critique of post-Enlightenment cultural biases, we find instead a "conscription" or co-optation of ethnographically attested alternatives to pre-existing agendas arising from a cultural context beyond the discipline of anthropology" (Lyons and Lyons 2004: xiii). Pre-existing notions of the normative and an ingrained resistance to legitimizing practices from divergent socio-religious backgrounds is validated through studies that legitimize itself by claiming to be 'scientific'.

The study of sexuality is a field heavily inscribed by cultural biases. The very word – sexuality – is a loaded term that lends itself to multiple interpretations. Remarking on the ambiguous nature of the referent, Lyons and Lyons call it a

"Wittgensteinian odd-job word, a signifier with numerous, sometimes contradictory referents" (2004:12). According to them, the term sexuality encompasses multiple meanings. While

> It can be used to mean a biological given, whether a propensity or a drive; it may refer to individuals or groups; it may refer to "unconscious" or conscious impulses; it may describe behaviour, whether indulged in, observed, desired, or related in narrative; it may be a concept in discourse that refers to some or all of the preceding (Ibid.: 12).

Not surprisingly, sexuality studies have had to struggle for legitimacy, navigate biases, confront derision and ridicule, while simultaneously refining methodologies that take the difficulties involved into consideration.

The concept of sexuality is determined largely by factors that are extraneous to it. A study of our approach to sexuality exposes inherent deep-seated prejudices that border on the incredulous. In fact, till fairly recently, it was commonly accepted even among the scientific community that some races have excessive libido while some races suffer from a deficit sexual drive.[2]

> In both the late 18th and the 19th centuries, discourses … [p]rimitives were usually portrayed as lacking in emotional control and rationality and were seen to be sexually more excitable (and more physical generally) than Europeans. Males were seen as sexually aggressive and promiscuous. Africans in particular were seen as sexually rapacious and domineering. Their genital endowments were exaggerated, their cranial capacity was underestimated (Lyons and Lyons 2004. 7).
>
> …the portrayal of the American Indian differs from that described for Africans and other allegedly oversexed populations. The prudery of some North American societies with respect to heterosexual relations, the toleration of institutionalized homosexuality (the institution of the *berdache*), the males' relative lack of body hair and beard, and a decline in population suggested an alternative model: the undersexed rather than the oversexed savage (Lyons and Lyons 2004. 8).

The nomenclature used to refer to these races – primitive – immediately removes them from the normative and by locating them as the *other*, eliminates any possibility of unbiased scholarship. These challenges are compounded by the historical reality of colonialism and the power it accorded to the ruling race – Europeans, and the religion they professed – Christianity. Wiesner-Hanks exploring "The ways in which Christianity regulated the sexual lives of … colonial

[2] Cf. Roy Porter's essay "The Exotic as Erotic: Captain Cook at Tahiti" (Porter: 1990) for a critique of early anthropological studies on Polynesian sexual behaviour; for an examination of attitudes to First Nation (American Indian) sexual behaviour see "*Les Sauvages Amériquains*": *Persistence into the* 18th Century" (Jaenen 1982), for western prejudices regarding African sexuality see Jordan's "*White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro*" (Jordan: 1969).

subjects, and the ways in which individual men and women, Christian and non-Christian, responded to and shaped these attempts at regulation" (2000: 9), focuses on how anything considered deviant by a narrow interpretation of Christian concept of sexuality was criminalised and suppressed, and even exterminated. This not only included practices that were considered deviant by the ruling class but even extended to its documentation. For instance, Burton's record of the existence of male prostitutes in Sind in colonial India (Arondekar 2009: 27-28) has been censored and even destroyed, because it proved the existence of institutionalized homosexuality.[3]

Folksongs and the Social Background of Malabar

It is in this context that I propose to examine the corpus of folk songs – *vadakkan pattukal* – that is prevalent in the Malabar region of present-day Kerala, a state in the southern tip of India. Composed over a period of more than 400 years (roughly from the 14th century to the early 19th century),[4] *vadakkan pattukal* songs occupy an interstice in terms of narrative. These songs are composed and sung by forest dwellers (since the term 'tribal' is culturally suspect, I have replaced the word with forest dwellers instead) known as *Panan*. The *Panan* eke out a meagre living by selling products made from forest resources like bamboo and grass. However, their songs are not about their lives, but about the lives and exploits of the people belonging to *Namboothiri* and *Nair* households. The implicit permission granted by society to these allegedly lowly singers to sing about the ruling class itself has to be located in the larger power politics of the Malabar region, where the existence of rituals like *theyyam* points to an uneasy coexistence and normalisation of the displacer and the displaced.[5]

To understand the complex sexual relations that exist in the Malabar, it is first necessary to understand the caste dynamics of the region. The major castes in the Malabar – the *Nairs* and the *Thiyyas*, are matriarchal and uxorilocal. This means, that the girl, after her marriage, continues to stay at her parental residence, and it is the husband who shifts to the wife's residence or visits her. Among the *Nairs*, contrary to normative Hindu *Brahminical* and North Indian

[3] Instances of male prostitutes – "boys and eunuchs, the former demanding nearly a double price, lay for hire' – catering to a male clientele" (Arondekar 2009: 27 [quoting Burton 1851]). Sexual relations between men are a social reality, commonplace in Afghanistan and parts of Sind – in present day Pakistan and Western India. Though these practices were and are largely driven underground within these territories, they could never be completely eliminated either by the colonial British government, or through the spread of reformist Islam.

[4] There is very little clarity regarding the period in which these songs were composed. Chelanattu. Achutamenon asserts that the *aromal chekevar* songs from this genre were composed as early as the 12th century, while the *othenan* songs were composed four or five hundred years later. M. K Panikkoti is of the view that the earliest of these songs were composed sometime during the early 16th century and the latest ones in 19th century (Sreekumar 2013: 65).

[5] *Theyyam* is a ritual dance performed in the smaller temples called *Kavu* which can be found extensively in Kerala. It "is a ritual wherein, for a period of time, a human being becomes one with the deity and he is worshipped as god. The *Theyyam* of Malabar is radically different from other oracular traditions in that the *Theyyam* is not merely the spokesperson or oracle of the voice of a goddess, but the goddess herself. During the performance, the *Theyyam*[5] becomes the god or the goddess and it is the Dalit or the untouchable – the subaltern – who has the right to become the *Theyyam*" (Puthiyedath: 374-375).

traditions, marriage vows are not binding, and the wife can terminate the relationship with her husband, with comparative ease. The genealogy of a family is traced through the mother and not through the father. Property is passed from mother to daughter, and a man's property passes from him to his sister's children and not to his progeny (Puthiyedath 2021: 368). However, matriarchy is not the reverse of patriarchy here, and to construe it as such would be far off the mark. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, "matriarchy is not the suppression of the male by the female, but a system where the matriarch exerts tremendous power because she is granted that power by the stakeholders and through societal conventions" (Puthiyedath 2021: 368).

In contrast, the most powerful caste group, the *Namboothiris* are not matriarchal, but rigidly patriarchal. Among the *Namboothiris* only the eldest son is permitted to marry within the community. The younger brothers marry women belonging to lower caste communities, such as the *Nairs*, and hence their progeny are not considered *Namboothiris*, but *Nairs*. Since the *Nairs* are matriarchal, their children inherited their mother's family name and property. The landed property, on the other hand, belonging to the *Namboothiris*, passed from the father to the eldest son. This ensures that the *Namboothiri* land remains undivided. Property belonging to *Nair* families also remained largely undivided because they were owned jointly by families.

The symbiotic marriage customs between the *Namboothiris* and the *Nairs* often result in sexual tensions. The law that forbade *Namboothiri* men who were the younger sons from marrying within their own caste, created a lopsided situation, wherein the majority of *Namboothiri* women could not find suitable grooms. The community responded to this challenge by imposing draconian laws that controlled the sexuality of *Namboothiri* women, while at the same time sanctioning polygamy among eligible male members. Any woman who transgressed this boundary, or was suspected of transgression, were subjected to inhuman trials and retribution. Logan (2017: 184-185) explicates this custom that is known as *smartha vicharam* at great length in his pathbreaking work on Malabar, and this custom is also the subject of a popular folk song *rayamangalathillam devamma*,[6] apart from constituting the central theme for two major Malayalam literary works: *Prathikaradevatha* by Antharjanam (1938 [Holmstrom 1990]) and *Bhrashtu* by Kunhukuttan (1973).

Compared to *Namboothiri* women, women belonging to the other castes enjoyed relative physical, social, and sexual freedom. *Nair* women's freedom to have multiple partners, annul their marriages, and to contract new marriages has already been extensively recorded. What the songs of *vaddakkan pattukal* actually reveal, are the existence of practices, and the voices of those that have been supressed and erased. They attest to the prevalence of sexual behaviour that is sharply at odds with practices considered acceptable by arbitrators of

[6] *Rayamangalathillam devamma* is the story of a young female scholar of the Namboothiri caste who dares to challenge elderly male scholars, and defeats them in a debate when she was merely twelve. Humiliated, the patriarchs trap her in a convoluted argument, falsely accuse her of sexual misconduct, and banish her to the forest.

morality and taste – namely colonial rulers. A study of these songs proves that concepts of sexuality and acceptable sexual behaviour have undergone a metastasis due to colonial contact with European, especially British notions of sexuality. To understand India's approach to sexuality, one has to discard these received notions that are determined by extraneous influences, being coterminous with to notions shared by Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Their attitude to sexuality, and the Indian response to it determined and fashioned the conception of sexuality as we know it today. It is notable, that the very approach and definition of sexuality is based on the outsiders' notion of what is acceptable. To trace Indian ideas, practices and cultural conceptions of sexuality is an arduous task and well beyond the scope of this paper. What I propose to do instead, is to highlight cultural practices surrounding sexuality that appear to have societal sanction. This, evident in the folk songs of Malabar – *vadakkan pattukkal,* can force scholars to rethink concepts regarding women's sexuality in Kerala and can be applied as a model of analysis to find resonance with folksongs from other regions of India.

Reflections of Society and Gender Relations

Vadakkan pattukal refers to a loose collection of folk songs that originated in Malabar. These songs, embodying the culture and ethos of the region, have entered the warp and weft of the land. Until recently, these songs were sung by women as they worked in the fields (Sreekumar 2013: 65). The themes of these songs vary widely. While many songs celebrate the heroism of men and women, some also record the injustices meted out to them by powerful rulers and chieftains. While some songs record caste injustices, other songs provide testimony to rampant misogyny. Scholars are, however, divided on the date of the composition of these ballads. The two major clusters of the *vadakkan pattukal* – *aaromal* and *thacholi* have been linguistically analysed for their dates of composition (Sreekumar: 65).

The absence of any mention of colonial presence, or of objects like firearms in the former category (*aromal*) has led to the conclusion that these songs were composed between the 14th and 15th centuries. The *thacholi* songs, on the other hand, describe the presence of Englishmen, Muslim chieftains, and guns. Moreover, the language of the *aromal* songs contains no words that are transliterated from English or Portuguese, while the latter has many such words. Apart from these two major clusters of poems, the *vadakkan pattukal* also contain two additional categories called *ottapattu* – literally translated as 'one song', and *tottampattu*, which chronicles the story behind the *theyyam* and is sung as a prelude before a *theyyam* performance. *Ottapattu* tells us the story of different men or women, [7] but is largely neglected as an area of study.

The kind of society depicted in *vadakkan pattukal* folksongs is a brutal one where often might is right, and the powerful turn their back upon traditional laws of

[7] Unlike *thacholi* and *aromal* songs, which celebrate the exploits of one hero, *ottapattu* is composed of stories of various men and women. These characters appear only in one song – hence they are called *ottapattu* or "one song."

restraint and even common decency with impunity. The laws themselves are loaded in favour of those in power. The absence of any centralized locus of power ensured that petty chieftains, called *naduvazhis*, who exerted suzerainty over a few villages at a time, could do as they pleased. However, this state of affairs also guaranteed that he could be challenged with relative ease. The *vadakkan pattukal* songs contain numerous stories in which a *naduvazhi* desires a woman and has to suffer its consequences. The songs also record the presence of feisty women who refuse to yield, and even outwit the lord.

In one song called *poomathe ponnammayum kadalumkara naduvazhiyum*, (Ponnamma of Poomathe and the King of Kadalumkara), when the *naduvazhi* hears a *Pulluva* girl singing in her lowly hut, he gets her to work in his field. When he beholds her, he is seized with desire. Though he promises her riches, she refuses to yield to his advances. Thwarted by a lowborn girl, the enraged *naduvazhi* concocts a story of her sexual transgression with a cowherd, alienates her from her community, and subjects her to a farcical trial. The judgement is harsh. Her head and breasts are to be burned in the fire. But the proud woman does not die immediately. Instead, she walks up to the chieftain and asks, "You bloody, evil-eyed chieftain, do you want to cavort with my burnt head and sweet breasts" (Nambiar 2018: 38)?[8] After she succumbs to her injuries, she does not die, but rises as a goddess, to avenge the injustice done to her. She denounces the chieftain and exposes his dastardly act. The enraged *Pulluvas* burn down the *kovilakam* or the palace. Ponnamma is installed as a *theyyam*, a goddess who heals the sick and helps those who call out to her when in peril.

Like Ponnamma, the *Pulluva* girl, all women born into lower castes were fair game for local chieftains. The story of Archa, the *Thiyya* woman narrated in *karumbarambil kannente katha* (The story of Karumparambil Kannan) is no different, but her response is devastating. Her husband, Kannan, was a toddy tapper and she had accompanied him to the coconut grove. The owner of the grove, Puthukolom Thampuran desired her and offered her husband the job of a night watchman at his plantain farm. That night, the landlord visits Archa with four *kuthu* (unit of measurement) of silk. Archa had no other choice but to submit to his superior physical strength. The satisfied man then gifts her his gold ring. When her husband returned, she did not reveal what had happened, but instead, merely asked him to get a length of white thread. The next time the *thampuran* (Malayalam word for lord) travelled outside the village, she sent her husband Kannan, dressed as a Brahmin, wearing a sacred thread, which she had fashioned from the white thread to the *thampuran*'s wife. She instructed her husband to gift the *thampuran*'s wife the ring, after having sex with her – the same gold ring that the *thampuran* had gifted her after raping her. Her husband follows her instructions. Seeing his own gold ring on his wife's finger, the *thampuran* questions her and realizes that he has been paid back in kind. Enraged, he denounces Kannan and insists that he be hung to death. But Archa stops him and demands the reason for the decision. When told of the crime Kannan had committed, she responds, "*thampuran*, first you climb the gallows,

[8] Translated from Malayalam. All translations in this article are by the author.

next Kannan will. First you pay the price, next we will" (Sreekumar 2013: 1211). While the *thampuran* stands astounded by her argument, Archa takes hold of her husband's hand and walks back home, her head held high.

Surprisingly, women born into rich, upper caste families were subjected to sexual exploitation as well, and often, this exploitation was institutionalised. One of the songs under discussion, narrates the story of a lecherous lord who insists on gifting money on the occasion of *Vishu* to all the young Nair girls in his territory. The only caveat to this was that they would have to present themselves before him without wearing the upper cloth that covered their breasts – they had to appear before him bare breasted.[9] Whichever girl caught his fancy, would receive pearls rather than coins, and he would send word to the families of these girls, along with gifts of money, that he would visit the girl, for one night. The ballad narrates how the ruler set his eyes on a young girl called Kunjikanni and fancied her. He sent word that he would visit her. Money passed hands and a day was fixed. Kunjikanni, who was in love with another young man called Kammarankutti, outwardly agreed to receive the lord when pressed by her uncle, who was the patriarch of the household. After a sumptuous dinner, the ruler goes to her boudoir, where she greets him with the traditional betel leaf-nut preparation. Then she playfully tickles him in the navel and immediately the king doubles up in pain. He spends the entire night wracked in pain, unable to do anything. The pain does not subside even after attempts by expert physicians to cure him. Kunjikanni then visits him with her uncle and promises to rid him of the pain if he promises her two things. The desperate king agrees, and she makes him sign two documents – one that granted her permission to marry the man of her choice, and the other that gifted her uncle land and power. Once the deeds were signed, she healed him of his pain. What Kunjikanni did to the ruler was a secret *adavu* (move) that she had learnt from *kalari* (Kerala martial arts) that twisted the ruler's intestines. She also knew how to untwist it, and thus relieved his intense pain. What is surprising is that this kind of sexual exploitation of young girls by chieftains or rich men enjoyed social sanction. The money that was paid is referred to as *poruthipanam* (money – *panam* for staying together – *poruthi*), and the custom of paying it was provided with a semblance of legitimacy by referring to it as *anthiporuthimangalam.*[10]

Ponnamma, Archa and Kunjikanni have earned their place in ballads because they resisted exploitation. Their actions were celebrated by the *Panan* who sang these ballads. The existence of these women in these songs also points to a malaise permeating society: for every Ponnamma, Archa and Kunjikanni, there must have been thousands of girls who had no other option but to succumb to masculine avarice and sexual exploitation. Living in a matriarchal society

[9] Women belonging to the lower castes were prevented by custom from wearing an upper cloth to cover their breast. The king was exploiting this custom for his own purposes.

[10] In Malabar, the word *mangalam* refers to marriage, and so the word literally means a marriage for one evening. Such a term afforded legitimacy to what amounted to prostitution, and since this custom went against the narrative of upper-caste culture, instances of such practices were duly suppressed. In the songs of *vadakkan pattukal* one finds a rare instances and references to this practice among the upper castes.

afforded them no protection, nor did their caste or station at birth. The prevalence of female exploitation is also borne out by the ballads of one of the most celebrated heroes of Malabar called Thacholi Othenan. The popular narrative about Othenan is of a heroic brave-heart who fights against injustices. This is also how he is also portrayed in popular films.[11] Yet a deeper study of the corpus of ballads that have Othenan as a hero, reveals a far from complimentary picture. While unknown balladeers chronicle his conquest over various women, many of them against their will, he remains all the while married to the love of his life, Cheeru. As M. T. Vasudevan Nair, the distinguished Malayalam writer observes:

> Among the characters in *vadakkan pattukal*, the one who *has been made* [emphasis in original] most attractive is without doubt, Othenan. There is no need to confer such heroism on Othenan. He has been showered with praise by Kadathanattu Madhaviamma and others. However, when I read the entire *thacholi* songs, I felt that there was no other character who is more wicked and despicable as Othenan (Sreekumar 2013: 43).

While many songs in the *vadakkan pattukal* corpus refer to male sexuality, there are songs that explore female sexuality as well. While Bala the young girl in *balayum ezhu angalamarum* (Bala and Seven Brothers) and Mathu in *puthunaddan chanduvum mathuvum* (Chandu and Mathu of Puthu Nadu) freely invite a man into their bedchamber, there are other characters who seek men because they are sexually unsatisfied. The characters of Chirutai Kunjiamma who, when widowed in her teens, sits at the gatehouse checking out men, and Dechu, who sleeps with many men before she chooses one to be her husband, are far from isolated cases. While Chirutai meets with a sticky end, Dechu is able to find a suitable husband. Dechu, who accepts *poruthipanam* from many men for spending an evening with her, playfully treats her sexual encounters as an *adavu* in a battlefield, and judges all of them as wanting. She sleeps with so many men that she could fill seven bronze pots with gold. Finally, Unnikandan Nair accepts her challenge and Dechu finds a man who can satisfy her in bed. The custom of paying *poruthipanam* for spending one evening together may have historically emerged as a custom that allowed men easy access to multiple women within a socially acceptable framework. This practice was subverted by Dechu, as she used it to check the sexual prowess of her potential bridegrooms before accepting the one who satisfied her. The fact that she was not castigated for it, but became the heroine of a popular ballad, forces us to re-evaluate precolonial social attitudes to female sexuality.

Women did have the right to accept multiple partners, as evidenced in the case of *thampuran*'s wife from *karumparambil kannente katha*, (The story of Karumparambil Kannan) who agrees to sleep with Archa's husband, Kannan, without coercion, while her husband is away. True, she thought he was a *Namboothiri*, but this does not mitigate the fact that she agrees to sleep with a

[11] There are more than fifteen popular films based on *vadakkan pattukal* folksongs in Malayalam, and the figure of Thacholi Othenan is a predominant presence in most of these movies.

virtual stranger. Rudrani, another powerful female character, is furious when she is accused of adultery. She defends herself in the open court by claiming that she was forced to seek other men because her husband was not man enough, and thereafter breaks off her marriage and walks away – a free woman. Many women in the songs openly acknowledge their sexuality, and seek fulfilment both within and outside the bounds of marriage. While the patriarchal policing of female sexuality is evident, the ballads confirm the existence of a society that was not only permissive, but celebrated female sexuality. From these songs, it is obvious that society in Malabar admitted to the presence of sexual desire in men and women as a powerful force. They also seemed to have recognized that unregulated sexuality could be disruptive to the social fabric. While male and female sexuality were subjected to codes of behaviour, it is evident that society also allowed ample scope for expression and experimentation.

Caste, religious and ethnic boundaries can also act as sexual boundaries. While instances of sexual liaison between men and women belonging to different castes, religions and ethnicities are evident within these folksongs, it also confirms that it was easier for men to cross these boundaries.[12] Women who crossed these strictly policed borders risked losing their family and community. Though men belonging to so-called upper castes could have sexual relations with women born to the lower classes, whether consensual or not, women who were even suspected of having illicit relations with men belonging to lower castes risked being thrown out on to the street. These issues became more visible with increased trade with Arabs and the increased intermixture between local populations and Arabs that resulted in the growth of an indigenous Muslim population in Malabar. Women who married Muslim men had to forgo their Hindu identity and had no other option but to embrace the faith of their husbands.[13]

Historical Negotiations and Colonialism

The shift in political power from native chieftains to colonialism in Malabar, especially in the late 18th century, marks a shift in cultural attitudes as well. Though the Malabar region had a small body of Christians before Portuguese,

[12] Sexual privileges are intricately linked with power. Men who occupy a position of power within their caste group may be utterly devoid of power in a social structure where another group supersedes their group's collective power. For instance, a man belonging to a lower caste or a man belonging to an ethnic race may find himself powerless when confronted by a man or woman belonging to a higher caste or a race which enjoys more political power.

[13] One of the popular folk songs refers to the fate of a young princess of *chirakkal kovilakam*, who accepted a dhoti from a Muslim man who rescued her from drowning. He gave her the dhoti since she had lost her garment in the process. Traditionally, Nair women accepted a piece of cloth from the groom as part of their marriage. Since the young princess accepted the cloth from a man, she was considered married to him. The *arakkal* royal family traces their origin to this girl and Muhammad Ali, who married her. Before marriage she had to convert to Islam and was later known as Arakkal Beevi. The *arakkal* family is the only Muslim royal family in Kerala.

Dutch, and British[14] arrivals, they did not create much of a cultural impact[15]. Instead, local Syrian Christians combined "Christian with Hindu practices, following many of the same birth, puberty, marriage, and death rituals as their Hindu neighbours" (Wiesner-Hanks 2000: 183). When Malabar came under British rule, cultural practices that were deemed contrary to Christian values were discouraged, and even made unlawful. Missionary ideas and institutions altered older perceptions towards sexuality and marriage among native communities, who were influenced by these new values. For instance, while the concept of marriage in Malabar was understood very differently, marriage often being an alliance between families of similar caste, power and position. Also, the role of the father in the children's upbringing was negligible. Matrilineal practices privileged the mother over the father, and children could belong to different fathers. Their surname was derived from the mother's family name, ensured family bonding. The ease with which marriage was contracted and annulled came as a rude shock to European missionaries who strove to convert the native Hindu population to Christianity.[16]

The period reflected in a majority of *vadakkan pattukkal* songs coincides with the proliferation of Christian missionary ideas of sexuality, that were also simultaneously being redefined in Europe.[17] The rapidly increasing exposure to new geographies and cultures, the increasing role of secular governments in regulating sexuality, the changing perception of the body, and the "greater symbolic significance attached to sexuality" (Wiesner-Hanks 2000: 2) ensured that ideas regarding sexuality were subjected to increased scrutiny and control. This scrutiny constituted a border that separated 'us' (Christians) from 'them' (Natives), a process that *othered* natives. Sexuality and, by extension, marriage was now controlled and regulated by the church. As Wiesner-Hanks observes, marriage customs were used to distinguish and endow a separate identity, especially for converted natives.

> Religious and secular authorities drew (or attempted to draw) a sharp boundary between marriage and other types of sexual relationships, and to limit sexual activity to married people. These efforts began during the Roman Empire in Europe, as the church preached against concubinage and other non-marital sexual arrangements (Wiesner-Hanks 2000: 255).

[14] See *A History of Eastern Christianity* (1968) by Aziz S. Atiya for a detailed history of Christianity in India, especially South India. The Christians in Malabar were influential traders and are mentioned by Vasco de Gama in his report on Malabar (Ibid.: 359). The social impact of the community is uncertain, and they are not mentioned even once in the *vadakkan pattukal*.

[15] Malabar had a much more numerous Muslim population, which was largely indigenous. They are present in many ballads in *vakkan pattukal*. Bambay Ali (sic) and Kunjali Marakkar appear as audacious, colourful characters. The Muslims, referred to as *jonakan* in these songs and their impact on cultural practices is beyond the scope of this paper and should be studied separately.

[16] The first church council held in Asia was at Goa in 1567. One of the important decrees of this council was regarding marriage: "polygamy was forbidden, and men were ordered to live only with their first wife or to take one of their concubines as a wife" (Wiesner-Hanks 2000: 189).

[17] To trace the changing perception of sexuality in Europe, see Sexuality by Jeffrey Weeks (2009: 4-5).

The sexual beliefs, rules and practices of colonial powers impacted the beliefs, rules, conduct and practices of their colonised subjects. Any practice that was recognized as variant was actively discouraged or suppressed. While the people of Malabar had their own notions about what constituted legitimate and illegitimate sexual relationships, their scope of permissibility was broad. Boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable sexual encounters became increasingly rigidified under the influence of Christian missionary values,[18] that were reinforced through codes of law, courts, and prisons. Acknowledged and internalized by the native communities, these values resulted in an expurgation of various previous practices that were now termed unacceptable, and even illegal. This transformation strongly impacted the dialectics of morality, legitimacy and sexuality within the region.

Interestingly, this period of colonial subjugation in Malabar was also a time when sex and sexuality began to be theorized and talked about in England and in Europe. Foucault identifies this upsurge in theorization as a "veritable discursive explosion" (Foucault 1978: 17) caused by the Counter-Reformation's legislation on the practice of confession. The expectation on the confessor to examine and articulate details and nuances of his own sexual transgressions, even if they may be mental transgressions, in order to determine culpability (mortal or venal sin), led to an explosion of conversations surrounding sex. Foucault challenges what he called the 'repressive hypothesis',[19] arguing that power is not exercised through active repression but through the invention of modern discourses about sex that replaced articulation of sexuality. These discourses that Foucault talks about did not bring about greater understanding about the nature of sex or sexuality, instead it served to problematize and repress it further. Displaced from the West, the sexual ethics of politically subjugated populations across the colonized world – the Global South, henceforth became a contested site for articulation surrounding sexuality. Especially female sexual expression was designated as unnatural, and began to be actively repressed by political elites, and regulated by community elders. Further studies are required in the field to map the increasing control that was exerted over female sexuality and the sexuality of marginalized groups that included transgenders in 19th and 20th centuries in the Malabar who are surprisingly, completely absent from the *vadakkan pattukal* corpus.

Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (1988: 1) identify the presence of an "overarching narrative of repression" around sexuality in India. They consider the erotic content in "temple sculptures," and "miniature" paintings as anomalies and assert that there is a "conspiracy of silence regarding sexuality in India, whether

[18] Christian values cannot be restricted to the beliefs promoted by the Church, its different denominations, its officials, theologians and missionaries. These values were also entrenched in the beliefs and ideas of monarchs, administrators and ordinary individuals.

[19] The repressive hypothesis refers to "the common assumption that the primary attitude of modern society toward sex (beginning in the 18th century, reaching a peak in the Victorian Age, and still exerting strong influence today) was negative; that, except for the closely delimited sphere of monogamous marriage, sexuality was opposed, silenced, and, as far as possible, eliminated" (Gutting 2005: 92).

within political and social movements or in scholarship." While this might be true of post-independent India, we have to admit that this is not borne out by historical evidence. When we consider the evidence provided within linguistic or artistic discourses – literature, bhakti poetry, songs, ballads as well as painting, murals and sculptures, we must admit that the history of sexuality in India is distinct from the history of sexuality in the West. In Europe, "who could speak of sex and the body was tightly regulated – Churches and states, yes, the medical profession, usually, poets and novelists, perhaps" (Weeks 1997: 1), while this does not appear to be the case here. If the notion of 'shame' had been associated with the body, sex, and sexuality in India, we would not have found evidence of bare bodies, copulating couples and explicit sexual content in murals and sculptures in public places, let alone places of worship. Nor would this depiction be present within mainstream Sanskrit poetry, where even the cadence of poetic recitation mimics the rhythm of the sexual act.[20] Linking imagery of nudity or sex with shame, therefore, appears to be a comparatively modern phenomenon – one that is born out of colonial encounters.

Anti-colonial resistance that gained momentum in India in the 20th century, triggered an anxious interrogation of Hindu identity. Community honour, predicated on women's bodies, led to intensified management and policing of female sexuality. Simultaneously, the rhetoric of India's 'golden past' when women were revered was used to curb female agency and sexuality, and bring it in line with a redefined sense of identity that also borrowed to some extent from Victorian morality. Independence in 1947 did not actively interrupt the momentum of Hindu identity building, especially because the trauma of partition was effective in installing a new threat of the 'other' – the Muslim community. Although the Indian national movement professed unity, the construction of Hindu identity in India was not a homogenous process and was subjected to various local considerations. As Charu Gupta observes, "…this desire for internal homogeneity—which Hindu identity politics treated as foundational was not a natural but a constructed form of closure, leading to various tensions and gaps" (Gupta 2001: 13). The emergence of a right-wing ideology that took root among both Hindus and Muslims attempts to paper over these fissures and construct a narrative of homogeneity within the respective communities. An exploration of local socio-cultural histories in India, will effectively puncture such a narrative.

Conclusion

In the absence of records of social history, the significance of *vadakkan pattukal* as a source to unpack customs, beliefs, and practices associated with sexuality of a particular historical period in Kerala is immense.[21] These songs discredit

[20] For instance, Kalidasa in Raghuvamsa uses a variety of meters. The choice of meters is carefully done to capture the essence of the content and, in places, the mixing of long and short legs of the meter mimics the sexual rhythm. Also, Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiripad (also known as Bhattathiri) in *Narayaniyam*, in 69 *dasaka* "*Rasakreeda Varnanam*" uses the meter *kusuma manjeri* which imitates a rocking motion.

[21] There are exceptions, the most significant being William Logan's *Malabar Manuel*. Most available texts focus on the people of Travancore.

notions of 'purity' and norms of behaviour imposed on women and affirm the existence of an alternate ethic that not only upends these notions of sexual morality but also of female sexuality itself. What is surprising in these folk songs is the manifest celebration of female sexuality. While some songs narrate tales about women who negotiate power politics using their sexuality as a bargaining chip, others glorify women who unabashedly enjoy their sexuality and seek carnal fulfilment. Some stories exalt women who subvert the machinations of men who attempt to place a price on their bodies. What is surprising is that these women do not fall in the category of the so-called '*devadasis*,' or 'prostitutes'. They belong to powerful feudal families and function largely within the limits set by society. It is imperative to uncover cultural beliefs and attitudes, especially during current times when the backlash by patriarchal societies and reactionary forces seek to control female sexuality and reproductive rights, under the guise of assertive nationalism and cultural identity. Unsurprisingly, this suppression is predicated on traditional values belonging to a golden past. A study of sexual ethics prevalent during the past can effectively debunk such a claim.

Finally, to add a note on how the folksongs from Malabar under discussion in this article, the *vadakkan pattukal* songs are mostly retained, remembered and sung by forest dwellers. This gives us an interesting insight into the unusual caste dynamics in Malabar. The *Panan*, the forest dwellers who composed and sang these songs, though considered as lower castes, were welcomed by people to their houses, and even by kings into their courts, because of the popularity of their songs. The implicit licence they had, to sing about the exploits and foibles of men and women belonging to the upper castes, not only ensured the survival of these songs but also points to practices that challenge concepts regarding caste hierarchies. It demonstrates the memorialization of precolonial traditions that surrounds the thematic of an indigenous sexual ethics by populations that underwent patriarchal processes of honour-politics quite differently, in contrast to the upper-castes. While upper-caste women had to content with a rapid erosion of their freedom, their bodies becoming the repositories of male and patriarchal community honour, inflected to by Victorian notions of morality, forest dwellers and the lower castes were perhaps, relatively exempt from this external imposition. While the upper-castes, with time, were made to forget and even disown their 'licentious' traditions, it is the forest dwellers, who retained the memory of what was once a more elastic moral social world in the Malabar. It is a point worth remembering that though this world was harsh, even brutal, it also had space for expressions of man-woman equality.

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Research Article

Shaping Muslim Literary Heritage in Kerala: *Mappilapatt* in Malayalam Literary Culture

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Abstract and Keywords

Muslim communities of Malabar, popularly known as Mappilas have long been considered notorious for their violence and ignorance, a reputation they gained through several centuries of resistance that they put up against the Portuguese and British colonial regimes. Negative stereotypes about them were also extended to their literature that was evaluated as unimportant. While the colonial regime reprimanded Mappila traditions for their blind adoration, expressed in devotional poetry and songs composed in Arabic-Malayalam (Malayalam written in Arabic script), popularly known as *mappilapatt*, they also accused this literature of inciting 'fanatical feelings.' This colonial suspicion reaffirmed Mappilas as agents of fanaticism who derived their religion chiefly from devotional songs and stories about Muslim heroes. Their 'dangerous sympathy' for 'vulgar ballads' was perceived as a rejection of liberal values, and of rational thought. The recitation of their poetry at religious or domestic gatherings was denounced as detrimental, and as evidence of how Muslims disturbed the peace. Such colonial assumptions are reflected in postcolonial scholarship (Dale 1975) that neglected, dismissed, and even scorned Arabic-Malayalam print culture. Arabic-Malayalam print culture burgeoned during the colonial period, and was perceived as an instigator of intense emotions like martyrdom that triggered outbreaks and suicidal mentalities (Fawcett 1901). Postcolonial scholarship, thus, largely accepted the colonial antipathy to Mappila literary tradition that marginalized Arabic-Malayalam, Mappila songs. This in turn denied the idiom and literature from gaining state patronage, and branded it as a 'vulgar' dialect that was at best limited to oral literature, folklore, and fairy tales.

Malayalam, Literature, Folk-songs, Mappilas, Arabic-Malayalam, Devotional-Poetries

Introduction

This article explores the rich poetic tradition of Mappila songs composed in Arabic-Malayalam, and challenges literary historians of Malayalam for implying that these poems are essentially alien to Kerala's literary sensibilities due to its Arabic component. While the postcolonial writing of Malayalam literary history as an expression of literary modernity led to the emergence of the Malayali public sphere (Kumar 2010), accounts

that regard Arabic-Malayalam as 'deviant' ignore its poetical contributions and hermetical value. Limiting Arabic Malayalam to the language of folk songs, evaluates it as insufficient in terms of literary quality, and hence, undeserving of inclusion within elevated annals of Malayali literary space and sensibility. This article problematizes this epistemic trap that conceptualizes the *mappilapatt* as folk songs – an opinion replicated by historians and literary analysts of Malayalam, despite their general acknowledgement of the presence of Muslim literature in the region. Despite these perceptions, I will argue that *mappilapatt* cannot be appended to the category of folklore, as these songs were intended for particular occasions that followed strict literary and aesthetic rules.

While folk songs are mostly oral ballads that are anonymously composed, transmitted through contact, and without chronological specificity, the *mappilapatt* generally includes the composer's identity along with the date (year) of composition within poems. I wish to elucidate how their categorization as folk songs, continues to create a prejudiced perspective about *mappilapatt* that rejects and refuses Mappila songs from occupying a place of dignity and recognition within the common cultural memory of standardized Malayalam. Mappila songs have been entirely neglected within the exploration of dominant literary traditions in Kerala, and is denounced for its 'impurity', due to its Arabic components.

I do, however, clarify right at the outset, that this article, in its effort to counter the negative view that classifies the *mappilapatt* as folklore, does not mean to create another epistemic error – the error of demeaning folklore as a 'lower' idiom. In this article's effort to redeem *mappilapatt* as a hermetical contribution, the drawing of negative comparisons with folklore, instead tries to argue that framing the entire hermetical tradition of Mappila songs as folklore is itself a reflection of a discriminatory and classist process that establishes boundaries around vernacular expressions and its historical evolution, based on false notions of purity and homogeneity. To say that Mappila songs are considered folkloristic, while ignoring that they cross the boundaries of the folk idiom (political, anonymous, popular, and universal in their absence of dates), places them as an interstitial and therefore, also a political category of literary activism between standardized modern literature, and folklore.

Arabic-Malayalam Poetry

The term Arabic-Malayalam, in its most basic meaning, refers to the writing of Malayalam, not in the left-to-right running Malayalam script, but in the right-to-left running Arabic script. Arabic-Malayalam literature or *mappilapatt* also introduces additional, modified letters/ alphabets that represent the native phonemes that are alien to Arabic, and can be considered an independent, regional literary model classified into prose and poetry. The central part of this literary corpus, allegedly emerging from oral tradition (Karasseri 1989: 88), was composed in the early years of the 20th century and comprised of the *malappatt* and *kissappatt* genres. The *malappatt* that can be translated as 'garland songs', are hagiographical and laudatory, commemorating the miracle stories of Sufis and heroic martyrs of the local and wider Islamic tradition, while also commemorating momentous events and episodes in the history of Islam and in the history of the local Muslim community in the Malabar.

The term *mala*, literally meaning garland, symbolizes the rhythmic union of meaningful words that are strung together one after another like beads in a garland. Most early *malas*, like the *Muhyiddin mala*,[1] and *Rifai mala* (1812),[2] have clear associations with Sufi orders, whose founders they praise. While most conventional historians comment in passing on the Sufi character of *mala* texts (Kunji 1982: 168), these eulogies also commemorate miracle stories that are linked to the Prophet and his family, local Sufi masters, and martyrs. Apart from personages, compositions describe various themes that emerge from local historical events, while also discussing legal and ethical questions, philosophy, and heroic events that are well-known in Islamic history, in addition to the Mappila community's own past (Illias and Shamshad 2019). *Kissappatt* on the other hand, are narrative songs about the life histories of Prophets and Sufi saints, and other eminent personalities that recount their participation and martyrdom in epic battles. This genre covers narratives about seminal historical events that include political confrontations between the Mappilas and the British, as well as a record of the lives and deaths of regional spiritual figures, and war heroes. Various fictional tales and renditions from the Arabic,[3] and Persian cosmopolis have widened the scope of the songs and stories contained in the *Kissappatt*.[4]

Mappilapatt texts are culturally prominent due to their role in ritual performances. Stories and songs from within its various genres are performed during *nerchas*, or ritual acts in which devotees make vows to saints or deities for wish fulfilment (Dale and Menon 1995). In the Muslim context, *nerchas* consist of the ritualized veneration of saints and/ or martyrs, accompanied by elaborate ceremonies that include visitations made to the shrines and tombs of saints and martyrs. The main ritual in this public veneration consists of the recitation of praise poetry that eulogizes the saint, recounting his heroic exploits as that of a martyr. For example, exploits of the forty-four Mappila martyrs of Malappuram are commemorated in the *Malappuram kissa* (1883) composed by Moyinkutti Vaidyar, who explicitly endorsed the performance of the *kissa* during *nercha* ceremonies dedicated to the martyrs. In *nerchas* celebrated at home, or for private audiences, organized for explicit purposes like curing diseases; the hagiographies of Sufis like Abdul Qadir al-Jilani,[5] Ahmad al-Rifai, or other martyrs from the battle of Badr are also recited alongside. Small assemblies at the mosque or at home are specially organized to commemorate occasions where recitations of the *Muḥyiddin Mala* (1607) and *Rifai Mala* (1812) are then prearranged. A celebration of such occasions, especially during Ramadan also includes the commemoration of Badr martyrs, performed through a rendition of the

[1] The first of this genre, and the first *mappilappatt* in general. It was composed by Qadi Muhammad in 1607 AD in praise of Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1160 AD).

[2] *Rifai Mala* venerates Ahmad Al-Rifa' I of Egypt (1118-1182 AD), the founder of the *Rifai* Sufi order.

[3] The circulation of shared stories or ideas from the original Arabic, Islamic texts, expressed and presented in the local idiom through translation, inspired adaptation, or retelling, even in its corrupted versions, identified as the Arabic Cosmopolis (Ricci 2011).

[4] Cf. Eaton (2021) for ideas elaborated in Persian texts that were translated and circulated as mentioned above for the Arabic case, across the vernacular world between the 9th and 19th centuries. These constitute great swathes of West, Central, and South Asia, that are generally referred to as the Persian cosmopolis.

[5] The *nercha* of Jilani, held in the month of Rabial-Akhir, is observed, and accompanied by the recitation of the *Muhyiddin Mala*.

Badr kissa (1876) and the *Badr mala* (1886) composed by Kanjirala Kunjirayin. *Nerchas* were and are also unconditionally performed, and their performance can also be located outside the context of vowing and wish fulfilment (Makhdum 1967: 261). The pervasive influence of the texts' ritual purpose is easily traced within *malas*, the overwhelming majority of which are concerned with making vows or *nerchas*. Hence, *nerchappatt* is another alternative name that is often used for describing *malas*.

Conventionally, historians have assumed the essential purpose of Mappila literature to be the propagation of those Islamic religious principles that inspire spiritual life (Karim 1985: 121). According to this perspective, the earliest *mappilapatt* was composed in order to impart knowledge to 'illiterate' and 'backward' Mappilas, in regard to various rituals and religious customs surrounding Islam and Muslim history, and to provide them with testimonials on various saintly functions (Kutti 2014: 93). However, recent studies have taken a fresh, socio-cultural approach and locates the *mappilapatt* within the social life of Mappila Muslims, demonstrating its poetry to constitute a vivid, aesthetic erudition that emerged from subaltern literary cultures in Kerala (Vallikkun 2008). Some other scholars have read the *mappilapatt* as a form of resistance literature, composed by Mappila intellectuals against the backdrop of colonial hegemony, and the encroachment of the Portuguese and the British over Muslim life in the Malabar (Arafath 2014). A few scholars have also focussed attention on the need to map the *mappilapatt* as a performative idiom, within the realm of idealistic religious devotion, developed within the broader tradition of vernacular Islam and Sufism in Kerala (Kunhali 2004). While most of these studies base themselves on the thematic content of songs, they ignore the structural layout, stylistic features, metrical arrangement, and semantic composition of the individual poems. This article focuses on addressing this lacuna, by analysing the metrical arrangements of the *mappilapatt*, in order to understand the extent to which its corpus was influenced by Tamil and Malayalam.

Marginalizing Arabic-Malayalam Literature

In her pioneering thesis, Sutton (2015) attributes the exclusion of *mappilapatt* and Arabic-Malayalam from the literary canon of South Asian Islam to three factors. According to her:

> Firstly, Kerala lies outside the generic notion of the Islamicate and conceptually on the edges of widespread notions of Indo-Islam. Secondly, scholarship on South Asian Islam has tended to privilege particular languages and literary traditions, primarily mainly Urdu, Persian, and Arabic, while ignoring most of India's vernaculars. Finally, the Mappila community and their Muslim identity appeared enigmatically 'incomprehensible,' simultaneously 'syncretic' and 'fanatic.' As a result, the vast resources of Mappila literature related to everyday and spiritual life, which constitute important sources for the politicization of the community in response to British colonialism, remain understudied (Sutton 2015: 8-17).

But this neglect is not only visible from the perspective of Islam. Within Malayalam literary historiography too, Arabic-Malayalam literature has similarly been

marginalized, leading to the emergence of a Malayalam public literary domain, that is Brahminical and elitist in nature. Initial historical accounts about Malayali literature have been unquestioningly accepted despite they ignoring Muslim contributions through suggestions like 'Arabic-Malayalam' or 'Mappila literature' belonging to a separate cultural strand. Most scholars have imbibed the bias that accuses the idiom of being so overwhelmed with Islamic elements, that it was unrecognizable as 'true' Malayalam. Or then, that these texts could only be considered folk songs, due to their insufficient literary quality, that made it impossible for the idiom to find any inclusion within Malayali literary space.

The writing of multiple varieties of literary history for Malayalam has increased since independence, but most of these histories neglect Mappila literary culture, or merely acknowledge its presence (Pillai 1881 (1965); Menon 1939; Nair 1967). The exclusion of Arabic-Malayalam is partly due to linguistic difficulties that are encountered in accessing the texts, since it is necessary to know Malayalam and some Arabic to read them. Moreover, except for Mappilas, the modified Arabic script and vocabulary, as well as archaic Malayalam morphological forms, produce them as further challenging for even native language readers. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that the political situation of Mappila Muslims, especially the absence of royal authority and courtly traditions among them, marred the formation of a cogent historical and cultural narrative of their literary history (Dale 1980: 28). As described by Kunhali (2004: 13), this literature was made even more inaccessible due to its generally scattered and fragmented nature, despite vibrant oral tradition and the devotional tradition of performing Arabic-Malayalam poems at public festivals.

A few historians of Malayalam literature like Iyer (1957) and Chaitanya (1971) included some minor references about Muslim literary contributions in their research writing – mostly about poetry, regardless of any methodical arrangement and organization of the corpus' historical and thematic order. To further expand on these first scholarly treatment of Muslim textual culture in the history of Malayalam literature, Iyer's *Kerala Sahitya Charithram* (History of Kerala Literature) that was posthumously published in 1957, is considered the most authoritative description on the subject, despite only one short passage on the *mappilapatt* which was further and misleadingly categorized as folk songs (Iyer 1957: 269). Iyer also made negative comments about the 'foreignness' of Arabic-Malayalam, stating that the influence of Arabic on Mappila literature reduced the 'poetic chastity' of Malayalam literary works. The presence of foreign, mainly Arabic and Persian words, in Arabic-Malayalam literature has similarly led several literary historians to present Arabic-Malayalam works as alien to Kerala's literary sensibilities (George 1968: 26). Most literary historians criticized Arabic-Malayalam literature for its distinct linguistic structure, apart from its mythological content, imagery, or icon-devotional related themes that were considered foreign. Chaitanya (1971: 195-98) acknowledged that "the traditional Muslim literary effort has remained almost completely isolated", in regard to "Moplah Songs", in his chapter on Christian and Muslim contributions to Malayalam literature. He criticized Arabic-Malayalam for its Arabic script and its assimilation of words from Arabic, Urdu, and Tamil, by rebuking traditional Muslim literacy practices for their belated entry into 'modern education' (Ibid.).

Native scholarship on the subject has hitherto been reluctant to analyse the *mappilapatt* in any positive light, due to hegemonic consensus among Malayalam literary scholars to exclude the *mappilapatt* from Malayalam literature, and instead denigrate it as folkloristic. Due to this discrimination prevalent in the dominant literary traditions of Kerala, literary historians generally treat *mappilapatt* as a historical and cultural product of linguistic interactions between Arabs and Malayalam-speaking populace, framing it as a negotiated and unorganized local idiom that was limited to anonymously authored, oral compositions that did not subscribe to special metric rules (Taramel 2021). While Paniker in his *Short History of Malayalam Literature* (1977), appreciated the "local flavour" and "the quaint beauty of melodies" of Arabic-Malayalam poetry, he considered its richness to lie in "the *vira* and *sringara* (the heroic and the erotic) templates in the vague classification of folk poetry" (Paniker 1977: 8). Similar ideas have been expressed by Leelavathy (1980) in her *Malayala Kavitha Sahitya Charithram* (History of Malayalam Poetry), a comprehensive treatise about the history of poetry in Kerala that dedicates only one solitary sentence to *mappilapatt* under the genre of folk songs, describing the literature as "isolated" (Leelavathi 1977: 74). The epistemic trap of conceptualizing the tradition of *mappilapatt* as folk, is subsequently repeated by many historians and critics of Malayalam literature, despite acknowledging the presence of Muslim literature (Menon 1982: 41; Choondal 1980: 77). Mappila linguistic and literary traditions were, therefore, entirely marginalized, attributed to their alleged lack of coherence, and impurity that was diagnosed as besieged by cross-regional linkages (Illias and Shamshad 2019: 14). Literary historians of Kerala thus neglected the existence of an entire, alternative literary space (Abubakkar 2014: 7-12), while on the other hand, providing this same literary spaces to Hebrew/ Jewish Malayalam (Gamilel 2021), or Garshuni/ Syriac Malayalam (Perczel 2014). Mappila textual culture has been conveniently marginalized within political processes interested in constructing a new Malayali or Keralite identity that is predicated on their use of standardized Malayalam.

Standardizing Malayalam and the Politics of 'Pure' Language

The introduction of standardized Malayalam print in the 19th century instated a process of hierarchical order for different actors in the linguistic and literary field of Malayalam (Arunima 2006). The traditional and dominant model of noble, and elite writings in 'pure' Sanskritized Malayalam was increasingly preferred in the domain of literary and artistic activities, patronized by discursive arrangements of the colonial power. With the crystallization of a 'Malayali' identity in the mid-20th century, standardized Malayalam became the most crucial political identity marker. Along with the formation of a linguistic-based Kerala state in 1956, standardized Malayalam became the central element of a national political imagination for Keralites. Literary scholars considered elite-Sanskritized Malayalam as the master narrative, and the idealized representation of the Malayali self, when classifying and evaluating Malayalam literature. The historically constituted dominant ideology of the upper classes implicitly determined Sanskritic ideas of literary and cultural practices and Brahmin-oriented script as the standard of modern Malayalam, and determined it as the reference frame for any prospective works of literature. Hence, according to the sensibilities and standards of this paradigm, the position of a different variant of writing Malayalam in Arabic, framed Arabic-Malayalam literature as unchaste. Iyer's

evaluation of Arabic-Malayalam's lack of 'purity' emerged from these very judgments. Historical works that documented and surveyed Malayalam literature followed Sanskrit-oriented linguistic and cultural ideologies that failed to appreciate Arabic-Malayalam works. Thus, the marginalization of Arabic-Malayalam literature to the peripheries of the Malayalam literary field, became crucially based on the dominant ideology of the caste system. Critically commenting on the prevailing practices of the history writing of Malayalam literature, Taramel elucidates how most literary historians following this trend, and only commended those Malayalam writings that reflected the Sanskritized ideal. Consequently, the textual culture of Arabic-Malayalam and its historical importance was excluded, overlooked, and disregarded due to the heterogeneity against the prevailing Sanskrit-oriented inclinations (Taramel 2006: 17-18).

The subsequent effects of this dynamics of domination and subordination of diverse groups in the Malayali literary sphere created a linguistic and cultural hierarchy that marginalized various dialects. The variations within the spoken expressions of the lower strata of society became marginalized due to this upper-caste domination and failed to find sufficient representation in the trajectory of language development that proceeded towards standardized speech and script. While the 16th century in the Malabar may have witnessed the presence of non-Indian scripts for Malayalam like Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac, the historically constituted dominant ideology of caste implicitly determined Sanskritic ideas about literary and cultural practices that privileged Brahmin-oriented scripts and linguistic structures. As Vallikkunn remarks, mainstream Malayali literati overlook literary traditions of weaker sections of society, and consider lower castes and Muslims as too 'polluting' and hence, unsuited to Brahminical aesthetic presuppositions (Vallikunnu 1999: 6). Malayalam literary histories that document and survey Malayalam in the colonial and postcolonial period, and Muslims reformers who wrote 'pure' and 'standard' Malayalam, continued to follow Sanskrit-oriented linguistic and cultural/ ideological formats that could not qualify Arabic-Malayalam as 'standard' Malayalam. Thus, the marginalization of Arabic-Malayalam as 'non-standard' Malayalam, located at the peripheries of 'pure' Malayalam were only reinforced by the crystallization of the Malayali identity in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Asserting Space in Malayalam literary History: Aesthetics and Poetics of Mappila songs

Some Mappila scholars have made an effort to integrate Arabic-Malayalam texts and poets into a more general and unified narrative about Malayalam literary history, and this move has exerted considerable influence over later-day discussions about Muslim literature. The first academic study to underscore the contribution of Arabic-Malayalam to modern Malayalam, and Malayalam literature and its development, was an article presented by Ubaid in the 18th conference of the *All Kerala Shaastra Saahithya Parishat* in 1947 (Karim 1985: 117). Kutti remarked on and praised the Arabic-Malayalam idiom for its resistance to becoming drowned within standardized Malayalam, and for retaining its special linguistic vitality that represented the idioms of a religious minority (Kutti 2014: 18). Abu's scholarship in this regard has been pioneering, and has constituted a critical effort to integrate Arabic-Malayalam texts

and authors into Malayalam literary history (Abu 1970). Karim too, insisted on the similarity between meters and descriptive styles of the *mappilapatt*, and Ezhuthachan's *Ramayanam Kilipatt* (Karim 1985: 129). Such scholarship has successfully questioned the deep-seated discrimination that only served to detach Arabic-Malayalam texts from Kerala's literary traditions, and linked its linguistic elements, semantics, and the metrical arrangements of compositions, to mainstream Malayalam poems. This questioning of discrimination was specially aimed at incorporating Arabic-Malayalam literary culture into the master narrative of Malayalam literature. Most such scholars highlight the typical and distinctive literary style of Arabic-Malayalam poems, that state the date and author of compositions in its concluding lines. The composition itself is imbued with beautiful verbal imageries of a lapidary, made out of precious gems.

In the 1047th year of the Kollam era [1897]
I carved this mala in 156 lines
Fashioned as a single garland of beads
Shaped this Mahmud garland, Oh people! (*Mahmud Mala*, Couplet, 142-143).

I have composed this recital
In the Kollam year 1294, Oh you Learned!
Composed of 164 lines

I have blended this garland, Oh you Learned!
Harmonized with diamonds and rubies
I string the garland for Alawi, Oh people! (*Sayyid Alavi mala*, Couplet, 156-158).

The metaphor of stringing a garland of valuable gems indicates to the rhythmic convergence of meaningful words that follow one after another in a song, and most scholars suggest that this metaphorical description of words as pearls and rubies in the *malappatt* constitutes a deliberate attempt by authors to present their poetic language as hybrid, indicating to the crafting of beads or Malayalam words in Arabic script. Recent studies have also compared the confluence between Arabic and Malayalam to *Manipravalam* – a combination of rubies and coral that symbolizes the union of Malayalam with Sanskrit in the precolonial period (Freeman 1998). Scholars speculate that Arabic-Malayalam script constituted a transfer of Arabic sacrality into Malayalam (Arafath 2020: 529-31), transforming the Arabic-Malayalam idiom into a movement could be considered as moving parallel to the *Manipravalam*. According to this view the trope associating pearls with rubies resonates with the more usual notion about Manipravalam that is considered to also encompass a combination of rubies and coral (Karasseri 1995: 170).

The *mala* was often composed as a single canto, deploying complex alliterations, a style that finds similarity with Tamil poetry (Kutti 2014: 129). The couplets of *malappatt* repeat their first letters, using alliterations consistently, while ending couplets with suffixes that are in the third person plural *avar*/ *ovar* or *ekallah*/ *ya allah* (please bestow!/ Oh God!) as well as in similar ending rhymes. While the endings *avar*/ *ovar* emphasize on the centrality of the protagonist, or subject, terms like

ekallah/ *ya allah* are supplications. These standard poetic features serve to enhance the memorialization of songs:

allahu tiru munnil erram stuticchovar *arral muhammad enn allahu vilicchovar*	He is the one honoured the most before the praiseworthy Allah! He is the one designated as the precious Muhammad by Allah! (*Mahmud Mala*, Couplet 4).
tanivaral praṇitamay margamin namatte tavariṭunna Qaḍirriya yenna tarikhatte guruvar Muhyiddin haqal poliv arul ya allah *kaniyar haqal kullu hajat enkalil vitallah*	Solely instituted the spiritual order, Distinguished the mandate of the Qadiriya Tariqa, With the mediation of this great master, gratify my hopes, O Allah! Believing in his truth, reward my anticipations O Allah! (*Putiya Muhiyudin Mala*, Couplet 67).

Though the *mappilappatt* does not have any prescribed rhythmic rules and poetic regulations, it closely follows the Tamil poetic style as described in the *Lilatilakam* (a 14th century treatise on Tamil poetics and grammar). The authors follow poetic rules of *kazhuttu* (the repetition of the second letter in the first line of a stanza and subsequent verses), *kambi* (repetition of the first letter in every couplet), *valkambi*/ *vepp* (last letter repetition in couplets), *etuppu*/ *valummalkambi* (sing the same word that ends a stanza to begin the following verse), *chittezhuth* (the repetition of letters within a line or stanza), *padaanupraasam* (the second letter in the first line of a couplet is repeated in the same place in the following three verses) and *etuka/kunipp* (repeated in four verses).

The Relation Between Arabi-Malayalam and Tamil Poetics

But why did Arabic-Malayalam poems follow Tamil poetics? This is because authors composing Arabic-Malayalam poems in the 19th century did not self-identify their language as Malayalam, written in Arabic script. They did not think beforehand of the contributions made by their Arabic-Malayalam poetry to Malayalam literary history, before standardized Malayalam was even instituted. Nor did they regard Arabic-Malayalam as a specific, hybrid dialect that had Islamic affiliations, that would have to, in the postcolonial period, struggle to achieve inclusion within the standardized and Sanskritized language of the region. At the time of composition, poets generally followed existing linguistic structures, and prevalent poetic rules of what would be later called Malayalam, which, in any case, was closely related to Modern Tamil, and descended from Old Tamil. Christian Missionaries and linguists had long since observed how language in Kerala was peculiarly related to and intertwined with Tamil,

constituting an ancient and altered offshoot (Frohnmeyer 1889). Since the 9th century, Malayalam has undergone numerous changes and innovations, especially after the branching off between Tamil and Malayalam (Burnell 1874: 39) and the relationship between the two languages has often been expressed through analogies and metaphors that presented Tamil and Malayalam as sisters, or Tamil as the of mother of Malayalam (Caldwell 1856; Gundert 1872).

In the 13th century, Kerala began to develop its own literary form that was eventually called Malayalam. Rich Freeman has argued that the consciousness of a unique Malayalam identity crystallized relatively late, and only during colonial times. Until then, the boundary between the Tamil and Malayalam was less clear. While everyday speech in Kerala was generally called Tamil, it was the Sanskrit word *bhasha*, that was used to refer to Malayalam (or any other spoken vernacular in Kerala) within the literary registers of the time (Freeman 1998: 45). Only in the 19th century, in the colonial period, did the name Malayalam for a specific language gain in currency. Based on his study of the *Lilatilakam* (14th century treatise on Tamil poetics and grammar), Freeman observed how the *Lilatilakam* did not even designate the language it was describing as Malayalam. Instead, it claimed the presence of a new literary, and distinctive cultural-linguistic identity, called the *Manipravalam* that constituted a literary medium for what was described as the speech of Kerala or *keralabhasha* (Freeman 1998: 46).

Similarly, only in the second half of the 19th century, did some colonial officials and Muslim reformers coin the term Arabic-Malayalam – a move that reinforced Malayalam as the standard, against which the other languages of the region were evaluated. Since the latter developed in its modern form only in the colonial period, the application of the term Arabic-Malayalam refers to all Malayalam that was spoken by Muslims, prior to the development of standard Malayalam. This naming then, also became a device for marking and segregating Muslim history, discourse and language in Kerala as automatically non-standardized. In contrast, when surveying texts from the 17th century, it is evident that authors, who employed Arabic for Malayalam, did not consider Arabic-Malayalam to be too distinctive to ordinary Malayalam. While writing in any script, authors and composers were instead identifying the language in which they wrote as *svadesha bhasha* indicating to their native language. Qadi Muhammad, the 17th century composer of the *Muhyiddin mala* never designated either the script or language of his text as *Kerala bhasha*.

Hence, the association between language and script in the term Arabic-Malayalam is a clear anachronism. This anachronism is very problematic, because of the Arabic script part of it, being reduced to a religious and sectarian marker (Muslim). This is a biased, and unstudied approach, as the Arabic script, just as any other normal script is a literary tool for writing on any subject by any writer from any religious background. The Arabic script was used quite widely in fact. It was used in Maratha court records in Western India, and was also used by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, who wrote in the Persian language. The use of Arabic script for writing any vernacular, does not necessarily produce these vernacular texts as religious or specifically, Muslim, just like writing in Devanagari does not necessarily produce the literary text under discussion

as Hindu. As is further evident, writing in the Roman script for any language by any author, in times today, does not produce its writers as necessarily Christian either.

The Importance of Poetic Meter

As mentioned earlier, the *mappilapatt* can be roughly divided into the *malappatt* and *kissappatt*. Compared to *malas*, the *kissappatt* have additional poetical elements that are deeply influenced by Dravidian poetics. Structurally, a *kissappatt* may consist of multiple cantos, defined by its rhyming scheme. This rhyming scheme is referred to as *ishal*. The *ishal* is an essential feature of Mappila songs. While the *mappilapatt* is distinguished as a "blend of music and literature" by Karasseri (1989: 86) accompanied with "vocal rhythms" (Kutti 2015: 101), it is their *ishals* that make the song melodious and generate widespread appeal among listeners (Netiyanad 2012: 26). The word *ishal is* derived from the Tamil word *iyal*, meaning rhythm, meter, melody, or style, and largely implies beauty, love, or grace. According to Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, however, the word *ishal* is derived from the Tamil word *icai* that means melody or tune. Applying the principle of *ishal*, The meaning of words within poems are often transformed to act as functional equivalents of Malayalam prosody (Pillai 1979: 201), and in longer *kissappatt* poems, the *ishal* or rhythmic meter can change multiple times throughout the various cantos. In fact, from another perspective, the change in cantos is oftentimes marked by a shift in *ishal*, which then decides the tune, style, or rhythm of recitation. However, in shorter songs, the *ishal* remains fixed (Sutton 2015: 53).

The *Muhyiddin mala* for example has been composed using a single *ishal*, that is simply identified as *ishal Muhyiddin mala* (Kutti 2014: 24 & 118). The change in *ishal* is usually indicated by a subtitle, placed within the song itself that helps the reciter to identify the melody of the section under performance. Some *ishals*, apart from the influence of Tamil meters dating to the 18th century, also imitate Arabic prosodic patterns (Abu 1970: 88). Their typical rhythmic arrangements, and the specific figures of speech that are influenced by Old Tamil poetic techniques, are evident in the *pattu*, an exclusively Dravidian, song-making tradition.

While the *pattu* historically blended *keralabhasha*, Tamil, and Sanskrit together, it utilized phonological forms, meters, and patterns of alliteration that altered Sanskrit words to transform them into the Dravidian forms (Freeman 2007: 164). According to Sutton (2015: 30), the muddling of three linguistic streams, further became conflated with folk songs that to some extent, also influenced the *mappilapatt*. For example, Mappila poets like Kunjayin Musliyar and MoyinKutti Vaidyar followed the prosodic and syntactic mechanisms of Dravidian metres, influenced directly by the *Ramacaritampatt*, composed in the 12th century (Kutti 2014: 119-123). While most rhythmic patterns and poetic techniques of *mappilapatt* poems were orally transmitted between teacher and student, there are no surviving treatises today that explicitly discuss its poetics. On the other hand, the songs itself mention specific rules or procedures, that are to be utilized when critiquing a composition, or when discussing how a poet can compose a classical song. For example, the poet MoyinKutti Vaidyar in his *Salikhat kissa* expounds:

Grasp the poetic rules of the repetition of first and second letter in the first line of a stanza and the subsequent verse,

And the aesthetic beauty of opening and ending (stanzas) *imitate the repetition of last letter in four subsequent verses and the first letter in every couplet*,

Every prominent poet observed the before-mentioned rules
Uncover the purpose of the Physician's Son (*Salikhat Kissa*, Couplet, 34-35).

In Tamil poetry, this professed modesty is referred to as *avaiyatakkam*, and it consists of an apology rendered by the author in advance, aimed at disarming his critics beforehand (Ebeling 2010: 74-76). In a similar vein, but a different instance, composers of the *Cerur Kissa* in 1845 also express regret for their incompetence about fulfilling the poetic criteria of compositions, and providing proper semantics that are necessary for its recitation.

The poets neither possess any experience,
Nor consciousness of the poetic rules,

No knowledge about repetition of the first letter in every couplet and the second letter in the first line of a stanza and the subsequent verses,

Unfamiliar with the rule of using the same word that ends a stanza to begin the following verse and last letter repetition in couplets,

Not intimate with the semantics
We are neither intelligent nor learned (*Cerur Kissa*, Couplet, 50-51).

As already described, *ishal*s represent and determine the tune and rhythmic pattern of each canto in a poetic contribution. But they also indicate to the situational mood of poems. For example, *ishal*s related to battle scenes that describe the movement of armies and confrontations between troops, accompanied by the testimonies of martyrs about themes such as the realization of divine help, are all delivered in an amplified and high pitch to indicate the implicit tension of the song's content and intent. For example, the rushing or reducing of tempo for verses contained in Moyinkutti Vaidyar's *Badr kissa* and *Uhd kissa* composed in 1879 are mainly aimed at facilitating high-pitched performances.

During the 19th century, derivations of different rhymes were often used to indicate the nature and intent of specific compositions that enhanced its dramatic style (Netiyanad 2012: 49-50). While Arabic-Malayalam followed Old Tamil and Dravidian vocabularies, many words also underwent morphological innovations. Moreover, to adjust to rhythmic patterns, poets often replaced Sanskrit words with the vernacular. While this made for other, slight changes, it did so without changing the basic metre

of the composition (Khader 1960: 31-32). For example, the word *nidra*, meaning sleep, was often pronounced as *nittira*; the word *suryan* or sun was often pronounced as *curiyan*, and *candran*, the moon, was pronounced as *cantiran*. This change was primarily made to suit the adoption of old Tamil and Dravidian poetic systems of pronunciation into the *mappilapatt*. *Mappilapatt* authors and composers also often followed rhythmic patterns or tunes that were used in popular Malayalam folk songs. For example, Shijai Moidu Musliar's *Saphala mala* composed in 1899 has obviously derived some of its *ishal*s from a folk song corpus (Netiyanad 2012: 32-33), and it is important to note that folk songs from Kerala also subscribe to specific metric patterns that are also considered *ishal* (Kutti 2007). However, unlike Sanskrit or Dravidian poetic rules, folk songs that are fundamentally oriented to performance, are more flexible with variations, additions, and substitutions.

The flexibility of the *mappilapatt* corpus that allowed for infusions between Malayalam poetic traditions, and folk songs are especially evident during wedding celebrations, and are encompassed in a special genre known as *oppana*. Widely prevalent among Mappila Muslim women across the Malabar, *oppana* songs enable and facilitate dancing and clapping in a chorus by women who celebrate the auspicious occasion by surrounding the bride. While most scholars identify *oppana* as a mere performance, Kutti (2007: 121) claims that *oppana* constitutes a separate *ishal* – a specific style, tune or rhythm that corresponds to specific performances, characterized by shifting tempos and rhythms that are also used within *kissappatt* poems. These merges and conflations strongly indicate to cross-linguistic relations between Arabic-Malayalam poetical traditions, and Malayalam poetics that descend from Old Tamil and Sanskrit. It leads us to the conclusion that *mappilapatt* songs were not alien at all, and hence, cannot be reduced to the epistemic frame of folk. Instead, *mappilapatt* constitutes a shared linguistic heritage within the domain of Malayalam literature.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to outline how Malayalam literary historians marginalized and denounced the *mappilapatt* corpus as archaic, and as mere folk songs that were anonymously composed, orally transmitted. and with no special metrical rules. Proving the contrary – the shared and rich literary heritage of Arabic-Malayalam poetics, this article challenges the denouncement as a form of belittling, contextualized within the dominant linguistic politics of the region. This article also mitigates against colonial and early postcolonial scholarship that reinforces notions about Muslim textual practices as deviant, when evaluating Arabic-Malayalam against standard Malayalam, paradoxically, for a time when standard Malayalam had still not developed.

Studying the aesthetic standards and specific composition rules of the *mappilapatt* corpus, especially the rhythmic and meter arrangements, this article concludes that this literature corresponds quite directly with Dravidian and Tamil poetics. Several scholars have additionally demonstrated the vivid and intricate socio-cultural perspective of *mappilapatt* texts, located within the social life of Mappilas. Arabic-Malayalam poetry can, hence, be regarded as a poetic movement, a subaltern literary culture, or a form of resistance literature, composed by Mappila intellectuals against the backdrop of colonialist hegemony. However, such studies have also served to

separate the *mappilapatt* as a fixed category that is loosely organized, either according to themes or according to performance. Such scholarship has also ignored the structural layout, stylistic features, metrical arrangements, and semantic composition of each poem.

Muslim literary culture in Kerala has been mainly performative, and consciously geared towards the public. The performance of the *mappilapatt* in the late 19th century also entailed collective singing. Most of these songs are encountered in the form of printed texts, composed by well-known poets, whose presence can be historically dated. Though this is not to denounce the importance of folk literature as a vital source of local, religious, and political knowledge, the literary treatment of defining a robust textual corpus as folk, is also a misnomer that intends to misrepresent the community, consisting of both authors and audiences. Though folk literature is of tremendous social and historical value, the *mappilapatt* corpus does not fit its definitional frame entirely, despite some of the *ishal*s that are borrowed from folk tunes. The insistence on framing *mappilapat* as folksongs is derogatory – a derogation that is dissociated from the intrinsic socio-historical value of folklore. Instead, this derogation through the mis-framing of their Arabic-Malayalam literary corpus, derogates Mappila Muslims for their religious backgrounds and social roots, by branding them as aliens and outsiders. While some *mappilapatt* texts are explicitly geared towards performance, with instructions on the festive, or devotional occasions on which they are supposed to be performed, other poetic texts provide details such as dates of composition, and authorship. They are devotional poems, specifically intended to be delivered on prescribed occasions, and follow compositional and metric rules, while maintaining high aesthetic standards.

The last thing that must be reiterated, is, that though this article mitigates against the misnaming and mis-framing of the *mappilapatt* corpus, this is not to derogate the category of the folk itself. Instead, what this article highlights in terms of a side-argument, is the way in which 'folk' as an epistemic category is falsely perceived as a lower binary to Brahminical and Sanskritized, standard literature. While folk literature is a vibrant genre of resistance and negotiation, remaining anonymous and orally transmitted for the very purpose of enabling subversive speech, *mappilapatt* songs are devotional songs and prayers that have a specific domestic and community purpose in the everyday social and religious lives of the Mappilas.

It is equally uncommon in other contexts, to frame devotional songs as folk songs, and in the many hoary literary, religious traditions of India – the Vedas themselves, have enjoyed a rich history of both oral and codified tradition. The insistence on framing the *mappilapatt* as folk, despite codification, thus seems intentional – a way to discriminate against the Muslim roots of the community, and of its authors, performers, and listeners/ participants. Their denouncement and exclusion as 'impure' due to the Arabic script in which the poems are written, have a negative effect on Mappila dignity, as it brands their literary culture as inadequate within standardized Malayalam.

While folksongs are subversive, and political, as a resistance genre, their resistance is located in the taboo content of songs. The *mappilapatt* in contrast, is almost coerced

into inhabiting a subjectivity of resistance – not because of the content of the songs – but because of its discriminatory treatment of the idiom that privileges a Brahminical perspective about standardized language. In terms of its content, which should actually be the criteria for all or any evaluation, the *mappilapatt* cannot be framed as folk at all, apart from some tunes. They encompass devotional music and prayer songs, with a strong collective and performative element to it.

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Research Article

From Folklore to Srivaisnava Literature and Beyond: The Birth, Evolution, and Mainstreaming of the tale of Tatipantan and his pot in the Tamil land[1]

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Abstract and Keywords

The story of Tatipantan (<Skt- Dadhibhanda) the potter, his pot and Krsna are popular among the Tamils. Traditional discoursers never tire of narrating how Tatipantan saved Krsna from Yasoda's anger in exchange for liberation, not just for himself, but also for his pot, within which he had hidden Krsna. Neither the epics nor the Puranas allude to this story nor do, interestingly, the Alvars (6th century to 9th century). The Srivaisnava Acaryas (mainly from the 12th century onwards) are the first to mention it, but only in passing, in their commentaries on Alvar poetry, in one of their hagiographic works, and in an influential theological treatise, as well as in a couple of praise-poems. But this, still, does not really provide us any details. One of the two *Pakavatam*s (i.e., *Bhagavatapurana*s) in Tamil, known as the *Purana-pakavata*m composed by Arulala Tacar in the 16th century (1989), however, does expand on the story, and this is one of the features that makes the *Purana-pakavatam* unique. Some of the epistemic questions this article seeks to explore are: Where and when does the story of Tatipantan originate? Could it be a folktale that entered the Krsna-lore? How did a potter enter the repertoire of the Srivaisnavas? Why did his story grow in importance? This paper tracks the evolution of this fascinating legend and its integration into mainstream religious culture and literature in the Tamil land of the 2nd millennium.

Tamil, Folklore, Tatipantan, Srivaisnava, Liberation

Introduction

Many of the tales that now populate the *itihasa*s and the *purana*s may once have been popular stories originating from within local communities, before they were incorporated into texts that served to eventually preserve them. But a few of the stories may have also missed or even evaded this assimilation process for centuries, due to temporal reasons. Either they emerged later, perhaps even from the stories

[1] I would like to Deepra Dandekar for encouraging me to write this essay, as well as thank Jean-Luc Chevillard and R. Narenthiran for their precious help and suggestions.

that were already absorbed in those texts, or they may have evaded assimilation due to geographic reasons: they may have emerged in faraway local regions that were perhaps tucked away at the margins of mainstream Tamil society, and away from the scrutiny and knowledge of the urban literati. We may cite a few examples of such stories that are related to Rama or Krsna,[2] and that are mentioned within Alvar poetry (6th century to 9th century) for the first time, side-by-side with very popular stories like those that include Krsna's exploits in Gokula. And then, there are those tales that enter written text even later than the period of Alvar poetry. One such tale that explicates the point about this later entrance, is that of Tatipantan and his pot.[3]

In the introduction to his *Dictionary of Folklore,* David Pickering (1999: vii) reflects on the premise that "boundaries between folklore and the related fields of mythology and religion are often obscure." This is especially true of the tale that this article focuses on, as it ticks all three boxes: it involves none other than Krsna—a folk hero, it involves a mythical person, *and* a god—whose stories are found across genres and fields. This article explores questions such as: Who is Tatipantan? How is he associated with Krsna? When does he appear first within Srivaisnava texts? Could his story be a folktale that later merged with the Krsna-lore? How did a cowherd (or a potter according to some versions) find his way into the repertoire of the erudite Srivaisnavas? Why did his story grow in importance? While seeking answers to such questions, I shall first introduce Tantipantan, and then subsequently proceed to an analysis of how his story surfaced within the Srivaisnava writings, before concluding with a focus on how the story blossomed in the Tamil *Pakavatam*, composed by Arulala Tacar in the 16th century.

Introducing Tatipantan

Oral traditions hold that when the devout poet Pillai Perumal Aiyankar[4] asked the Lord for liberation, the Latter demanded to know what he had done to deserve liberation, which is, after all, not so easy to achieve. Aiyankar snapped back at Him, asking Him

[2] See Narayanan 1994 for an exploration of the previously unknown, *Ramayana*-related stories in the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*.

[3] In his commentary on Vedanta Desika's *Rahasyatrayasaram*, modern commentator Uttamur (1980: 971) explains how the word *dadhibhanda* (<Skt. *dadhi* + *bhanda*) literally means 'curd pot', but in extension, also refers to the man to whom it belongs (especially in reference to the Tamil masculine noun ending).

[4] The dates of Aiyankar are shrouded in mystery. A few scholars (e.g., Pillai 1955: v-vi, [primary text, second edition, as Astaprabandham] probably repeating popular beliefs) assert that he worked under King Tirumalai Nayakkar in the 17th century, although the basis for this claim is unclear and convincingly refuted by Catakoparamanujacariyar et al in 2009 (1916: 5). This late date, however, seems to be corroborated (although not too conclusively) by early 19th-century compositions that explicate the biography of poets. Indeed, the *Pulavar caritam* (chapter 66; 1908: 332-9), arranges the list of poets in what seems like a chronological order, and places Aiyankar among the last few poets without specifically mentioning dates. On the other hand, traditional scholars (e.g., Catakoparamanujacariyar et al 2009 [1916]: 12-13) rightly think that Aiyankar lived between the 12th-13th centuries, since according to his own verses (*Nurrettu Tiruppati Antati* 5; 2009 [1916]: 1022), he was the disciple (*al-patta*) of Pattar (Parasara Bhattar), a younger contemporary of Ramanuja (in approximately the 12th century), whom he mentions in the invocations and signature verses of his other poems, and ending his list of teachers with him. There is, therefore, little doubt that the author of the *Astaprabandham* lived between the 12th-13th centuries.

what Tatipantan's pot had done in order to achieve liberation. The Lord remained silent. But what was this Tatipantan's pot exactly? How did it attain liberation? While arguing that the cult of Mayon-Krsna grew organically in the Tamil land,[5] Mu. Irakavaiyankar (1938: 52-70) lists a few tales from Krsna-lore that apparently originated in the Tamil land, and cannot be traced to any Sanskrit epics or Puranas. In that list, we find three characters of renown, arranged at varying levels. The first is celebrated in pre-Alvar and Alvar poetry: Krsna's cross-cousin and wife Nappinnai, who is named as early as the 5th-century in the Tamil epic *Cilappatikaram* and widely mentioned by the Alvars in a story that describes how Krsna had to tame seven bulls first to win her hand. Taming bulls as part of a contest to win the hand of a girl is a Tamil folk practice that is already recorded in classical Tamil poetry.[6] The next reference pertains to an obscure character called Cimalikan, whose head was accidentally severed by Krsna's discus.[7] Only Periyalvar (approximately the 9th century) seems to mention him in a verse (*Periyalvar Tirumoli* 2.7.8) that elicits a later comment on the same by Manavala Mamuni in the 15th century. While these tales were known to the Alvars (and in the case of Nappinnai, well before the Alvars), the third character that Aiyankar mentions, Tatipantan, is not that well-known. It seems that Tatipantan's story emerged for the first time only after the 13th century, and progressively developed into a fully-fledged narrative that gained so much importance with the passage of time that it gave rise to additional variants.[8] The following paragraph captures the main versions of the Tatipantan story, and the story of his pot.

As Yasoda once pursued Krsna in fury, the Latter took refuge in the home of a cowherd called Tatipantan,[9] who, according to some versions, hid Him inside his big curd pot and told Yasoda that Krsna was not there. After she left, Krsna requested to be let out, but Tatipantan refused to do so until He granted him liberation. Threatened by the spectre of being handed over to His mother, Krsna agreed. However, Tatipantan also insisted that his pot should attain liberation too, since it played an important role in saving Him (Velukkudi 2020: 312). And ultimately Krsna had to give in. This is the core of the story, although it does have other variants, as already mentioned above. As we shall see, though the writing-down of the tale, rather unsurprisingly, did not freeze the tale in time either, it continues to give rise to certain questions: When and where did the story first appear? And why did it gain such prominence?

Tatipantan in the Srivaisnava Theological Writings

> Every culture in the world boasts its own proud folkloric tradition, reflecting a universal desire to keep alive the legends and lore of earlier

[5] Please note that scholars such as Friedhelm Hardy (1983) believe that the Tamil pastoral deity may have merged with the Northern divinity at the beginning of the first millennium when the Northern influence became more pronounced in the Tamil land.

[6] For more on Nappinnai, see Edholm and Suneson (1972).

[7] The commentator Mamuni (1969: 107) tells a story in which Cimalikan, a friend of Krsna's, began to indulge in evil (*asuri*c) acts. In order to finish him off without accruing the blame of having killed a friend, Krsna provoked his by-now rogue friend to borrow His discus. When Cimalikan, unsurprisingly, held the discus in a wrong manner, it accidentally severed his head as a result.

[8] This is a surmise, since these variants could have already existed, but without being recorded.

[9] Mutaliyar (2020 [1899]: 773) indicates that the potter community considers Tatipantan, a potter.

> times. The preservation of such traditions strengthens national and ethnic identities and value systems as well as consolidating relationships within… It is also folklore's role to pass on lessons of life learned by preceding generations (Pickering 1999: vii).

The tale of Tatipantan is first[10] alluded to in the poetry of Pillai Perumal Aiyankar (*Tiruvarankattu malai* 53; 2009 [1916]: 299-300) as mentioned above:

cintikka nenc' illai, na illai namankal ceppa; ninnai	No heart to think (of You)! No tongue to utter (Your) names!
vantika mey illai vant' iru potum; moym ma malar pum	No body to come (to Your temple) or to pay homage to You on both (twilight) times![11]
panti tatam putai cul aranka! tatipantan unnai	O You from Rangam surrounded by rows of tanks with blossoming flowers swarmed by bees!
cantitta nal mutti perrat' enno? tayir taliyume!	How come a mere curd pot attained liberation the day that Tatipantan met You?

This verse tells us that a curd pot, a mere insentient entity, incapable of acts of worship, achieved liberation on the day that the curd-pot-man (Tatipantan) met the Lord of [Sri]rangam, not addressed here as Krsna. While the verse expresses amazement at such a curious occurrence, it does not tell a clear story. The next place that Tatipantan makes an appearance is in Nampillai's formidable *Itu Bhagavadvisayam* commentary (13th century) on Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* (9th century). This veritable repository of knowledge on all things Srivaisnava, composed in Manipravala, constitutes a highly Sanskritized form of Tamil. The *Tiruvaymoli* apparently makes an allusion to the character of Tatipantan, but without naming him. Indeed, while commenting on verse 2.3.8, Nampillai imagines that the Alvar followed Krsna when He went to steal butter, shut Him inside, and spoke to Him after cornering Him thus:

ivar venney kaḷavukanap ponavitattile atiyorrikkontu cenru, avan pukka	He (Nammalvar) followed (Him) to where He went to steal butter. And it
grhattilē patalai tiruki vaittayirru kettukkontatu.	was after turning the (lock of the) shutter of the house that He had

[10] It is best to deduce that he lived between the 12th-13th centuries. See fn4.

[11] Since the subject of the sentence is not explicit, it is equally possible to take its meaning as referring to the poet himself, in which case he would be claiming to have no other means of worshipping God.

entered that he had requested (Him).

The gist of the Tatipantan story seems to be invoked here, especially since the original verse (*Tiruvaymoli* 2.3.8) also describes "the Lord eating in stealth butter and milk placed in suspended pots" (*uri konta venney pal olitt' unnum amman*). However, without the name being explicitly mentioned, we cannot be certain whether Nampillai indeed compares Nammalvar's actions to Tatipantan's here. This is perhaps why both sub-commentators on the *Itu*[12] indicate that "Dadhibhanda's (Tatipantan's) story should be remembered here" (*ivvitattile dadhibhandan kathaiyai ninaippatu*). Either Tatipantan was already sufficiently known in Nampillai's time for him to allude to Tatipantan without bothering to name him explicitly, or else, it was the later Acaryas who chose to interpret the commentator's words to echo Tatipantan's story. This process probably took place during a time that predates the sub-commentators by a large margin, becoming explicit in Manavala Mamuni's expressions in the *Itu* passage quoted above (*patalai tiruki vaittu*; see fn. 16).

The next explicit mention of the Tatipantan story is contained in a scholarly Srivaisnava theological text in Manipravala, called the *Acaryahrdayam*, authored by Alakiya Manavala Perumal Nayanar (approximately in the late 13th century). Nayanar includes both Tatipantan and his curd pot in a list of 18 entities, whom the Lord accompanies personally on their way to liberation (in the *arciradimarga* or 'path of light [leading to Vaikuntha]'):

… vetan, vetuvicci, paksi, kuranku, caracaram, itaicci, ***itaiyar, tayir tali****, kuni, malakarar, pinaviruntu- vent' aticil- ittavar, avan makan, avan tampi, anai, aravam, maraiyalan, perra maintan …* (228)	…the hunter (Guha), the huntress (Sabari), the bird (Jatayus), the monkey (Sugriva), all created things [in Ayodhya], the cowherdess (Cintayanti), **cowherd (Tatipantan), the curd pot**, the hunchbacked woman (Trivakra), the garland-maker, those who offered a corpse as a feast (Ghantakarna) and rice (the ascetics' wives), his (Hiranyakasipu's) son (Prahlada), his (Ravana's) younger brother (Vibhisana), the elephant (Gajendra), the serpent (Sumukha), the Brahmin (Govindasvami), the son begotten (by Mrkandu, i.e., Markandeya)…

We can note that most of the characters in this varied list are taken from the epics (especially the *Ramayana*) and the Puranas (especially the *Visnu-* and the *Bhagavata-*

[12] The sub-commentaries are the *Ataiyavalaintan arumpatavurai* by Attan Jiyar's (slightly before the 15th century) and the *Jiyar arumpatavurai* by Kunakarampakkam Ramanuja Jiyar, which quotes Mamuni's, and his disciples' works (post 15th century).

*Purana*s), except for Govindasvami[13] and the cowherd-pot duo, with the pot being the only insentient entity listed.[14] Since, usually, the Srivaisnavas preferred to quote examples from an established list of authoritative evidence (*pramana*s such as the Vedas, certain Upanisads, the epics, a few select Puranas, as well as the Tamil *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*), it is interesting to find characters from the realm of folk literature entering this text of considerable theological importance. Moreover, we notice that Nayanar is at his cryptic best here, since he does not name Tatipantan or provide any hint about his identity while referring to him quite generally as the "cowherd", who could then mean anyone. But this raises further question about whether Tatipantan's identity was already as evident as that of, say, the huntress and the bird?[15] Or is it simply because Nayanar could not afford to get into any details of the *sutra*s (which is what the *Acaryahrdayam* is composed of). Then, why did Nayanar include Tatipantan's reference among other better-established examples? In short, why did Nayanar include the cowherd and the pot in his text? Some answers to this question may be found in Manavala Mamuni's commentary on the passage:

venney kalavu kana pukka itatte totuppuntu vantu tam akatte pukap patalait tiruki vaittu moksam taravitil kattik kotuppen enru moksam perra tatipantar.	The honourable Tatipantan who obtained liberation, after saying that he would betray (Krsna to Yasoda) if (He) did not grant (him) liberation, shutting the drum when (He) entered his house (and hid in it), after being pursued from the place that He went to in order to steal butter –
tayir tali *atavatu nama rupankal ullavarrukku ellam oru cetana atistanam untakaiyale itukku moksam kotukka ventum enkiravan nirbandhattukkaka moksam kotukkap perra tayirt tali.*	The curd pot, which was granted liberation at the insistence of him, who said that (He) ought to grant it liberation, since all things that have a name and a form have the presence of a sentient entity (in them) –

As evident, Mamuni provides us more information about these two characters – Tatipantan and his pot, by perhaps spelling out the whole story for the first time.[16]

[13] Apparently, the story is not mentioned in any Sanskrit texts, and Govindasvami is solely alluded to by Tirumankai Alvar in his *Periya Tirumoli* 5.8.5 (1909: 970-2), with his tale provided by the commentator Periyavaccan Pillai in the 13th century.

[14] Since we do not find the explicit mention of names or stories, an element of doubt will always remain, even though the commentator Manavala Mamuni (15th century) tries to clarify the reference, which is dealt with later in the article.

[15] Those who are well-versed in the epics, especially the devout Srivaisnavas, would immediately recognize these characters from the Ramayana, namely, Sabari (who served Rama before shedding her body) and Jatayu (who gave up his life trying to protect Sita from Ravana), who both met Rama during his stay in the forest.

[16] Mamuni's word choice seems to echo Nampillai's in his *Itu* 2.3.8 quoted above. Please compare Nampillai's *ivar* ***venney kaḷavu kanap*** *ponav****itatt****ile atiyorrikkontu cenru, avan pukka grhattilē* ***patalai tiruki vaitta*** *yirru kettukkontatu* with Mamuni's ***venney kalavu kana*** *pukka* ***itatt****e totuppuntu vantu tam akatte pukap* ***patalait tiruki vaittu.*** There are at least 7 words in common,

But does he provide extra details for these two only because they were relatively unknown? While checking his commentary, it becomes clear that he identifies them all, by using a similar linguistic process, without picking any one of them out for special attention. But perhaps what is worth noting here is that as a rule, Mamuni only quotes from an appropriate *pramana* each time that he deals with the 18 entities,[17] perhaps to justify why they figure in the list. But he does not do so for the cowherd-pot duo (as well as a couple of other members), which probably means that there were no *pramana* referring to them to quote from in this case. This, in turn, demonstrates that while the tale in question must have been popular in the early centuries of the 2nd millennium, it was not written down in any important text of the time. However, it remains important to ask why it was deemed meaningful enough to include in this list, then? Nayanar was trying to make a point about God and liberation, and the Tatipantan-pot duo made for an outstanding case or example to explain his theory of liberation, described by Mamuni: that Narayana (and His incarnations) granted liberation (the highest goal) to various entities without any discrimination, based on caste, gender, species, and so on.

It would therefore seem that, since Tatipantan's story enriches the discussion around the topic of liberation, a most crucial issue for the Srivaisnavas, this non-*pramanic* tale joins the ranks of the more illustrious ones. It demonstrates how a cowherd, who presumably did not know, or perform *karma, jnana*, and *bhakti yoga*s, or even the much easier surrender for that matter, gained liberation. Nor did he plead, cry or pine, but threatened his way into liberation using Yasoda (or rather, Krsna's fear of her reprimands) as leverage. Moreover, he earned liberation also for an insignificant insentient entity,[18] using the same methods, for no obvious reason whatsoever. This soteriologically significant tale also serves to illustrate the Supreme Lord's qualities such as *saulabhya* (accessibility), for it takes a special God to voluntarily allow Himself to be cornered and outwitted in this way. And it is not often that Krsna was ever fooled or constrained in this fashion, and even celebrated for it!

As a matter of fact, the formidable Vedanta Desika, one of the most important *Vedantin*s ever known, who was a younger contemporary of Nayanar's, and a predecessor of Mamuni's, precisely uses Tatipantan's example by naming him directly, to illustrate another of the Lord's qualities, i.e., His generosity:

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including an unusual expression to indicate that the door was locked (*patalai tiruki vaittu* 'turning [the lock] of the shutter [shut]').

[17] Let us take the example of Vibhisana to see how Mamuni introduces him in the process of explaining why he was part of the list: ***avan tampikku*** *ennum pati ravananujan-ay, "anujo ravanasyaham" ityadi patiye svanikarsattai munnittu, "raghavam saranam gatah" enru tiruvatikalai atainta sri vibhisanalvan* the divine Vibhisana-Alvan, Ravana's younger brother referred to as **his younger brother**, who put forth his lowliness as per "I am Ravana's younger brother" (*Valmiki Ramayana* Goldman et.al. 6.13.4; 2010 [2009]: 150) and reached His (Rama's) sacred feet as said in "I have surrendered unto Raghava" (*Valmiki Ramayana* Goldman et.al. 6.11.14; 2010 [2009]: 144).

[18] While commenting upon the passage by Vedanta Desika quoted after this paragraph, the modern commentator Uttamur (1980: 971) points out that Tatipantan obtained liberation for the *bhandajiva* ('the soul in the pot'), and the existence of a soul within an insentient entity is not self-evident. This could also be a key point that some of the Acaryas were trying to establish.

paramodaratvam-avatu – upayalaghavamum, upeyagauravamum, patrapakarsamum parate, sarvasvadanam panniyum, nam ceytatu poratu enrirukkum vadanyatai. itu, tatipantadikalai pole hathatkaram panniyum, anubandhiparyantam-aka paramapurusarthattai apeksikkaikk' urupp' am. (*Rahasyatrayasaram* 28; 1980: 971)	Being supremely generous means having a munificence that consists in thinking that one has not done enough despite giving away everything, without considering the swiftness of the means (i.e., surrender), the high value of the goal (i.e., God/liberation) and the inferiority of the receiver. This is the reason why people like Dadhibhanda (Tatipantan) and the like even use force, expecting the supreme human goal to be extended to those associated (with them).

Not only did Desika know about Tatipantan, but he also presumed or expected that his audience would also be familiar with the story, as he does not explain or give any further details about him, although his *Rahasyatrayasaram* does not require him to be succinct. It is also worth observing here that the conservative Desika is stricter in his choice of *pramanas* as a general rule, and therefore, his mention of the Tatipantan-pot duo is significant: he must have judged it to be an exceptionally relevant example to illustrate his point on the Lord's extreme generosity.

We thus see that a story of unknown origin (unless it was born in the minds of an early Srivaisnava), which presumably transformed it into the local Krsna-lore at some point, caught the attention of some of the most influential Srivaisnava theologians of the premodern period, as the story became part of their common pool of myths. While Ramanujan (1987: xix) rightly suggests, "In the civilizations of India, myth and folktale, two instances of the so-called classical and folk expressions, are intermeshed yet distinct", in this particular case, it seems that the folktale turned into a myth in quite an indistinguishable way. Let us now map the evolution of this tale from this point in time onward: Did the story evolve further? If yes, then how and why? Did it cross the boundaries of theological writing, and the boundaries of the Srivaisnava world at large?

The Evolution of the Tale of Tatipantan and his Pot

> Yet, while the great myths and the local tales share similar structures and motifs, we must not imagine they are put to the same uses or carry the same unchanging meanings. Motifs do not predict structures, and structures do not predict functions, nor functions meanings… The same narrative materials may function differently in different genres and present different concerns. For example, the myths and folktales may have much in common but use the materials very differently (Ramanujan 1987: xvii-xviii).

We shall see in this section how different textual genres used this tale of Tatipantan differently with passing time. While I have striven to maintain a certain chronological

order in this investigation, the occasional overlap, along with the difficulty in dating authors with accuracy, has rendered this task challenging.

Tatipantan in a *Mahakavya*

The first allusion to this story outside the realm of devotional texts (although the boundaries between what is devotional and what is not is unclear, especially in this case) is found in a passing reference to the curd pot in the *Villiparatam* (2013: 130-1),[19] the most well-known Tamil retelling of the *Mahabharata*, by Villiputturar dated in the 14th century[20]:

aruccunanum/ tali tanakku mun vitu kotutt' arul tal inai pitiya… (6.3.15)	And Arjuna held (His) twin feet that graciously gave liberation to the pot previously …

Once again, the allusion to Tatipantan is cryptic here, and does not tell us much about the tale itself. Although Villiputturar is composing a *mahakavya*, his intention is to render the *Mahabharata* in Tamil, which means that he narrates what he believes to be historical facts and events. And yet, this allusion to the curd pot as an epithet that lauds Krsna's feet for its role in granting liberation is telling, as this tale is still mostly known for—and quoted for—being of soteriological interest. Could Arjuna be begging Krsna to show the same mercy that He showed upon a pot, especially since he falls at His feet and begs, unlike the pot? Or was he hoping that He would *not* give liberation to Bhisma? It is hard to know what the author thought. While this is interesting, we shall see from the following references that, perhaps, more than the poet and the author of an *itihasa*, it is the hagiographer/ Pauranika who makes the most of the story, especially since they use it for reasons other than the one mentioned above.

Tatipantan in the Srivaisnava Hagiography

Let us first begin by looking at a 16th century Srivaisnava hagiographic text called the *Patinettayirappati Guruparamparaprabhavam*, which is attributed to a prolific commentator and writer named Pillai Lokam Jiyar, who lived a few generations after Manavala Mamuni. A passage in Jiyar's text includes a conversation between none other than Ramanuja and an unnamed woman from the town of Tirukkolur, in which he asks her why she was leaving such a sacred town (2018 [1909]: 777). She offers her reasons to him through 81 statements that are crafted as rhetorical questions, in which she underlines her spiritual unworthiness when compared to some great people,

[19] It is perhaps worth mentioning that the author is most likely of Srivaisnava descent, although to my knowledge, his work has never really been identified as distinctly Srivaisnava nor have the Srivaisnava *Acarya*s embraced it as one of their works.

[20] This happened when Arjuna begged Krsna, who was wielding a wheel to kill Bhisma in battle, not to do so, since He had vowed not to carry or use weapons during the Bharata war.

especially devotees. And in one of these statements, which is preceded by a statement on the greatness of Prahlada, she refers to Tatipantan and his greatness:

inkum untu enreno prahladanai pole (51.)?	Did I say, '(God) is here, too!', like Prahlada did?
ink' illai enreno dadhibhandanai pole (52.)?	Did I say, '(He) is not here!', like Dadhibhanda (Tatipantan) did?

She mentions Prahlada who declared to his father Hiranyakasipu that his Lord was 'there' (pointing at a pillar), and in the same breath, she speaks of Tatipantan too, who lied to Yasoda about Krsna *not* being there. What is to be remembered as important here is that whatever is done for the sake of the Lord *is* dharma. Thus, Prahlada's truth to establish Him as God is as honourable as Tatipantan's lie to protect Him. Therefore, although fundamentally very different from each other, Prahlada and Tatipantan, linked by their superior bhakti, are considered equal in the eyes of the Lord. We can therefore see that the tale here is alluded to for a different purpose than in theological writings, which focuses mostly on its soteriological aspect, while also highlighting Krsna's goodness and universal love. We can once again take note of the fact that Tatipantan was placed in the august company of better-known devotees such as Prahlada in Jiyar's text. Something worth mentioning over here is that although Jiyar's hagiographic text is dated to the 16th century, it is harder to date this particular passage contained within it, for two reasons: first, it was allegedly the transcription of a conversation that occurred many centuries ago, and second, its style and language stand out from the rest of the text as different. So, the hagiographer could have simply incorporated a popular legend from his own times into the text. Therefore, for all we know, the story might have already existed around the 12th century, during Ramanuja's own lifetime, and then adopted by post-Ramanuja Srivaisnava theologians into the text, though we do not possess any textual or other means to prove our theory.

Tatipantan in a Tamil Purana

So far, we have only seen fragments of the Tatipantan tale, which, when pieced together, give us an idea of his story which is undoubtedly one of the many versions. In fact, it took a poet writing a Purana to fill this void, and present us with a complete picture. Nellinakar Arulala Tacar, also known as Varadaraja Aiyankar, a Srivaisnava Brahmin, composed a retelling of the *Bhagavatapurana* in Tamil in the 16th century, which is simply known as the *Puranapakavatam*.[21] This particular work, which is encyclopedic in nature, contains many stories that are not present in the Sanskrit *Bhagavatapurana*, like those of Nappinnai (never told properly before), and that of Tatipantan. The latter's story begins with a furious Yasoda running at full speed to

[21] The 16th century maked a time when Purana-compositng activities flourished among Tamil poets (Arunacalam 2005 [1977]: 227-32). Another retelling of this Purana was accomplished by Cevvai Cutuvar, also in the 16th century, whose work is better known compared to Tacar's. For more details about these two retellings, see Anandakichenin (2021). Tacar's work in the 16th century (1989) was composed in the form of 9147 verses that were divided into 130 *patalam*s or sections.

catch Krsna, who is in dire need of shelter (1989 vol.2: 239). And Tatipantan's house promises Him just that:

viti venta varam alittu pumi param vilakkutarku vata ma[tu]raip pirantu, pinnar	The Lord — who gave a boon to Brahma as (he) begged (and) was (as a result) born in Mathura
nati tanti, yacotai manai pukka nampi, nal tavankal ceytu mun nal, alintitata	in the North in order to remove the burden of the earth,
pati venti, arivutanum pirante, ayar pati iruntu paraman tan varavu parkkum	(and) who then crossed the river and entered Yasoda's house —
tatipantan urai manaiyin eytinan. marr' avanum ivan tal inaiyai parri colvan. (30.9)	reached the house in which dwelt Tatipantan, who,
	— having previously performed good austerities,
	seeking the Imperishable Place and being born with knowledge,—
	remained in Gokula and watched for the arrival of the Supreme Being.
	At that moment, he caught His feet and said:

We notice here that this version begins by providing some background information about Tatipantan, who is not merely a cowherd who happened to know of Krsna's real nature, but actually an ascetic-like person desirous of liberation (the 'Imperishable Place', a euphemism for Vaikuntha, being the locus of liberation for the Srivaisnavas). One may wonder whether Tacar is seeking to justifiy how a person of humble origin for all intents and purposes could claim liberation and also obtain it. To return to the story, the cowherd lay in wait for Krsna and made use of His appearance by first seeking surrender from the Boy who came seeking shelter (ibid):

'pot' ayanu(m) matavarum anekam kalam poruntiya nal tavam purintum veli ceyyata	He said, 'I have recognized You, the Primal Cause, not revealed to Brahma on the flower or to the ascetics,
ati unai kantukonten! arul ni vitu!' enr' araintitalum, accutan inr' arul ceyvan am:	although (they) performed good, extended austerities! Bless [me] with liberation!',

'et' uraittay al! nantan matalai ennai annai pititt' atippatark' int' eytukinral!	Acyuta graciously says today, 'You speak wrongly! Mother is reaching here to catch and smack me, Nanda's child!
petai entan kal vituti!' enru kura, tatipantan muruvalittu pecuvan al. 10	Please let go of poor me's feet!' (At that,) Tatipantan smiled and said:
'naru malarin ayan mutal a natar ellam iracatamum tamatamum nanni tankal	'Will You confuse me today just as (You) cause illusion so that all the gods such as
irai enave ankaratt' irukka mayam iyarriya pol enai inru mayakkuvayo?	Brahma on the fragrant flower
uru vinaiyen tanakkum enakk' uvanta nal el illavarkkum iyan pititta uyar talikkum	remain with the conceit that *they* are gods, being stuck with *rajas* and *tamas*?
kuraivil patam kotutt' arul ni! kotayel, unnai yacotai karattil kattikotuppen!' enran (30.11).	Graciously grant the Faultless Place to me, who suffer from *karman*, to a few poor people that I approve of,
	and to the superior pot that I have made. If You will not grant [that], I will betray You and hand (You) over to Yasoda!'

This dialogue begins with Tatipantan's surrender, both physical (with his holding Krsna's feet) and verbal (with his begging for liberation), and is something that is not referred to by other authors, theological or otherwise. And this very soon leads to a reversal of roles, turning into a comical exchange between a god travelling incognito in this world wishing to keep up the pretence of being a human, and a devotee who refuses to be fooled. This cowherd sees what even gods and ascetics cannot, as the poet reiterates, as he recognizes the unfathomable Primeval Cause behind the facade of Nandagopa's frightened toddler. Thus begins the blackmail not just for his own liberation but also for that of a select few people and his pot. Once again, Tacar uses this occasion to illustrate the Lord's *saulabhya* or 'accessibility', before proceeding to provide his readers with the story's happy ending (ibid: 240):

enum alavil acotai anukitalu(m) mayon 'iyntanan yan parakati ni iyampukinra	As (Tatipantan) said (that), Yasoda drew close. (So) Mayon-Krsna said, 'I have granted the Supreme State
anaivarukkum, unakkum, untan kaittalikkum! ataitir!' ena, accutan ant' arulalotum,	to everyone you suggest, to you and to the pot in your hands! May you all reach
munivar tola putu malarkal poliya, teva tuntumikal pala mulanka antami poy	(Vaikuntha)!' With Acyuta graciously ruling (thus),

iniya keti eytinarkal. nantan maintan annai kaiyil akappatatu ekinan al (30.12).

they reached the Sweet State, going upon the (cosmic) egg, as ascetics saluted,

as fresh flowers were showered [upon them] and as many divine kettle-drums thundered.

Nanda's Son slipped off, uncaught by Mother.

The comic element is unmistakable here, as Nanda's Son, the primeval Lord, is willing to pay *any*thing in exchange for safe passage, that even includes free passes to the Supreme State. This passage is interesting on more than one account. First, Tatipantan obtained liberation not just for his pot (which is something also alluded to by Vedanta Desika in the passage quoted above), irrespective of whether they undertook any steps towards liberation or not, and also irrespective of whether they wished for, or deserved it or not. Perhaps, this passage shows that one's association with a proper devotee (which Tatipantan undeniably is) brings about supreme good. Secondly, the description of the journey towards Vaikuntha is reminiscent of similar passages from many other texts, such as Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* 10.9 (which is part of the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*) and Desika's *Rahasyatrasaram* 21. We shall never know if the original folktale actually included such a description, but it is interesting to see that Tacar chose to develop this post-mortem part of Tatipantan's story, a happy ending so far as he is concerned, by going further away from where the Srivaisnava Acaryas left off, while dealing with Tatipantan. Thirdly, it seems that in this story of twin-liberation (on the one hand, of Tatipantan, his friends and his pot, from *samsara*, and on the other, of Nanda's Son from Yasoda), the pot has no role whatsoever to play, as it is not used to hide Krsna at all. So it is out of his whim that Tatipantan seeks to take the pot with him to Vaikuntha. This tale, already embellished with so many additions, does not cease to evolve, even after this elaborate narration by Tacar. As a matter of fact, further twists are introduced to it within the later stotra literature.

Brief mentions in other genres

> In each generation aspects of the [folk]song are transformed while others remain stable. The song is essentially recomposed in each generation (Oring 1986: 10).

An unusual allusion to this story occurs the *Pap pavinam*, a 16th-century work on Tamil prosody attributed to Tirukkurukai Perumal Kavirayar (1932: 94):

tatipantan tanakk' aliya tamaniya nat' alittanaiye (94).

You granted the indestructible Golden Land to Tatipantan

One may wonder whether this story had become so mainstream and commonplace as to be included within a text on prosody, but perhaps it is worth remembering that its author was probably a Srivaisnava, who added a story well-known to him to his list of Krsna's exploits.

Moving on to the stotra literature proper, apart from *Tiruvarankattu malai* 53 that is dealt with above, another pertinent reference to Tatipantan occurs in *Empiran catakam* (53) authored by Putur Kopalakirusna Tacar,[22] a non-Brahmin Srivaisnava poet of the 18th century. This is especially interesting because he introduces a little variant to the story by making Tatipantan a blind man, to whom Krsna gives vision, just before hiding in the curd pot in his house:

tinnamutan kopalar manaiyil venney tirutinatai kantavarkal turattum potu	When those who saw (You) steal butter from the cowherds' house gave (You) a vigorous chase,
kan ila tatipantan manaiyul pukku kan kotutt' or catiyul pukk' olittukkolla	(You) entered the house of the blind Tatipantan, gave (him) vision, entered a pot and hid (there).
'pun nikar am kan venten! kati ta! allal poka-viten!' ena cati muti kolla	He shut the pot saying, 'I do not want sore-like pretty eyes! Give me salvation!
en ariya paramapatam avanukk' intay iraiva! narayanane! Empirane (53)!	Otherwise, I will not let (You) go!'
	And, o Lord, You gave him the unthinkable Supreme Abode! O Narayana! Our Lord!

It would seem that in this case, Krsna wanted to thank His saviour in advance by giving him sight, but the man seems to have rather gained a special vision, one that allowed him to see Krsna for what He really was, and thereby, to refuse His material favour. The loss and/or restitution of sight is a common topos in the epics, Puranas and hagiographic texts, the most poignant of them perhaps being found in Kurattalvan's story, about which Kopalakirusna Tacar, being a Vaisnava of the Ramanuja *sampradaya*, must have already known.[23] But why make Tatipantan blind in the first place? What does he gain by making such an addition? Perhaps this twist

[22] Catacivam Pillai (1979: 145) has very little information about this poet except for that he was a Vaisnava (presumably a Srivaisnava) and an *itaiyar* or 'cowherd' by caste (which may explain why he likes Tatipantan and his story) from the town of Sriperumputur (supposedly Ramanuja's birth place), who lived approximately at the beginning of the 18th century. His *Empiran Catakam* (1891) is composed in praise of the Deity Varadaraja in Kanchipuram.

[23] Kurattalvan, also known as Kuresa, was Ramanuja's disciple. He is said to have been blinded (or blinded himself according to a variant story) due to a religiously intolerant king's unfair punishment. When Ramanuja pressed him to request the Lord for his eyesight, Kurattalvan was very reluctant to do so, not just because he did not want to see this world again, but perhaps also because he did not wish to ask something so petty of God. In the end, he obtained sight from God solely to see Him and Ramanuja.

to the story was provided to highlight his wisdom in not wanting something that was transient, and related to his present state and body, but rather seek what would ensure eternal good for his soul.

Conclusion

We have seen how the story of Tatipantan and his pot has grown in importance over the centuries, and while it did not become part of mainstream Tamil literature, it surely gained inclusion within mainstream Vaisnava literature in Tamil and Manipravala texts. While the story has evolved to some extent, it has not changed so much that it becomes unrecognizable, or where the main ideas conveyed by the text become transformed. The importance of liberation over anything material, and the possibility of attaining liberation despite one's unworthiness (especially when associated with a devotee) are themes that are underlined in the story. The devotee is shown to profit through those close to him/her, and through the Lord's accessibility, and the Lord's generosity towards those devotees on whom He willfully depends. Unsurprisingly, the original teller (if at all *one* such person existed) is not known. As a matter of fact, it is not even clear who first mentioned the story, apart from Aiyankar, who seems to be the first to do so.[24] It is also worth mentioning that this story never stopped evolving, with its modern versions becoming imbued with more of a folk flavour than the original hagiographical references.[25] Some versions even go to the extent of infusing further humour into the story by stating that one could perhaps still see that pot in Vaikuntha—if at all, one manages to be liberated (Mukkur 2005 [1997]: 340-4).

A glaring truth that we need to take notice of is that, from what I have seen, only Srivaisnavas seem to use the example of the duo's story, even when not composing a work that is strictly Srivaisnava, like the *Villiparatam* (2013). And while it would be tempting to suggest that the story may have been generated by the early Srivaisnavas so that it could serve as an illustration for many of their theories, this hypothesis seems unlikely. For one, although not all Tamil Vaisnavas are or were Srivaisnavas, most of them were. Therefore, a tale that is part of the Tamil Krsna-lore is more likely be mentioned in texts composed by Srivaisnavas, especially since they were prolific writers, and at any rate, wrote more than non-Srivaisnava Vaisnavas in the Tamil land. Not to mention that eminent Srivaisnava Acaryas such as Nayanar, Desika and Mamuni seem conversant with the tale and do not question its authenticity.[26]

As mentioned earlier, stories of Krsna being tricked are rare, and Tatipantan's is one of them, which perhaps explains its popularity among the Srivaisnavas. Also, stories relating to simple people who manage to achieve liberation through their cleverness and/or persistence are also popular among the Vaisnavas: indeed, a hagiography dedicated to Ramanuja's life (*Ramanujarya Divyacaritam*, attributed to Pillai Lokam

[24] Not all Tamil texts, Srivaisnava or otherwise, are available to us. So, any attempt to trace the first occurrence of a word or a story might only be a tentative exercise.

[25] See for example the (Tamil) transcription of a discourses made by Dr. M.K. Anantapadmanabhacaryar, a contemporary traditional Srivaisnava scholar at https://www.tamilbrahmins.com/threads/mahaperiyavas-teachings-and-messages.10466/page-37 (Accessed on 05/01/2021).

[26] Their intellectual integrity cannot really be questioned, since they never hesitated to question the points made by their predecessors, even when they did not deem them to be correct.

Jiyar authored in the 16th century) narrates how a woman called Tumpaiyur Konti, who supplied dairy products to Ramanuja and his entourage, asked him for a note of recommendation for the Lord so that she is allowed into Vaikuntha. There is even a popular story (which is similar, and yet different from the version found in the *Bhagavatapurana* X), according to which a woman who sells *jamoon*-plums exchanges those fruit for liberation with Baby Krsna. It is no wonder that for the Srivaisnava Acaryas obsessed with liberation, such stories make for very good illustrations that clarify their terse theological statements, especially for their audience that would have consisted of scholarly disciples and lay Vaisnavas alike.

One final point that needs to be made here is that the Srivaisnava Acaryas were Brahmins after all, who abided by the *varnasramadharma* ('dharma according to one's caste and station in life'). This was despite some of them claiming that devotion to God was greater than the performance of the *varnasramadharma*. But that is a multilayered topic, too complex to be dealt with over here. The point I am trying to make here is that despite being staunch Brahmins, the Srivaisnava Acaryas also followed the Alvars (*inter alia*), many of whom were not Brahmins, and insisted (and continue to do so to this day) that liberation was open to everyone, no matter what their current birth, so long as they sought a proper Acarya and approached God through him.[27] So, in a way, they offered the most sought-after gift, the gift of liberation, to everyone who desired it. Bhakti under their supervision, therefore, did *not* break with Brahminism, nor did it challenge the question of breaking loyalty with the Brahmanical worldview, especially on critical issues such as caste and gender. Equal but different, everyone was integrated into the faith, and the Srivaisnava Acaryas presented their belief and devotional system as being transcendental and above petty discriminations. They produced and transformed this Srivaisnava theology of transcendance into a flagship that defined their very identity as a community that followed Srivaisnavism.[28]

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Astaprabandham.

[27] Only Brahmin males can be Acaryas.

[28] I thank the anonymous reviewer, editors, and Deepra Dandekar for suggesting that I deal, even if briefly, with the caste issue, which is at the very heart of Tatipantan's story, although I chose to focus on its other aspects for placing it within the epistemic framework of folklore.

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Research Article

Khudurukuni Osa: Woman-Centric Maritime Traditions of Odisha

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Abstract and Keywords

The coastline of the Indian state, Odisha (ancient Kalinga), extends to well over 400 kilometres, and links neighbouring regions, as well as other countries like Southeast Asia. The history of Odisha's internal and external linkages can be traced to the early historic period, and the history of ancient maritime activities in Odisha can be substantiated by archaeological findings, literary references, and sculptural representations. Such accomplishments had a constructive effect over society, through various rituals and festivals that commemorate this history. Interestingly, some of these rituals are still prevalent in coastal Odisha as commemorative traditions. One such tradition is that of *khudurukuni osa* that has unmarried girls observe the ritual on all consecutive Sundays of the Indian *bhadrava* month (August-September), for the welfare of their brothers. The procedure of doing the *khudurukuni osa* ritual, entails a morning and evening ceremony, besides reciting the ritual text or mythology of *bruhat tapoi.* The text recounts the story of an ordeal. The central character of the story Tapoi, is a young girl from a merchant family, whose life takes a complete turn after her brothers leave home for purposes of overseas trade. While the myth of *bruhat tapoi* describes the rituals that comprise of drawing of merchants seated on boats, accompanied by the worship of boats, *boita bandana*, the text repeatedly emphasises the protective powers of the Goddess Mangala, who protects her devotees against all odds. This paper analyses the mythology and rituals of *khudurukuni osa* as a maritime tradition with significant socio religious significance.

Khudurukuni Osa, Maritime-tradition, Odisha, Goddess-Mangala, Tapoi

Introduction

Odisha, that was earlier ancient Kalinga has a massive coastline of over 400 kilometres that is enriched further by an extensive riverine network. Odisha was an active centre of trade, commerce and culture since ancient times, and the existence of its maritime contacts with other distant geograhies has been proved, and substantiated through excavated materials from archaeological sites like Sisupalgarh, Manikapatana and Khalakatapatana. The representation of boats within the sculptures found at the Brahmeswara temple in Bhubaneswar, Jagannath temple in Puri, and the Sun temple

in Konark suggest that people in Odisha were and are intimately associated with boats through their history. Their flourishing maritime activities had a constructive effect on society through their representation in various fairs and festivals. Interestingly, the glorious maritime heritage of Odisha reverberates even today through rituals and festivities that are celebrated as commemorative traditions that celebrate a centuries-old history. Elaborate rituals were followed, before merchants could embark on a sea voyage since in ancient times, and these rituals including the *boita bandana* or boat worshipping ceremony have continued through time, and in due course, become transformed into cultural traditions, rituals and the cultural practices of present times.

The maritime adventures of people from Odisha to far off countries has found extensive mention in Odia literature. Bhanja's *Lavanyavati* (1965: 123) is one of the earliest Odia literary works that provide accounts of a foreign land, evident in comments such as: "the boat has reached the Shore of Singhala Island." Large numbers of folktales like the *khulana sundari* (a story based on the name of its central character)*, prastava sindhu* (a collection of folktales that concern merchants), *boley hoon ti* (saying yes/ marking approval), *jehu chintai para manda* (one who contemplates evil for others), *kuhukamandala chadhei* (bird of the magic world), and *chari mahajanapua* (the four sons of a trader), all provide references to overseas trade and the social life of the merchant community of Odisha. Any attempt to analyse and translate these lesser-known regional texts might be worthwhile in setting a context for the maritime heritage of Odisha. However, the most popular of these stories has been the myth of the *bruhat tapoi* that is further represented in the ritual of *khudurukuni osa*. The myth recounts the story of a distressed sister of seven brothers, hailing from a merchant family. She was tormented while her brothers were away on a sea voyage, and the story recounts how they were finally rescued by the blessings of the goddess Mangala. The story of this pathetic young girl managed to catch the imagination of common people, resulting in the myth's wider acceptance among young girls in coastal Odisha.

The story of *bruhat tapoi* or the *khudurukuni osa* ritual has been considered quite significant by scholars, since it reflects the maritime activities of the ancient Odias. Odia folk literature is replete with stories about the origin of *osa* (fasting) and *brata* (votive tales) and these stories remain strong in popular memory, and are regularly recited by devotees to reconstitute it as a mythology with a lasting impression. *Osa* and *brata* are observed for common, and/ or for individual good, and transcend class or caste parameters. From villages, the myth and associated ritual has spread to nearby cities as well, suggesting that these traditions have come to embrace larger sections of society over time. Though there are some differences and adjustments within the rituals, implicit to the process of their growth, most traditions also take care to retain the older ethos, and continue, more or less, as the same.

Osa and *brata,* though the words are usually spelt together, have slightly different connotations. In his seminal work *odia loka kahani* (Das 1962: 29-30), Das has divided Odia folktales into seven sections, of which the words *osabrata katha,* are combined to make a separate section. Each of the *katha* or mythological ritual tales is connected to a story that explains the reason behind the worship of a particular deity. The specific powers of the deities are enumerated as well. If satisfied, the deity

bestows blessings over her devotees, or if angered, curses them, this curse being expressed in terms of illness, sadness or disgrace. *Osa* is derived from the word *upabasa* (fasting) and is observed explicitly by women, for the welfare of their families which includes brothers and husbands (Panda 1993: 145). The *oseiti* (one who observes the fast) fasts completely and, in some cases, without water, till the very end of the ceremony. During *brata*, in contrast, devotees are not required to fast completely. *Brata* is instead observed to fulfil certain desires. *Osa* on the other hand, does not necessarily have any such objective in mind, but for the more abstract aspiration of wellbeing for all. Both categories of fasts usually involve the recitation of respective stories that justify the observances of these fasts. Most of these stories, an integral part of Odia literature, are available in the printed form, and are commonly found at all bookstores at a nominal price.

Story of *Bruhat Tapoi* or the *Khudurukuni Osa*

This article uses as primary source, the most popular version of the *osa* that is currently available in the market called the *bruhat tapoi ba khudurukuni osa* (large/ lofty or the great Khudurukuni osa) (Das 1972). Consisting of five chapters and composed in twenty-four pages, the text of *bruhat tapoi* matches mostly with the manuscript titled *khudurukuni brata* that is currently archived in the Odisha State Museum in Bhubaneswar.

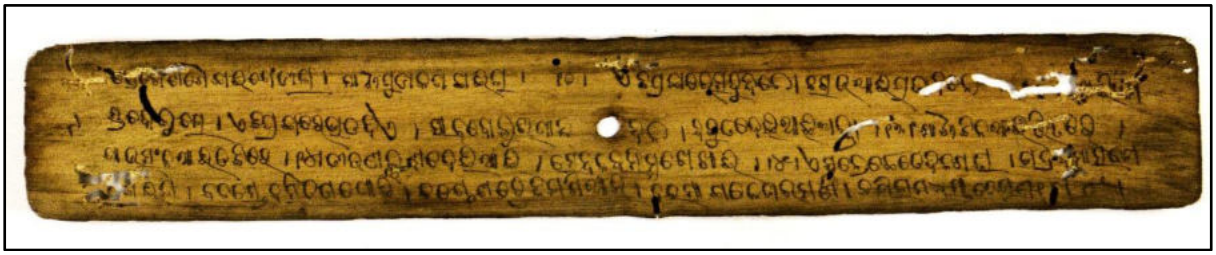

Image 4.1: Folio of *khudurukuni brata*. Image source: Odhisha State Museum (OL/ 1559).

The *bruhat tapoi* story and *kudurukuni osa* ritual encompasses the story of a wealthy merchant named Tanyabanta who lived together with his wife Shakuntala, their seven sons, daughters-in-law, and youngest daughter Tapoi. Once while Tapoi was playing with her friends, a Brahmin woman ridiculed her for playing with a cane basket, and not with gold and silver baskets, like her other friends. She further instigated Tapoi to demand a golden moon from her wealthy parents, rather than playing with the cane basket. Tapoi returned home and demanded a golden moon, to which her parents' acceded. Unfortunately, her father passed away, while the golden moon was on its way, and her mother too expired, till the time the golden moon reached Tapoi. As days progressed, the family recovered from the shock of losing their parents. Resuming their professions, the brothers decided to go on a voyage – cross the seas for trade. But before starting their journey, all the seven brothers requested their wives to look after the house, and specially take utmost care of their sister Tapoi.

Accordingly, their wives started managing the household in the absence of their husbands, and took good care of Tapoi. This went on till the day, a widowed Brahmin came to their doorstep, asking for alms. All the ladies were busy in the household at the time, while Tapoi was enjoying herself, swinging on a swing. Thus, no one

attended properly, or responded immediately to the Brahmin widow. Angered, the Brahmin woman instigated the wives against Tapoi, asking them not to pamper Tapoi, as she would soon, surely change her colours, and pose as their enemy as soon as the brothers returned, and create problems for their wives in the future. The widow, hence, successfully brainwashed the young wives to send Tapoi to the jungle everyday on the pretext of grazing the family goats, so that the wild animals could kill Tapoi. The attitude of the wives towards Tapoi changed overnight, and then began a traumatic life for poor Tapoi, who was deprived of food, clothing and comfort. This routine continued almost endlessly for Tapoi, who went out every day to the jungle with the goats, and starved herself, throughout the day. Only the youngest sister-in-law remained kind to Tapoi, giving her some food that was enough to sustain her body. Days passed by in misery till the month of *bhadrava,* when suddenly Gharamani, the favourite goat of the eldest sister-in-law got lost in the jungle. Tapoi searched relentlessly for Gharamani and in the process, stumbled upon a group of other girls observing the *khudurukuni osa* ritual. Tapoi, too, joined them, as she was told that her wishes would be fulfilled if she worshipped the deity with devotion.

To her utter surprise, Tapoi soon found the goat on her way back home, and this deepened her faith in the *khudurukuni osa* ritual. She continued to observe the ritual for its prescribed duration for five consecutive Sundays, and offered *khuda* (broken rice) to the goddess, praying for her brothers' safe return. As her hardships continued endlessly,Tapoi unable to take the grief anymore, decided to end her life. She cried out in her agony to the jungle, and cursed her destiny. Her helpless cries attracted the attention of Tapoi's youngest brother, who along with the other brothers, in the meanwhile, had just returned home from their journey. As they immediately rushed to help the person crying out in distress in the forest, they discovered that this distressed person was none other than their sister Tapoi. The brothers were shocked to see the condition of their beloved sister. Tapoi shared her story of suffering at the hands of their wives, all except for the youngest one. Feeling miserable on hearing her tale of her torture, the brothers placated Tapoi, adorning her with gifts of the expensive clothes and jewellery that they brought, and planned to take revenge on their wives.

The brothers, thus, sent their wives a missive about their arrival at the seacoast, and asked them, accompanied by Tapoi, to complete the ritual of *boita bandana* (the boat worshipping ceremony). All the wives became worried at this, as Tapoi was nowhere to be found. Nevertheless, the wives continued with making preparations for the welcoming ritual, and left for the coast, to perform the ritual without Tapoi. Being questioned by their husbands about Tapoi's absence once they had reached, they lied that Tapoi had preferred to stay back home, for she was unwell. The brothers then instructed their wives to proceed one by one, to offer prayers to the goddess inside the boat. Now, the 'goddess' inside that boat was none other but Tapoi herself, who sat there in disguise, with a sharp knife in her hand. As directed by her brothers, she began chopping off the noses of the wives as they approached her. She only spared the youngest one, in return for her good deeds. The wives, their noses cut, then, fled in shame to the nearby jungle, where they were devoured by a tiger. Thereafter, they were miraculously brought back to life by a Saiva devotee called Birupa, and were repatriated with their parents and natal homes. Tapoi subsequently married into a

merchant family, and her brothers, later on, were also reunited with their wives. Their children continued with the ritual of *khudurukuni osa*, which was performed on all the Sundays of the *bhadrav* month, that also included the worship of the goddess Mangala, and the recitation of the story of the *bruhat tapoi*. Towards the end of the story, it became revealed that Tapoi was none other but a *gandharva* princess, a celestial being, who was suffering from the curse of living on earth among humans for sixteen years. Tapoi's story became extremely popular, and in due course, became available in the form of poetry, which is easier to recite during worship.

The Ritual Process of *Khudurukuni Osa*

The observance of the ritual of *khudurukuni osa* is echoed in folk songs like, "fasting on Sundays of *bhadrava* month by unmarried girls is identified as *khudurukuni osa*" (Meher 1996: 11). On Sundays of the *bhadrava* month, unmarried girls wake up early in the morning to pluck flowers and make garlands for the goddess. After that they go for a community bath to a nearby river and at the riverbed, construct a moulded figure out of the river sand that is called *balunka*, which symbolises the goddess. They decorate the goddess with flowers and leaves and offer their prayers.

Image 4.2: Balunka

The activities of the girls on the ritual occasion mainly include making sweet dishes for the goddess's offering, and preparing decorations for the worship. The goddess

Image 4.3: Dhinki worshipped as a symbol

Mangala is installed in the *dhinki sala*, a demarcated area in the house that has the rice mill, or husk lever to produce rice from paddy. It could also be a particular wall of

the verandah that is cleaned and prepared for the ritual by first smearing it with cow dung. As real *dhinki*s are hardly ever used in modern households, a miniature *dhinki* is used as a symbol of the worship's ritual context. Earlier, while symbolic deities were made out of flowers, stems and the leaves called *malachula* plants (Patnaik 2016: 640), this was later substituted with idols, and largely decorated with flowers. It is important to note here, that the *malachula* is not a plant per se, but a combination of flowers, stems, and leaves mixed to form a bunch that symbolizes the deity.

The floor and walls in front, and around the goddess are decorated with *jhoti* (floor painting) made out of the liquid pulp produced from grinding raw rice. Thse drawings depict seven boats, merchants, and other mythological events from Tapoi's story. In the evening, girls again assemble to offer their prayers, recite the *bruhat tapoi* and

phoola singhasana karanti
phoolare asana paranti
gabha aau beni phoolare
phoolara chita je mondare
phoolara chauni sundara
mala gunthithanti phoolara
mudi sabu kale phoolara
jhumuka pahuda abara
phoolare kacha ti bahu ti
phoolare mandile dehati

Image 4.4: Description of ritual

distribute offerings among listeners. In case the *malachula* is used to make the idol, the flowers and leaves are collected and immersed the following morning in the river, and this ritual is continued on all consecutive Sundays. For those worshipping idols, their immersion is organised on the last Sunday of the month. While the words *khuda rankuni* is referred to as one who craves for *khuda,* or broken rice, with time it is believed that the corrupted version of the original term *khuda rankuni* became *khudurukuni* (Patnaik 1979: 272). As Tapoi herself was starving at the time she was sent to the jungle and craved food (*khuda rankuni*), the offering of her *khuda* to the goddess was significant. Tapoi while wandering in the wilderness, looked very fragile and with open unkempt hair, and her looks were hence, compared to a bear (*bhalu*) and she was thus, also referred to as *bhalukuni* (Mahapatra 1971: 37). Subsequently, the *osa* was also called *bhalukuni osa* sometimes. Besides flowers and leaves, other offerings made to the goddess include *lia* (fried paddy) *ukhuda* (fried paddy sweetened by molasses), and fruits. The ritual also requires the girls involved in the worship to decorate the deity, entirely with flowers: "throne for goddess carpeted with flowers, flowers on bun, hair plaits and forehead, flowers stitched together in garland with rings, earrings and bangles in flower, flowers covering throughout" (Mishra 1981: 241).

Image 4.5: Goddess Khudurukuni

Image 4.6: Offerings to the goddess

The mythology of *bruhat tapoi* (Das 1972: 23) explains the process of observing the *osa* as, "devotees keep fast that day and worship goddess Mangala after cleaning and decorating the temple area. Seven merchants are made to sit on seven boats in the ritual image, and the goddess is worshipped with flowers and fruits that include coconut, banana, cucumber, and corn that are placed in a plate decorated with camphor, sandalwood paste, incense and a lamp. Offerings also include a basket of fried paddy balls that are sweetened with molasses. Worship ends with ululation."

se dina upabasa kari mangala debi ku sumari
osa mandira jatna kale chunare jatana lipile
sata boita je dekhile sata sadhava basaile
bibidha phala phoola mana karpura kasturi chandana
agaru dhupa dipabali bandai dele hulahuli
sriphala adi jete phala kakudi maka je kadali
ukhuda muan thula kari changuda manakare bhari
deina mangala pujile anande hulahuli dele

Image 4.7: Ritual process further described

The procedure described suggests a simple ceremony that can be performed easily at home. No temple priest is required for this worship. Girls can draw or install the goddess themselves and follow the instructions provided in *bruhat tapoi* text. The *osa* is celebrated by groups of 10-15 girls from the same neighbourhood, who complete worshipping the idol of the deity with flowers. In some areas Brahmin girls are forbidden from observing the *osa*, as it is believed that it was due to the deception of the Brahmin widow that Tapoi had to undergo such misery. But the *bruhat tapoi* itself does not mention any such distinction, and thus, caste restrictions seem to have been a later development. Moreover, the

character of the Brahmin widow in the text is similar to their occurance in many *kathas* (mythological ritual tales) that include the *laxmi purana, dutia osa, kaanjiaala osa*. But not in all cases, is the Brahim widow potrayed so negatively. Since the *khudurukuni osa* ritual spans through the Sundays of the *bhadrava* month, it culminates on the last Sunday in quite a unique manner, with girls from different groups taking their idols for immersion at a nearby water body. They argue with each other, claiming their idol to be better than other groups, and this competition takes place through the genre of folk songs called *bada gita*. In this exchange, the contending groups of girls respond creatively to each other in arguments that can border on vulgar and abusive. Allegations like "Our goddess has betel nut in hand, yours is standing outside, ours has a bracelet in hand and yours has a curved face" (Das 2011: 248) contend with others like "Our goddess eats coconut while yours get only the shell, our goddess eats sweets, and the clan of your goddess should end" (Mishra 1981: 241).

ama bhalukuni lo khae nadia
tuma bhalukuni lo khae phadia
ama bhalukuni lo khauchi nadu
tuma bhalukuni ra bansa budu

Image 4.8: Argumentative exchanges between girls

Image 4.9: Arguments that may get vulgar

ama bhalukuni khae khiri
tuma bhalukuni bata haguri
ama bhalukuni rani
tuma bhalukuni baunsa kani
ama bhalukuni khae muan
tuma bhalukuni muhare nia
tama bhalukuni mala
ama bhalukuni thila boli niaa tikie dela
ama bhalukuni bekare mali
tuma bhalukuni tripinda kali
ama bhalukuni pindhichi pata
tama bhalukuni khauchi chaata
ama bhalukuni lagae tara
tuma bhalukuni muhare khara
ama bhalukuni mundare beni
tuma bhalukuni munda ukuni
ama bhalukuni mundare mani
tuma bhalukuni akhita kani
ama bhalukuni sue khate
tuma bhalukuni bhuinre lote
ama bhalukuni soichi ghare
tuma bhalukuni cheli charae
ama bhalukuni khae mudhi
tuma bhalukuni naa ta budhi
ama bhalukuni dharichi ladu
tuma bhalukuni muhata podu

At times these disagreements between contending sides may get unpleasant with allegations such as "Our goddess eats rice pudding while yours defecates openly, our goddess is the queen and yours is thin like cane, our goddess eats sweet ball and yours has fireball, your goddess died and ours was present there to flame on her pier, our goddess has a garland and yours is pitch dark, our goddess is draped in silk attire and yours is getting beaten up, our goddess smears coolness and yours is facing sunrays, our goddess has plated hair and yours is infested with lice, our goddess has a jewel on the forehead and your has a squinted eye, our goddess is resting on the bed and yours is turning over on the ground, our goddess is sleeping at home and yours is grazing goats, our goddess eats puffed rice and yours is famed as elderly, our goddess is holding a sweet and yours has a burnt face" (Mahapatra 1971: 208-09). While eating puffed rice may be

glorified in one song, it is underrated in another: "Our goddess wears bangles and yours eats puffed rice" (Das 1974:311).

The songs typically end with rhyming words, but these words do not necessarily have a specific meaning. When translated into English, the rhyming words in some cases, may even sound superficial or senseless. In some of these confrontational songs, the girl-groups try their best to impose their own supremacy over their goddesses. While the goddess concerned, goddess Mangala is one, the competition among separate groups of girls vie for supremacy over their own personified goddess Mangala in the same locality. It seems that with a month-long duration of worship, they develop a special attachment to their own goddess idols. In the process of their argumentation, they sometimes forget that the opposite counterpart is after all, the same goddess. The ritual of singing these songs is followed by taking the goddess on a boat ride, before finally immersing her idol into water. However, this part of the ritual, of boatrides, is hardly practiced any longer.

Analysing *Bruhat Tapoi* or the Ritual of *Khudurukuni Osa*

The observance of *khudurukuni osa,* especially in coastal districts of Odisha, acts as a reminiscence and memory building about the ancient maritime heritage of Odia people (Mahapatra 1971: 36), especially as the ritual text provides information on various facets of ancient society, religion, economy and culture.

Authorship, Date and Place

While most *osa* narratives are not ascribed to any particular authorship, there is more clarity with regard to the *bruhat tapoi*, since the text itself mentions its author, Gopinath Das. However, there is no consensus among scholars about the date of the text, or the actual origin of the *osa* tradition. While characters, situation and the denominational worship of the goddess, indicates a very remote origin, the immense popularity of the original prose has long since been replaced by a simple narrative poem (Mansinha 1962: 38). The *bruhat tapoi* can, however be ascribed to the 16th or 17th century, based on certain key observations. For example, the story of the *bruhat tapoi* begins with a conversation between Lord Krishna and Rukmini, suggesting the popularity of Vaishnavism in Odisha, and the text could have therefore been possibly written in the post-Chaitanya period (Kar 1993: 125-27). While the language of the text is standard Odia, ascribed to around 17th century, the *bruhat tapoi* also mentions both Ratnadwipa and Jambudwipa as geographical spaces that describe Tapoi's native place. Ratnadwipa has been identified as Simhala, a place that finds mention in the Odia literature of the 16th century (Sahu 1993: 44) and the elaborate description of the wealth and prosperity of Simhala in medieval Odia literature also finds reflection in the *bruhat tapoi*. Hence it can be assumed that the text was written during or after the 16th century. The story of *bruhat tapoi* has been summarised by various authors so far, who have provided diverse endings for the story, while keeping intact, the sequence of events till Tapoi's marriage. While Das (1964: 464) concludes the story with the instance of the punishment that was given by Tapoi to her sisters-in-law, who were subsequently killed by the tiger, Mansinha (1976: 76) ends the story with the death of the sisters-in-law, following which, the brothers got new brides. Kabibhushan

(1971: 17) on the other hand, concludes the story with Tapoi's marriage, followed by the merchant brothers becoming reunited with their earlier wives.

Traces of Maritime Activities

Bruhat tapoi describes that the merchant brothers left for their trading activities and returned afterwards, without mentioning any stipulated time-period for their journey. However, the fact that the story starts with Tapoi being a five-year-old child and ends with her being sixteen-years-old at the time of her marriage suggests that the story approximately has a ten-year span of events, bridged by frequent mentions of "few days passed as it is". It is also to be noted that in ten years the brothers had travelled for business only once. Hence it can be assumed that such trade journeys may have lasted for a few years at a time. While the *bruhat tapoi* (Das 1972: 3) mentions Jambudwipa and Ratnadwipa, it does not define the particular place inhabitated by Tapoi. There are also differences among scholars about the name of the place where the story is based. Neither Das (1964: 458) nor Mansinha (1976: 74), refer to any specific place where the eminent Odia mercant lived, and Kabibhushan just says that "the famous merchant named Tanayabanta lived in Simhala" (Kabibhushan 1904: 1). Though there are differences in opinion regarding the story's origin, some scholars strongly believe that the story was originally based in Odisha, and was written to address issues arising in ancient society about maritime trade. The fact that *khudurukuni osa* is still celebrated in Odisha, the names of the characters and relationships discussed in the story, continue to have an important ritual place in contemporary Odishan society. This might be an important corroborative feature for the origin of the story within Odisha.

Since the *bruhat tapoi* is composed in the post Chaitanya period, it could be treated as a strong piece of evidence, of Odisha's maritime heritage dated to the 17th century (Kar 1993: 126-27). At the same time, it should also be highlighted that not much discussion has taken place about the differences in the names of places occurring in the story, in all its accounts. While names of characters, like Tanayabanta, Sakuntala, or Nilendri, sound familiar in the context of Odisha, names of characters as central as Tapoi, are either unheard of, or at least, not in use anymore. Usually, proper names do carry a meaning, but the meaning of Tapoi is yet to be deceiphered. The *bruhat tapoi* mentions that the merchant brothers after starting their sea voyage, first stopped at a place called Kushal Island (Das 1972: 6): "Few days passed like this, the boat reached a kingdom called Kushal Island and they lived happily there." Since a part of Odisha was also known as Kosala in ancient times, it is possible, since the merchants in the story were coming to trade in Kosala, that the story is based elsewhere, and not in Odisha as is popularly believed.

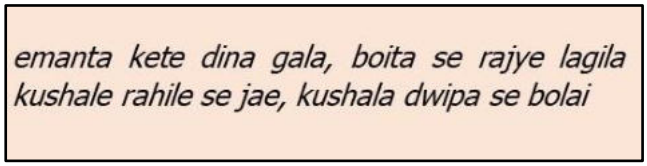
emanta kete dina gala, boita se rajye lagila
kushale rahile se jae, kushala dwipa se bolai

Image 4.10: Probable references to Kosala

The third chapter of *bruhat tapoi* mentions the tradition of *boita bandana* or the ceremony of worshipping the boat, performed when the merchant brothers returned from their trading journey, after a long time as: "You better go fast and convey to our brides to come along with Tapoi for the boat worshipping ceremony" (Ibid.: 14).

bega hoina tumbhey jao bohu manaka agey kaha
sangate gheni tapoi asantu boita bandai

Image 4.11: Merchants asking their wives to perform the ritual along with their sister Tapoi

The traditional worship of boats, the *boita bandana utsav* or ritual, is performed on the full moon day of *kartik purnima* and constitutes quite a celebration in Odisha. Early on the morning of *kartik purnima*, small boats made out of banana bark or paper, decorated with betel nut, betel leaf, flower and a lamp are floated on water, as a symbolic gesture to mark the historic annual departure of the merchants on their transoceanic journeys from Odisha to other countries. Interestingly the spirit of *boita bandana* resonates with a similar Thai celebration called *loy krathong* that means to 'float a lotus shaped boat', and the *masakapam kepesih*, a south Balinese Hindu custom that is also marked by the ritual floating of a tiny vessel into the river. While the *bruhat tapoi* does not provide any details about the items of trade, it mentions the purchase of different ornaments abroad: "They reached an Island, completed their trade, stayed for some time and purchased jewellery" (Ibid.:7).

Lagila eka dwipantarey sukhena bikakina kale
Kinile alankara mana rahile tahi kichi dina

Image 4.12: The purchase of ornaments from overseas

The feminine fascination of precious jewellery bought from other countries is evident from the list of personal ornaments that wives demanded from their husbands as gifts instructing them to bring these along while returning home: "Someone asked for a golden bangle with gemstone while another a diamond nose ring, added on were a golden bracelet, well crafted jasmine bud made out of diamond and Tapoi asked her brother for a diamond doll" (Ibid.: 6). The merchant brothers returned loaded with jewellery for all the ladies of the family and even "covered Tapoi with jewellery studded with eight gemstones" (Ibid.: 13). The *bruhat tapoi* text describes how the merchant brothers returned from their overseas trade and business trips in the month of *bhadrava*, after the completion of the rituals of *khudurukuni osa.* Thus, though the text specifies the month of their return, it does not mention the month on which their voyage began.

ke bole mora suna chudi anithiba ti ratna jadi
ke bole hirara basani mohara pai thiba ani
ke bole subarna kankana anithiba moh nimantena
ke bole hira malli kadhi uttama rupe thiba gadhi
bhai ki bole tapoi mo pai hirara kandhei

Image 4.13: List of ornaments that the wives demanded

Social Status of Merchants

The *Bruhat Tapoi* is one of the many folktales of Odisha, with the *sadhaba* or merchant as the subject matter. Eminent folklorists (Das 1962: 45) have divided Odia proverbial tales into nine sections, wherein the adventure tales of the four friends, sons of the king, minister, merchant and *kotwal* specially feature as a separate section. Such representations may suggest that merchants were an influential community within society. The abundance of wealth and the high social status of merchant families is evident from description provided in the *bruhat tapoi* : "they walk over gold and

silver"(Das 1972:4) and for Tapoi it is mentioned "friendly with the daughter of Minister"(Ibid.:4). The description of Tapoi wanting to play with a golden moon also seems to be quite common amongst the children of merchant families, and the story describes how "the ladies of the merchant family are seen to be covered with gold" (Ibid.: 4). *Sadhabas* seem to have been the third most influential section of society, coming after the kings and ministers, since they were the wealthiest, and since the strength of the region's economic prosperity therfore depended upon them. They became the favourites of the kings by gifting the latter with precious goods, and also befriended their sons. In some instances, they were also seen as establishing matrimonial relationships with the royal family (Das 1962: 50).

The ritual story also depicts the social condition of the merchant's family members, that spelled danger to the women and children, when male members of the household were away for many years on sea voyages. During these long spells of absence, the women of such households had to fend for themselves. The wives and sisters of merchants thus offered prayers and kept fasts in order to protect male family members and travellers from any oceanic dangers (Patnaik 1993: 76). Merchants too, were fully cognizant of the harsh times their families had to undergo, because of their long overseas journey, and also prayed for their family members' welfare. Probably the sailors established a platform near seaports for the worship of Goddess Mangala, as they believed that only the goddess could protect them from the chaos of their long absence (Mansinha 1967: 77). They left their household responsibilities to their wives before starting voyages, their helplessness reflected in prayers and words such as: "as we initiate the sea voyage, you be responsible for the homely affairs and ensure good care of Tapoi as it is but destiny that we lost both parents one after the other. She should not miss them" (Das 1972: 6).

boite jauachu ambhe ghara sambhali thiba tumbhe
dekha e daibara krutya pita sangate gale mata
jemante jhia na jhuriba temante seba karuthiba

Image 4.14: Merchants expressing their worries to their wives

Religious Beliefs

From another perspective, the *bruhat tapoi* could be summarised as a pathetic story of an only sister among seven brothers of a merchant family, who was subjected to torture while her brothers were away on a trading business trip. It was her devotion to goddess Mangala that helped her sail through hurdles, and finally reunite with her brothers. Thus, a major part of the story deals with the devotion of a young girl towards goddess Mangala, who ensured the safe return of her brothers from their voyage, represented in the observance of the *osa* ritual performed for the welfare of brothers. While most scholars agree with the above argument, many have presented different interpretations of the story. It is said that the fast is observed by girls for securing protection against the tyranny of the brother's wives (Das and Mahapatra 1979: 110), to obtain the sympathy of brothers (Mansinha 1962: 40), and to expedite their own marriages in rich families, and ensure they are never in any want (Sen Gupta 1969: 318). The wider acceptance of the *khudurukuni osa* ritual can be traced to a belief that the goddess Mangala would prove to be a saviour for those women, who were in dire need. If remembered with devotion by sisters, something that is

emphasised in the text time and again, the goddess would protect their brothers during the sea voyage. The goddess's promise of saving voyagers from drowning is highlighted in the *bruhat tapoi* text through words such as: "the drowning boat can be rescued with the grace of goddess Mangala" (Das 1972: 10), and also, "every crisis of drowning of boat gets averted with the grace of goddess Mangala" (Ibid.: 3). The story depicts merchants looking upto the goddess Mangala for protection during their journey, and also praying to her for the welfare of their separated family, and its women members, during their absence. This is reflected in the axiom: "If worshipped with utmost devotion, goddess Mangala will come to the rescue of one and all" (Ibid.: 24). The mythology and ritual of *khudurukuni osa* has been continuing since the ages, carried forward by the legacy of Odisha's ancient maritime past. The tradition has strong religious and social significance, as the *osa* continues to inspire young girls to be devotional, and encourages them to have good familial relationships (Patnaik 1979: 272). The tradition of keeping a fast for the welfare of the family has been passed on from mother to daughter, since the *osa* tells the story of a woman and her relationship with her natal family. The role of marital partners and men, apart from brothers, is quite negligible. The fact that girls observe the *osa* in groups of ten or fifteen, enhances the community feeling among women of the same village and side of the natal family even after they marry and migrate away. The riual can hence be considered a matrilineal ritual, but because its celebration is located in a patriarchal context, celebrating the ritual allows women more agency and independence.

The Shakti cult is quite popular in Odisha and the goddess is worshipped in various forms, like the Mahisamardini (Durga), Parvati, Chandi, Mangala, Varahi, Bhagabati, Charchika, or Bimala, to name a few. Every village and individual household worships goddesses, either as their clan and family presiding deity or their home or village protector. The Shakti cult, in its various manifestations has enjoyed a long and continuous history in the region, facilitated by royal patronage and popular support. In the case of *bruhat tapoi*, the touching story of Tapoi has also enjoyed immese social appeal, gradually becoming an established practice within many households. One of the notable features of the goddess idol in Odisha is the depiction of motherhood. In contrast to other depictions as a deity that kills demons, in Odisha, she is encountered as being seated and at ease on her mount, holding babies on her lap, and full of motherly affection (Das 1977: 356). Similarly, also for the *khudurukuni osa* ritual, some Mangala idols are depicted as holding a baby on their lap. The story of *bruhat tapoi* certainly propagates the Shakti cult among common people, particularly among womenfolk, without the additional paraphernalia of temples, priests, and additional rituals. Interestingly, the story briefly mentions the power of Shiva, in the context of the time, when the wives of the seven merchants were killed by the tiger, but brought to life by the Saiva devotee Birupa. Thus, the grace of Shiva and Shakti both find a place in this story.

Conclusion

The ritual of *khudurukuni osa* has been a longstanding practice, and is perhaps older than the time, poets and writers composed and compiled the story. The story of Tapoi, constitutes a long and rich storyline that is replete with plentiful events. This story has caught the imagination of many people, and has directly struk a chord for young girls.

Girls observe the ritual with utmost sincerity and dedication, taking guidance from senior family members, as they pray for the welfare of their brothers. Since all the rituals are done in groups and not in isolation, its performance strengthens community feeling for women, and solders their bonds with parental homes, besides building a spiritual atmosphere in the neighbourhood. The ritual reflects the simplicity of life, and the acute faith of devotees in the goddess Mangala, as their protector and saviour in difficult times. However, with the passage of time, certain elements have changed in the ritual process of the *khudurukuni osa*. The symbolic deity made out of the flowers, stems and leaves – the *malachula*, has given way to the predominance of the *murti* or idol. The installation of the goddess at the paddy pounding corner, or the *dhinki sala* has also shifted to within rooms, verandas, or open spaces. The procession ceremony for the immersion of idols has become much more extensive, elaborate, and commercial, while the *bhalukuni bada gita* of competition of idols between the different groups of girls has become sidelined.

Amongst the many references to Odisha's ancient maritime activities in the *bruhat tapoi*, it is notable that the merchant brothers returned home in the month of *bhadrava* (August–September). Merchants in ancient times were completely dependent on seasonal monsoon winds, and the northeast monsoon wind helps boats that sail from the eastern coast of India to Sri Lanka. The southwest monsoon in turn, helps boats that return from Southeast Asia via Sri Lanka to the eastern coast of India. Studies undertaken on wind and oceanic currents suggest that mariners from the eastern coast of India probably set out on their journeys between October and February, and returned home between April and September (Tripati 2011: 1085). To a certain extent, this substantiates the reference of the time when Tapoi's brothers came home in the month *bhadrava*. Interestingly though, the period, place of origin, and actual location of the *khudurukuni osa* story is still somewhat obscure, even though the tradition has managed to retain its popularity, especially in the villages and cities of Odisha's coastal districts. This indicates that the very purpose for which girls observe the *osa,* mainly for the welfare of their brothers in emulating Tapoi, has remained relevant. Even today the primary offering to the goddess includes *khuda bhaja* (rice husk), *khuda tandula* (rice bran cake), *liya* (fried paddy) and *ukhuda* (fried paddy sweetened by molasses). Girls, even today, continue to draw boats with the seven merchants and goddess Mangala on it, as part of the ritual that "invoke goddess Mangala in the prayer room, for the safety and prosperity of their brothers" (Das 1972: 11), and as a living memory of Odisha's maritime history and heritage.

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Book Review

Renny Thomas, *Science and Religion in India: Beyond Disenchantment*. Abingdon, Oxford & New York: Routledge, 2022. Pp. ix + 203. ISBN 978-1-032-073194 (h/b). Price: Not stated.

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One must not dare speedread Renny Thomas's *Science and Religion in India* that has already garnered accolades of acolytes from Cambridge to New York. Ironically, however, a painstaking but painful glossing of the text in between the otherwise handsomely produced front and back covers exposes singularly banal and shoddy statements and arguments about Indian scientists' religiosity by observing, and also participating in, their various rituals within the confines of the workplace, the laboratories of "a leading scientific research Institute in Bangalore, Karnataka" (most certainly the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore) and ingratiating himself with the alpha scientist Srinivasan (not a real name) presiding over the largest lab of the scientists' *sanctum sanctorum*. No wonder, our veritable pilgrim researcher is so beholden to his patron that he chooses to refer to him by a rather unacademic moniker "Boss" (p. 4) (more apposite for a Hindi movie character with Bollywood bravado) somewhat resembling the syrupy and quasi comical *guru* or *syar* (sir) in Bengali or 'Benglish', (a neologism and a portmanteau term [Bengali + English] describing the Bengali way of pronouncing words in English).

It is puzzling to note the incredible stark contrast between the book's cover and content. The book comprises five chapters flanked by an introduction in the beginning and a conclusion at the end. Chapter 1 contains what the author says "the story of the emergence of science as the paradigm for modernity in India" which is really a summary of Nehru's project of industrialisation and modernisation. Chapters 2 and 3 looks at the specific ways scientists lived their religious lives. Chapter 4 deals with the life of non-believers. Chapter 5 deals with the issue of casteism to posit that science is a meritorious caseless field.

The book's prepublication celebratory encomia by the unsuspecting reviewers in the publishers' web page are categorically compromised by its sheer callow content composed casually and purveyed nonchalantly with fanfare. His stated specialty in sociology/ anthropology notwithstanding, Dr. Thomas recalls with sophomoric swagger his triumphant gate crashing into the scientists' shrine (that is, their laboratory) and his charming them by his extempore peroration on sociology, anthropology, philosophy of science, and 'social studies of science', especially on the French philosopher of science Bruno Latour, and thereby converting his audience,

those diehard believers in the superiority of science as a field of study, into votaries of social science as the new epistemology.

A problem with Thomas's work under review is that he has nothing new, creative, or provocative to offer his readers except information that is recycled or recondite. For example, he takes the trouble to remind readers that "as anthropologists we need concepts and ideas to work with" (p. 48). He also cautions them that the "majoritarian religious groups always experience privilege" (p. 49). He claims that "American sociologists have been studying the religious lives of scientists, but these have been largely dependent upon surveys and interviews" (p. 2). Yet this *sotto voce* oblique aside debunking American scholarship notwithstanding, his own work under review comes littered with banal quotations of coffee hours chats with his 'lab mates' (euphemized as interviews) in the boss man's lab, author's mega source of insight and enlightenment. His casual albeit clever deemphasis of his own lack of science education is a classic instance of benevolent obfuscation. To cite him without my paraphrasing:

> The current book does not deal with the content of science. Instead, the lab is used as a site to understand the religious life of the scientists. Studying religion in the lab is following the tradition of Science and Technology Studies, by arguing that religion and religious life is not part of the outside of the lab, but very much part of scientific labs. The lab is very much a religious, as much a religious place, as much as it is a political and scientific site (p. 5).

Likewise, he excuses himself for not researching the history of Indian science by an enigmatic qualifier: "the book doesn't intend to present India as a special case, rather it intends to present a case study of universal science…a case study of 'Science' in an Indian context" (p. 14).

The publishers' bold but bald announcement in the title page "This book provides an in-depth ethnographic study of science and religion in the context of South Asia" is, as will be clear later in this review, neither an 'ethnographic' exercise in the proper sense of the term nor a representation of South Asia but almost resembling a travel diary of conversations with his 'lab mates' at the Institute of the 'science city of India'. If ethnography means a scientific description of the customs of individual people and their cultures, then Thomas's tome, clearly, is not it. However, our author's *ex cathedra* pronouncement on the valorisation of his book "as a case study of universal science" is not only inappropriate but downright ridiculous (p. 14). He is totally uniformed about scientific research in northern, eastern, and western India. His single and singular reference to north India occurs on page 6 in connection with purely indigenous scientific activity called *jugaad* (he means to write *jogar* or creative improvisation) and this intrusion of the north achieves his unwitting reification of the superiority of southern science over the informal northern improvisation. He does not demonstrate his understanding of Late Mughal India's contact and its eventual and consequent fallout initially in Eastern and thereafter in other parts of the country years before the advent of Nehruvian technological Indian Republic and the rise of Bengaluru as the 'science city of India'.

Sadly, unbeknownst to him, there are several distinguished scholars of colonial science, among whom the pride of place must go to Professors Jayant V. Narlikar of Pune, and the celebrated sociologist Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1917-2015) of Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, followed by such specialists as Professors Arabinda Samanta of New Delhi, Chittabrata Palit of Jadavpur, Kolkata, or Sadhana Majumdar of Kolkata, just to name a few distinguished scholars. There are, besides, some phenomenal scientists, educationists, and medical practitioners in 19th century Bengal, personalities such as Aksaykumar Datta (1820-86), Mahendralal Sarkar (1833-1904), Rajnarayan Basu, *Hindukulashiromani* [Crown Jewel of the Hindus] (1826-99), Rajendralal Mitra (1823-91), Ishwarchandra *Vidyasagar* (1820-91), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh (1872-1950), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and many other trailblazers who wrote copiously on rational pursuits as well as commentaries on the Hindu scriptures dealing with philosophy and theology (Sil 2014 & 2017).

In similar vein, it ought to be noted here that our author does not believe in the stereotypical binaries (part of the well-known but by now a hackneyed postmodernist jargon for covering up the lacunae in creative and critical research and reflection on the part of run-of-the-mill Indian scholars) such as brahmin and non-brahmin, science (rationality) and religion (faith), tradition and modernity and the like, as he avers that his "book looks at how scientists live their 'religious' and 'non-religious' life beyond a 'disenchanted' world of rationality and scientific modernity" (p. 3). Not being a student of either history or anthropology (he tends to conflate sociology with anthropology), Thomas displays unabashed unfamiliarity with Indian or European history and culture. Thus, he is silent over the scientific achievements of the Indians of the Hindu antiquity or the Perso-Arabic Islamic Middle Ages, and the post Mughal colonial period of the Company Raj through the regime of the British Empire, the era of Westernised modernity. His repeated use of the terms 'Brahmanism', 'Hinduism', 'secularism', 'casteism' seem unclear and hence vacuous. Regrettably, he has missed out on the historic syncretistic developments within Hinduism ever since the rise of Buddhism, Vedantism, Tantricism, Vaishṇavism, and its offshoot *Bhakta* Kabir's (1440-1518), devotional piety, and *Guru* Nanak's (1469-1539) Sikhism (and many more, both men and women through the past century, the latter dominated by *Svami* Vivekananda, 1863-1902), the inventor of Practical Vedanta, the miraculous Sathya Sain Baba, 1926-2011, the producer of sacred ash (*Vibhuti*), the sensuous Osho or Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, 1931-90, and the ISKCON man A.C. *Bhaktivedanta Shrila* Prabhupada (1896-1977).

Ever since 1893, Vivekananda's colourful and triumphant propaganda of India's unique civilisational contribution to humanity—a monumental but cleverly contrived exaggeration—Hindu religion has been perceived always as quintessentially 'spiritual', not just by the *emic* (that is, insiders—both sectarian and secular) and the *etic* (that is, 'outsiders'—both positivists, i.e., Rankean [Leopold von Ranke, 1795-1886] and followers of the methodological imperative, 'thick description', in ethnological research i.e., Geertzian [Clifford Geetrz,1926-2006]). On the other hand, it was such distinguished Orientalist scholars as the German Indologists Hermann Jacobi (1850-1937), Helmuth von Glasenapp (1891-1963), and Walter Ruben (1899-1982), who wrote about Indian hylozoists (primitive materialists) and their philosophical precursor

Uddalaka Aruni (8th century BCE) and additionally, the Russian Buddhologist Fyodor Theodore Stcherbatsky (1866-1942), who wrote on the history of materialism in India as well as the brilliant Bengali mathematician Prasanta C. Mahalanobis (1893-1972), who foundation of statistics in India (see Chattopadhyay 1978-79. II: 34-51, 32-4 I; I: 141-56; III: 343-51).

Interestingly, the birth of the modern in the West occurred amidst tension, turmoil, and transformation—a cosmic clash, as it were, between the two simultaneous antinomic presence of stasis (stagnancy, *sanatan*) and stirring (movement for change, *andolan*) in society and polity: the religious revolutions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: *Devotio Moderna* (The New Piety) and the so-called Lutheran (Martin Luther, 1483-1546) Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Crisis of the 17th century, the *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment), and the period of 'disenchantment' (the 19th century leading to the *Gotterdammerung* of 1914).

Further, author's rather unusual decision to maintain anonymity with respect to his interviewees and citing some of their works under pseudonym (p. 5) along with citations from the works of scholars in the references as well as the titles listed under bibliography (pp. 181-96) causes disturbing confusions about identities of authors and thus some undesirable issues as to their credibility as authority. The bibliography lists several titles not used by author, does not list some sources used substantially, and thus the text appears, partly as mere 'padding' and partly as a failsafe strategy to pre-empt any possible accusation of academic wrongdoing. It should be pointed out in this context that our author is alarmingly innocent of methods and manners of preparing the index for an academic or scholarly text (it will take too much space to discuss them here).

The most egregious omission by author has to do with the work of Francis Collins, a most germane source for Thomas's preferred, but not clearly articulated, theme of secular and sacred. Apparently, he picked up *de rigueur* a fashionable term such as 'disenchantment' (that is, *Entzauberung* or cultural rationalisation and devaluation of religion originally coined by Friedrich Schiller [1759-1805] and borrowed and popularized by Maximilian Karl Weber, [1864-1920], from Bruno Latour's controversial but magisterial tome [see Massimiliano 2019] without really probing the cultural, psychological, or pathological impulse and import of this condition). This is much like another attractive term *Entfremdung* (alienation) that had been frivolously used (and abused) by the scholars of an earlier generation.

Surprisingly, after having spilt much ink breathlessly on this French scholar, Thomas borrows the idea of the 'myth of disenchantment' from another Western author and fills two pages with further quotations only to come to a quite familiar realization that Indian scientists are neither die hard secular nor hard core Hindu. This humdrum 'discovery' might have saved his already oppressed readers from being further brutalised because any educated observer—emic or etic—would notice how everywhere in India businessmen, conmen, modestly educated *hoi polloi*, professionals of all sorts, including preachers, teachers, profiteers, professors, taxi drivers, police officers or pimps wear armlets, amulets, or talismans (*kavach*), and other lucky charms either as necklace or astrologically prescribed rings on all five

fingers, and sport garish red marks on the forehead The point to note is that Indians in general are no natural monks or sages or transmundane spiritualists in their quotidian behaviour in respect of their inherited faith. Thus, to make use of the concept of 'disenchantment', Dr. Thomas is advised to peruse Guym 2020 and Han 2015.

In view of our author's stated concern—albeit by now quite dated and overmuch discoursed—about 'Science' in an Indian context' as the harbinger of modernity in late Mughal India solely due to colonial contact, one would have liked to appreciate author's understanding of modernity (cf: Saler 2006) and numerous other studies on this theme). Regrettably, his unfortunate and undoubted *nescience* of both Indian and European history makes him appear as an overconfident *ignoramus* knowing virtually nothing of interest about the history and culture (especially religion) of his native land as well as that of the coming in of the British East India Company (EIC) during the declining days of Mughal *imperium* in India.

Embarrassingly enough, Dr. Thomas never mentions his own faith even though he claims to have studied the religion of the Hindus. On the other hand, with few exceptions, he describes his interviewees in the boss man's lab by their 'caste' name 'brahmins'. Though such naivete may be treated as pardonable ignorance and hence sufferable, he makes himself downright ridiculous with his mumbo-jumbo of separating 'religion' from 'religious beliefs', due to his being "aware of the limitations of using the term religion and the complex genealogical histories underpinning the category" (whatever such a *copia verborum* means!) (p. 48). Another such oddity is his distinction between 'religion' and 'culture', as he learnt from various scientists of national and international renown, he communed with at that Bengaluru temple of learning (pp. 96-97). His most telling weakness as author is his muddle with respect to the identity of Orientalist scholar. He writes: "The orientalists imagined India in opposition to the West as metaphysical and irrational, and the West as rational and scientific" (p. 13). Thomas here presumes the Orientalists as indigenous (oriental) scholars, thus overlooking the fact that they were Westerners *par excellence* as understood by the late Professor Edward Said (1935-2003) who had coined and popularized the term in the academe.

It would be tiring and frustrating to prolong the veritable laundry list of Dr. Thomas's unique brand of academic exercise. Suffice it to say that he shows himself as singularly ill-prepared for his project and thus, he must first acquire a foundational knowledge of the history of late Mughal India's contact with the rule of the EIC starting in a faint and failed attempt in Surat and thereafter more successfully in Bengal. Our author ought also to acquire an understanding of the birth of modernity in parts of the West, especially in late Tudor and Stuart England, amidst religious turmoil and decline of feudal system though not the feudal ethos that persisted through the 18th century in Europe. Similarly, he ought to mine the indigenous (mainly Bengali) sources of the development of scientific thought following the establishment of the Company *Raj* in eastern and northern India. In general Dr. Thomas needs to come out of his box, the laboratory of the Institute at Bengaluru and look way north of that megacity of Karnataka in search of the birth of modernity and scientism in colonial Calcutta. There is a rich cache of research studies both in English and in Bengali besides the

corpus of *Pandit* Jawaharlal Nehru, whom author Thomas considers as the pioneer of India's modernisation and cites copiously. Meanwhile, Dr. Thomas's ahistorical essay forgot, willy-nilly, such Indians as, *inter alia,* Rammohan Ray (1772-1833), the social reformer and the founder of the reformed Hindu religion called *Brahmoism*, and Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel Laureate poet and polymath, the two harbingers of modernity in India long before its first Prime Minister Nehru (r. 1947-64).

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Book Review

James McHugh, *An Unholy Brew: Alcohol in Indian History and Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 403. ISBN: 9780199375943. Price: $39.95.

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In *An Unholy Brew: Alcohol in Indian History and Religions*, James McHugh presents "a detailed survey of drinks, drinking, and ideas about drinking in premodern India" (2), making it the first monography devoted to this significant lacuna in scholarship. In so doing, the author offers a novel vision of premodern India—one that acknowledges the enormous diversity of Indian approaches to making, consuming, and representing alcoholic drinks. In constructing this vision, McHugh analyses an extensive range of Sanskrit sources dating from the Vedic era to the colonial period.

Utilizing creative, drinking-related chapter nomenclature, the author divides the book into two sections, or *Rounds*, and nine chapters, or *Cups*, intended to mirror the nine drinks offered by Sura, the goddess of liquor, in a myth from the *Devirahasya* (as discussed later in the book). The first *Round* is prefaced with a brief excursus, or *Aperitif*, recounting a tale from the *Kumbha Jataka* about how humans discovered *sura*, the "prototypical drink of premodern South Asia" (16). Here, the author introduces many of the key terms and vectors of inquiry that define the remainder of the book.

The first section (or *Round*), which encompasses the first five chapters (or *Cups*), looks at ingredients, terminology, and methods for brewing and drinking. Chapter one focuses on a category of fermented grain drink called *sura*. In it, the author first examines a Vedic recipe for *sura* from the *Baudhayana Shrauta Sutra*, noting the advent of a fermenting agent called *kinva*. Next, he tracks the evolution of *sura* and the accompanying *kinva* process through later sources, including the *Arthashastra*, the *Sushrutasamhita*, the *Sharngadharasamhita*, and the *Manasollasa*.

In the brewing of grain drinks like *sura*, cereal starches must be converted into sugars in a process called saccharification before alcoholic fermentation can occur (28). However, chapter two takes account of other, more sugary, early Indian drinks that did not require this added, starch-converting step. Here the author investigates drinks like *sidhu* (sugarcane wine), *arishta*s and *asava*s (made from various sugars and herbs), *maireya* (a spiced drink), grape wine, palm toddy, *madhvika* or *madhuka* (from the flowers of the mahua tree), honey *madhvasava*, and jackfruit *panasasava*. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of non-alcoholic drinks and the relationship between Indian drinking cultures and the chewing of betel, or *pan*.

Chapter three investigates public brewing and drinking practices. In it, McHugh returns to the *Arthashastra* for its detailed descriptions of liquor production and sale in public drinking-houses as well as its prescribed regulations for alcohol production, trade, and drinking. He then highlights the prominence of women in India's early drinking culture, drawing examples from the *Mahabharata*, the *Dhammapadatthakatha*, the *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya*, and other sources. According to these accounts, the *sura* shop appears as "one of the few places in a small town where people, both men and women … , could socialize" (110). The author also considers other contexts for public drinking, like weddings, festivals, and parties, before concluding with an overview of Indian distillation practices.

Whereas chapter three looks at public drinking, chapter four focuses on more elite drinking practices as described in works of Sanskrit literature, including the *Buddhacaritra*, the *Kiratarjuniya*, the *Brihatkathashlokasamgraha*, as well as the *Kamasutra*. McHugh acknowledges that "this chapter is as much about genre as about drinking practices" (111) because the luxurious, romantic, or even erotic drinking scenes described in these texts are as much idealized products of generic conventions and literary moods as they are reflections of actual elite drinking practices.

In chapter five, the author explores drinking prescriptions in medical sources like the *Ashtangahridaya* and the *Carakasamhita*. These works are concerned with proper drinking methods, treatment for patients who have drunk improperly, and the effects of alcohol on body and mind. Furthermore, that such medical texts deploy the language of orthodoxy and *dharma* to defend the virtues of drinking provides an alternative perspective to the more moralizing tone deployed in other sources concerning *dharma* and drinking.

Having thoroughly surveyed brewing and drinking practices in the first section, in the second section (or *Round*), which comprises the remaining chapters, the author analyses "second-order reflections" and theories about drink, primarily in pre-modern Indian religious contexts. As with the rest of the book, McHugh organizes the chapters progressively, according to complexity—from topics "that can be explained on their own to those that can be understood only in terms of previously explained topics" (163). In chapter six, the author introduces the Vedic *Sautramani* ritual before reviewing several legendary narratives about alcohol, including the story of Sura arising at the churning of the ocean, Shukra's prohibition against alcohol for Brahmins, and other tales from the *Mahabharata*, as well as the story of Balarama discovering his favourite drink, *kadambari*, from the *Harivamsha*. Accordingly, the ritual and mythological material presented in the sixth chapter sets the stage for McHugh's account of ethical and legal theories about alcohol contained in the following chapter.

In chapter seven the author first investigates drinking morality in the *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda* before transitioning to later sources like the *Mahabharata*, the *Arthashastra*, the *Nitisara*, and the *Dharmasutras*. He then considers Buddhist and Jain perspectives, drawing from sources like the *Vinaya*, the *Abhidharmakosha*, and the *Kumbha Jataka* in the case of the former, and the *Acaranga Sutra*, the *Yogashastra*, and the *Yashastilaka* for the latter. Chapter seven also examines satirical works like the *Mattavilasaprahasana* and the *Agamadambara*.

Chapter eight offers a brief account of alcohol and tantra. Given the immensity of this topic, McHugh introduces only a small sampling of sources, focusing primarily on the *Brahmayamala Tantra* and the works of Abhinavagupta, like the *Tantraloka*. Next, the author recounts the tale of the goddess Sura and her nine cups from the *Devirahasya*, as mentioned above. Finally, the chapter concludes with an excursus on the history of cannabis use in South Asia.

In the terse, ninth chapter, McHugh briefly discusses drinking practices and attitudes in early modern Sanskrit works, including the *Arkaprakasha*, the *Bhaishajyaratnavali*, the *Hamsavilasa*, and the *Rajavyavaharakosha*. The author takes note of the ways in which these sources expand earlier concepts, like *sura*, to include new intoxicants, like tobacco.

Finally, in the conclusion, or *Digestif*, McHugh offers some general observations and suggestions for future research. He begins with a disclaimer, stating that he "can't possibly suggest one main thesis about alcohol or drinking in India for the vast period covered in this book" (286). Elsewhere, the author characterizes the book as "descriptive" since it lacks a single thesis (3) and concedes that "the collection of topics" is sometimes "large and by no means coherent" (163). Indeed, transitions between texts and topics are sometimes jarring and the relationships between different examples are not always clear. Finally, as McHugh acknowledges, the book does not consider drinking in Tamil or vernacular language sources, in South Asian Islam, or in art history (3).

On the other hand, *An Unholy Brew* is much more successful when considered on its own terms: as a "rough map" (16) or "detailed survey" (2) intended to cultivate the still nascent study of alcohol and drinking in India. As the first book-length treatment of the subject, *An Unholy Brew* is a panoramic endeavour; McHugh surveys a truly substantial breadth of materials. As such, this field-defining work will serve as a much-needed point of departure for future scholarship.

An Unholy Brew will appeal to several audiences, including scholars of South Asian history and literature who are interest in premodern Indian drinking cultures; scholars of food, drinks, and drugs with an interest in South Asia; scholars of religion and ethics; and even interested non-specialists. Likewise, many readers will appreciate the appendix, an overview of modern scholarship on *soma*. Considering *soma*'s primacy in many academic discourses on drinking and intoxication in India, this is a thoughtful addition.

While the book may ultimately lack a single thesis, a recurring theme does emerge: the sheer diversity of opinions and regional variation found in the sources; no one idea ever appears to predominate to the exclusion of all others. Drinks are forbidden in some sources and praised in others; drinking is viewed as an impediment to ascetic success by some and a shortcut to enlightenment by others; some drinks are considered poison and others are medicine; for some, drinking is a public activity and for others, it is private. Ironically, *An Unholy Brew* ultimately reveals that alcohol in India has not always been regarded as such an unholy brew after all.

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Book Review

Enrico Beltrami (Forward by Leonard Fernando). *Passage to India: Abhishiktānanda and the Retrieval of the Supernatural in Roman Catholicism*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2021. Pp. 185 pages. ISBN 978-1-6667-0159-3. Price: $ 26.00.

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Henri Le Saux, later known as Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973), was a French Benedictine monk who went to India at age thirty-eight and lived there for the rest of his life, never returning to France. While remaining a Christian, he immersed himself in Hindu teachings and practices. Much has been written about his spiritual quest and his ideas on the relation of Catholicism and the form of Hinduism to which he was most connected, non-dualist or Advaita Vedanta. Interpretations have varied widely. In this finely nuanced and deeply researched study, Enrico Beltramini seeks to remedy a misleading lack in previous discussions of Abhishiktananda. He finds that writing about Abhishiktananda since his passing almost fifty years ago has gone through three phases: first, a focus on his identity as a spiritual seeker and mystic in works often written by those who knew him; second, a perception of him as a pioneer in interreligious dialogue; and third and more recently, scrutiny of his thought to assess its theological orthodoxy (Beltramini 2018). Overall, Beltramini says, the first part of Abhishiktananda's life has been neglected, making the point that "Abhishiktānanda matured his existential preoccupation in France and ...his intellectual interests and theological concerns mainly depend on this preoccupation" (12). This preoccupation was "the retrieval of the supernatural" or the recovery of a "sacramental ontology" – this was his "guiding theological intuition" which provides coherence to his thought and is a key to understanding him. As well, Beltramini states that Abhishiktananda should not be viewed as a theologian, but as a literary artist with theological interests, and that his contributions are best evaluated in this perspective.

Beltramini shows that Abhishiktananda cannot be understood apart from pre-Vatican II French Catholicism, which in turn must be seen in the context of the extreme official secularism of France in the early 20th century. He was born and raised in Brittany and entered the Benedictine Abbey of St. Anne de Kergonan in 1929 at age nineteen. At this time, as Beltramini describes, "Breton Catholicism was tormented by the secularized attack of the Third Republic and dreamed of restoring the integrity of the church, liberating it from the rule of the State" (16). Church dogma held to theological "extrinsicism," a key term in this book, meaning that the divine source of Christian revelation is entirely outside the realm of the natural. In this view the supernatural – the order of reality beyond reason and nature – is separate and self-enclosed and communicates with the natural order only by revelation coming from without. Revelation, and doctrine based on it, are not subject to confirmation by reason or any

other process of "nature." The only proper response of the faithful to this "extrinsic" teaching of the church is to believe with obedience; spiritual life should be devotional in this spirit of obedience to authority. The church had become hostile to science, to "historicism" in interpreting religion, and to modernist intellectual life in general. It was in this environment that Henri Le Saux was formed for his first thirty-eight years. Interest in the drama of his life in India may have occasioned treatments of this earlier period as merely a prelude which was then left behind, but Beltramini helpfully restores continuity and wholeness to the narrative of Abhishiktananda's life.

To this day scholars of Abhikshiktananda do not know exactly why he had been drawn to India from age twenty-four (du Boulay, 40-41). By all accounts he was an exemplary Benedictine monk. He had entered monastic life with an "irresistible call" to experience "the presence of God more immediately than anywhere else" (37) but it seems that the devotions he practiced in the abbey did not afford this experience, or not as deeply as he wished. It might be suggested that they were densely particularistic, penitential and externalized in ways that were an obstacle to the deep interiority he longed for. As well, the theology in which he was educated was one of "extrinsicism" and consciously or unconsciously (we cannot tell for lack of evidence) he wished to escape it. This is central to Beltramini's interpretation. He assembles what he calls "circumstantial" evidence while freely admitting that having more direct testimony would strengthen his thesis. Whatever the reasons, in 1944 Henri le Saux began to petition his superiors to go to India. His first requests were denied but after four years, once he began to correspond with Father Jules Monchanin, he received permission to depart for India with the purpose of helping him to establish a Christian ashram, Shantivanam, also known as Saccidananda Ashram (management of the ashram was taken over in 1968 by Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine [1906-1993]).

Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) was a brilliant theologian who instead of pursuing an academic career had gone to India in 1939 to work among Indian Christians in Tamil Nadu. In this he had been encouraged by his teacher and friend Henri de Lubac (1896-1991). De Lubac was one of the most prominent Catholic theologians of the 20th century, a Jesuit and a key figure at the Second Vatican Council (he was made Cardinal in 1983). He was a leader among theologians who opposed the alienation of the "supernatural" from nature and reason which, in their view, was making the church rigid and sterile. De Lubac was much influenced by the thought of Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), whose philosophy affirmed the necessity of the supernatural in a meaningful account of the human condition. In de Lubac's words, Blondel "launched the decisive attack on the dualist theory which was destroying Christian thought" (23). De Lubac, Monchanin and others sought to recover the supernatural by retrieving the sense of a "sacramental order of reality" or "sacramental ontology," in which the supernatural and the natural are distinct yet co-inherent and mutually participating. Following Blondel, God's self-disclosure to human persons is received in two ways: externally from God's revelation as Jesus Christ in the world and the witness of scripture, and internally by experience given by Grace. Drawing on patristic sources to recreate Christian thought, these theologians affirmed the role of human consciousness and aspiration for knowledge of God, restoring importance to experience and interiority. (It is significant that de Lubac was a friend and supporter

of Teilhard de Chardin, as a central theme in Teilhard's thought is interiority, not only of the human but of all creation.)

Arriving in India, Henri Le Saux took the name Swami Abhishiktananda. Shantivanam was to be a Christian monastery combining Benedictine monasticism with Indian ideas and practices (the missionary approach known as "inculturation") and based on a theology of 'fulfilment' of other religions by Christianity with the aim of bringing Indians to Christianity. He now learned in depth from Father Monchanin the thought of de Lubac and others which charted a path out of "extrinsicism" and to "recovery of the supernatural." In intellectual terms, this provided the means for him to forge a sacramental vision which would integrate the inner life and the outer life, contemplative practice and social concerns. At the same time, he was entering more and more deeply into Hindu practices and especially Advaita, first encountered through Ramana Maharshi at Arunachala. By his own account he experienced a life-changing awakening to the truth of Advaita as a teaching of pure Being beyond "name and form" and underwent for many years painful tension between his embrace of Advaita and his Catholic identity, at times saying he was "torn apart." He found some degree of reconciliation through early versions of religious pluralism developed with his great friend Raimón Panikkar and others in interreligious dialogues in the 1960s; the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) also played a role. By this time, he had moved away from the missionary theology of 'fulfilment' and tried to find ways to speak of both the Trinity and Advaita within the framework of sacramental ontology.

Interpretation of Abhishiktananda is impeded by the fact that he wrote in many different modalities. He kept a journal and wrote countless letters, poetry, jottings in notebooks, dialogues with fictional characters, informal reflections, some articles and theological statements – but never a systematic work. This picture is further complicated by the fact that the journal of the last several years of his life was transcribed by his disciple Marc Chaduc; some speculate that it is edited and not complete. Crucial evidence is therefore missing. Abhishiktananda did not have a taste for the sustained discipline and rigor of academic theology and wrote in a more emotional tone. Amidst these challenges, Beltramini effectively demonstrates that "sacramental ontology" is the overarching theme that gives his work a discernible coherence. His embrace of Advaita and his monastic vocation had earned him the appellation "acosmic," seemingly first used by Panikkar, but Beltramini explains how the characterization of Abhishiktananda as "acosmic" is mistaken. The term "acosmic" may in blunt language be rendered as 'world-negating' and in no way does this describe Abhishiktananda. Rather his sacramental perspective unites the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural, and prioritizes communion with others and with the cosmos.

He is to be understood, as Beltramini successfully argues, not in terms of a rupture with his formation in France but of continuity with it. He had been moulded by the dualistic "extrinsic" view of the supernatural as isolated from the world and his lifelong quest was to close this gap. He did this by constructing a "sacramental ontology" informed by his Advaitic awakening to the all-pervading divine presence, thus returning the supernatural to its true sense. He came to think of the real nature of Christ as the "I am" of John's Gospel and to view religion based on formulations as

secondary to inner realization, "awakening" to pure Being. This did not lead him, however, to abandon the particularities of Catholicism, but to his reclaiming them in a profound way. He was a monk who spent long periods alone in contemplation but was also a priest dedicated to community. As Beltramini rightly insists, the fact that as a priest he celebrated the Eucharist regularly to the end of his life, even when on solitary retreat (as he adopted Indian elements into the liturgy) is irrefutable evidence of his commitment to the recovery of the supernatural in the sense of "a sacramental ontology" – and not to an "acosmic" flight to the formless as "*neti, neti*." Beltramini summarizes his vision: "In his universe, the supernatural erupts into the natural to the point that landscapes both symbolize and contribute to a larger world of grace;" he notes that "the term *sacramental* refers to the embodiment of the transcendent in the immanent, the extraordinary in the ordinary...it is the infinite embodying itself in daily acts of eucharistic love" (142, 147), echoing much contemporary eco-theology. Finally, Beltramini recommends that we approach Abhishiktananda not as a professional theologian dealing formally with doctrine, but rather as an artist, a writer whose achievement is to re-enliven the sacramental imagination in ways that can nourish the life of the church through the art form Beltramini calls "myth," construed as the making of a worldview through image and metaphor, within which we can recover true ways of seeing.

Beltramini's interpretation of Abhishiktananda is compelling and his proposal that sacramental ontology is the guiding theological theme of his life's work is convincing. This book will be of interest initially to those concerned with Catholic theology; it does not deal in detail or comparatively with Hindu philosophy and is not a basic introduction to Abhishiktananda. For scholarship it should prove to be an invaluable contribution with lasting influence, an influence one hopes will extend to less specialized treatments. Beltramini mentions that "This is ideally the first of a two-book series on the mid-twentieth-century project of contemplative mission pursued by Jules Monchanin and Abhishiktananda that culminated in the establishment of the Saccidananda Ashram at Shantivanam" (xv), and one may look forward with anticipation to this second book expanding his account of this important and fascinating subject.

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Book Review + Interview

Jon Keune. *Shared Food, Shared Devotion: Equality and the Bhakti-Caste Question in Western India.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 332. ISBN 9780197574836. Price: $99.00.

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Feasts of the Unexpected

On the relationship between bhakti and caste, Bhimrao Ambedkar was of two minds. On the one hand, the preeminent twentieth-century critic of caste proffered a categorical judgement of poet-saints in the vernacular devotional traditions popularly known as the bhakti movement. "The saints have never, according to my study, carried on a campaign against Caste and Untouchability," he wrote. "They did not preach that all men were equal. They preached that all men were equal in the eyes of God—a very different and a very innocuous proposition, which nobody can find difficult to preach or dangerous to believe in" (Ambedkar 2014: 336). Yet on the other hand, Ambedkar chose to dedicate his landmark treatise *The Untouchables* to saints in that very tradition: "Inscribed to the memory of Nandnar, Ravidas, Chokhamela, three renowned saints who were born among the Untouchables and who by their piety and virtue won the esteem of all" (Ambedkar 2008: 3). Unconditional in his assessment of bhakti's failure to challenge structures of oppression, the anti-caste theorist nonetheless found himself drawn to saints at the heart of the bhakti canon. What was it about saints and their stories—about the narrative universe of medieval and early modern bhakti—that somehow appealed to Ambedkar, even as he remained fundamentally sceptical of the social value of bhakti traditions?

In *Shared Devotion, Shared Food*, historian of religion Jon Keune offers a sustained, deeply-researched dialogue with Ambedkar on this ambivalence, a probing of the tension between repudiation and embrace of bhakti that is not only an under-explored element in the influential thinker's oeuvre but also a source of friction within the Dalit movement ever since. In fact, Ambedkar's dilemma haunts multiple fields of scholarship as well—history, anthropology and religious studies fall into clamorous disagreement when they attempt to answer what Keune identifies as a "deceptively simple question… did bhakti traditions promote social equality? Or more elaborately, when bhakti poets taught that God welcomes all people's devotion, did this inspire followers to combat social inequalities based on caste?" (p. 2). The question, the reader soon finds, is anything but simple. Keune adopts two broad approaches in tackling the complexity of what he calls the 'bhakti-caste question'. One is to historicize the question itself. "The negative account of how bhakti traditions failed to overcome caste in the past is one variation of a broader historical-sociological theme about what religion does for non-elites: it promises hope and may deliver compassion,

but it ultimately fails to transform society and these people's status within it" (p. 27). Contending that this influential framing of bhakti speaks more to the prevalence of Marxian tropes and modern assumptions in the prevailing historiography than it does to the lifeworld of the people about whom it is ostensibly concerned, Keune turns critical attention to the political and intellectual conditions under which it began to make sense, in late 19th century colonial India, to adopt such a framing in the first place.

The second approach is to carefully examine, in a range of Marathi-language bhakti texts from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, stories of transgressive, inter-caste intimacy mediated by food. The core cluster of these narratives centre on Eknath—a sixteenth century brahmin of Paithan whose poetic corpus and hagiographical representation hold a prominent place in Marathi bhakti cultural production—and his controversial feasts with Dalits. These belong to a class of food-related devotional narratives—an entire subgenre of bhakti literature, one could argue, notable also in north Indian languages—to which Keune applies the analytic of 'critical commensality'. Why the focus on food? In the tradition of anthropologist R.S. Khare's study of 'gastrosemantics', Keune notes that food appears in Hindu texts "as the substrate of reality, a component of hospitality, a concern for purity laws, an instrument for extreme test cases, and a medium for conveying ritual offering and blessing" (p. 119). Further, "food is suspended between basic dualities… that connect the material (*laukika*) and spiritual (*adhyatmika*) realms and thereby structure Hindu worlds" (Ibid). In the Marathi bhakti narratives at the heart of the book, the exchange and ingestion of food anchor sociological abstractions in that most palpable of empirical grounds, the body.

Food stories, it turns out, are also feasts of the unexpected. These are not anodyne vignettes of bhaktas peaceably dining together—at least not the eighteenth and nineteenth century versions of the stories that Keune recounts. Rather, the reader encounters stories in which Eknath consumes dog's milk, half-eaten food and already-chewed *paan* taken from the mouth of his apparently Muslim sadguru (guru's guru); in which Eknath drinks the saliva and cleans the excrement of his guru Janardana; in which Dalits discourse on their hunger while brahmin ancestral spirits become living Dalits in order to eat Eknath's rice; in which brahmins plot violence against Eknath and assault his servant; and in which Eknath rolls in plates of half-eaten food left behind by guests at his feasts. If twentieth century representations have primed us to think of bhakti stories as edificatory tales of social inclusion—as parables of the proto-nation—the gallery of Marathi sources though which Keune leads us suggests something stranger, less accessible to modern habits of thought, something both more ambiguous and more transgressive. The stories at the heart of the book sometimes seem to have it both ways, simultaneously affirming and violating brahminical order through narrative devices in which Keune detects a 'strategic ambiguity'. In many tales, though, the exchange of food and other bodily substance across caste and community lines reveals forms of intimacy fundamentally—even spectacularly—at odds with the dominant social order.

But do these forms of intimacy constitute *equality*? Keune's commitment to the Marathi vernacular and its speakers in history—especially to lesser-known, non-

metropolitan writers and activists whose lack of English (unlike, say, Tilak or Ambedkar) have led them to be comparatively neglected in scholarly accounts—leads him to focus on the local, emic terms applied to the social relations depicted in bhakti narratives. These terms—*samata* (sameness), *samadrsti* (impartial vision), *sarkha* (like, similar), *jani-janardana* (god in/ among people), and others—have conceptual genealogies and theological moorings altogether distinct from that of 'equality' in English, even as they share with it degrees of semantic overlap. In a remarkable exercise in trilingual (Sanskrit-Marathi-English) conceptual history, Keune tracks usages of these terms in key writings in western India between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, asking what happens when Thomas Paine-inflected instances of the anglophone equality concept begin to circulate alongside Upanishadic non-dualist ideas modulated by popular Varkari deployment in the Marathi countryside. What conceptual grafting, displacing, and reshuffling takes place? And in the late decades of the late nineteenth century when *samata* and *equality* begin to be treated as synonyms, in what ways does this newly forged equivalence lead to misleading projections of modern categories onto premodern pasts, or to the erasure or obfuscation of earlier social imaginations? Parts of the discussion could benefit from a more explicit acknowledgement that the meaning of English 'equality' was no less subject to flux and shot through with contradiction—acute contradiction in the colonial context—than its Marathi counterparts in this period. But the nuanced explication of vernacular concepts in context is dazzling. One would like to see more of this kind of careful conceptual history in the historiography of South Asian religions.

Indeed, *Shared Devotion, Shared Food* raises at least as many questions as it answers, opening lines of enquiry that promise to stimulate debate in the several fields in which it intervenes. The conceptual history discussion begs comparison with neighbouring regions and languages—with the oeuvre of Ravidas, for example, who sings of bhaktas as *barabar*, breast-to-breast, a Persian-derived concept-image that would eventually come to be translated as "equal." The critical commensality analytic likewise invites application in parallel studies of popular religion in other regions. Though understated in style, Keune poses questions as original as they are at times provocative. Were Dalit saints like Chokhamela and Ravidas in fact living historical persons, or are they better understood as generative literary tropes? Before the *jani janardana* concept (again, god in/ among people) was co-opted by Hindu nationalism, what did it mean for centuries of everyday people in Maharashtrian towns and villages? If Ambedkar had been raised in the Hindi belt where the iconoclastic, stand-alone Kabir—rather than the humble, Varkari-encompassed Chokhamela—bore the mantle of paradigmatic subaltern bhakta, might the Dalit movement have followed an entirely different trajectory vis-à-vis bhakti traditions? If scholars were to turn from questions of belief and belonging to questions of eating and shared saliva, how might the story of South Asian religions be retold?

Shared Food, Shared Devotion is a fascinating book. Erudite yet accessible, it should appeal to students and scholars alike. Confronting the bhakti-caste question with which Ambedkar wrestled nearly a century ago, the book offers no easy answers, no pat affirmations or repudiations of bhakti 'equality'. Rather, its deep dive into precolonial Marathi bhakti narratives reveals forms of fraught inter-caste intimacy that

challenge modern expectations and elude prevailing scholarly frameworks, raising questions that should stimulate debate for years to come.

Interview

Throughout the book you draw attention to non-elite, often rustic bhaktas whose creative endeavours in the vernacular—poetry, hagiography, theatre, community service—have been overshadowed in scholarly representation by their urban and often anglophone counterparts, yet whose work arguably reached and reflected the values of a wider audience than that of the latter. How does the bhakti-caste question look and sound different when viewed from the mofussil and heard in Marathi?

This question is harder that it may seem to answer confidently with precision. As I got further into researching Marathi bhakti and the Varkari tradition, it became increasingly clear how deeply rooted published scholarship was, solely in textual analysis. Ethnographic work on the Varkaris as a living tradition has been remarkably limited. One reason for this may lie with the hurdle of learning Marathi (a lesser taught Indian language that still lack robust learning materials of even its most relatively standardized form) and then try reckoning with the local dialects that people in rural areas regularly use. And due to differences of caste, class, interest, and other reasons, lifelong Marathi-speaking scholars also have not carried out extensive fieldwork on the living Varkari tradition. As a result, the translated work of Irawati Karve and D. B. Mokashi, based on their respective singular experiences with the pilgrimage, have filled the gap in English readers' imaginations about the Varkaris. In my opinion, although it was published over fifty years ago, Bahirat and Bhalerav's *Varkari Sampraday: Uday va Vikas* (Varkari Tradition: Emergence and Development) remains the unparalleled source of local knowledge about the tradition's recent history and practice that deserves more attention than it has received (Bahirat and Bhalerav 1972 [1988]).

To observe how the bhakti-caste question looks in the Maharashtrian countryside would require more extensive ethnographic engagement with a range of Varkari participants—not only local group leaders (*maharaj*s) but the diverse everyday people who join the pilgrimage annually or occasionally. Unless I've overlooked something that was published recently, I think it's still not widely understood what 'being a Varkari' even means to people during the large majority of the year when they are not on pilgrimage. And of course, there are a wide diversity of views and relationships (and non-relationships) to bhakti in the countryside in Marathi; the bhakti-caste question is not limited to only how self-identifying Varkaris perceive it.

Based on my limited ethnographic study and interviews, the bhakti-caste question (which admittedly is difficult to ask people about in ways that yield more than pat responses) is managed on a local basis, reflecting local traditions and politics. The popular image of Indian village culture as socially rigid and timeless is not always helpful in this respect. On an individual level, people are always engaging in micro-navigations, evaluating how to

relate to each other, who can be challenged or appeased, and judging where, when, how, and whether to push boundaries. As decentralized as the Varkari tradition is, we should expect to see people on the ground improvising, including among Varkari leaders and their local constituencies. We see already in the hagiographical sources that there was no single, univocal answer to the bhakti-caste question historically.

At the same time, Dr. Ambedkar's legacy especially among Dalit communities and the effects of increased assertion among non-Dalit neighbours since the late 1970s (viewing the Marathwada caste riots as a reference point) has brought the bhakti-caste question into sharper relief in the countryside. A sizable contingent of Dalits has lost patience with what I called the "ideology of inclusive difference" and strategic ambiguity in Varkari hagiography on the bhakti-caste question, whereas other Dalits (who are not well represented in research on Maharashtra) have continued engaging with bhakti on their own terms. But to assess all of this would require more ethnography to know for certain. I'm cautious about speculating, since I anticipate that the reality is more complex than I can imagine.

Key to your intervention in the historiography is advancing a Weberian attentiveness to religious motivation in place of what you portray as a prevailing Marxian tendency to treat religion as epiphenomenal. While we could argue about the reading of Marx in play here, your point is well taken that in "a Weberian bidirectional view, it is at least conceivable that bhakti-infused concepts could reshape adherents' attitudes toward caste, even if it was rare and difficult" (p. 214). To follow Weber, though, is surely to ask how religious motivations relate to the needs and interests of historically determinate social groups divided by status and occupation. How, then, did Eknath's spectacular hospitality relate to his position in the agrarian political economy in early modern western India, with its distinct caste-based organization of land, labour and food? What is the source of all the rice that the brahmin protagonist so abundantly shares within and across caste lines, in stories that simultaneously emphasize Dalit hunger? The question is not only one of contextualizing food stories in a political economy in which, as agrarian historians have shown, starvation often served as a means of labour control; it is also a matter of making sense of Eknath's anomalous status and behaviour. Unlike other brahmins, he is an annadata, a giver rather than receiver of food; the stories cast him in the role of landlord and jajman. Might this help explain how Eknath seems to serve the same structural function in Maharashtrian bhakti as does the queen of Chittor and the king of Kashi in the hagiographies of Ravidas further north—the landholder whose brahmin dependents are outraged when he/she begins to patronize Dalits?

I referred to Weber and Marx at the start of the book mainly to offer an on-ramp that would bring a wider audience to engage the Marathi materials that are at the heart of the book. My main focus was always on untangling the knotted question of bhakti and caste by referring to emic Marathi terms rather than western theoretical ones. To that end, I did observe how modern authors who wrote about Marathi bhakti referred to Marx, which is a limited

subset of Marxian interpretative possibilities. More sophisticated and illuminating ways exist for drawing on Marxian thought for analysing religion (indeed, Ambedkar himself does this in his later years) than these 20th century scholars of Marathi bhakti did. I limited myself to reckoning with their interpretations. If my reading of those authors writing about Marathi bhakti was off, then I certainly want to be corrected. And I am eager to see how others may bring Marxist thought to bear on religion and bhakti more broadly in the future, beyond only how past authors of the bhakti-caste question have done.

Eknath's religious motivations, status, and occupation in their historical political economy is a great and important question. I too would like to understand this more clearly, but the major obstacle is how to gain reliable historical knowledge about it. The great historian of Maharashtra, A. R. Kulkarni, pointed out that by the early 18th century, *inam*s and *sanad*s from the Peshwa and Hyderabad Archives show that the descendants of Eknath had been granted tax revenue from several hamlets for the support of Eknath's temples in Paithan (Kulkarni 1965), but this was already over a century after Eknath's death, and the patronage was designated toward honouring his legacy. I have yet to find anything that challenge Kulkarni's conclusion that there is no surviving archival or inscriptional evidence of Eknath's own historical circumstances.

Bhakti poetry and hagiography has sometimes been recruited as sources of historical information about saints like Eknath, but due to the complex and usually unclear transmission history of this literature, most contemporary scholars of bhakti nowadays (myself included) read it more for what it reveals about discursive representation (Keune 2019). The consistency of these representations suggests that Eknath belonged at least for a time to the corps of Marathi-speaking brahmans who worked in the service of Muslim rulers in the various Deccan sultanates (Keune 2015), but no other known extant evidence that I know of confirms this. It is also notable that no stories about Eknath comment on the economic conditions that supported what seems to have been a fairly stable life, yet there is no suggestion of financial hardship. In short, it appears likely that his was a family of some means, although we know little for certain about the details.

In terms of Eknath being an *annadata* or giver of food, this does apply to some stories about him. The most elaborate story about this, in which ritually sanctioned food intended for brahmins is given to stigmatized interlopers, Eknath functions as a householder who is wealthy enough to sponsor a *shraddha* ritual. The story hinges, however, on him breaking convention to share food with people who the ritual did not authorize as worthy recipients, and when he does so, the hagiographers sometimes cite the dharmashastric injunction toward hospitality. Furthermore, the most controversial and popular story about Eknath hinges on *receiving* and eating food made by Dalits. So far as I'm aware, there is no parallel story about the queen of Chittor eating food from Ravidas. Although the narrative structure that involves a disparity of privilege and means appears similar between Eknath and the queen of Chittor, the stories' gastrosematics work differently. Depending on the

rendition of the story, Eknath directly transgresses caste by eating the Dalit couple's food, he performs the divine role of accepting an offering made by people with pure hearts, he sets up a miracle in which God appears and directly accepts the food, some combination of these, or something else. All of these possibilities are based on him receiving food, not giving it.

In times like ours, when Narendra Modi is shown on television washing the feet of Dalit sanitation workers at the Kumbh Mela, and when Rahul Gandhi makes headlines by sharing meals cooked by Dalit laborers in villages of Uttar Pradesh, one could imagine several ways of thinking about the contemporary relevance of inter-caste contact and commensality stories in early modern bhakti literature. How would you say that Eknath and his infamous meals speak to our present moment?

As my perspective has been shaped (and limited) by investigating the hagiographical stories, I'd be most interested to hear what other people think about this! In the book's final chapter, I note the tactic of 'lunch diplomacy' and efforts by politicians to physically demonstrate their readiness to disregard untouchability, in efforts to show solidarity and thereby secure votes. We could perhaps read stories of Eknath's commensality as an example of political theatre; politics in some form always shape interpersonal and social interactions. I may have missed it, but I am not aware that contemporary political acts of lunch diplomacy have tended to elicit much outrage or blowback from orthodox and conservative quarters, which would be different from the way that the stories about Eknath unfold. Resistance by antagonistic brahmans is essential to the bhakti stories; the stories would bear no punch or interest if they had been just reports of an everyday meal. In this sense, the stories about Eknath may speak more to a different time and context where caste hierarchy was more overtly announced and enforced (contrasted with the often more implicit and indirect ways in which caste is enforced today). In light of political tactics for pandering, we might suspect that the stories of inter-caste commensality were always manipulative, utopian fables that were meant to distract attention from social problems more than transform them, and thus stories about Eknath's meals are irrelevant today. As I write in the book's conclusion, I'm certainly under no illusion that eating together more will magically resolve the world's social inequities.

There is also no escaping the fact that sharing food in India at all raises questions about group dominance and marginalization. If people eat together, who gets to choose what kinds of food are to be shared, who concedes (or not) to others' dietary restrictions, and why do they decide as they do? Opting for a vegetarian menu free of garlic and onions that would be in theory most accessible to everyone effectively requires that some communities leave behind some of their customary dishes (especially meat, including beef) in favour of foods that other communities eat all the time and thus do not have to adapt. Caste figures into these choices in India, but the question of how different groups' particular dietary concerns shape inter-group commensal events is common around the world.

Yet I think that Banu Bargu makes a good point by reminding people (she's

speaking especially to colleagues on the left) not to ignore the 'micro-political tactic' of eating together as a constructive activity. Shared food and common meals with diverse people, especially if it becomes a habit and is repeated, can have incremental effects. There is something prosocial and interactive about it, which is more integrally connected than advocating for change at a distance or abstractly theorizing about inequities. Anyone technically could challenge themselves to go beyond their comfort zones and try to contribute even a little bit toward building community and new kinds of social bonds. At the very least, Eknath's meals could serve as a reminder of the deeper significance to sharing food, including in everyday encounters that appear so mundane as to be inconsequential. I have certainly become more mindful of this in my daily life than I was before researching the materials for this book.

Along the lines of wondering how Eknath's meals may relate to the present, some readers may ask why I sought to balance understanding Varkari ways of handling caste with Ambedkar's critique, rather than simply endorsing Ambedkar alone and giving up on the bhakti-caste question completely. It is a delicate balance that I anticipate some readers–Ambedkarites, Varkaris, and unaffiliated scholars—will find overly judicious and even untenable. Yet I think it is important to hold open the possibility that people have found equitable answers to the bhakti-caste question (however fleeting and incomplete as they may have been) and they may do so in the future, even while fully acknowledging the systemic, inherently conservative social challenges involved. Foreclosing on the possibility of human creativity and the desire to change in order to become more equitable seems intellectually unnecessary and unwise.

The book weaves together conceptual history, media studies and the literary analysis of Marathi texts to persuasive effect. Then late in the final chapter you offer a passing observation based on meals you shared with Varkari pilgrims while accompanying them on an eighteen-day journey on foot from Paithan to Pandharpur. It's an understated and all-too-brief glimpse of the ethnographic methods that further enrich the research informing the study, and even in its brevity it upends scholarly truisms that have been repeated about the Pandharpur pilgrimage since D.B. Mokashi's 1964 novel. One would like to hear more from the participant-observer. If you were to choose a vignette, conversation or interaction from your participation in Varkari life that, in hindsight, speaks to the themes of the book, what would it be?

If I had been able to return to India frequently and carry out more ethnography beyond the main research that I did in 2008-2010, I would have incorporated more ethnography into the book. I was also self-conscious that, being trained more as a textualist and historian, I strove to be very careful (some might say too careful) about representing living people, especially given the difficult question at the book's core. Yet, I did share more reflections as a *vari* participant-observer in a book chapter published in 2013 as part of a volume that introduced readers to living traditions (Keune 2013). There, I described a powerful experience that still sticks with me, as a fellow pilgrim revolutionized my understanding of

how the pilgrims were viewed by local supporters.

This took place after we had been walking together for ten days, and the small group of a dozen pilgrims I was with had built up a rapport. One late afternoon, three of us were walking through a colony of farmers' huts on a stretch of road filled with potholes and crumbling pavement. One was a middle-aged pilgrim who hadn't struck me as overly pious, and the other was a man in his twenties who had undertaken the pilgrimage with a vow to give up chewing tobacco. As often happened along the way, some local farmers spotted us and called for us to join them for tea. We still had at least an hour more to walk before reaching the place where we would spend the night, and I was concerned about reaching our destination before nightfall. So, I gently suggested to my companions that we diplomatically decline the farmers' invitation and push on. The older pilgrim disagreed and said we should stop. I warned that further delays would mean that we end up walking on the dangerously rough road in the dark, and I pointed out that we had already accepted several such invitations to rest and drink tea earlier that day. His response surprised me: "We're doing *vari*. These farmers feel that we are God walking on the road. It is our duty (*dharma*) to allow them to show devotion." So, we accepted the farmers' invitation.

After finishing the tea and snacks, as we got up and prepared to leave, our hosts knelt and touched our feet, which humbled me even more. Of course, the pilgrims were relying on people they met along the way to provide them sustenance, but it was clear in the faces of these farmers and other supporters that they derived something quite important out of the transaction as well. That night as we continued our journey in the dark, I mulled over how, even if only for this short time, shared food had facilitated a connection. Small everyday experiences like this may not overhaul everyone's social relations, and events like these pilgrimages are exceptional, outside normal time and normal social relations.

But in villages that the pilgrimage passed through I witnessed hosts and pilgrimages maintaining inter-caste connections year after year, staying in touch outside the pilgrimage, and looking forward to seeing each other again. So, I think it is overly dismissive to imagine that such events of shared food leave people—who were formerly strangers—completely unaffected and unmoved by the experiences.

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Book Review + Interview

Venugopal Maddipati. *Gandhi and Architecture: A Time for Low-Cost Housing*. London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xxi+202. ISBN 9780367199456. Price: $158.94.

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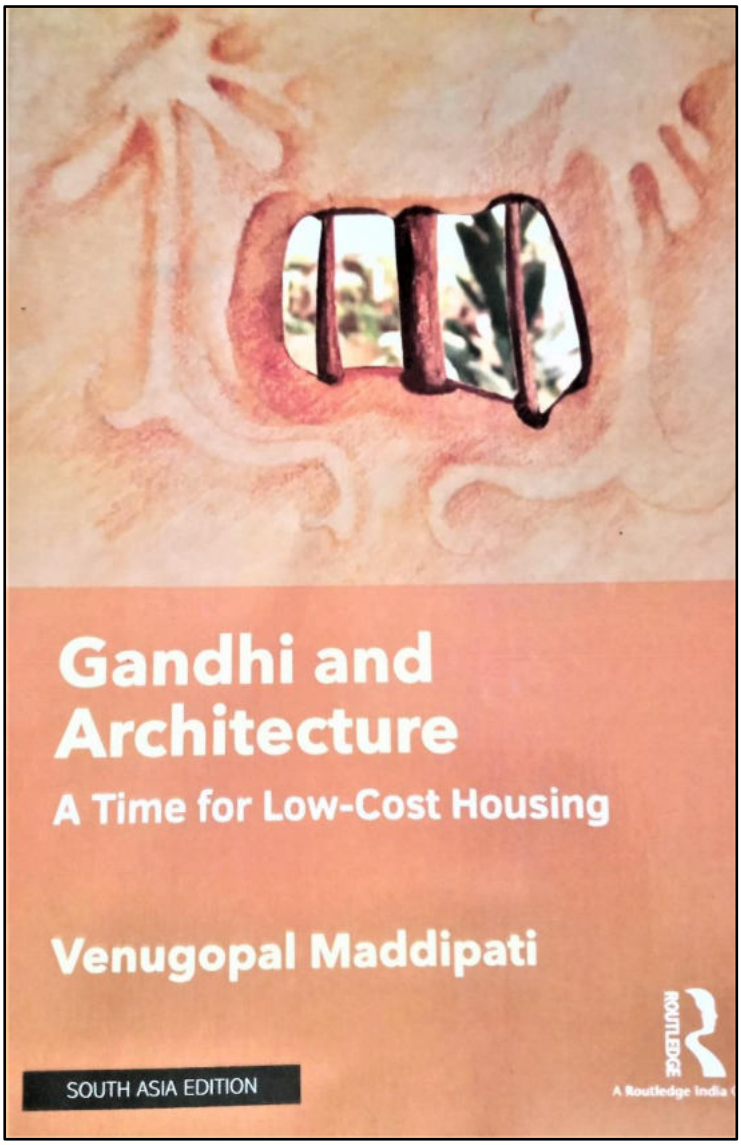

Jacket of 'Gandhi and Architecture', artwork and courtesy Venugopal Maddipati

Most of us, who have grown up in India, in the last decades of the 20th century, have known of a Gandhi, who primarily dwelt in the realm of ideas, especially political ideas of Satyagraha that were pivotal to the Indian nationalist struggle. Though Gandhi is sharply criticized from an Ambedkarite standpoint (cf. Roy 2014: 17-179 for a detailed outline of the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate), this critique is nevertheless, still intellectual. Venugopal Maddipati, an architect and historian, a brilliant young scholar of tremendous erudition, has initiated a new, cutting-edge project in this book *Gandhi and Architecture* that reveals to readers a Gandhi, who is reflected and refracted through ideas about home-building and architecture. The book describes how Gandhi-refracted becomes extended to the agenda of nation-making, that is conflated with low-cost home-building for the poor – an adaptation central to postcolonial citizenship-making. All those, hitherto organized in separate communities, considered outside the boundary of reformed Hindu citizenship in 1948 (when Gandhi died), used Gandhi's architecture, as Maddipati shows, when applying his model to their own journey of self-forming as home-building citizens and national-inhabitants.

A man is certainly known by the house he builds and keeps in this context, and Maddipati's book goes a step further in demonstrating how even national policies may emulate a man's home, and through it, his personal and religious ideas to reproduce and regenerate a timeless model of a nation – transforming the home-builder into a nation-builder. This domain of metaphor merged with action provides citizens with moral and religious safety, while physically transforming private space into a static and public, nationalist domain that draws on the model of a timeless past. This process, in turn, transforms inhabitants into a special kind of citizen, embodying a timeless history that consolidates their modern/ regional/ linguistic identity.

Maddipati draws meticulously on archival data, primary texts of the late Mughal period, and combines it with in-depth ethnography, carried out with the Marathi and Telegu-speaking *Kolam Adivasi*s of present-day Central-Eastern Maharashtra. In addition, he draws upon existing secondary sources, and on Indian intellectual history, combined with nationalist and architecture discourse that delves into Gandhi's Hindu religiosity that undergirded his architectural preoccupations in the mid-1930s. Seeing Gandhi through an architectural lens constitutes a novel way of confronting a different and yet familiar Gandhi, who was compellingly religious, and caste-conscious. As already mentioned, the monograph does not stop with Gandhi, but continues to argue about how Gandhi's architecture reconstitutes itself as a universal paradigm of low-cost housing in post-Independent India. Examining the legacy of Gandhi's conservative and exclusive conception of religion expressed in architectural traditions for his own times, made relevant for the times that were beyond him, *Gandhi and Architecture* invites us to take a closer look at our own aesthetics, as we choose the low-rise, earthen, and ecological as sustainable tropes of modern Indian nation-making. Indian nation-making through the Gandhian paradigm has, of course also, speedily become a commercial brand in contemporary India that keeps alive a post-facto, powerful Gandhi, whose image as a nationalist, humble Hindu leader competes with none other than the last Mughal emperor of Delhi, Bahadur Shah Zafar. The Rajghat in Delhi that was built in Zafar's times was where Gandhi was cremated in 1948, and Rajghat is where Gandhi's *samadhi* remains physically and emotionally entrenched, architecturally re-enlivened to keep the moment of his cremation alive. This re-enlivening serves to emplace Zafar's previous association with Rajghat, and in the process, produces the Gandhi-ethos as eternal and timeless. As Maddipati puts it:

> The book argues that the present of a Gandhian low-cost architecture of finitude inaugurated in 1936 endures, albeit in a secular sense, to this day and refuses historicizing (p. xxi).

The preface begins with describing the mid-1930s – a time when British spiritualist Madeline Slade first built (1936-1937) a low-cost hut (*Adi Niwas*) for Gandhi in the village of Segaon, in the Wardha district of central-eastern Maharashtra. This hut, as the book argues, constituted a turning-point, or rather, a beginning point of a distinct tradition of Gandhian low-cost home architecture, informed by Gandhi's own beliefs in the *varnashramadharma* – an ancient idea of hierarchically organizing society through notions about caste-identity, caste-pride, and caste-dignity. *Gandhi and Architecture* is divided into six chapters with an additional introduction (*Introduction: the enduring present*) that outlines the book's primary conundrum: of how Slade's low-cost

architecture, based on Gandhi's explicit demands, persisted over decades, and was remade and reimagined anew as a new artifact each time it was deployed. The first chapter (*An architecture of finitude: Segaon, 1936-1937*) examines how Slade's Gandhian hut was predicated on the emergence of a new, pious Gandhi, who wanted to fulfil his ideas of deliberate self-limiting, framed by the *varanashramadharma*. As mentioned above, Maddipati describes how Gandhian low-cost housing was primarily an architecture of 'finitude', producing a space that was characterized by finite boundaries, and constraints and limits that reflected Gandhi's own withdrawal from political life in the mid-1930s. This finitude highlighted the religious importance he gave to staying within the boundaries of his 'proper' place in society, dictated by religion and caste. The finitude of the home was, hence, an extension of Gandhi's own religious conception and practice of finitude, exemplified by place-boundedness, self-sacrifice, self-restraint, and a place-appropriate life (p.31). Maddipati describes a time after 1935 when Gandhi

> Embraced, at the time, with newfound intensity, a human religion: *varanashramadharma* – a caste-based system of social stratification in South Asia, in which *Kshatriya*s or warrior-like humans engaged in acts of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation (p. 4).

Gandhi felt strongly about the *Kshatriya* spirit that entailed readiness to sacrifice the self and limit human action, a notion that emerged from an idea of religiosity itself, that constituted a way of limiting human action:

> It would appear that in Gandhi's imagination, it was not so much a celestial, non-human being that piously sacrificed itself or forcefully withdrew into absolute nothingness; rather, it was, in a more limited sense, the spirit of the *Kshatriya* – a warrior who was one of the four varnas or castes in *varanashramadharma* – that led people to limit themselves to their own supposedly proper place of difficulties and sacrifice themselves in the face of danger. While previously Gandhi may have imagined an infinitely extended non-violent soul-force that compelled all living and non-living beings to withdraw into absolute passivity, now, in 1935, it seemingly fell in a more limited sense upon human *Kshatriya*s to embody the spirit of non-violence by sacrificing and withdrawing into absolute passivity (p.32).

This drive of finitude, expressed in low-cost housing architecture, soon became an extended moment in time "The architectural morphology of finitude itself, however, endures, indefinitely in a state of relative sameness, almost as if the early years of Gandhi's stay in Segaon never did come to an end" (pp. 4-5). Gandhian ideas of finitude endured beyond his death and produced a universal timelessness that could not be penetrated through by mundane chronology. The second chapter (*The Present endures: a late-colonial Gandhian architecture for a post-colonial age at the low-cost housing exhibition of 1954*) demonstrates how Gandhian low-cost housing architecture never entirely emerged as a historical entity. Expressed in the event of making a life-size replica of Gandhi's hut (Bapu Kutir) in Segaon that was presented at an international low-cost housing exhibition in Delhi in 1954, Maddipati explores how organizers of the exhibition saw the hut as a solution to the housing exigencies of

post-Partition refugees from Pakistan in Delhi – an endeavour, wholly impersonal and general in its separateness from Gandhi's personal religious inclinations in the mid-1930s:

> Gandhi's hut in Segaon, if not the very space of that village, may have been properly given in the mid nineteen thirties, to visitors, as his own place of extreme, self-sacrificial religiosity. And yet, the manner in which the plan of that was presented in the souvenir booklet of the low-cost housing exhibition in Delhi in 1954 would indicate that the proper nature of the reality that accounted for the presence of Bapu Kuti within the premises of the exhibition was not so much an individual, religious one. Rather, the proper nature of the reality that accounted for that structure was to be established by stepping beyond individuality (p. 90).

The third chapter (*Urbanizing finitude: for what reason must a vernacular architecture die? Charles Correa, Gandhi, India: circa 1974-2006*) examines the housing and architectural discourse of Indian and Gandhian architect Charles Correa in the mid-1970s, that saw him attempting to position Gandhi's idea of housing that was originally planned for a rural scenario into an urban housing setting. The chapter explores how Correa saw Gandhi's ideas of finitude as a potential that would lend itself to seeking a solution, not just to rural or refugee housing problems, but to general urban housing problems in post-Independent India in general. While the fourth chapter (*The house that necessity built: ecology, economy, customization and architecture in the global south; Wardha: 1978-1998*) investigates specific designs within Gandhian housing structures from the 1970s like the conical-tile-vaulted-roof, architecturally perfected by the Gandhian Centre of Science for Villages (CSV) in Wardha as a presentist Gandhian architectural style, the fifth chapter (*Regionalizing limits; "The Wardha House," language, identity and environment in Wagdara: a Kolam village*) continues with the same theme of Gandhian CSV construction in Wardha in the 1990s. This chapter is especially interesting for the way Maddipati analyses how the *Kolam Adivasi* community in the region have adapted to CSV low-cost architecture, even though this architecture is inconsequential to their present-day issues of survival, and to the preservation of cultural heritage. Based on in-depth ethnographic analysis with the *Kolam Adivasi* in Wagdara, who have adapted to CSV Gandhian huts, Maddipati examines how the *Kolam* ascribed the architectural grid plan of CSV huts to the will of a *Dev* (a deity) that was imposed upon the community:

> Moreover, the location of the new village itself had been divined by the spirit medium, who, for his part, was informed by the ghosts of the various directions about the feasibility of the new village layout provided by the CSV (p.178).

Maddipati argues how the *Kolami* acceptance of CSV villages served to organize them within a compact regional radius, as they migrated to Gandhian villages from older villages. This reflects processes, Maddipati argues, of regional consolidation that further amalgamates *Kolam Adivasi*s into a linguistically unified group, and as citizens that are now included within the nationalist ethos through Gandhi's religious ideas of Kshatriya self-limiting finitude, self-sacrifice, and its refraction in low-cost housing.

The final conclusion chapter (*Afterword*) is the most poignant, and written almost in one breath, as Maddipati returns to Delhi's Rajghat, where Gandhi was cremated in 1948. Describing how Gandhi's cremation remains alive through commemoratory practices, the cremation from 1948 is in fact constantly invoked in the way Gandhi's *samadhi* is architecturally planned, characterized by Gandhi's own values of simplicity and finitude that took centre stage, harking to his pious disposition: "We continue to live in the present moment of Slade's creation of a hut for Gandhi in Segaon in the mid nineteen thirties" (p.191). It is also here, in this last chapter that we glimpse Maddipati's own emotions, as he remembers the last true king of Delhi – the Raja of the Rajghat, Bahadur Shah Zafar, during whose reign the *ghat* was built:

> Surely, then, the Raja of the sovereign of Rajghat *Darwaza*, was nobody else but Bahadur Shah Zafar, the emperor of all Hindustan. Rajghat belonged, one assumes in the strictest sense, in the present time of Bahadur Shah Zafar (pp. 199-200).

This older history of Zafar is superimposed upon, replaced and emplaced by Bapu's Rajghat that obliterate the past before him. It is through the very processes of emplacement that memorializes and keeps Bapu's cremation alive as a symbol of nationalist Hindu life, lived in finitude, and with a self-sacrificing, caste consciousness. The *ghat*'s prehistory that was at the helm of the 1857 uprising, has mostly been forgotten with the British dethroning Zafar after the defeat of the uprising in 1857:

> It is here, in 1857, at the bathing *ghat* of the Rajghat Darwaza, at a short distance from what is today known as the Sunehri masjid, that *Baghi Sawar*, or rebel cavalrymen, had marched into the then British-requisitioned city of Shahjahanabad (p.192).

Gandhi and Architecture is a book of significant interest to architects, and to historians of architecture, scholars researching memory, culture, space, and the production of modern institutions, religion and caste in contemporary India. While reiterating Gandhi's importance as a philosopher and nationalist leader, this book provides rare insight into Gandhi's religious and emotional life that saw him limiting his bodily and physical space to a caste-allocated 'proper' place. Gandhi's 'propriety' constituted a cornerstone of his *Kshatriya* spirit of self-sacrifice, defined by *varanashramadharma* and this self-sacrifice saw itself transformed into a nationalist architectural ethic that came to dominate the values of low-cost home-making in post-Independence India.

Interview

All through the reading of your brilliant analysis of Gandhi's finitude, and Kshatriya *renunciation, I kept thinking about 'romance'. What motivated Gandhi so urgently towards the path of self-imposed constraint, physical suffering, and withdrawal, despite health breakdowns? While Gandhi was perhaps convinced that* Kshatriya *withdrawal constituted the only viable postcolonial mantra of self-governance, didn't self-denial and withdrawal also produce a certain sense of heroic and tragic, romantic martyrdom? A selfhood imbued with longsuffering, stoic heroism, that strengthened the wielder by releasing him from the guilt of an unknown burden? The emotional*

terrain is complex here, with puritanical and extreme ideas of self-governance stemming from guilt. What would you say?

The book is organised around a simple question related to sovereignty. To what extent is Gandhi a sovereign figure, or let's just say, a person who exercised his authority over others. And this matter of Gandhi's sovereignty seems particularly acute in the mid-1930s in Wardha, after the time Gandhi resigned from the Congress in 1934, when he relinquished sovereignty as it were, and took up village improvement work in Segaon. In my book I begin by examining this idea of relinquishment, which is such a significant aspect of mid 1930s Gandhian prose in Wardha. There are two contradictory aspects to this Gandhian prose of relinquishment.

In a first register, Gandhi's relinquishment of sovereignty also serves to re-establish his sovereignty – as that of the arms bearing warrior or *Kshatriya*, a male who establishes his own sovereignty and the sovereignty of *varnashramadharma* over all others, precisely by relinquishing his sovereignty over others or say through martyrdom. The archive does suggest that Gandhi was inclined towards thinking about the *Kshatriya*'s sacrifice in mid-1930s Wardha. And so, self-sacrifice or the sacrifice of the sovereign authority vested within oneself is, paradoxically, a form of asserting sovereignty rather than withdrawing from it. And perhaps this was one way Gandhi asserted his dominance in Indian politics, even as he withdrew from it. In this sense, yes, romanticizing sacrifice in many ways may have served Gandhi well, politically.

In a second register, however, Gandhi goes beyond his own desire for authority. His Satyagraha necessitates a withdrawal from all forms of sovereignty – so the relinquishment of sovereignty is, in principle, a relinquishment of all forms of authority, including that of the warrior or the *Kshatriya*. Satyagraha therefore involves thinking beyond exercising sovereignty over others. Instead, it entails becoming vulnerable to the other. It entails becoming friends with others, rather than vanquishing them or ruling over them. And so, there are two incompatible registers of Gandhi's withdrawal from sovereignty that I was investigating. In this matter I was deeply inspired by the questions raised by the Gandhian scholar Ajay Skaria in the classroom in Minnesota. His work is very insightful.

For my own part, as an architect and architectural historian, I was particularly interested in buildings and how they resonate in both registers of Gandhi's withdrawal from sovereignty. And that is where my work tries to go beyond Gandhi in the conventional sense. Is there an architectural register to Gandhian thought, especially to Gandhian thought about self-sacrifice? The book sets out to answer this question. It takes into account Gandhi's emphasis on relinquishment and self-sacrifice as these manifest themselves in the form of an emphasis on limits and finitude. In the mid-1930s, Gandhi's relinquishment of sovereignty was principally a relinquishment of a sovereign's desire for limitlessness. And so, I write about this Gandhian, self-willed, self-sacrificial leaving behind of limitlessness in the favour of limits, economic limits, spatial limits. I examine how Segaon became the place of confinement within limits, a place

with a boundary, a place of finitude. In what ways was Segaon's finitude an architectural matter? This is the question the book sets out to answer.

Did the prescribed reform and fixity of caste and caste duty, redeem Hindus from a history of caste violence? Did imbibing the reformed caste system, constitute an aspirational paradigm of upper-caste Hindu individual freedom?

I suspect reform in the Gandhian imagination was more than an aspirational matter. It also was a matter related to political representation. Gandhi's thoughts about reform are fundamentally contradictory. In *Hind Swaraj* he wrote about reform or *sudhar* principally as "an initiative of minorities in opposition to majorities." Which is to say that Gandhi did not trust majorities when it came to reform. In this view, a call for social reform implies the presence of minorities or the marginalized in society, who, even as they participate in social life, do not seek subsumption within a homogeneous totality. The minor or the marginalized resists being reduced or subsumed within the majority. Reform implies a society where heterogeneity and differences endure, and no one single view or way of life dominates. In fact, friendship and love emerges principally as ways of living with differences in such a reformist society. Friendship and love, even as they bring people together, allow for differences, or, as Ajay Skaria has shown, allow for an equality of differences.

As we know only too well, Gandhi did not persevere with this conception of reformism as a space for the equality of differences, especially when he refused to acknowledge Dr. Ambedkar as the representative of Dalits. When the demand arose for separate electorates for 'depressed classes,' Gandhi presented himself as the representative. This centring of the self and the erasure of the minor was itself a sovereign act – an act of making a majority. Gandhi went against the very minority-oriented anti-sovereignty that he proposed earlier as a part of Satyagraha in Hind Swaraj. Reform now became purely an internal matter, within a majoritarian society. I think Gandhi has to be examined for his contradictions. Satyagraha calls for it. There has to be a space for Critical-Gandhi studies.

Was the Gandhian paradigm of a simple, low-cost, but expandable hutment house, where rooms could be added, an expression of upper-caste benevolence, and patronage?

To begin with, I see buildings as artefacts that sometimes formalize sovereignty and authority. Buildings are often metaphors for certitude, reliability, stability and endurance. Buildings express the strong enduring power of particular political regimes or even particular political ideas. They are sites for the assertion of a person or an idea's sovereignty not only over space, but also over time, or more specifically, over the passage of time (by the means of a near permanent architecture sovereign power strives to withstand the passage of time itself – it strives to live beyond its own lifetime).

Perhaps you may now appreciate why a Gandhian architecture in Segaon presents peculiar challenges in terms of interpretation. How is one to engage with the architecture designed by Madeline Slade in Segaon in the face of Gandhi's very withdrawal from a desire to endure? One way of answering this

question is to argue that it is precisely by withdrawing from the desire to endure, that is, through self-sacrifice, that Gandhi ultimately endures as a sovereign self. And so, an impermanent, low-cost Gandhian architecture, particularly the mud architecture of Segaon, emerges as a significant artefact in Gandhian studies, crucial for the continuation of Gandhi's sovereignty as a Kshatriya self. Gandhi endures precisely because the architecture of Segaon was not supposed to endure… We cannot escape this kind of counter-intuitive thinking when it comes to Gandhi. He comes at us unexpectedly with *Kshatriya* Dharma….

Simultaneously, however, I also suggest that there is a non-sovereignty-oriented way of arriving at a Gandhian architecture in Segaon. The mid 1930s archive would suggest that the mud huts in Segaon may not so much have been a form of Gandhian self-expression (that is, an architecture of self-sacrifice). Rather, that architecture rendered intelligible the workers' inability to effectively make and remake themselves on a daily basis. In short, the mud huts of Segaon relate more to questions about the social reproduction of labour power. Those huts show how the house itself, on account of its very fragile material constitution, was to remain a cause of physical strain to those living with it. In that sense, staying within those huts, with their mud walls, entailed becoming vulnerable. It involved participating in the worker's life of unremitting labour, bereft of the resources to adequately reproduce the body on a daily basis. It follows, therefore, that the impermanent huts did not belong to the self, but to the worker, to the "other." In this second register, the architecture of Segaon is not an architecture of sovereignty (or the sovereignty of self-sacrifice) but the architecture of friendship and vulnerability towards the other and, to use the word Gandhi uses affectively, of "love."

After reading your book, I can no longer unsee Gandhi's upper-caste Hinduism that underlay his politics, and I appreciate your deconstruction of dialectical historical writing, that is impossible in Gandhi's case. I realize how replete Gandhian-ism is, with a myriad perpetual moments. And this perpetual moment has only grown in extent, celebrating a comfortable, well-loved, recognized, and freedom imbuing, retro-moral, national ethic. How does this aesthetic celebration that privileges the traditional Indian nationalist 'organic', link up with cosmopolitan and globalized bio and eco-sustainable movements that influence the production of commercial products?

Yes, I found it difficult to see past the many moments of Gandhian-ism. And this is reflected most explicitly in the way I approach the question of temporality. My book resists historicity as a form of sovereignty, that is, it sets aside, at least momentarily, the sovereignty of the historian.

The material I studied in Wardha, particularly in the CSV archive at the Magan Sangrahalaya, resisted being conscripted as a part of a single historical narrative. That archive is mostly a collection of very different, sometimes even dissonant records of experiences. In this sense my book is an attempt at imagining the extended temporarily of a Gandhian architectural present, without the benefit of a historian presiding over events and

committing them to a single narrative-form in the past tense. So narrative closure never really happens in the book. With each successive wave of interpretative efforts, with each chapter, Gandhian architecture resurfaces as more of an enigma than it was previously.

But most specifically, the book strives against the forms of closure that one is apt to find in narratives related to organicism and architecture. The sovereignty of the organicist conception of architecture, that is, the sovereignty of arguments in favour of vernacular architectural revivals has to be unsettled a bit. Vernacular architecture means entirely different things in different registers. There are many different narratives, structurally and socially dissimilar ones, oftentimes within the same space – and a part of what this book sets out to do is to bring this heterogeneity to the fore. Capital, for instance, strives endlessly to subsidise itself by forgoing housing costs for workers. Vernacular architecture or certainly non-formal ways of imagining housing architecture are conscripted by Capital as it seeks to make surpluses. A self-help, non-formal Gandhian organic architectural paradigm in India, as this book shows, is hardly innocent, especially in urban areas. Its presence implies the absence of state support and even industry-support for the housing of workers. Workers are left to fend for themselves and build their houses using immediately available, local materials in slums and in shanty towns.

But this is not to say that Gandhian finitude has no relevance. Gandhi's emphasis on limits and finitude also brushes up against the grain of the constant and explosive expansion of Capital. Cosmopolitan and global discourses related to bio and eco-sustainability, while laudable, will not question capitalism's rapacious and near-infinite need for production and consumption. And this is precisely where Gandhian finitude assumes significance as an alternative paradigm.

But with a caveat. Gandhian finitude also brings with it its own form of sovereignty. It contains within it the potential for hierarchies and inequalities. And recognizing this aspect of finitude or localism is vital if we are to imagine new forms of sustainable living in a time of climate change. We tend to valorise localism, without paying heed to the forms of inequality that lurk within it. We have to think about going local not just in a material register, but also with a wholly new imagination of politics, if we are to make any progress towards sustainable living.

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Biography and Intellectual History

Writing as a Non-Hindu Indian: J.E. Sanjana and the Caste Question

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Abstract and Keywords

This paper is an invitation to the life and work of Jahangir Edalji Sanjana (14th May 1880 – 17th January 1964) – a Parsi scholar, literary critic, columnist and translator – active during the first half of the 20th century. This article takes you through the key features of his writings on caste and untouchability — pausing intermittently to discuss a few associated concerns. One may question the relevance of Sanjana's writings for our times or even the need to go back to a 'little-known' scholar of the late colonial period. We argue that Sanjana's public interventions are a window to the dynamic conversations on caste, religion and nationalism in the closing decades of the British era, and the dawn of Indian Independence. Sanjana was a minor figure in this dialogue, yet in his writings we see the twists and turns of the caste question (as played out in Bombay Presidency) in meticulous detail. He bears witness to this debate as a non-Hindu Indian, and as a cynical outsider, to use his own words. We can thus place him among modern rationalists who wanted to lift the question of caste and religion from the abyss of sentimentality. In doing so, we see Sanjana advocate the autonomy of minorities, especially 'Untouchables'.

Religion, Nationalism, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Congress, Caste

Introduction

Jahangir Edalji Sanjana (1880-1964) was a Sanskrit graduate of Elphinstone College with an expertise in six languages – Persian, Marathi, Sanskrit, Gujarati, Urdu and English (Bombay Legislative Council Debates 1929; Joshi et al. 1981: 224-225). He started his government career as a 'second assistant' to the Oriental Translator of Bombay in 1909 and retired as the head of the office in 1938. Reporting on his retirement and farewell, *The Bombay Chronicle* described his service as "29 years of

solid strenuous work" without much recognition (The Bombay Chronicle 1938).[1] In his book *Caste and Outcaste*, Sanjana (1946: vi) mentions that he grew up among upper-caste Hindus in the Marathi-speaking province of Akola. As a result, he witnessed untouchability first-hand and read more about Hinduism than his own faith. He spent two of his formative years in the company of a non-Hindu theosophist (Ibid). This experience shaped his critique of the theosophical doctrine and the caste question (for his critique of theosophy, see Sanjana 1926b & 1955). His scholarly engagement on caste commenced with the writing of a long paper on transmigration and *karma* during his undergraduate years. Sanjana (1954) continued to engage with the questions of *karma* and rebirth throughout his life and argued that the 'double dogma' systematized and legitimized caste and Hinduism. He also notes that his official work shaped his writings on caste (Sanjana 1946: vii):

> The most important part of my duty, for about thirty years, was to read or glance through about a hundred Indian newspapers and magazines, and hundreds of other publications, in half a dozen languages. It was also part of my duty to give opinions on matters and disputes concerning castes and creeds which made it necessary for me to read up these subjects and refer to authoritative books on them.

The Oriental Translator's office received resolutions and decisions from every department which needed to be translated into several Indian languages and the office scrutinised all publications of the Presidency to weed out 'disloyal' and 'seditious' content.[2] This access or professional affordance ensured J.E. Sanjana's multi-lingual repertoire on caste. Thus, his writings can be recovered as critical interventions of a translator-archivist beyond the call of his duty. In his *Times of India* series called 'Through Indian Eyes',[3] and 'Hystericus' in the late 1920s, Sanjana engages with a range of issues— nation, nationalism, self-rule, historical methods, religion, geopolitics, language, Gujarati literature etc., apart from or sometimes in conjunction with caste and untouchability (Sanjana 1946). His work as a Gujarati literary critic needs special mention. Jhaveri (1978: 487) counts Sanjana as a formidable scholar of Gujarati literature alongside Ramnarayan Pathak, Visnuprasad Trivedi and Vishwanath Bhatt. Sanjana's *Studies in Gujarati Literature* based on his lectures delivered at Bombay University as part of the Thakkar Vassonji Madhavji Lectureship (1940-41), is considered one of the most authoritative commentaries on the modern history of Gujarati literature (Sankalia 1949).[4] Sudhir Chandra (2014: 200) describes Sanjana as a non-conformist scholar who explored the hinduization of the Gujarati literary sphere

[1] Such a description arose from the claims that his appointment as the head (or the Oriental translator) was unnecessarily delayed and short-lived, despite his long years of experience. We come across other Parsi members (K.F. Nariman in 1926 and F. J. Ginwalla in 1929) of the Bombay Legislative Council, who raised this issue and even alleged that the post of the Oriental Translator always went to a Muslim, disregarding factors of qualification and suitability (Bombay Legislative Council Debates 1926 & 1929).
[2] He did act as a member of the British establishment that curbed the press freedom of many nationalist publications. One finds him appearing as a government witness under the National Press Act of British India (The Bombay Gazette 1910).
[3] 'Through Indian Eyes' was dearly appreciated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Sanjana mentions that Ambedkar had even asked him to publish the series in book form (Sanjana 1946: 215).
[4] We find J.E. Sanjana's presence in the reading list of Bombay University's M.A. Gujarati course work as early as 1930 (Bombay University Handbook 1930).

in the twentieth century. Sanjana (1946) skilfully connected the interchangeable use of 'India' and 'Hindu' with the emergence of Hindu revivalist movements of the mid-19th century, which according to him, was consolidated by Balgangadhar Tilak, and M.K. Gandhi in the 20th century — the latter, as we know, was also a celebrated Gujarati writer.

Sanjana consistently stood against the communalization of politics and literature. He argued that caste consciousnesses and blind opposition to colonial modernity (often using the tools of the same modernity) played out at the root of such communalization. He was part of a generation of modern rationalists (Ambedkar can also be counted as one among them) who critically evaluated the shift in nationalist politics under the leadership of Gandhi. He called it the 'spiritualization' and 'caste-hinduization' of Congress - a departure from an earlier age of liberalism characterized by Dadabhai Naoroji and Ranade (Sanjana 1946). He argued that such a shift, excluded Muslims and subordinated the lower-castes, especially the 'Untouchables'. Sanjana enters into an interesting analysis and comparison of Gandhi and Ambedkar to substantiate this argument and in many ways, one can count him as one of the forerunners of post-nationalist critique in India.[5] Along with the context mentioned above, Sanjana invoked his Indian identity to justify his critique of caste and untouchability. According to him, Gandhi lifted the issue of caste from the socio-religious field and made it one of the main problems of general Indian politics. Thus, as an Indian he had the right to speak against caste and evaluate the social programmes aimed at its eradication. While asserting his own 'Indian-ness', Sanjana countered narrow visions of nationalism. Yet, he alludes to the idea that being a Parsi made him a more 'objective' outsider, in comparison to Christians and Muslims who were perceived as groups with predilections and prejudices against Hindus. Unlike Parsis, who formed an affluent, exclusive group; Muslims and Christians troubled the boundaries of caste and Hinduism – making them into participants of National polity. About his position, Sanjana writes (1946: xi):

> I have been a dispassionate, but fully conscious and fairly awake, 'onlooker' for more than forty years now; and as I have no personal or communal or creedal axe to grind, I think I am in a position to view the problem steadily in the cold light of reason and quite objectively, without being consciously or unconsciously influenced by anything like a 'personal equation'.

In the remainder of this paper, we provide an overview of his key ideas on the caste question and for this purpose, largely borrow from his book *Caste and Outcaste* (1946), which is a collection of his essays and newspaper articles on caste. We also go back to some of his older articles published in the *Times of India* during the interwar period. As mentioned above, the book *Caste and Outcaste* was a product of twenty-five years of 'collecting cuttings and excerpts from newspapers' in over six languages on the subject. Sanjana's writings tell us how caste was read and debated by the English-speaking native elite, located at a critical juncture in Indian history. The presence of the coloniser as a mischief maker or then, as an arbitrator, shaped the nature of this debate. The notes and intonations of this debate are relevant to

[5] In the works of M.S.S. Pandian (2009) and G. Aloysius (1998) we encounter a well worked out critique of the nation-form. While Sanjana wasn't against the form, he was vary of a non-reflective nationalism.

contemporary discussions on caste, religion, and fundamentalism, within modern history.

Caste as a Hindu Question

Hinduism was subjected to clinical dissection during the late colonial period through debates on caste and untouchability, and the overall aim of this dissection was to update Hinduism and enable it to meet the demands of a changing world. A key element to such a process was the standardization of Hinduism through legal instruments and social reforms in order to reconfigure social and gender relations. Non-Hindus like J.E. Sanjana were also a part of this project, as the Hindu question was ultimately perceived as a national question. Sanjana wanted to have a reasonable debate on religion and religious reform. For that purpose, he sarcastically and fearlessly attacked new and old superstitions and dogmas within his own faith, often attracting the ire of the Parsi priestly class (Sanjana 1955) and he was well aware of the challenges posed by such a stance. In one of his essays on Hindu Law Reform, he points to how the word 'reform' itself had offended 'Hindu susceptibilities' (Sanjana 1946: 229-230). He argued that Indians prefer to live contradictory lives, divided between the public and private realm. While we (as Hindu Indians) stand for the 'most modern of constitutions', we are still keen on retaining the privileges of caste and sex. J.E. Sanjana, like many of his other contemporaries, viewed caste as a fundamentally Hindu question. He argued that *karma* and theories of transmigration formed the philosophical edifice of the caste system that had its origins within Hinduism. The Varna order, according to him, rested on this double-dogma (karma and transmigration) which ensured mutual untouchability, and inter-communal rivalry. He was an avid reader of Indologists, and scholars of comparative religion. One in fact, finds him going back to Rhys David, to discredit the doctrine of rebirth. In *The Rationale of the Dogma of Rebirth*, he cites David to argue (Sanjana 1954: 154):

> The dogma [of rebirth] posits as a main premise what is sought to be proved. It is only a tremendous *petitio principii.* As no one can disprove it, no can prove it too. It is in effect a subterfuge, an evasion of the real issue, resorted to in order to give some satisfaction to the dissatisfied and baffled human mind.

Damning the doctrine, Sanjana calls it an overwhelmingly egocentric conception, blind to the vastness of the universe and the insignificance of human beings. Placing caste within the semantics of religion — almost exclusively — without focusing on the social and economic conditions that shape (and get shaped) by caste can be identified as being a limitation. His reading of caste was not unique for his times as he lived in a time and through a period that established caste as a unique feature of the Indian society. While post-independence sociology has challenged this view, nevertheless, the usefulness of the religious doctrine to justify caste, and its socio-economic ramifications can hardly be understated. Sanjana notes that this double dogma atomizes suffering, making collective action against oppression a difficult task.

Conversion as a Solution

If caste is perceived as a religious problem, its solution is also sought in religion. Thus, Sanjana held that conversion was a more practical option for the lower-rungs of Hindu society. In 1944, *The Bombay Chronicle* published a landmark editorial titled 'Caste Must Go' and J.E. Sanjana was among the few who engaged with this article (Sanjana 1946) . His strong critique of caste coupled with an appeal made to 'Untouchables' to embrace Christianity unsettled many. K.M. Munshi was so annoyed with Sanjana's interventions that he accused Sanjana of being anti-Hindu, and acting on behalf of the British government. Sanjana's 1946 book, compiles his responses to this allegation. Sanjana makes it clear that he was not personally attracted to the Christian creed or to Christ. Rather, his proposal emerged out of practical considerations. He argued that the Christian conversion of a large section of the population would serve to counteract militant Hinduism and Islam. It would realign significant sections of the population to progressive nations, while weakening reactionary nationalism, which he felt characterized his times. Seeking solutions to problems faced by the Untouchables through conversion, was not a new idea in the late 1940s. In fact, drawing from a rich body of literature, which discerns the secular from the social functions of religion, scholars like Sanjana, underlined the role of religion in the lives of the people (especially the poor), and linked it to social and political well-being, cultural and spiritual matters, and even "status in the scale of nations" (Sanjana, 1946: 179). Nevertheless, he wanted Untouchables to adopt a Christianity, which was neither "literalist or quietist", but progressive and transformative (Sanjana, 1946: 213). Sanjana opposed Gandhi's characterization of Christianity as a foreign faith, unknown to India. Gandhi (among other leaders) was in favour of penalizing conversion, perceiving it to be a denationalizing act. This approach to conversion was one of the biggest assaults on the public presence of Christians (and Muslims) in India. Public intellectuals, and commentators like Sanjana were aware of this strategy of exclusion. J.E. Sanjana's proposal of mass conversion to Christianity received mixed responses. While the mainstream of the Congress Party denounced him, *The Indian Social Reformer* (1944), a Bombay-based journal of 1940s, reminded him that Christianity was equally caste-ridden, and such a move would make the present leaders of the scheduled castes jobless. However, certain Christian quarters appreciated and welcomed his proposal (Pothacamury 1947).

Subaltern Movements and Leaders

Sanjana's writings depended heavily on older newspaper reports and articles, and with their help, he wove narratives focused on writing a history of the present. His stories captured the conflicts that arose out of modern demands of Untouchables and other marginalized groups (see Sanjana 1926a). One realizes that their demands, like access to schools, water, a right to sit alongside caste-Hindus, common salutations etc., faced a backlash and were bitterly contested and battled (Sanjana 1946: 247). In 1928, Sanjana wrote a captivating piece which drew attention to the public burning of the Manusmriti (text) in some regions of Tamil Nadu, and the Brahmin protest against such acts. He then, juxtaposed the Brahmin Conference in Akola to the Non-Brahmin Conference in Tinnevelly, and the Mahad Satyagraha of Dalits in the late 1920s to highlight how caste was being fiercely contested (Sanjana 1928). One cannot escape

a disturbing sense of déjà vu here, when reading these stories, given the persistence of casteism in India. In his 1928 article 'The Commission and the Depressed Classes', Sanjana continued to explore the problems of caste-based distinctions in Bombay, to highlight how caste was a ubiquitous problem that manifested everywhere (Sanjana 1946: 224). Among the stories he recorded and analysed, the Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha, and the Mahad Satyagraha, both led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, stand out as prominent. Sanjana points out that the Kalaram Satyagraha (which started in 1930) constituted a litmus test for the Congress. Gandhi discouraged and delegitimized the movement as he didn't want the caste question to hamper the Civil Disobedience Movement. Nevertheless, the spirited campaign of untouchables made the Congress quite "desperate" (Sanjana 1946: 249). He indicates to the complexity of the caste question as a problem that could not be easily subsumed under the nationalist agenda of the Congress Party. Sanjana generously drew from arguments of subaltern groups and leaders. For example, in the backdrop of the Round Table Conferences and the Decennial Census of 1931, Sanjana cites the petition of the Adi Hindu Depressed Class Sabha submitted to the Census Department, making a case for the counting of castes within the Census record. In the same article in 1930 titled, 'Untouchables and the Census', he records how the demand for caste enumeration was bitterly opposed by high-caste leaders, especially as it challenged the numerical integrity of 'Hindus' as a single block (Sanjana 1946: 233-235). In another article on the 1931 Census, Sanjana refers to a speech made by an 'untouchable' member of the Punjab Legislative Council, Mr. Bansi Lal, to a gathering of scheduled castes that exposed the politics of census enumeration in the early 1930s. Lal appealed the gathering to return themselves as 'castes' and not as 'religions' in the Census, as 'sweepers remain sweepers' in any religion. Sanjana notes that soon after this statement Bansi Lal was denigrated as the 'Bhangi of Lahore'. He writes (Sanjana 1946: 236):

> This confession and advice have created much consternation and bitterness in the Hindu press, and Mr. Bansi is now denounced as a mere "Bhangi of Lahore" by the very papers that once welcomes his candidature and election as a great triumph of the Congress Party […]. All this may seem amusing, but as a fact it is such incidents that give us revealing glimpses of the real India – the India that is far away from the idealised India of some constitution makers who move about with their heads in the clouds.

Similarly, one finds Sanjana (1946: 8) engage with M.C. Rajah's account about Gandhi's betrayal after the Temple Entry Bill was struck down by the Congress majority government of the Madras Presidency in the 1940s. Nevertheless, it was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings and work that find repeated mention and analysis in Sanjana's work.

On Ambedkar

From his writings, one can infer that Sanjana shared an intellectual camaraderie with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.[6] Perhaps, they knew each other at a personal level, given the fact

[6] We first came across J.E. Sanjana in Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's writings. In his book, 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables', Ambedkar (2014) cites Sanjana on four occasions to point out the ironies of the Harijan uplift programme of the Congress, especially in Gandhi's home state, Gujarat.

that they lived in the same city and even shared similar convictions on the caste question. Sanjana agreed with the conclusions drawn by Ambedkar and other leaders from marginalized groups, about Untouchables never being able to find any salvation in the Hindu fold "so long as the basic doctrines of the Hindu socio-religious polity remain what they are" (Sanjana 1946: 202). He admired the autonomous presence of Ambedkar at the national centre stage, when he writes (1946: 139):

> He (Ambedkar) is one of the few who have shown the courage to stand up to the Mahatma and call his sanctimonious bluff, he has been consistently hated and reviled by the Hindu, and particularly the Congress Press.

He mostly appraised Ambedkar's work in the light of Gandhi's "Harijan Uplift programme". Yet, such appraisals such as his, stand on their own (regardless of Gandhi) and give us a sense of why Sanjana considered Ambedkar to be the real representative of untouchables in India. Sanjana (1946:193) describes Ambedkar's movement in the following manner:

> Dr. Ambedkar's Movement has brought about, the determination to assert their common humanity, to refuse to be treated any longer as lower than animals, or even to be patronised by sanctimonious political bosses, climbers and bounders; the resolve to assert their rights as Indians to enter all walks of life, to advance in every possible direction, to carve out their own destiny, to fight for social, educational and economic equality with higher castes.

Sanjana goes on to compare this emancipatory vision of Ambedkar's movement with Gandhi's programme for untouchables. Commenting on Gandhi's programme that the untouchables should be raised to the level of Shudras – by arranging intermarriages between them – Sanjana (1946: 243) observes that Hindu reformism pretends to "raise the lower to the next higher caste level, leaving those higher still immune from the hated contact." Representation and representativeness are ultimately linked to the broad interests of the classes in question. Congressmen "with shouts of Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai!" opposed the religious or civic assertions of Untouchables on several occasions. On the other hand, Untouchables faced this challenge with slogans of "Ambedkar ki Jai" (Sanjana 1946:242). Sanjana perceptively observes that Ambedkar had to fight both the conservatism of caste Hindus and also 'the idea of caste' that held down his own community. According to him, the Congress tactic to discredit Ambedkar utilized the strategy of enlisting the support of competing leaders from among the other depressed classes, instigating them to speak against Ambedkar. Recollecting Dr. Ambedkar's humiliation at Phanaswadi Temple in July 1927 and the consequent attempts by upper-caste reformers to preach patience and contentment to Ambedkar, Sanjana underlined the inability of even well-intentioned reformers to understand Ambedkar's urgency (Sanjana 1927). By contrasting Ambedkar's movement with the dominant stream of Indian nationalism, Sanjana underlined their oppositional visions towards progress and social change. Today, we witness several

It should also be noted that significant portions of 'Caste and Outcaste' are rejoinders to A.R. Wadia's critique of Ambedkar.

academic attempts to reconcile Gandhi and Ambedkar in an attempt to face the conundrums of the postcolonial condition (For example, Kolge 2018, Guru 2017). Sanjana's lively commentary on the debate, especially at its peak, can serve as one of the many starting points of how we understand the debate today.

On Gandhi, Congress and Nationalism

Though Sanjana maintains that he is an 'outsider' throughout his writings on caste, we do chance upon an 'insider' Sanjana at times – a Gujarati – especially when he critiques the Gujarati 'Mahajan' culture. For him, M.K. Gandhi was a product of that 'Mahajan' culture — a representative of the idea of 'eternal and changeless Hindu conservatism', with cow-protection and non-violence as key doctrinal features (Sanjana 1946: 128). Similarly, he held the fall of the Peshwa regime in the early nineteenth century as a defining historical context that had shaped Tilak and his politics (Sanjana 1925a). Commenting on the evolution of Indian political thought, Sanjana argues that revivalists such as Chiplunkar, Tilak and Gandhi were a reaction against the 'modernism of the rationalizing, westernizing movement' ushered in by thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in early nineteenth century. He points out that the invention of a 'golden past' – a key feature of revivalist politics – was ironically a combined consequence of the diffusion of English language, modern research carried out by British orientalists into the past and history of the subcontinent, accompanied by the rapid improvement of communication, and the upsurge of political movements in Western countries (Sanjana 1946: 118). Sanjana observes that the identification of the Indian Nation with Hinduism starts in all earnest from mid-19th century, and it gets consolidated under the 'Mahatmic regime'. One of the features of such revivalism was the happy marriage of political radicalism to socio-religious conservatism. Commenting on M.K. Gandhi's advent, Sanjana (1946: 122-123) writes:

> With the advent of the Mahatma, Congress politics assumed the form of a religious creed, and patriotism came to mean intense distrust and dislike of everything of western and especially English origin - except political catchwords and claptraps. The negative and more catching - because much the easier and more palatable part of our nationalism is this dislike and distrust of what is foreign and new. Hence, conservative reaction in socio-religious matters has naturally allied itself with nationalist and political extremism, and those political leaders have proved most successful with the populace who have appeal to this traditional negative conservatism of India, with its natural socio-religious inertia, by practising 'orthodoxy' in dress and food, in social observances and public manners, in the paraphernalia and conduct of political assemblies. Folding of hands has replaced the western hand-shakes, the bare or carpeted ground has taken the place of chair, the 'dhoti' has ousted trousers, and Ahmedabadi 'Hindustani is taking the place of English.

This process of transforming the Congress – from its early days of liberal bourgeois politics to a religious creed, was conceptualized by Sanjana as 'spiritualisation' and the 'caste-hinduization' of politics. Caste-hinduization expressed itself in strictures against the consumption of meat and eggs when the Congress met for its annual sessions,

singing Bande Mataram, vouching for cow-protection, aligning against the demands of Untouchables, promoting Sanskritized Hindi etc. Sanjana extensively discusses their difficulties to come up with a 'national' diet, or a common scheme of pure and impure food. A common national menu that was put in place in the Haripura Congress session, did not include any meat (Sanjana 1946:84). Similarly, Sanjana highlights the Brahmanical object of 'Hindi Prachar' or the perpetuation of Hindi. He exposes the ugliness of projecting a language as 'national', when there was as yet no nation in existence. Sanjana brings out the ambiguity within the Congress, and within Mahatma Gandhi's own writings in the context of the national language. He concludes that Hindu leaders of the Congress stood for a Sanskritized Hindi, based on certain assumptions that posed the Sanskritic kinship between all Indian languages (Sanjana, 1946: 86-94). Sanjana alludes to the fact that the politics of manufacturing a national language disillusioned Muslims and further snuffed out any hopes of Hindu-Muslim Unity. Sanjana (1946:86) highlights and substantiates the ideological proximity between the Congress, and the Hindu Mahasabha, by using the term 'Congress cum Hindu Sabha ideology' to denote their ideological conflations and overlap.

After the victory of the Congress Party in several provinces in the late colonial period, programmes for cow-protection were taken up with the support of the wealthiest groups among nationalists - the Gujarati and Marwari business community. These programmes ensured the exclusion and criminalization of Muslims and other marginalized minorities. As mentioned earlier, Sanjana (1946: 95-105) contextualized Gandhi (and his love for cow-protection) within the Mahajan culture of Gujarat which slowly made its way into Maharashtra in the late 19th century under the leadership of Chounde Maharaj. Quoting extensively from Gandhi's Gujarati writings, Sanjana explains how the cow was made central to the resolution of the Hindu-Muslim question. Gandhi likened the killing of the cow to that of a Hindu. We know that the creed of cow-protection – a tool to mobilise Hindu masses – spread across the country from the late nineteenth century, leading to several instances of communal conflicts (Pandey 1981). Sanjana includes Gandhi as a prominent figure from among this creed, though he also remains polite and tactful while he does so. Gandhi defended cow-protection even when challenged by scholars who proved that consumption of beef was commonplace during 'Vedic' times. Gandhi refuted such scholarship by simply stating his own belief (irrespective of what was written in the Vedas). Sanjana mentions that Gandhi speculated that only those Vedic Brahmans ate cow meat, who had the power to revive the cow after killing her. Gandhi's 'dialectics' was an example of projecting his own personal convictions onto ancient texts composed in the distant past. Sanjana (1946: 109) calls it the 'soul-satisfying fallacy' of Gandhi's position, where the latter mixes up 'what ought to be with what actually is'.

J.E. Sanjana was an ardent observer and critic of the nationalist social programmes from the perspective of their success at eradicating Untouchability. Whereas Hindu-Muslim Unity, self-reliance through Khaddar and 'Harijan Uplift' were prominent within the itinerary of this programme, Sanjana points to how Congress leaders, and external observers were quick to falsely claim that the caste system was gradually dissolving, a few years into the programme (Sanjana 1925b). Sanjana challenged this eyewash throughout his activist writing career, and his writings bear witness to the caste-Hindu backlash against progressive demands made by Untouchables, and the pursuant

'reluctance' of Gandhi to tackle the problem. Sanjana made his case against the communalization of the Congress Party by citing the writings of dissenting Congressmen (S. Ramanathan, N.N. Menon, M.C. Rajah etc.) of his times. He also exposed the inherent Brahmanism of the Congress by dwelling deeper into the writings of Congress veterans such as K.M. Munshi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, C. Rajagopalachari, and Sarojini Naidu among others (Sanjana 1946: 70-76). For instance, Sanjana skilfully explores the contradictions inherent within K.M. Munshi's perspectives about nation and nationalism. While Munshi opposed Jinnah's conceptualization of a nation, calling it communal, Munshi himself nurtured the idea of Brahmin exceptionalism. Munshi strongly advocated the use of Sanskritized Hindi and wrote about protecting Aryan women from abductors — a theme that continued to inspire cultural nationalism in India (Sanjana 1946: 66-67). For Sanjana, caste and communal hatred were 'centrifugal forces' that relegated the possibility of an autonomous national government on democratic lines to a distant dream. He consistently attempted to arrive at a more sustainable vision of nationalism and self-government. Reflecting on the impossibility of a 'nation' in India, Sanjana (1946: iv-v) writes:

> We have wasted no end of heat and energy in building up an imposing facade of all India nationalism with the help of 'national' slogans and songs, processions and flag salutations on 'national days' and during 'national weeks'; but none of these devices can permanently camouflage, and we cannot wish away, these fatal 'centrifugal forces', such as the baffling variety of conflicting creeds and castes, provincial and linguistic jealousies, deep-seated cultural and political antipathies and animosities, - to speak nothing of the bafflingly unfathomable gulfs dividing intensely caste-conscious super-bloated Seths and Sahukars, and the still more caste-conscious Brahmans who claim to be the ne plus ultra of 'Aryan' super culture, from the hundreds of millions of low-caste and depressed caste Hindus who die like flies when the rains fail and whom the Bania-Brahman flower of 'Aryan' culture have, through centuries untold, not only kept deliberately like dumb driven cattle, but also treated as much lower than animals.

Sanjana propounds self-criticism as the key to mobilize a nation. His provocations, wit, sarcasm and argumentative attacks were aimed at garnering introspection about the travesty of including lower-castes within Hinduism at a subordinate level, accompanied by an exclusion of religious minorities from its body politic. In his opinion, avoiding to address the fault lines of caste and religion would impede the development of full Indian nationhood.

Concluding Thoughts

Sanjana's description and analysis of Indian nationalism – its evolution, problems and programmes tell us a great deal about the persistence of caste and communal hatred in post-colonial India. The politics and slogans of right-wing fundamentalism today look similar to those of the Congress in the late colonial period. Be it cow-protection or the imposition of a certain language, the cultural agenda hasn't seen a shift. Though

this is not to undermine the legal, social and economic changes in the past several decades, one must nevertheless agree that a self-introspective nationalism is as yet, nowhere to be seen. Sanjana's writings never embraced an outright 'anti-colonial' position. His government job could be partly the reason for that. More importantly, he had serious doubts about a religio-centric nationalist politics and instead shared well-informed anxieties about such politics, mostly as an 'objective onlooker', but also as a non-Hindu Indian. Though he held no brief for Ambedkar, yet he identified Ambedkar as posing a secular challenge to the revivalist nationalism of Gandhi.

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Biography and Intellectual History

The Dark Foreigner with the Great Big Dog: Jayasurya Naidu in Germany, 1922-1934

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Abstract and Keywords

Jayasurya Naidu (b. 1899) was the eldest child of Sarojini Naidu, the acclaimed poet and leader of the Indian National Congress. Carrying the onerous burden of high expectations, he travelled to Scotland in 1921 to study medicine, much like his father did, but unexpectedly shifted to Berlin. Influenced early on by the radical anti-colonialism of his mother's brother, the (in)famous Virendranath Chattopadhyaya or Chatto, Jayasurya veered away from the path his illustrious parents had hoped he would continue on. His rebellious, mercurial personality was complicated by his many troubles—psychological and otherwise. Of a melancholic and often depressive nature, Jayasurya was highly sensitive to the inequities and hardships he witnessed. His family was constantly worried as to his condition and the course of his actions and much to their displeasure, Jayasurya discontinued his medical studies in Germany and became increasingly entangled with Comintern-backed politics of the League Against Imperialism (LAI) in the late 1920s. His correspondence with his family, an 'affective archive', reveals great insights into a unique phase of anticolonial politics through the intersection of his personal and political trajectories, enmeshed and entangled as they inevitably are. His life in Germany, from 1922 to 1934, as seen primarily through his correspondence with his siblings and sparse archival documentation, appears as an idiosyncratic narrative thread in a broader, complex tapestry of transnational anti-colonialism and entangled histories. A largely ignored figure, Jayasurya Naidu's life in Germany, as a medical student, researcher, and as a confused, homesick anti-colonial political activist, adds very interesting and illuminating textures to the network of Berlin Indians in the interwar period.

Anticolonialism, Transnationalism, League against Imperialism, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, A.C.N. Nambiar, 1920s Berlin

Introduction

> From her I bought him at a considerably low price. I paid her £3-10 sh about Rs 50 – and at present it costs me in Germany about one and half anna to feed him…I am known as the dark foreigner with the great big dog. The children want to know whether is a goat – and interested ladies ask me

> embarrassing questions …He is as quiet & gentle as a lamb & like the people of his country [Russia] he is frightfully sentimental… He never fights & never cries …He ought not to be in my small room…When I lie in bed he towers over me half the night though I see no reason for such close guarding.[1]

In a rambling affectionate letter to his sister Padmaja, the young medical student in Berlin Jayasurya Naidu,[2] writes of a surprise for her—a large Russian Wolfhound or *Borzoi*. Reminding his sibling of the dog that they had seen in Bombay belonging to the Nagarseths which she "went mad over", Naidu says he had met in Berlin an impoverished Russian refugee who had come from better circumstances before the Russian revolution. Long-legged and delicately veiled "like a woman in a Gainsborough picture", he adds that she was very ill and could not even feed herself, alluding here to her 'pomp and former splendour' and the fact that her husband had been killed by the Soviets on account of being a 'Czarist'. The crash of the German currency had turned the pitiful lady into a pauper. "With tears in her eyes she sold me this dog" Jayasurya continues, adding that the impecunious émigré pleaded with him to not sell or beat the magnificent creature, who attracted great attention everywhere. Indeed, as Jayasurya adds wittily, the people of Berlin admire his beauty but "that he is a degenerate aristocrat I can always give proof of." The haughty, patrician lineage of the breed, patronised as it was by the Tsars over centuries and said to be persecuted by the Bolsheviks as a symbol of the profligate bourgeois past, and the youthful Naidu's waggish affections for his four-legged friend, serve as a colourful introduction to the life of the soon to be radicalised, deeply sensitive activist, plagued as he was by intense internal conflicts, ill-health, disenchantment with the world at large, and a profound sense of alienation, inadequacy and longing. Jayasurya Naidu was a passionate and troubled young man from an illustrious family, bearing a great burden to distinguish himself in the world and live up to the high ideals of his parents. His life in Germany, from 1922 to 1934, as seen primarily through his correspondence with his family and sparse archival documentation, appears as an idiosyncratic narrative thread in a broader, complex tapestry of transnational anti-colonialism and entangled histories.[3] A largely ignored figure,[4] Jayasurya Naidu's life in Germany, as a medical student, researcher, and as a confused, homesick anti-colonial political activist, adds

[1] Undated Letter, Padmaja Naidu Papers (1905 – 1975), Individual Collections, List No 139. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. This letter was most likely written around late November or early December 1922.

[2] Alternatively, Jaisoorya Naidu, M.J.S. Naidu, Mutyala Jaya Surya Naidu, and later Dr. N.M. Jaisoorya.

[3] I use the phrase 'entangled histories' as much for its conceptual value in contemporary historiography, foregrounding as it were, transnationalisms that run parallel to conventional nationalist and other modes of enquiry, but also for the literalism of the phrase, privileging the complex, tactile intersection of personal, 'affective' narratives with institutional ones. As Razak Khan writes in an article on South Asians Muslim students in Berlin, "affective archives" lie at "the intersection of history and memory, remembrance and forgetting… Emotions and feelings give texture to these affective archives." See https://www.projekt-mida.de/reflexicon/entangled-institutional-and-affective-archives-of-south-asian-muslim-students-in-germany/

[4] Srikishen Balmukund was another interesting and largely ignored figure of the revolutionary phase of Indian nationalism. Also from Hyderabad, his family and the Chattopadhyaya's were good friends. See https://maidaanam.com/deccan-vanguard-rediscovering-the-forgotten-revolutionary-srikishen-balmukund/

very interesting and illuminating textures to the network of Berlin Indians in the interwar period.

A Sensitive Young Man

Jayasurya Naidu was born on 26 September 1899[5] in Hyderabad, Deccan, and was the eldest child of the well-known poet and leader of the Indian freedom struggle, Sarojini Naidu, and Dr. Mutyala Govindarajulu Naidu, an Edinburgh trained doctor who was employed as a medical officer in the Nizam's Imperial Service Troops.[6] Little is known about this early period of Jayasurya's life but by all accounts, the household, with four children, several animals and pets, was said to be "laughter-bound and sorrow free (Baig 1974)." Sarojini Naidu wrote a joyful poem dedicated to her four children early on, describing Jayasurya as the "Golden sun of victory born, in my life's unclouded morn" wishing him to be the "sun of song and liberty" (Ibid). In a letter from London in September 1913, a week shy of his fourteenth birthday, Sarojini Naidu lays out her expectations of him: "When you were born, indeed, long before you were born, I consecrated your young life to India; and as you grow towards your manhood you must fulfil these responsible pledges I gave in your name. The whole of your energies must be centred in serving India and you cannot bring to that privileged service anything but your best possibilities….these are the years of your training, your apprenticeship; and all depends upon yourself whether you are going to fulfil all the hopes that father and I have for your future" (Paranjpe 1996: 85-86)." Now a "friend and comrade" to his mother rather than just a son, Sarojini Naidu anointed Jayasurya as "a co-trustee of her dreams and endeavours." (Ibid). Jayasurya would go on to disappoint his mother greatly in this regard.

Following the footsteps of his father, Jayasurya left India for Scotland by the end of the monsoon of 1921, setting sail from Bombay on 10 September. The young seasick student was on his way to study medicine in Edinburgh after much vacillation.[7] He had by then revealed his troubled and melancholic disposition. The previous year, writing from London, his mother counselled him eloquently. His letter was "filled with trouble and restless longing", she tells her son; his lonely temperament is the cause for his sense of alienation and his "supremely sensitively nature" makes him to feel "tenfold anguish vicariously for the sins and sufferings around you, the wrongs and horrors and tyrannies and falsehoods of the world." She implores him to "learn to

[5] A few sources carry an incorrect birth date. This date appears on his CV, in a letter to his sister Leilamani, and on the official Lok Sabha website since he was an elected MP in 1952.

[6] Belonging to different castes, the couple's marriage in 1898 was one of the earliest under the provisions of Special Marriages Act of 1872 (a result of the Keshab Chandra Sen's Brahmo Marriages Bill) which interestingly, was championed in Hyderabad by Sarojini Naidu's father, the famous chemist, educationist and progressive reformer, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya. See Baig (1974) "Sarojini Naidu". New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.

[7] Sarojini Naidu wrote to her younger daughter Leilamani on 10th August 1921, a month before Jayasurya's departure, saying that Baba (her son's nickname) was "causing me endless and needless anxiety and trouble. He is so undecided and unsettled about everything." Jayasurya had wanted to go to Paris to study medicine but did not know any French. Thereafter he toyed with going to America. She adds further that her husband's resources were strapped and so it is she who has to bear the cost for her son's education, reassuring her daughter to not worry that it will cause any reduction in her allowance. See Paranjpe (1996) "Sarojini Naidu: Selected Letters 1890s to 1940s". Kali For Women, New Delhi.

wrest serenity out of travail", concentrate on his medical studies and not look back with regret. She points to his lack of faith in himself and ends her concerned letter saying: "I understand all your moods, my son—and comfort you in all my love and compassion. (Ibid). Jayasurya carried his bleeding-heart and his "weary and troubled spirit" firstly to Edinburgh, from where he cheerfully writes to his sister Padmaja (nicknamed Bibi) in March 1922 that he has passed his examinations in first class; "nobad" as the Scotsman would say, he adds. He encourages her, then studying in London, to pay a visit and requests her to carry some saris so that they can attend gatherings "as Indians. If she were to meet Nanu, she was to ask him about his coat that he had left behind by mistake.[8]

Nanu was A.C.N. Nambiar, married to Suhasini Chattopadhyaya, a young sibling of Sarojini Naidu. The couple were at the time living in London. Nambiar had moved back to London in March 1922 after having returned to India earlier in January. He had first arrived in the city at the end of the autumn of 1919 to study at the London School of Economics but gave that up to enter the London Day Training College on the advice of Sir C. Shankaran Nair, a prominent lawyer and a former president of the Indian National Congress. Suhasini had also moved to England in 1920 to study at Oxford University. At the time, Nambiar was employed in the London office of a Madras-based trading firm. Suhasini soon joined him and they set up house. The young couple had a period of domestic stability for about a year, after which, Nambiar was informed that his employment was to end due to losses incurred by the firm. As a temporary arrangement, the couple took on boarders in the house they rented while awaiting news of a job he had applied for through the good offices of the recently retired Governor of Madras, Lord Pentland. In the meantime, Jayasurya Naidu visited them and as Nambiar recalls: "he spoke to me very confidently of my getting in Berlin work relating to India and of it giving me, if not a very comfortable living, a better one than I was having in London. Without waiting longer news from India, accompanied by Suhasini, I left for Berlin."[9] Importantly, Jayasurya also tells his aunt's husband that a group of Indians in Berlin were hoping to establish a trade magazine, and this may also be a good opportunity for him.[10] Nambiar and Suhasini moved to Berlin in the middle of 1923.[11]

Leilamani Naidu (known as Papi by the family) visited her brother Jayasurya in Edinburgh to spend her birthday week in April 1922, which cheered him up and

[8] Letter to Padmaja Naidu 25 March 1922, Padmaja Naidu Papers (1905 – 1975), Individual Collections, List No 139. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
[9] Nambiar, A.C.N, Balachandran, Vappala (1985) "Memoir - Oral Transcript".
[10] This detail is mentioned in Nambiar's interrogation by British Military Intelligence following his arrest by Allied troops in 1945. See KV-2-39004_2, UK National Archives. The proposed magazine *The Commercial Review of India* (*Indo-German Commercial Review*, according to Nambiar) was launched by the efforts of Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. Two Indian businessmen, W.R. Talwalkar and N.G. Ganpuley were associated with this venture. They were at the time working at the Indian Information Bureau, which provided assistance to Indians arriving in Germany and liaised with businessmen in India who traded with Germany.
[11] The date mentioned by Nambiar in his memoir is early 1924 but Jayasurya Naidu writes in a letter to his sister Leilamani at the end of June 1923 that Nanu & Shisty [perhaps a nickname for his aunt Suhasini?] are in Berlin. Other sources point to Virendranath Chattopadhyaya as being the instigator of his sister Suhasini & her husband A.C.N. Nambiar's move to Berlin. See "A Life in Shadow: The Secret Story of A.C.N. Nambiar" by Vappala Balachandran (2017) for more.

brought the siblings closer. It was just the thing, he writes to her in early May, "to take me out of myself and my gloomy, silent life."[12] Grateful that she was "so intent on being happy and making others happy" he writes in a greatly melancholic tone that he knows no sunshine "but only the soft dreary twilight with all its ineffable softness, a serenity I am happier with that, because there is the great peace & silence we long for — because it is the dominion of dreams where the ugliness of reality is softened & all the hard lines are lost in the depths of shadows." (Leilamani Naidu Papers, 1922) Jayasurya revealed to her that he had been admitted to the University of Berlin. That autumn, following a reconnoitre in July, Jayasurya shifted to Berlin, causing his parents distress. Sarojini Naidu and her husband regarded Edinburgh as the perfect choice for their son. In a letter written to Leilamani (who had since returned from her trip to see her brother) in April 1922, she expressed hope that Jayasurya had shown her "the glories of Scotland." She then reminded her daughter that "for 3 generations Edinburgh has been our ancestral home as it were—the home of our mind and spirit." (Paranjpe 1996: 163)

Beyond Jayasurya's unexpected repudiation of family tradition, one can surmise that Berlin presented deeper concerns for his parents. Berlin was home to her estranged brother, the prominent anti-colonial activist and revolutionary, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, aka Chatto. A serious thorn in the side of the British, Chatto was over the years chased, hounded and almost assassinated by British intelligence. His revolutionary career began in 1908 with his association with Shyamaji Krishnavarma's North London student hostel India House—the "hotbed of sedition."[13] Following the dramatic killing in July 1909 of Curzon Wyllie, a former British Indian Army officer and then political aide-de-camp to the Secretary of State for India, India House was shuttered and several of the activists including Chatto moved to Paris. The next year, Chatto's associate, the charismatic leader of the India House revolutionaries, V.D. Savarkar, was arrested and deported to India. Chatto's life thereafter unfolded as a series of manoeuvres to find sustained support for his anti-colonial activities, as he "staked out different paths towards Indian independence", bridging diverse political realms through his "politics of friendship", as Ole Birk Laursen has explored in his work.[14] The indefatigable Chatto moved about adroitly, making friends and connections constantly, publishing propaganda material, recruiting and indoctrinating willing young men and women, cooking up schemes and plots, and seeking newer avenues to foment trouble for the British. Jayasurya Naidu came under the influence of Chatto, despite the frictions that existed between him and Sarojini Naidu. The latter had publicly disassociated herself from him, very early on in his revolutionary career.[15] Jawaharlal Nehru's admiration for Chatto notwithstanding, Sarojini Naidu appears to

[12] Letter to Leilamani Naidu 4 May 1922, Leilamani Naidu Papers (1905 – 1975), Individual Collections, List No 139a. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
[13] See Acharya, M.P.T., Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary: https://olebirklaursen.files.wordpress.com/2019/09/m.p.t.-acharya-reminiscences-of-a-revolutionary-1937.pdf
[14] Ole Birk Laursen (2019), "Anti-Colonialism, Terrorism and the 'Politics of Friendship': Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and the European Anarchist Movement, 1910-1927". Anarchist Studies, 27(1)
[15] Baig (1974), op.cit.

have kept a judicious distance from her brother, perhaps only ever meeting him twice in Germany in the late 1920s.

Bundesarchiv Bild 102-09732, Berlin, Inder protestieren gegen Verhaftung Gandhis. Attribution: Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-09732 / CC-BY-SA 3.0 (Wikimedia Commons). In this picture, Jayasurya with a beard can be seen sitting on the extreme right, his forehead clasped in his palm.

In June 1923, after entering studies at the university, Jayasurya wrote to Leilamani from Berlin saying that she was welcome to visit him. He had made several friends and had picked up German quite well. He had wanted to travel to England that past March but was very ill for a few months and had not entirely recovered. Nambiar and Suhasini were in Berlin, and according to Jayasurya "not having that horrible anxiety…for tomorrow" (Leilamani Naidu Papers, 1923), indicating that the financial hardship the couple had faced in London had eased up. Tellingly, Jayasurya also says to Leilamani, that "it is next to impossible to tell you what things cost" (Ibid) in Germany at that time.

The hyperinflationary phase of the German economy was at its peak at the time of Jayasurya's letter. Prior to the First World War, there was both stability and prosperity in Germany and its currency was at par with other European ones, and had a favourable position with respect to the dollar. During the war however, inflation grew rapidly, fuelled by government borrowing and by 1919, prices had doubled. By 1922, they had doubled again creating a tremendous burden on ordinary citizens. Germany's loss in the war had additionally led to punitive reparations under the Treaty of

Versailles. The government printed surplus banknotes to meet these demands.[16] The Weimar Republic was floundering, and unrest was rapidly increasing. Adding greatly to this explosive situation, was the assassination of the charismatic German foreign minister, industrialist and writer Walther Rathenau in June 1922, by a right wing anti-Semitic ultra nationalist group called Organisation Consul. The importance of this event was not lost on Berlin Indians, as evidenced from the account of N.G. Ganpuley whose very arrival in Berlin in 1921 was a direct result of the currency crisis of the German Mark. The company he worked for in Bombay, Navjeevan Press, wished to utilise their greatly devalued German currency holdings for machinery in an effort to make the best of a difficult position. The situation was skewed to the advantage of foreigners like himself, who carried other currencies. By the time of Rathenau's murder, Ganpuley's Bombay employers had abandoned their plan and he came to be entirely occupied by the activities of the Indian Information Bureau.[17] Ganpuley would soon work alongside Nambiar editing two trade magazines, following the latter's move to Berlin, and would have come into close contact with Jayasurya Naidu.

An Entangled Life in Berlin

Jayasurya's early life in Berlin was profoundly influenced by the economic and political context of Germany at the time, and suffused greatly by his sentimentality and homesickness. Far from being a passive observer, he was profoundly entangled with his environment. In the aforementioned long, rambling letter to Padmaja in late 1922, he writes of the great economic hardships he has witnessed: "We are in the midst of real suffering – such poverty & such heart wrenching sorrows – everywhere there is oppression and such a bankruptcy of the putrid civilisation" (Padmaja Naidu Papers, 1922). He had met a young woman cashier in a large store, which in recent times only foreigners had the means to patronise. One British pound at the time was at 200,000 marks he said, and "for us everything is ridiculously cheap compared with England…but for the Germans it is a tragedy" (Ibid). Jayasurya advised the hopeless and defeated cashier girl to go to hospital since she looked quite ill. The girl replied that her baby would die of starvation if she did not work. The millionaire of 1914 was a pauper now, he observed, adding that in the restaurant he often ate at, one of the waitresses was a countess. Jayasurya's tumescent rhetorical prose continues on with "the sharks of Europe", the "anaemic & bloodless" women, the rickety babies and the starving workers. Speaking to the cashier girl at length he learned that she had never married and had no husband to support her. "One little phrase that went to my heart Bibi", Jayasurya continues, "that gave me the vision of all the greatness of woman's suffering" was when on his asking, how she was bold enough to have a child outside of marriage, "she truly answered – I wanted a baby." And then, he dramatically adds, "I understood the whole pathos of the thing & the great significance of what it means." Jayasurya links motherhood with identity and the destiny of a nation, of people, and of mankind expressed in declamative prose (Ibid).

Jayasurya Naidu enrolled in clinical studies in May 1923, after having spent a year studying German. As per archival records, he remained registered in the medical

[16] Other contributing factors to hyperinflation were the suspension of the gold standard and territorial losses including the Ruhr district.

[17] R.R. Diwakar, S.B.Nargundkar eds. (1983). "Ganpuley's Memoirs". Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai.

faculty of Fredrich Wilhelms University, Berlin, till 7 May 1925.[18] He was then living at Goethe Strasse 70, in the Charlottenburg area of Berlin, and was in contact with, and under the tutelage of his uncle Chatto who was in a relationship with the American journalist, writer and political activist Agnes Smedley. As Jayasurya revealed, "my aunt (Binnie uncle's wife) and I often go to get the life histories of the working conditions of the working classes – she herself is a daughter of the working classes & is proud of the fact" (Padmaja Naidu Papers, 1922). Indeed, Agnes Smedley's remarkable journey from abject penury of rural, coal-mining America; radical activism in New York against British colonialism, for women's suffrage and reproductive rights; political involvement with Chatto and the Berlin Indians; and thereafter her discovery of China and communism; is truly extraordinary for its time. Jayasurya's advice to his sister perhaps was influenced by Smedley's company, although, he is clearly also his own man with a mercurial sense of shape-shifting politics. Railing against the "terrible economic bondage of woman to man", he warned his sister off from the institution of marriage: "The only honest thing you can do Bibi is never to marry under any existing marriage laws because none do justice to your sex…with one stroke of the pen you become a bond slave..." (Ibid). Jayasurya was working at the Charité, Berlin University's teaching hospital. His busy schedule, from 8 am to 7.30 pm for six days of the week, and till 2 pm on Sunday, left little time for anything else, although he informs his sister in late November 1923, that he and his friend Asaf Ali Baig celebrated his recent birthday by attending a performance of Richard Wagner's famous music-drama "Walkerie" (Die Walküre). Soon after, he suffered "a fearful crisis…one month of what the vulgar expression is Hell…such anguish & the fight against myself. I sometimes felt I could shriek with this tension I went through" (Ibid). This is the first indication of his troubled psychological condition.

Jayasurya's personal and political transformation was soon to reach an important inflection point. His education was interrupted after completing more than two years of study. We learn of this fact form an oblique source. In his biodata, which appears at the end of his doctoral thesis (he completed his doctorate in mid-1934), he says "shortly before completing my studies in 1926, unfavourable circumstances forced me to interrupt my studies and take up a profession."[19] The exact cause of this disruption is not known but there is evidence from his letters that aside from his internal strife, he was also facing great financial difficulties by the end of 1923. His foreign currency holdings had depleted, and there was little help from his family during this period, as he writes in desperation to his sister Leilamani. Plagued by ill-luck, he was given fake dollars for the £17 he exchanged at a Büro and was nearly arrested for attempting to purchase items with them. In despondency he writes: "I have been so impoverished…I have received no remittance from home since March…mother is ill & I don't want to startle her…I am so to speak bankrupt – 17 pounds is a terrible sum to lose." (Leilamani Naidu Papers, 1923). He implores his sister to urgently cable their father for 30 pounds. In the next letter dated 7 January 1924 he is all the more desperate, and further in debt having borrowed money for his living expenses and university fees. The entire Christmas vacation he notes "has gone in anxiety & absolute

[18] University registration of May 23, 1923, No. 6278/113. Rectorate. Humboldt University, Berlin.
[19] Naidu, Jayasurya: Curriculum vitae, in: Id.,"Ueber einen Fall von Bauchdeckenaktinomykose". Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin, medical thesis, 1934, n.p.

pennilessness." (Leilamani Naidu Papers, 1924). He has also been living on the charity of his landlady. An additional 10 pounds that he had lent to a friend were spent to treat his illness. A month later on 1 February 1924, Jayasurya's tone turns vitriolic, having not received any response from his sister in London. Upset at what he describes as her callous, criminal, attitude, he angrily remarks: "This Bourgeois education is going to poison you…I never very much admired your values of world problems – nor your conception of art & life you know no more about it then the cat in my laboratory." Interestingly, he also attacks "that old donkey the Rector or Chancellor of Oxford University" who has prohibited Marie Stopes from lecturing on sex hygiene and birth control. "The Englishman" he adds "is the biggest prude & humbug and the Englishwoman she is more so." (Leilamani Naidu Papers, 1924)

Changing Course

It is during this period, following the interruption in studies, that Jayasurya's political activities become more apparent. There is very sparse material on what he actually did in that time, although various accounts point to his attendance at the February 1927 Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism organised by the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO), held at the Egmont Palace in Brussels. This was a result of the tireless efforts of the German communist leader, publisher, propagandist, and "patron saint of front organisations" (Barooh 2004: 247),[20] Willi Münzenburg, along with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (both secretaries of the newly formed League Against Imperialism or LAI). Jayasurya appears on the official list of delegates: Dr. Naidu, in that list, was said to represent the Haiderabad Association (Berlin Section) and Naidu was with the Indian Federation of Central Europe.[21] Jayasurya was already working with his uncle Chatto in early 1926, who had by then befriended Münzenburg. Berlin was at the time home to students, political refugees and activists of various persuasions. Münzenburg had proposed an anti-colonial coalition at the February 1926 "Rathauskeller" Conference in Berlin, which was attended by 43 delegates from across Europe.[22] LACO's aim was "to lay the foundations of an anti-colonial movement in Germany, which would focus on creating a forum for grandiose ideas and organising the disparate characters of the existing anti-colonial movements into one single movement" (Petersson 2013). This would prove to be the groundwork for the historic Brussels Congress the next year, which also saw the attendance of Jawaharlal Nehru as the official representative of the Indian National Congress (INC). The INC remained linked with the LAI, until its Comintern's influence became overt, following the second conference in Frankfurt in 1929.

[20] Barooah, Nirode. "Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe". OUP. p 247. As Barooah mentions here, Sarojini Naidu was elected the President of the INC in December 1925, around the time that Münzenburg and the IAH (*Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe* or the Workers International Relief), began to form plans for a broader anti-colonial coalition.

[21] A.C.N. Nambiar also appears as a delegate representing the daily newspaper "The Hindoo" [sic]. So does another Hyderabadi and friend of Jayasurya, Bakar Ali Mirza. See League against Imperialism. *League against Imperialism Archives*, Collection ID ARCH00804, International Institute of Social History: https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH00804

[22] Petersson, Fredrik (2013). "We Are Neither Visionaries Nor Utopian Dreamers": Willi Münzenburg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925 – 1933. Abo Akademi: 84-85

In late 1927, a feud broke out between Agnes Smedley and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, the wife of Jayasurya's uncle Harindranath, exposing the fault lines and the variance in political views, among members of the famous Chattopadhyaya family. Earlier that year, Harindranath and Kamaladevi had left India for a long tour across Europe, visiting Berlin for a considerable period. Agnes Smedley had published a polemic in which she defended Comintern and dismissed as ignorant those who opposed it. Her former mentor Lajpat Rai responded angrily, as did Kamaladevi, who branded Smedley as a communist of the type who were failed capitalists, and who took to communism for "recreation & amusement." As Smedley's biographers say, Kamaladevi was resentful of her influence over Chatto and the Berlin Indians. Tellingly, Jayasurya Naidu came to the defence of Smedley.[23]

The Indonesian student Achmed Soebardjo (later the modern nations' founding father and nationalist icon) who came to Europe as a delegate at the 1927 Brussel Congress with Mohammed Hatta and others, stayed on in Berlin and worked at the International Secretariat of the LAI. Soebardjo spent most of his time with Chatto, and was friendly with the visiting Harindranath and Kamaladevi and in addition, was Jayasurya's flatmate.[24] It is not known if he met Sarojini Naidu, when she visited Berlin in October 1927.[25] Very tellingly, a report of the visit by A.C.N. Nambiar, reveals that a local daily had published a humorous comment on her address to the Indian students of the Hindustan Association of Central Europe. Reportedly, it said: "Young India applauded. Only in her own family she finds opposition. Her son and her brother listened patiently, but one learnt afterward that they are not at all of the same opinion…they await salvation from Moscow."[26]

Jayasurya Naidu had a nervous breakdown in the autumn of 1926. Writing to Leilamani on 25 October from a forest lodge outside Berlin he says (Leilamani Papers, 1926):

> I was going to pieces with my nerves. I came to a stage where one is not ripe enough to go to a sanatorium for nervous breakdowns and one is not well enough to do his ordinary duties. I came to a stage where I felt sometimes I could shout in the street and hit the nearest man I could reach

[23] Janice R. MacKinnon, Stephen R. MacKinnon (1988). "Agnes Smedley: The Life and Times of an American Radical". University of California Press. 125 - 26

[24] Stutje, Klaas (2016). "Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917-1931'" University of Amsterdam, 184. As Stutje has revealed, Harin and Soebardjo performed at a demonstration of the LAI titled "Die Koloniale Welt in Flammen!" on 4 March 1928.

[25] We learn of this visit of Sarojini Naidu's from a report published by A.C.N. Nambiar in the Hindu on 1 November 1927. He writes that she had addressed a gathering at the Bristol Hotel on 8 October 1927. Fredrik Petersson cites records from the German Federal Archives (SAMPO-BA ZPA R1507/67113) to state that Sarojini Naidu met her son on a trip during the summer of 1928. The RKÜöO concluded, he writes, that her purpose was to see how Jayasurya's studies were progressing and to work with Chatto. From Sarojini Naidu's personal correspondence we know that she wrote to M.C. Chagla from Hyderabad on the 2 April 1928. Letters dated 30 June, 1 July, 8 July and 7 August place here at the Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh, where she was tending to her sick daughter Padmaja. In early September she writes to Gandhi from Allahabad but on 17 September she is in Genova.

[26] See, Balachandran (2017).

> with my hand bag…I therefore decided to do what I long wanted to I turned my back on the city and came to the forests here.

Thankful for the solitude Jayasurya writes: "I want to hear myself – hear what my heart & my soul have to speak before they die of suffocation and I become the rational machine" (Leilamani Papers, 1926). His homesickness was unbearable, and he restlessly awaited March, when he would go home. He dreamed of the day when the entire family could gather together at the dinner table, forget their differences and start afresh. In the following letter a month later he is "throwing out all doubts, shadows, unclear thoughts. I will allow no problems of no worth to worry me. I am straightening out all my fears, analysing my own emotional conflicts…" The poet will martyr himself to his emotions Jayasurya says, but "to the man of action they are a process of crystallisation from the chaos to the definite". Importantly, he expresses a strong desire to go back to India and enter public service for "there is plenty to be done at home. There is a big national battle which will occupy our whole life – this is something to look forward to with joy." His view that the national should take priority over the personal for "in Russia we look upon it as a crime", indicated his mutating politics. Jayasurya emphasises that the "world struggle is an economic struggle. It comes down to the class struggle….I intend to dedicate the next 7 or 8 years at home to a deep study of Marxism and Social Economics. I shall go back to Russia for two or three years & learn mass Hygiene & organisation." Importantly, his medical treatment would continue for the next four months and as a doctor himself, "I am now a patient of the nerve clinics" (Ibid). In July 1927, as Jayasurya's political activities with LAI progressed, he went to Vienna to meet his father who was on a visit. Jayasurya writes that "the first sight of him made my heart jump…I was pining to see him…He is so gentle and patient and loving…" (Leilamani Papers, 1927).

A Confused Radical

Jayasurya appears to have socialised in radical circles quite early on, facilitated of course by Chatto. In the aforementioned long letter to Padmaja he says: "I've met the Anarchists the social revolutionaries – the greatest minds of them…Each a master mind in himself. Do you know what made me love them Bibi? Their humanity – their love of humanity – to me they are each moment more and more like Gandhi – to them Gandhi is the world's greatest social anarchist & revolutionary…" (Padmaja Naidu Papers, 1922). From Errico Malatesta, Alexander Schapiro, and Rudolf Rocker,[27] the forces of influence on the impressionable student were hefty, to say the least.

As Fredrik Petersson reveals, Chatto described Jayasurya as "a sympathiser but one who is very confused and needs education." (Petersson 2015). Under the aegis of the International Secretariat of the LAI, Chatto and Nambiar started classes for "Colonial Students in Berlin" to train them in the principles of Marxism, Communism, colonial revolution and more, in order to "aid the dysfunctional anti-imperialist movement in the colonies." Jayasurya was a student of one of the courses, "Agrar Politik". Chatto had planned this curricular activity at the second congress of the LAI, held in Frankfurt in February 1929. [28] A most unusual episode involving Jayasurya Naidu is found in an

[27] Jayasurya mentions two other figures named Andreas Bagi [?] and Orlando.
[28] Petersson, op. cit. pg. 417.

account of Urdu writer and political activist Sajjad Zaheer, who attended the Frankfurt Congress and befriended Jayasurya there. Zaheer recalls that Jayasurya and Raja Mahendra Pratap, formerly the President of a provisional Indian Government in exile in Kabul in 1915, got into a violent argument and: "…we had to separate them, stop them from pulling each other's beard. This gives you an idea of the intensity of the political feelings inside the Indian delegation. We were not of the same mind."[29]

Jayasurya's activities were under scrutiny during this period. As Daniel Brückenhaus writes, the Germans were keen to maintain good foreign relations with Britain then, particularly in their common anti-communist agenda. They actively sought to "restrain any public activity in Germany that might be antithetical to British interests." Indian political activists in Germany were 'intimidated.' In August 1931 they

> rejected a broadcast containing a conversation between the LAI's Alfons Goldschmidt and the Indian student activist Naidu. According to the authorities, Naidu's statements were not only 'very utopian' and of a clearly 'bolshevist tendency' but 'would doubtlessly upset the British, causing them to accuse us of mingling in inner-Indian affairs and inciting the Indian population'.[30]

A German intelligence record of 1933 reveals,[31] that Jayasurya Naidu addressed a gathering on 17 June 1931 at a public meeting of the K.J.V.D. (Communist Youth Association Germany) and the Kampfbund Youth.[32] Importantly, this intelligence note, which is a summary of a telephone call with the Police Commissioner of Berlin, also notes that Jayasurya Naidu was a close friend of Ernst Thälmann, the well-known leader of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) at the time. A few months earlier British intelligence noted that on 27 March Jayasurya had organised a meeting called by Chatto of the Hindustan Association of Central Europe at the "Pscohorrbrau Restaurant"[33] to discuss the 'betrayal' of the INC with regard to the Irwin-Gandhi Pact.[34] Chatto was incensed by this and moved to censure the INC. Although Jayasurya remains mostly obscured by other prominent Indian activists and finds sparse mention in archival records of the period, it is clear from piecing together these stray elements, that he was an active anti-colonial activist with communist leanings. Jayasurya's immediate family, however, were opposed to his activities and greatly concerned for his wellbeing.

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[29] Oral History Transcript, Sajjad Zaheer (298), Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, New Delhi

[30] Brückenhaus, Daniel. "Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905 – 1945", 157-58.

[31] RZ 207 77416, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amts**,** Berlin

[32] *Internationaler Sozialistischer Kampfbund* (ISK) was an offshoot of the Socialist Party of Germany which was opposed to Nazism. As Julia Hauser has explored in her work, it was strongly linked to vegetarianism in Germany and their focus "on the figure of the ascetic male leader." Founded by the philosopher Leonard Nelson and educator Mina Specht in 1925, it brought together students and workers in Germany and beyond.

[33] This is most likely Pschorrbräu.

[34] Weekly Report of the Director of Criminal Intelligence (WRDCI), April 1931, PR_000003033107, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Writing to her daughters on 23 September 1931 during the ongoing Second Round Table Conference, Sarojini Naidu hopes that Jayasurya will come visit her in London for a talk. "He has", she adds, "worked himself into a great state of excitement over all sorts of things. But I think that after a talk with me he will become more normal in his outlook" (Paranjpe 1996: 248). Two weeks later, she reports that he did indeed visit her and that they had a nice day out visiting the Zoo, adding that he is now "a different person from the overstrung, desperate, aggressive, wild creature that arrived from Berlin last week. He has quietened down and grown much more normal: "I have had brutally frank talks with him and I think he realises the unreality and bombast of much of what he has been thinking, planning, proclaiming aloud." Importantly, she said she would see to his passport renewal and that he would now complete his degree and return home. It is the right decision given that "he realises that this is the very last chance he has." On 17 November 1931, Sarojini Naidu's letter reveals that Jayasurya had settled back into his studies cheerfully "and seems surprised and delighted that his most neglected knowledge of Medicine is so up to date." Two weeks later she writes that he "has matriculated to rejoin the University" (Ibid: 253).

Dark Times

After six years, Jayasurya's return to his medical studies was made possible by the "friendly concession of the Prussian Ministry of Education."[35] While Jayasurya got back on track, Germany's politics had taken a dark turn. The National Socialists (NSDAP) were on the ascendancy. The deep divisions between the Social Democrats and the Communists combined with the economic hardships and widespread unemployment provided Hitler ample latitude to propel forwards. The 1930 elections to the Reichstag saw the NSDAP make substantial gains. Over 1931 and 1932, the political situation only worsened, facilitating the rise of the Nazis. As A.C.N. Nambiar recalls, the National Socialists intensified their rhetoric and street fights became a common occurrence. Mixed electoral fortunes resulted in a period of political intrigues, finally leading up to President Hindenburg appointing Hitler as Reich Chancellor on 30th January 1933. Germany changed overnight. Jewish shops were looted, and communists were targeted. The LAI offices were ransacked. Two months later, on the day of the controversial Reichstag fire, A.C.N. Nambiar and Jayasurya Naidu were beaten up by S.A thugs (Brown Shirts) and hauled off to detention.

A.C.N. Nambiar and Jayasurya Naidu were separately arrested on the evening of 27 February 1933,[36] although communications between the British Embassy in Berlin and the German Foreign Office mention the date as 28 February.[37] Both were brutally assaulted, their flats ransacked and their personal items including papers and correspondence, taken away. Eva Geissler, then secretary to Nambiar (and his girlfriend) at the Indian Information Bureau, reported the arrest to the British Consulate some days later. The British establishment intervened in the matter and the issue of British subjects being mistreated in Germany was raised in the House of Commons by the Labour Party member Josaiah Wedgwood some days later. While Nambiar remained imprisoned for weeks, Naidu was let off after five days. He then

[35] Naidu CV, op. cit.
[36] This date appears in Nambiar's unpublished memoir. See Balachandran (2017).
[37] RZ 207 77416, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amts**,** Berlin

gave a telephone interview to the Belfast Telegraph saying that he had been badly beaten by a dozen SA stormtroopers (as was his Jewish landlady), questioned about "ammunition supplies and communist organisations", held at the Alexanderplatz police headquarters for a few days, and then transferred to Spandau.

On 5th March 1933 Sarojini Naidu wrote to Leilamani from Yervada Jail: "the news about Baba has naturally grieved me – but not surprised me" Despite feeling anxious about him she maintains a practical and stoic approach, telling her daughter, "I feel, and I want all of you to feel, especially father, that it would be foolish and unfair to Baba for us to be unduly grieved or anxious whatever the circumstances and consequences." Grown men must accept the consequences of their actions and "that madcap Baba with all his faults, follies, weaknesses and vagueness has evolved within himself a most impressive and moving passion of devotion to an ideal." The hardest lesson of Love she adds, is to "refrain from imposing a spiritual bondage on those we love." Though her heart was full of pain, but her soul "has the wisdom to say '*A chacun son destin*'" (Paranjpe 1996: 282).

Back Home

This incident brought an end to Jayasurya Naidu's political activities in Germany. He successfully submitted his doctoral thesis in July 1934 and appears to have returned to Hyderabad soon after.[38] His rebellious, mercurial personality was however, soon manifest in his repudiation of his western medical training, as he became a self-taught homeopath and became involved in public health issues, especially in the cause of leprosy eradication. This transformation created a rift between father and son, and Jayasurya would later write:

> My father, the doyen and senior most leader in the profession felt greatly hurt, felt that all the money he had spent on my education was wasted, that I was deliberately treading the road to failure and suicide. He attributed the freakishness and eccentricity in my nature as inherited from my mothers [sic] side, from my maternal grand-father, the late Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhaya, who taught and did the most unconventional things and died a poor but great man as any compatriot from Bengal will know.[39]

Tragedy seemed to haunt Jayasurya. Although there is no clear date known, he married a German lady named Eva who tragically died of cancer in late 1941, at the family home, 'Golden Threshold' in Hyderabad. Sarojini Naidu reveals this event in a letter to Nehru dated 9th December, writing that she has "passed through the most tragic three months of my life." She has been "night and day serving her" while Padmaja was holding "her thin cold hand. And Baba, unable to bear the agony of watching her suffering, is sitting outside" (Paranjpe 1996: 306).

[38] His research was related to an obscure stomach illness not native to India but which was found in World War One PoW camps and other prisons.

[39] See: https://homeopathybooks.in/the-homoeopathic-recorder-1946-aug-vol-vii-no-5/some-famous-cases/

Jayasurya, by then known as Dr. N.M. Jaisoorya, became politically involved in the 1952 Mulki Movement of Hyderabad, which saw widespread protests against outsiders being recruited by the interim government of the time. He was also elected to the first Lok Sabha of 1952 from Medak district on a ticket of the People's Democratic Front, a Communist Party of India affiliate in Hyderabad State, and lobbied with the central party leadership for a broader United Front of the political Left.[40] He remarried a practicing doctor; the couple remained childless. He actively promoted homeopathy, as the founding president of the Andhra Pradesh Homoeopathic Association, and often addressed gatherings and contributed articles. He did not continue with his political career. Jayasurya Naidu died in 1964, bringing to an end his numerous struggles. What stands out however is so much more — his insightful and sensitive observations of German society and culture, his passionate espousal of a cause he truly believed in, his successful scholarly pursuits despite great adversity, and his commitment to public health issues in India, not to mention his quirky humour.[41] He remains a unique, unusual character in the transnational anticolonial realm of the early 20th century.

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[40] Democratic Research Service. 1957. Ramamurthy's Letter to N.M. Jaisoorya and G.M. Shroff (1953) "Indian Communist Party Documents 1930 – 1956". Democratic Research Service. Pg 179.
[41] Thanks to Julia Hauser for her thoughtful comments in this regard.

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Book Presentation

Privileged Minorities: Syrian Christianity, Gender, and Minority Rights in Postcolonial India (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018)

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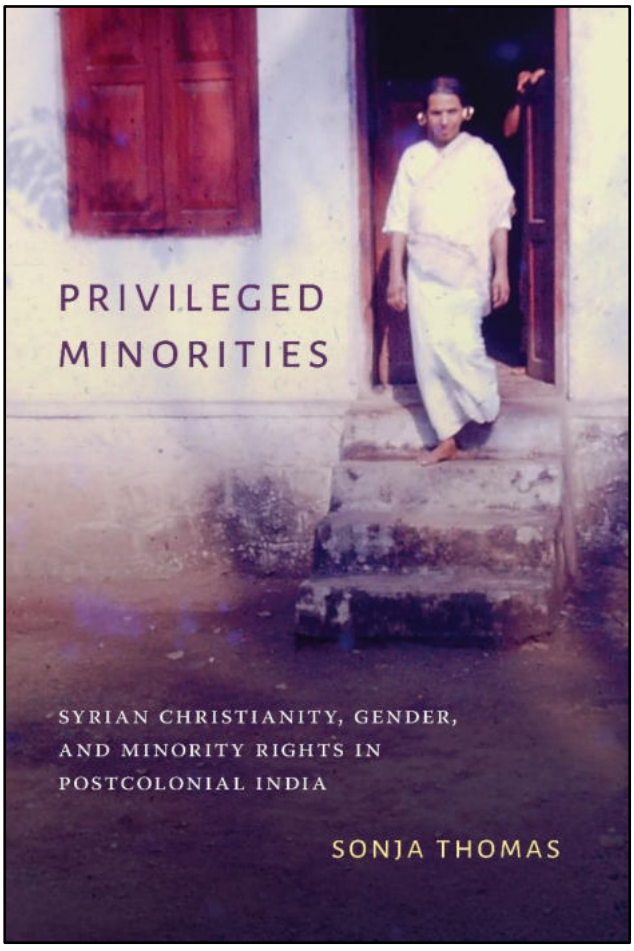

Jacket Cover of 'Privileged Minorities', courtesy, Sonja Thomas

In *Privileged Minorities*, Sonja Thomas looks at how a class, caste, and racially privileged minority in India, the Syrian Christians of Kerala, have crafted a particular sort of 'minority rights' discourse, defined and mediated through the upholding of brahmanical patriarchy. Rather than assuming the workings of power by documenting caste/ gender-based oppression, *Privileged Minorities* 'studies up', looking at how a community which has historically benefited from brahmanical patriarchy builds political bridges with other privileged groups, organizes to protect their socio-economic interests, and mobilizes itself for causes that both directly and indirectly cut off access to minority 'others'.

The Syrian Christians, so named for their use of the 'Syriac' language in their religion, is the oldest Christian community in India. The community believes that St. Thomas, the apostle of Jesus, came to India in the year 52CE and converted dominant caste Hindus to Christianity. While this conversion story is unlikely given the lack of a caste-based organizing system in the 1st century, their 'dominant' caste status over the centuries cannot be disputed. It was consolidated as they became part of the landed elite and participated in/ enforced the draconian caste apartheid practices of the region including distance pollution. To this day, they are recognized as a 'forward' group in the Kerala state, and they are the largest landowners in Kerala.

The book begins with a chapter explaining the caste and denominational divisions between Christians in Kerala and the Syrian Christian community's place in the 'Kerala Model' of development. Using a feminist lens informed by Black feminist thought, women of colour feminisms, and transnational feminisms, Thomas examines the caste, class, and racial privileges of the Syrian Christians through a number of different 'sites', such as women's caste based communal clothing, Aryan and Dravidian racialization, protests for 'minority rights' in the education sector, mixed marriages, and upper-caste Christian women's participation in the Charismatic Movement.

Bringing these disparate sites of analysis together, Thomas attempts to understand how those with caste, race, and religious power continue to police boundaries of group difference in the supposed secular, educated, and progressive state of Kerala, India. A major theoretical intervention of the book is its intersectional analysis and critique of South Asian Studies' unidirectional analysis of caste and religion. *Privileged Minorities* takes on this critique by critically analysing how South Asian Studies broadly and Indian feminisms specifically tends to rely on the 'upper-caste Hindu referent' in the study of caste, religion, and gender. This invisible referent problematically marks Dalit-caste Hindus as the caste 'other' and all Muslims as the religious minority 'other'.

Often, in South Asian scholarship, an inter-caste marriage is seen as separate or different from an inter-religious one. But this separateness is predicated on an understanding of marriage as taking place solely within Hinduism. An interreligious marriage in contrast is seen as one, that is between Hindus and Muslims (without caste). Thus, the vector of analysis always assumes the entry point to be Hindu and upper-caste. As Thomas explains, "because South Asian feminisms tend to, however unintentionally, rely on the upper-caste Hindu referent when imagining caste-based discrimination and minority religion, the frame for understanding how the intersections of gender and caste function in postcolonial India is overdetermined. The very idea that an inter-caste marriage is separate from an interfaith marriage is a case in point. In actuality, one can marry across castes and religions simultaneously (an upper-caste Christian marrying a lower-caste Hindu), just as one can marry within a minority religion and not the same caste (an upper-caste Christian marrying a lower-caste Christian). In other words, an inter-caste marriage can also be an interfaith marriage, just as a marriage within a religion other than Hinduism can be an inter-caste marriage. But because South Asian feminisms tend to see Muslim women as the primary *religious* "other," and Dalit women as the primary *caste* "other," such a nuanced intersectional analysis of mixed marriage fails to register" (Thomas, 2018: 11).

Thomas's critique of this unidirectional analysis by thinking through the norms governing endogamous unions cannot be understated especially given the fact that the Syrian Christian hierarchy is often behind the 'love jihad' moral panic in the Indian nation-state. Thus, gender and sexuality, endogamy, and upper-caste notions of the 'good woman' figure prominently throughout chapters of *Privileged Minorities*.

One of the truly innovative chapters in this monograph concerns caste-based racialized discrimination. Chapter three of *Privileged Minorities*, "Aryans and Dravidians," looks at how a history of slavery in Kerala, 'mythistories' of Aryans (as Brahmins) supposedly

conquering (oppressed caste) Dravidians, and Syrian Christian conversion stories (as supposedly former Aryan Brahmins), work to consolidate a sense of caste-based racialized entitlement amongst Syrian Christians while, making casteism invisible today under seemingly benign beauty preferences for fair skin. This chapter traces how ideas of 'dark' bodies deserving their 'fate' are tied to assumptions of which castes are supposedly best suited for manual labour. Drawing from the book's intersectional analysis of caste, gender, and religion, the chapter weaves in how calls for 'fair skinned brides' depend on compulsory heterosexuality and caste/ religious endogamy—endogamy which engenders and maintains the caste-based racialized system and make divisions between groups seem natural and inevitable. Studies on race in India and anti-blackness in South Asian communities are emerging in South Asian Studies, and this chapter of *Privileged Minorities* provides a basis for this emerging literature to stand on.

This is a book about Christians. However, *Privileged Minorities* does not seek to merely add Christians into the mix of scholarship on caste, gender, and religion. Rather, the intersectional feminist lens of the book allows readers to "examine the relationship between the production of caste and the production of religion and how these work together to engender and consolidate brahmanical patriarchal power, not just within Hinduism but across any religious group that can access social and economic positions of power" (Thomas, 2018: 11). *Privileged Minorities* does most of this analysis through the sticky and often times lesser understood topic of 'secular' education and Article 30(1) of the Indian constitution.

Article 30(1) supposedly protects religious minorities in the face of the tyranny of the Hindu majority by giving linguistic and religious minorities the right to administer and run their own educational institutions. While the postcolonial Indian nation-state set out to protect numerically subordinated religious minorities through constitutional protections like Article 30(1), they did not define how to determine what a minority is. Should a minority be determined demographically by region? Is a sect breaking off a majority religion considered a 'minority'? Are minorities defined through vulnerability? Or just numerically? As *Privileged Minorities* shows, Article 30(1) has become one of the most contested articles in defining what a minority is, and who deserves protection. And the Syrian Christians, although a privileged minority in the Indian nation-state, have been key players. Syrian Christians have historically held a virtual monopoly on private education in India's most educated state, and much of their political organizing since Indian independence has centred on the topic of 'minority rights' in education.

Privileged Minorities argues that protests for 'minority rights' have actually entrenched class, caste, and religious boundaries between minorities. 'Minority rights' for Syrian Christians in the education sector do not exactly encompass Dalit Bahujan Christian or Muslim concerns, or Dalit Bahujan Christian or Muslim social movements. In their wish to skirt regulations in the education sector, the Syrian Christians often tap into a longer history of cultural, civic, economic, and political connections to the upper-caste Hindu community in the region. These divisions between minority movements and connections between upper-caste interests across religions show how caste power routinely trumps religious affiliation.

Women in the Syrian Christian community are 'allowed' to protest in defence of their minority rights alongside men in the community. The defence of 'minority culture'—a culture shaped by brahmanical patriarchal controls over women's mobility, their sexual agency, and their adherence to a 'good woman' norm—is often the unstated but constant pillar around which Syrian Christian 'minority rights' is constructed. Clothing and ornamentation, as an extension of the body, is a 'site' that the book examines, to understand these casteist patriarchal controls. Thomas relies on photographs and oral histories with elderly Syrian Christian women to examine Syrian Christian women's communal clothing and boundary making.

The whiteness of Syrian Christian women's clothing and gold ornamentation—itself tied to Aryan and caste purity logic—has a symbiotic relationship to dominant caste Hindu clothing. But the clothing and ornamentation also marks Syrian Christian women as a unique religion, separate from Hindus, Muslims, and Dalit Bahujan 'others'. While there has been much written on the Breast Cloth Movement, a movement initiated by Dalit Bahujan women for the right to wear an upper-caste Hindu breast cloth, *Privileged Minorities* looks at the following sartorial change in newly independent India: the move to the 'secular' and supposedly unmarked sari. Does the ubiquity of the sari (and then churidar) amongst women of all castes and religions mean that communal and caste divisions also disappeared?

No.

As Thomas writes, "the change to the sari shows how shifting notions of belonging, from communal belonging to national belonging, reworked overt demarcations of identity into implicit ones…With this reworking of embodied belonging and exclusion came a revision of previous codes of female sexual morality (Thomas, 2018: 57)." Thus, in *Privileged Minorities* Thomas asks, "Which women are in a position to benefit from 'women's rights' in postcolonial India? And what sort of benefit is it? Which communities are in a position to benefit from movements that claim to be for 'minority rights'? And what sort of benefit is it (p. 92)?"

Privileged Minorities has a wide disciplinary audience—South Asian Studies, Women's Studies, Religious Studies, Education, Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, and Race/ Ethnic Studies. It is wide in scope and the in the 'sites' analysed. But what is constant in the book is a feminist intersectional analysis of brahmanical patriarchal power. Power often seeks to make itself invisible. In the state of Kerala, this is perhaps even more so because education, communism, and development indicators supposedly have eradicated caste-based divisions and social inequalities. But *Privileged Minorities* shows how a supposed educated, women friendly, and caste blind society has only taken previous divisions and "conveniently hides the workings of privilege within (the sari's) very folds" (Thomas, 2018: 65). To expose and speak truth to power requires disciplinary breadth and interdisciplinary bridging. In its disciplinary breadth and sites of analysis, *Privileged Minorities* makes visible that which power seeks to make invisible. In this, the book teaches us how to learn from the past, see the patterns of systemic casteism and racism in the present, and to better work toward equitable feminist futures.

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Book Presentation

The Rise and Fall of a Brown Water Navy: Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre and Maratha Seapower on the Arabian Sea in the 17th and 18th Centuries (New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2021)

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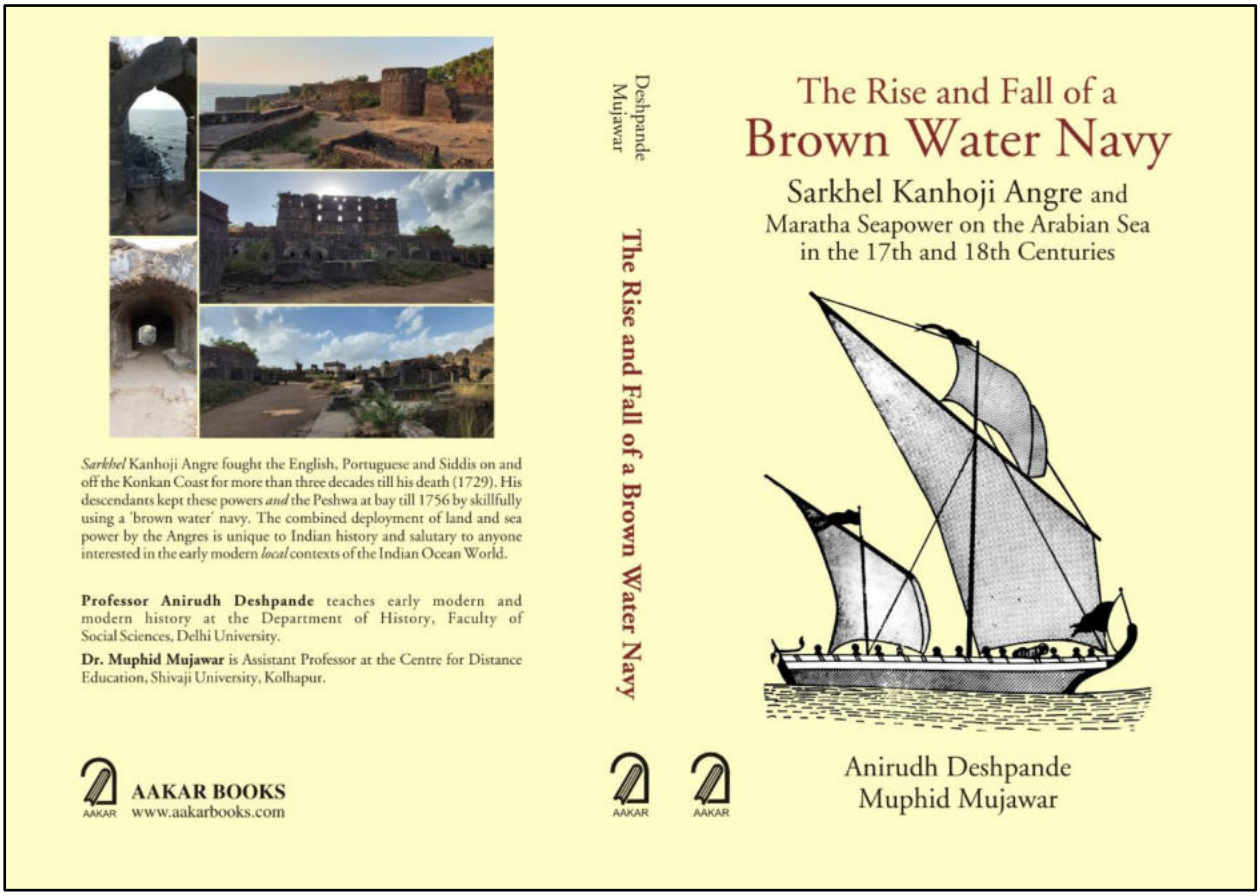

Jacket of 'The Rise and Fall of a Brown Water Navy', courtesy Anirudh Deshpande

This book tests the mega-historical hypothesis of the 'military revolution' propounded in a world-famous tome by the same name by Geoffrey Parker in 1988. The context of this examination is the remarkable naval exploit of the Angre family which successfully ruled the Konkan for more than half a century till 1756. Western scholars have probably not heard of this remarkable family. Naval historians, in general, do not pay adequate attention coastal navies. On the west coast of India several 'brown

water' coastal navies made their mark on history between 1500 and 1800 one of which was the Maratha Navy. The foundation of a sovereign Maratha navy was laid by Shivaji who realized the importance of securing the Konkan coast to his project of land based *swarajya*. His navy was purpose built as a 'brown water' navy manned by men drawn from the myriad seafaring communities of the Konkan coast. His naval commanders were Muslim and intrepid families of humble origins flocked to his secular standard. One such family which rose from obscurity to fame in the latter half of the 17th century was that of the Angres. The Angre military family lost its glory after Vijaydurg, Tulaji Angre's naval base, was stormed by a joint Anglo-Maratha force in February 1756. The English were led by Colonel Robert Clive who landed close to the besieged stronghold and led the assault. This was Clive's first major command and military action prior to the Battle of Plassey which made him famous in the annals of modern history. The loot of Vijaydurg, held by the English till July 1756, was substantial and included a sum of one million rupees in cash from Tulaji's treasure chest. Tulaji was taken away by the Peshwa's men, shifted from jail to jail before dying in captivity in 1786. The Peshwa helped the English get rid of Tulaji but received not a penny in return, the Treaty of 1755 between him and Bombay being totally advantageous to a Company not known for keeping its word. Barely twenty years ago the history of the Konkan peppered with the facts mentioned above was practically unknown outside Maharashtra. Parker had probably not even heard of the place. The capacity of Angre power to hold out against three strong navies on the Arabian Sea for five decades contrasts with the swiftness with which larger and more resourceful sub-continental polities fell to the English East India Company in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Bengal (1757), Mughals (1764), Awadh (1764), Marathas (1802-05) and the Sikhs (1849), compared with the house of *sarkhel* Angre, were vanquished by the well drilled Company armies almost in a twinkle of an eye. Both Marathas and Sikhs had modernized their armies with European assistance. By the 1790s they possessed artillery equal to the Company artillery or sometimes superior to it. Yet they lost all major battles to the well paid and better led Company forces. On the other hand, was a family of doughty sea captains in command of 'brown water' navies and coastal forts garrisoned with native and foreign fighters. Entrenched on the Konkan were the Angres and earlier, on the Malabar, were the Kunjali Marakkars of the 17th Century. Why and how did the Angres successfully retain their near autonomous rule over the Konkan by the use of sea power? How did they combine sea and land power to remain defiant against the Europeans and later the Peshwa? Would it be correct to project our views on the Angres? Is it possible to rescue them from an anachronistic reading of the 18th Century? Hopefully these questions are answered in this latest book on Maratha sea power which locates Kanhoji in the context to which he truly belonged. The excavation of local histories challenges the assumptions of *Eurocentrism*. While it is true that Europe, especially western and southwestern Europe, emerged as the centre of world power in the 18th and 19th Centuries there is much to learn from local histories situated in various sub-regions of the Indian Ocean World. The recovery of histories subsumed by a historiography coloured by Eurocentrism has much to teach those whose ancestors became the victims and subjects of Western imperialism and colonialism. This recovery of a new well researched past is also important to learn lessons from history and help make the transition from victimhood to being an agency of the historical process dominated by imperialism and colonialism. At the outset it must be pointed out that the colonizers' experience in America was radically different

from their experience in the Indian Ocean World. In Asia and the Indian Ocean World 'gunpowder empires' had flourished for a long time before the caravels of da Gama appeared on the Arabian Sea. While the native Americans had no horses and used arrows, axes, tomahawks and spears against the mounted Europeans wielding guns and artillery, in the Indian Ocean World the Arabs, Indians and Malaccans were, *inter alia*, adept at using artillery and matchlocks. America fell to Spain and Portugal within a matter of years whereas the true conquest of mainland India began only in the mid-18th century when the Mughal Empire disintegrated. The *Estado da India* of the Portuguese, it must be remembered, was confined to coastal enclaves with its capital in Goa. On the Konkan and Malabar coasts of India, the local history of the native powers was enmeshed with the local history of the European powers who vied with the native powers and with each other to dominate the profitable coastal and Arabian Sea trade. Since seaborne trade ultimately depends upon ports the coastal control over the ports stretching from the coasts of East Africa to Ceylon was crucial to all the powers who sought to milk maritime trade in the region. Ports were also strategically important as the confluences of inland and seaborne trade. Those who controlled the ports and commanded them from the heights of great fortresses were militarily formidable. Sometimes, to force an issue, the Company relied on crown forces and the Royal Navy but, research shows, the Royal Navy did not really play a *decisive role* in the history of British imperialism which unfolded in the Arabian Sea region. Company records continuously refer to the mortal danger posed to Bombay by the Angres. The larger Angre native warships armed with guns ranged freely on the coast attacking merchant ships and capturing prize between Surat and Karwar. To understand the naval history of the 'brown water' navies operating on the Arabian Sea it is important to study the activities of the Company, Siddis, Portuguese *and* Angres *together* in the 17th and 18th centuries. That is achieved in this book. There is reason to believe that if the Peshwa had not allied with the English against Tulajee Angre who carried forward the tradition of political autonomy established by his illustrious father, the Angre flags would have fluttered in the Arabian Sea breezes for a few more decades. The story of the rise and fall of the Angre admirals also reveals the difference between the state established by Shivaji who employed able men irrespective of their caste or creed and later the Brahmin Peshwas of the 18th Century. After the demise of Angre power the Maratha Navy passed into the hands of the Peshwa's chosen family, the Dhulaps. The brown water navy with its tradition of multi-religious recruitment survived and occasionally skirmished with the armed ships of Haider Ali, called *ghurab Haidari* in the sources, but its high noon had been achieved by 1756. The end of Angre naval power also paved the way for the rapid rise of British power in Western India.

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Book Presentation

Science and Religion in India: Beyond Disenchantment (London: Routledge, 2021)

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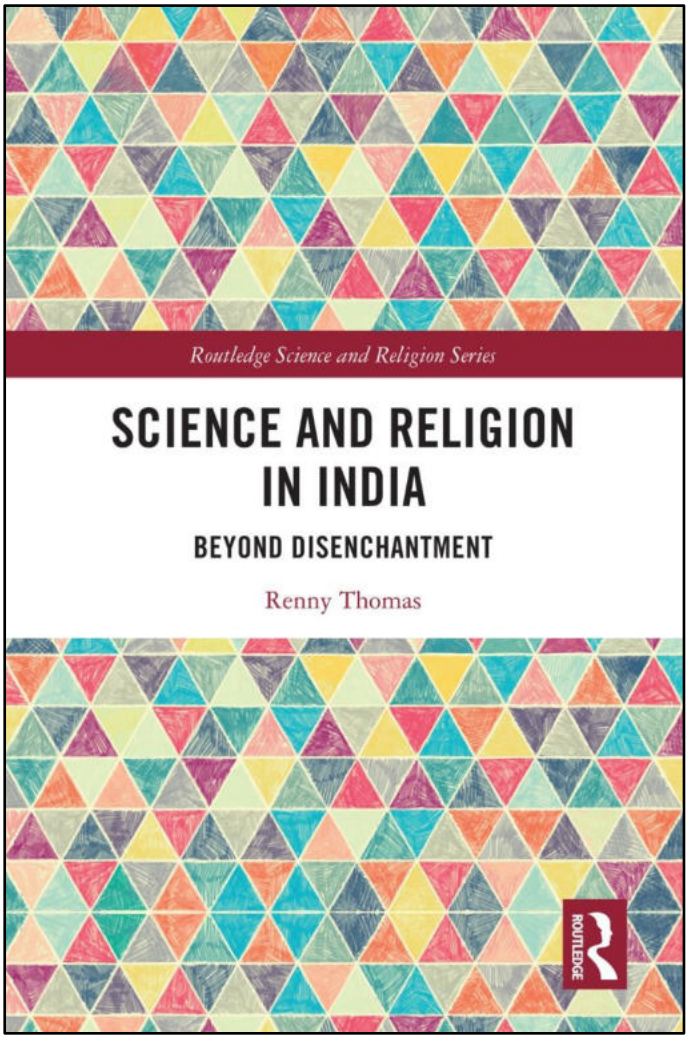

Jacket of 'Science and Religion in India', courtesy Renny Thomas

Science and Religion are two categories that are most discussed and most misunderstood in our times, especially within the Indian context. This book, *Science and Religion in India: Beyond Disenchantment* is an ethnographic study that focuses on epistemic questions surrounding what science and religion in India constitutes. I argue that since there is an everyday life to these categories, they should be understood beyond the hitherto bifurcative and binary reading. Drawing on biographical, autobiographical, historical, and ethnographic source materials, *Science and Religion* focuses on the scientists' own religious lives and religious practices, and the different varieties of religious expressions. While my arguments problematise the idea of science and religion being naturally interconnected, I propose a need for the discussion to transcend the binary model of 'conflict 'and 'complementarity'. By complicating the binary understanding and imagination of science and religion in India, my monograph engages with new ways of exploring these categories.

The relationship between science and religion is too complex to be accommodated within the paradigm of either conflict or complementarity. I trace the historicity of this binary by a reading of science and religion as a trend that emerged in response to a

particular Western context. Although we have a great deal of insightful and exciting scholarship in the history of science, on science and religion, we still don't have enough ethnographic studies of the subject for the South Asian context. It is only through detailed ethnographic study, enabled by being part of scientific laboratories and institutions, that we can think of newly emerging meanings of science and religion. This book is an attempt to do just that! As part of a laboratory for a year, I interviewed many of my lab mates, colleagues, and other scientists about their views and practices surrounding religion. I travelled with them, and spent a lot of quality time with them, both in formal and informal settings. This allowed me to be part of their lives in a way that enabled the asking of questions about their belief in religion and caste in a way that I hope was engaging. They too trusted me, but only because I was one of them, as a laboratory member. It initially took me some time to convince them about the nature and intent of my work at the laboratory, but with time, they showed an interest in my work. I also gave a presentation about my research, and what I would be doing, as an anthropologist at a meeting at the laboratory (henceforth, my field site). Not only were my interlocutors interested in my work, but they also provided me with all necessary support to conduct the interviews, embellishing it later with further comments, after going through my written notes. Therefore, after my methodological success, I argue that an ethnography of science and religion is perhaps the only gateway to understanding the new emerging meanings of science and religion. An ethnographic context also helps researchers converse about science and religion, without necessarily viewing science and religion through the fixed paradigms of dialogue, reconciliation, conflict, and complementarity.

This book further demonstrates how the allegedly complementary relationship between science and religion in our times, has been used to promote the cause of cultural nationalism. I argue that right wing religious groups and political regimes across the world look for a natural co-existence between science and their respective religions to claim a superior status. In the Indian context, it helped scientists to see themselves as interconnected practitioners of both – as scientists of high status, and as religious practitioners of a superior religious and caste group. My book argues that the call for a natural co-existence between science and religion is political in nature. While in India, this call has been often used to assert the 'natural' superiority of Hinduism and its 'natural' ability to accommodate modern science, this, I contend, is not a productive manner of looking at science and religion. It is primarily unproductive for assuming that a certain tradition or religion or faith is naturally connected to science, and is therefore superior to others. It is this idea that science and Hinduism are naturally connected, that leads to the various claims we hear from political leaders on an everyday basis about the coexistence of modern science and technology (including the internet and plastic surgery) and ancient India. This view posits that science is not new to Hindu religious traditions. The relationship between science and religion in India, however, is as complicated as it is elsewhere and the discussion, the monograph insists must transcend conflict and complementarity for a deeper understanding. When we discuss science, scientists, and religion in India, we also need, for instance, to also discuss the question of caste and science. There is a detailed chapter in the book that is dedicated to the subject of caste and science, and explores the many ways caste works among Indian scientists. While the rest of the sections predominantly outline an exploration of the culture of science, the book

argues that the story of science and religion in India should not be merely a narrative of and about upper-caste Hindu scientists. Instead, the study of science and religion in the Indian context is meant to contribute to the global study of science and religion, as all existing scholarship on the subject privilege a discussion of Western experiences. Experiences from different parts of the world would only enrich the academic discussion.

Although my book explores science and religion in India, I do not intend to exoticize the Indian situation, or erase the specific cultural context within which the thematic is embedded. By ethnographically studying the intermingling of science and religion, the book instead underlines the complexity, plurality, and ambiguity between science and faith, wherever its intermingling is encountered. The exploration of these various cultural contexts only deepen the epistemic complexity of the subject, and it is important to note how these contexts mediate the believers' 'assertions and anxieties about their religion and its possible scientific value. In the case of India, we see how such concerns are part of a Hindu majoritarian push to dominate political and civil space. *Science and Religion in India* explores the many lives of science and religion in the Indian context: the specific cultural and layered meanings of these categories, and the ways in which Hindu majoritarianism uses both science and religion for political purposes, trying to translate a nostalgia for lost science into a Hindu nationalist epistemic about the history of science.

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Book Presentation

Delhi, in Thy Name: The Many Legends that Make a City (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2021)

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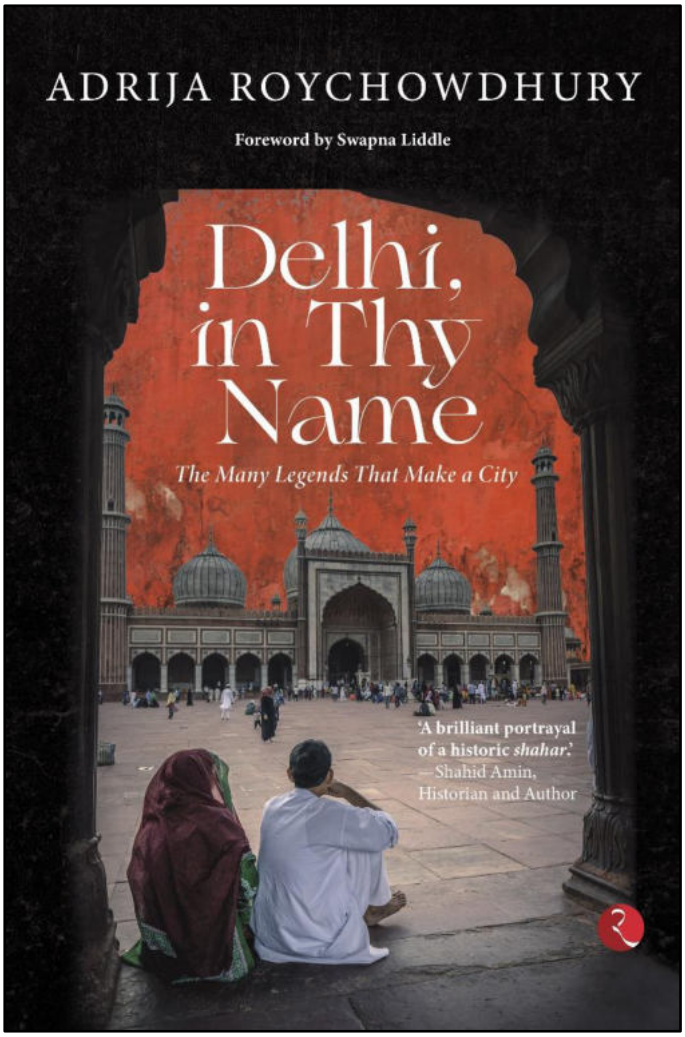

Jacket of 'Delhi, in Thy Name', courtesy Adrija Roychowdhury

Regime changes in any country and at any time have often been accompanied with a vast array of symbolic demonstrations of what that governance represents. Place names are a most potent political symbol in this regard. We know, for instance, that an immediate consequence of the Russian Revolution was that a majority of street names in the country carrying memories of the Tsarist regime were erased and replaced by those carrying names of Soviet leaders or philosophies that the new Communist regime represented.

Since the 2014 electoral victory of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, a similar spree of name changes have ensued. Allahabad for instance, is now Prayagraj, Faizabad in Uttar Pradesh has been renamed as Ayodhya, and the name of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in New Delhi has been erased and replaced with that of former president APJ Abdul Kalam. Similar name changes had followed the birth of independent India in 1947 as well, when a large number of street names honouring British officials were dropped in favour of nationalist icons. Street names offer a window into the history that a particular government represents, or that which those in power wish to erase.

My interest in names stemmed from the optics around them in recent times. *Delhi, in Thy Name* is a historical and journalistic exploration of street names in Delhi. Through

the book I tried to find out the meaning that those in authority assign to a particular street name, and how do residents living in the place relate to it. Consequently, the focus of the book is on the voices of the people of Delhi, and their lived experience of the city and the many names it carries. I chose the city of Delhi in this regard for the simple reason that being the capital of India, much of the political and ideological changes in the central government, find an immediate reflection in the names of places and institutions in the city.

The book begins with an analysis of street names across the world and in India. What does the fact that in France street names are variegated and changing all too frequently, in direct contrast to Great Britain, where multiple streets carry the same name, tell us about the differing historical trajectories in both the countries? Why is it that in Russia following the fall of the Soviet Union, several street names carrying the name of Joseph Stalin were removed and yet those named after Vladimir Lenin were retained? These are some of the questions I ask in the chapter. The desire to get rid of a place name might very well come from those living in it, as we see is the case of a small village in Bihar in India called 'Pakistan'. However, the act of renaming ultimately is dependent on the government's interest in the matter and whether or not the choice of the people is in line with the belief system that the government represents.

The book's journey of the street names of Delhi begins with the city's Mughal quarters or what was once named as Shahjahanabad by Shah Jahan who built it. For the average outsider Old Delhi is Chandni Chowk. But Chandni Chowk is really just one street that stretches out from the Red Fort to Fatehpuri Masjid. Situated inside the walled city of Shahjahanabad is a labyrinth of streets carrying an exciting potpourri of names like Suiwalan (lane of needles), Gali Churiwalan (lane of bangles), Lattu Shah ki gali (street named after Lattu Shah), Kucha Hira (a tiny cul de sac named after Hira). These are names that predate the coming of the British in Delhi and are testimony to how people named the places they inhabited, identifying them with the shops lining a street, a person living there, or any structure built. The chapter examines how and why these many names in Old Delhi are loosely combined and identified as Chandni Chowk and why the name Shahjahanabad dropped out of popular favour.

The British announced shifting the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. The second chapter of the book analyses the Delhi built by the British and the nomenclatures devised by them. It is focused upon the shopping arcade adorning the heart of New Delhi, Connaught Place, named after the Duke of Connaught. Interestingly, the Duke of Connaught was a rather insignificant character in the history of the British in India. Why then was his name chosen to honour one of the most significant places in New Delhi? The chapter examines the politics behind naming places in British India after members of the British royal family. What is also worth noting is that, despite the fact that many names of British officials and royals were happily wiped off after Independence, Connaught Place has held on to the imagination of the people of Delhi. The only attempt to rename it was made by Congress politician Mani Shankar Aiyer in the 1990s. He proposed naming it Rajiv Chowk after former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. The chapter ends with an interview with Aiyer, in which

he poured his heart out about why he wished the new name and why he thinks that Rajiv Gandhi's name did not have popular appeal.

Much of Delhi as we know it today was built after the Independence of India as waves of migrants flowed into the city, many escaping the horrors of the Partition and several others from all over India in hope of better jobs, education or life in general. The following four chapters of the book dwell at length over the post-independence history of Delhi and how names of the new neighbourhoods cropping up carried the philosophy of those in power in an independent India or the desires of the starry-eyed new residents of Delhi.

The third chapter is on Chittaranjan Park, the South Delhi neighbourhood, built to provide accommodation to those who lost out on property in East Bengal on account of the Partition. Housing for those who suffered on account of the Partition makes up large parts of New Delhi. A large majority of them are named after heroes of the nationalist uprising like Lajpat Nagar (named after Lala Lajpat Rai), Malviya Nagar (named after Madan Mohan Malviya), Tilak Nagar (named after Bal Gangadhar Tilak) and the like. Chittaranjan Park, named after Chittaranjan Das was also one of them. However, was it really the first choice of the residents, or one that was politically motivated? The chapter explores this question. It also traces the long and rich history of Bengalis in Delhi, of which Chittaranjan Park is the most recent addition, and how that played out into creating the neighbourhood as we know it today.

Standing right opposite Chittaranjan Park is the neighbourhood built to house the Kashmiri Pandit residents of New Delhi, Pamposh Enclave. Pamposh, which in Kashmiri means lotus, is of immense significance in the cultural and everyday lives of Kashmiris. It is also a symbol of neutrality that gives away nothing about the deep communal divides in the Kashmir Valley. The fourth chapter on Pamposh Enclave unravels how the Kashmiri Pandit community wove in migration as part of their identity and why it chooses to represent itself through a neutral symbol of lotus rather than paying homage to its history or its historical heroes.

The fifth chapter of the book travels into Saket, a colony built by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in the 1960s and 70s. Saket, as many would know, is the ancient name of Ayodhya, the birthplace of the Hindu God Ram. Interestingly, this name from Hindu mythology, was given to a neighbourhood that contains every ingredient of a 'secular', 'inclusive' and 'modern' India- glamorous malls, wide boulevards, multi storeyed housing complexes, lush green parks and more. A closer look at Saket would reveal that it is surrounded by urban villages dating back to the Sultanate era, with a significant Muslim population. The chapter traces the urban development of Delhi carried out by the DDA and how a silent spirit of majoritarianism crept into the way it envisioned New Delhi.

The book ends with the chapter on Shaheen Bagh, the colony made hugely popular by the 2019 anti-CAA protests that took birth here. Shaheen, in Persian, means falcon. It was a metaphor used frequently by the poet Muhammad Iqbal in his works. Shariq Ansarullah, who built Shaheen Bagh in the 1980s, told me that he was extremely influenced by Iqbal's words and philosophies, which is why he named his neighbourhood after the poet's favourite metaphor. The chapter on Shaheen Bagh

tries to understand what the ideologies of Iqbal meant to a Muslim migrant who moved to New Delhi in the 1970s. It also examines the relationship that Delhi shared with its Muslim residents, and why the residents of Shaheen Bagh were instrumental in ushering what is believed to be the most historic of Muslim led protests in independent India.

The chapters of *Delhi, in Thy Name* are by no means an exhaustive account of street names in the capital. They have been selected in ways to bring in six different historical trajectories, to show how multiple shades of history have made New Delhi. The book hopes to trigger an interest into the world of street names and what they can tell us about our past and present.