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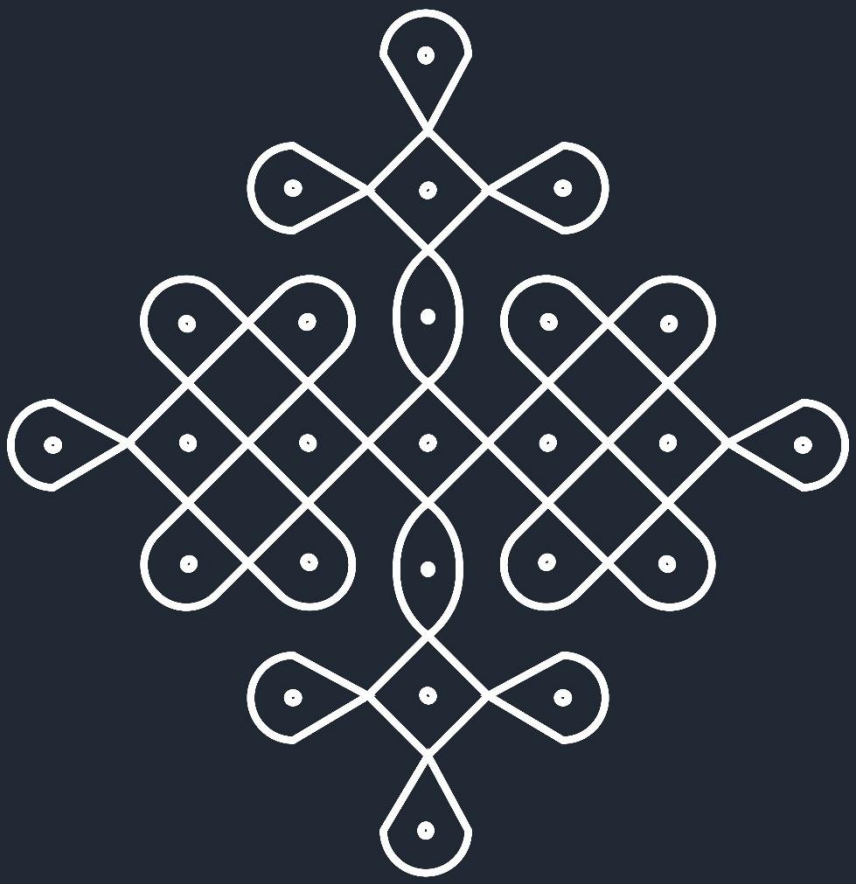

Ontologies of Relational Space in South Asia (Volume 1)

Guest edited by Venugopal Maddipati

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Editor's Preface: A New Beginning

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It gives me great pleasure to present the July 2023 issue of Nidān, and I would begin as usual, by first thanking our readers, contributors, peer-reviewers, and book-review writers for their encouragement, inspiration, advice, and patience. In many ways this is a new beginning for Nidān. While my predecessor and mentor Professor P. Pratap Kumar helped to build the journal as an institutional product since 1989, first at his own university department in South Africa, and then with Sabinet—a publishing house in Durban since 2012—Nidān has made a new, meaningful shift in 2023. From the July 2023 issue, Nidān is open-access, published and distributed as an e-journal by Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing (HASP), a publication division of Heidelberg University (Germany). With this open-access format, our authors and reviewers will henceforth retain copyright control over their contributions—a move, which I am sure will especially benefit students. I must thank my colleagues at HASP for helping me launch a renewed Nidān just as I must thank my colleagues at Sabinet for working closely with me in the last two years. I hope our readers will also enjoy the older issues of the journal that have been uploaded in the archives section of the journal website on the HASP portal. As tribute to the lifetime achievement made by Nidān, Professor P. Pratap Kumar has penned a special and poignant retrospective in this issue that not just describes his own academic journey as Nidān editor, but the journey that Nidān itself has taken as a journal, traversing many a choppy waters. I would not have been able to carry on as Nidān editor either without the support of my editorial team members, Professor P. Pratap Kumar and Westin Harris. I therefore take this opportunity to thank them for their priceless teamwork.

This issue is again, as usual, also an intellectual 'special issue' that introduces a fresh scholarly approach to the history of architecture and space in South Asia. I approached the present guest-editor, Venugopal Maddipati in 2022, and after many discussions and brainstorming sessions that took place both online and in Delhi, this special issue along with its cohort of scholar-contributors has consolidated itself into what is now a rich and rigorous investigation of relational space as an intellectual concept. Research on any subject, however specific the theme, is never completely closed. While brainstorming up until now has resulted in the publication of this special issue—both the July and forthcoming December volumes—this is not the end of all that can be said about relational space. This is also, therefore, a powerful new beginning. Our guest editor for this special issue, Venugopal Maddipati will I hope, feel enthused in the future to rework and re-collate articles from this issue, and transform the endeavour into an expanded collected volume that would promise an even more theoretically intense academic intervention. Not only do we at Nidān wish him the very best, but we are also proud to witness his academic journey of relational space, that started with us in 2023.

Relational space as a concept interrogates our own blind spots about how we perceive spaces and places as given entities—as if natural and self-contained along with its constitutive elements. This special issue investigates how space is formulated through social relationships that wield it and transform it, treating it not as a given, but as a part of an ever-changing physical, social, and political network that is imbricated within a historical power struggle. Apart from five research articles that are part of this special issue, the July 2023 issue contains three additional articles: "The (Im)possibility of Winning the Untouchables", "Beyond Reformism", and "Remembering Sharmila Rege." While the first article explores historical tensions between Ambedkarite and Gandhian politics in colonial Malabar, the second article on Shahu investigates the third space of lower-caste, Hindu politics in colonial Maharashtra (Bombay Presidency) that deconstructs dichotomized *savarna* and Dalit politics. The third contribution is a commemorative research article about Sharmila Rege by two colleagues from the Women Studies Centre at the Pune University. This is an emotional article for me, as the Women's Studies Centre was my Alma Mater as well, with Sharmila Rege being an important mentor and source of inspiration in my academic life. Her inspiring work: academics, politics, and teaching has served to motivate and inspire many colleagues and friends for many generations that thankfully included mine. The article is also special for other reasons. As feminist-academics, we specially remember Sharmila, ten years after her passing on the 17th of July 2013, and celebrate her Dalit-feminist academics and Phule-Ambedkarite pedagogies of grassroots feminism that were combined with tremendous academic rigour and personal empathy for students from non-privileged backgrounds. A special shout-out over here goes to dear Rohini Shukla, for providing a poignant illustration for the article, based on some photographs of Sharmila that are still available in the public domain.

Lastly, this issue contains five intensive book-reviews of excellent monographs written by Ehud Halperin on the Himalayan goddess Hadimba, Anirudh Deshpande and Muphid Mujawar on Kanoji Angre, Francis Clooney's translation of Tempavani—a Tamil work composed by Catholic missionary Beschi—and Paul Joshua's writings on Indian Christianity. As usual, I have contributed a book-review to this issue as well, where I present and analyse Kalyani Menon's thought-provoking and brilliant monograph on the place-making practices of Muslims in contemporary Old Delhi—an academic investigation that fits both with Venugopal Maddipati' special issue on relational space, as well as with Sharmila Rege's activist-academic, Phule-Ambedkarite pedagogies.

I hope our readers will enjoy Nidān's July 2023 issue!

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My Journey with Nidān: Looking Back and Looking Forward

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It is a truism that political processes and academic enterprises are inherently linked to one another. I cannot think of any academic enterprise that is free of politics of the state. The story of my journey with Nidān is underlined by the above assumption. I could hardly separate my academic career from the life of Nidān as a journal as it has stayed with me (perhaps I have stayed with it) for the best part of my academic career. Therefore, my journey with Nidān could hardly be told without my academic journey in South Africa.

Let me first begin with how I got to South Africa. After completing my doctoral studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, having declined job offers in the US and Canada, I decided to go to South Africa as my wife who happens to be a South African of Indian origin wanted to return to South Africa in the wake of the political changes happening at the beginning of the 1990s. Most readers of Nidān would know the story of South Africa and its notorious and infamous apartheid system. But I just want to highlight a couple of events that had impacted me. In February 1990 the then President of the country, F.W. De Klerk, unbanned the African National Congress, which was leading the struggle against apartheid, and released Mr. Nelson Mandela from prison. I was just in the process of preparing my thesis for submission. I submitted my thesis in June 1990 and the same month Mr. Mandela was visiting Los Angeles at the invitation of the Black Actors Guild. One of my professors had asked me if I would like to join him to go to the event. I said yes, and off we went and that was my first sight of Mr. Mandela.

After submitting my thesis, I went to the Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University to work with my main supervisor, Prof. John B. Carman who was at the time the Director of the Centre. Prior to that I spent 1988-89 at the Centre with him writing my thesis. This was an unusual arrangement, although my primary Ph.D registration was at the UC, Santa Barbara. In effect, I should have said I returned to the Centre after submitting my thesis to the Religious Studies Department, UC Santa Barbara. I spent a few months at the Centre until the end of 1991 February. I then left for South Africa to take up a job offer made by the department of Religious Studies, University of Natal, at the Pietermaritzburg campus in March 1991. This was an unexpected offer, but suited me well at the time. After two and half years at the University of Natal, I joined the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town in June 1993. In April 1994, I was offered a position at the Department of Indian Philosophy and Hindu Studies at the University of Durban-Westville, which was an Indian university at the time. Those of you who may be aware of the education system of South Africa under the apartheid system would know that the system catered for separate educational facilities for different race groups. I had mixed

feelings about taking up the job not only because the University was well-known as a hot bed of politics, but the man I was succeeding was known as a member of the Broederbond, an Afrikaner Calvinist secret society that promoted the system of apartheid. His name was Prof. Frederich Zangenberg, who was the son-in-law of the famous German Indologist, Erich Frauwallner. Now, Frauwallner was implicated in Nazi connections during the war, as most scholars of Indology would know. After the war, he was stripped of his academic position and was placed under house arrest, deprived of his personal library, during which time he wrote his most well-known two-volume Indian Philosophy text. Zangenberg was Frauwallner's student and married his daughter. In the wake of his father-in-law's arrest, the Zangenbergs headed to South Africa as the country under the newly formed Nationalist government was encouraging Europeans to settle in South Africa in order to increase its white population. Due to his Broederbond connections, I was given to understand, that the Indian community's political leadership viewed him with suspicion, and gradually he became isolated even from his own Indian colleagues at the University. But in my personal encounter with him he came across as a genuine human being struggling with his own identity, and seemed very troubled. In 1995, a year after I took up the position, I was made the Head of the Department of Science of Religion, even though my primary teaching responsibility was still in the Indian Philosophy section. The same year the Chair and the head of department of Hindu Studies resigned to take up a position elsewhere. The mantle of Indian Philosophy and Hindu Studies fell on me along with the responsibility to be the editor of Nidān: Journal of Hindu Studies, which was then a departmental journal.

This is a rather circuitous route to get to my association with Nidān, but I thought it was necessary for me to recount these connections. But before I proceed to talk about Nidān, let me make a de tour to place Nidān in the larger political context of South Africa. Here it is hard to separate religion and politics. Afrikaner Nationalism was born out of a particular view of Calvinism to which the Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa had subscribed to during the 18th century. It is in a sense an isolationist ideology that rejected European Enlightenment ideals of human rationality and individuality. It is out of these early religious ideas that a secular Afrikaner Nationalism emerged. Although the British were just as responsible for the racially prejudicial practices during their rule prior to the Afrikaner control, the logic of Afrikaner Nationalism went further in their effort to avoid being in a country as a minority community. The logic was quite simple and yet deeply religious—the Afrikaner intellectuals found that it would be "unchristian" not to allow Black people to develop politically and economically. So, the easiest solution was to separate the destinies of the two communities along political and social lines. Thus was born the notion of "apartheid" that allowed the Afrikaners to have their own state and let the Black people live in their tribal homelands, known as Bantustans or also known as Homelands or Independent Republics. To sustain this ideology two key pillars emerged—the Nationalist Party and the Broederbond secret society. The system of apartheid is deeply rooted in their experience of "Exdous" from the British rule in the Cape colony, known as the "Great Trek" of the 1830s. This "Exodus" is metaphorically aligned with the Biblical Exodus, in search of a promised land that God had given

them. The Afrikarners came to see themselves as the “chosen people” of God.

The Nationalist Party was established in 1914 (later came to be known as National Party) in an effort to oppose the anglicising policies of the British on the one hand, and to protect white people from the Black majority on the other. The party went through various formations between the time of its inception and its coming to power in 1948. It became largely instrumental in making various legislations to legalise the system of apartheid. Without having to go into the minute details of the history of apartheid, let me focus on how it impacted on higher education in South Africa, which has direct relationship to Nidan’s emergence and its identity.

In line with the apartheid ideology, the higher education sector had been divided into four racially identifiable parts—Whites, Indians, Coloureds, and Blacks. Higher education institutions were established for these four racial groups as separate entities to provide for their education. Obviously, the cream of the funding went to the white universities and technical educational institutions. But to understand the education system in South Africa, one has to understand the political system that was designed to entrench white privilege. In 1984, the National Party introduced a new constitution for the Republic of South Africa under which three houses of parliament were established based on a fundamental distinction between “own affairs” and “general affairs”. The former was meant for the three race groups—whites, Indians and Coloureds, whereas the latter was meant for all race groups including the Blacks. For this purpose, the National Parliament was established with three distinct houses of legislature—for the whites (House of Assembly), for the Indians (House of Delegates), and for the Coloureds (House of Representatives). Blacks were not included in the National Parliament, but instead under the “general affairs” they were provided for their education separately.

So, under this new constitution, the government of South Africa established 19 higher education institutions—9 for whites, 2 for coloureds and 2 for Indians and 6 for Blacks. The 6 for the Blacks were in addition to the 7 institutions they already had in their homelands under their respective tribal authorities. The institutions meant for the Indian community were—the University of Durban-Westville, and M.L. Sultan Technikon (I am using the Afrikaans spelling), both established in Durban as the largest of the Indian population lived in the Natal province. In designing these higher education institutions, the key principle that the apartheid government used was to separate science and technology as two fundamentally different domains, the former being primarily understood as creating knowledge, while the latter as using that knowledge for a practical purpose. Universities were understood as belonging to the former realm while the Technikons were located in the latter realm. It is not really unusual to make such a distinction as it is quite universal. But it may be horrifying for readers to realise that these distinctions were based on the belief that there is something of an “essence” that separated them. This is the uniqueness of apartheid. Therefore, the universities were not supposed to do what the Technikons were supposed to do and vice a versa, because they were “essentially” different. Although the non-white universities were called “Universities”, by the nature of their internal programmes, their

structures and facilities were in fact nothing more than “Technikons”. In a lot of the cases, some of the lowly qualified white academics were appointed as heads of departments.

The University of Durban-Westville, the Indian university, began as a college on Salisbury Island, close to Durban coast, connected by a causeway. Initially the island, which was nothing more than a mangrove became the Naval Base for the Royal Navy during the Second World War. Even though South Africa became a Republic and Britain gave up all its control, it continued to use South Africa for its Naval Base from Salisbury Island. In 1957, under the Simonstown agreement, the Royal Navy gave up the control of Salisbury Island in favour of Simonstown. And the South African Naval Service operated from Simonstown. Later on, after the Simonstown agreement expired, the South African Navy moved its operations to Simonstown in the Cape while continuing to use Salisbury as its base. It was here in 1961 that the infamous Salisbury College was built for the Indian community, primarily to train them for low key jobs. In 1971, it was upgraded to the status of a University and moved to Durban to its new campus in 1972. Back at the Salisbury College, Indian Philosophy was taught at the department of Philosophy by Prof. Zangenberg. Even after the new University of Durban-Westville was built in 1972, the Indian Philosophy department continued to exist within the department of Philosophy. Subsequently, other departments of Indian studies—Department of Sanskrit and Indian Languages, and the Department of Hindu Studies were established along with the Department of Science of Religion within the Faculty of Arts. Christian Theology enjoyed the status of a Faculty on its own.

After this de tour of South African political and educational landscape, I need to go on to another minor but important de tour to fully place Nidān in its proper intellectual, as well as the history of apartheid’s ideological context.

One of the consequences of the apartheid system, was its negative impact on South Africa in relation to the rest of the world, as much as it might have produced social and political security for the whites in general and for the Afrikaner in particular. From the stand point of Nidān as a journal, one key area it affected was the activities surrounding intellectual and knowledge production at higher education institutions in South Africa. As the country was gradually isolated from the United Nations, the Commonwealth, and the rest of the world, and despite significant hurdles, scientific and research activity continued unabated, with South African institutions contributing significantly to scientific knowledge in many fields. From heart transplant to military hardware, wildlife preservation as well as minor inventions of adhesives used in aircraft manufacturing (known as Pratley Putty, named after the inventor Mr. Pratley), a swimming pool cleaning instrument known as “creepy crawly” (named for its crawling at the bottom of the swimming pool to remove sediment), etc., South African scientists were at the forefront of scientific collaboration. The fields of social sciences and humanities too, produced significant scholarly research. However, in the face of the increasing isolation of South African institutions, the Department of Higher Education and Training sought to incentivize universities for them to produce

research and publish. Although the idea was meant in good faith to encourage quality scientific research, university administrations blatantly abused the system in order to gain access to government funding and so, put enormous pressure on academics to publish. The more one published, the more funding was given to the concerned university, as the formula tilted more towards quantity rather than quality. In the wake of intellectual isolation, especially in the 1980s, South African academics were forced to publish in South African based journals, which were for the most part, established within the context of various departments. This resulted in the proliferation of academic journals within South African universities. However, during the apartheid era, South African journals, particularly in the fields of social sciences and humanities were already heavily censored and monitored through a dubious system of journal accreditation. This was primarily to prevent activities of sabotage, communism, and terrorism through various publication channels. Scholars who participated through their academic work in any of such activities were isolated, jailed or exiled.

It is in this sort of environment of South African academia that Nidān as a departmental journal of Hindu Studies was born in the late 1980s with its first issue published in 1989. This was almost the tail end of the apartheid system. The then state president, Mr. De Klerk announced the unbanning of the African National Congress in early 1990 and released Mr. Mandela from prison in February 1990. The late arrival of Nidān on the academic landscape of South Africa, however, had less to do with the emerging developments of the late 1980s, but rather, more to do with the establishment of the department of Hindu Studies, and resourcing it took much longer than expected due to lack of qualified academics in the field. Nevertheless, it must be said, that Nidān too shares in the apartheid cultural finger prints, in the sense that it too was used to promote the university's share of the Department of Education funding. Right up to the mid-1990s, it suffered from the problem of quantity vs. quality and the inbred abuse that had internal staff members publish their own research, with dubious review processes.

Nidān, due to being a departmental journal; the chair of the Hindu Studies department was automatically made the editor. Prof. T.S. Rukmani (formerly retired from Miranda College, Delhi) who was hired as the chair of Hindu Studies in 1993 tried in vain to raise the standard of the journal and she left the university in 1995 to take up a position in Canada. As mentioned above, I became the journal editor of Nidān, when I was handed the headship of the Hindu Studies department in 1996, even as I continued as Head of Science of Religion in 1996. I too had the same problem with the journal's standard, and at the expense of becoming unpopular among my own colleagues, tried in vain to make it as international as possible. But the practical problem was that under the funding formula of the Department of Education, the journal could not receive funding for papers published by overseas scholars. By the mid- 2000s, I reached a vexing point and started to disregard the Department of Education funding at the expense of some unhappiness from the Research Office of the university. I began publishing papers by overseas scholars along with a few local ones that were properly reviewed using a double-blind review process, and gradually

worked on raising the standard of the journal. I had to fund the journal from my own research grants received from the National Research Foundation of South Africa. This bold move was specially made possible, when I made a contract with the South African academic journal distributor, Sabinet, to market the journal both within Africa and beyond. This not only brought-in some additional income for the journal's editorial expenses, but more importantly, it helped positioning the journal beyond Africa by spreading it to around 33 countries largely in the West, but also in the East. By this time I was competing with the Journals of Hindu Studies in the US and UK and found myself at a cross-roads, to review the future prospects and goals of the journal. It was in this regard that I decided to close the Hindu Studies Journal after the two issues of 2015, and launched a new journal with a new ISSN number and called it *Nidān: International Journal of Indian Studies*. This was an effort to broaden the scope of the journal, with two issues per year, while retaining the intellectual product brand name of "Nidān". The broadening of the journal's scope did not come out of the blue, but was a result rather of a realization that the journal had already become broader in its scope out of necessity. Even in its earlier phase, it did not just serve Hindu Studies, but also other disciplines such as history, Indian languages, fine arts, music and drama, as long as they had some reference to India. The first two issues of the new journal were published in 2016, and by that time, I had already retired from my university in Durban, South Africa.

Around this time I came into contact with Dr. Deepra Dandekar who showed an enthusiasm in becoming involved with the journal as a guest editor. Thus began her journey with Nidān. I gradually took a back seat and gave the reigns to Dr. Dandekar, finally stepping down from the editorship in 2021. Ever since Dr. Dandekar has taken over, the focus has shifted more to contemporary issues in Indian studies, and this has brought-in a new and fresh outlook, not only to the journal's physical appearance, but also, more significantly to its content. The time has now come to locate the journal outside South Africa. Fortuitously, that shift has become possible with the support of the Heidelberg University library and publication division (Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing or HASP) situated at the Centre for Transcultural Studies (CATS) and the renowned South Asia Institute (SAI) in Heidelberg, that graciously accepted to publish the journal and make it open-access. Through Dr. Dandekar's skilful negotiations, and the cooperation extended by the Heidelberg University staff members, Nidān is now poised to become more internationally available to readers. I wish to thank Dr. Dandekar and all the guest editors who have joined the journal and made Nidān a journal of scholarly importance in the field of Indian studies over the past many years. I am also grateful to Sabinet and the American Theological Library Association for their distribution of Nidan in various countries. I also wish to thank all the reviewers who have provided their free time and scholarly insight to ensure that the papers we published were of good academic standard. Last, but not least, I owe a special debt of gratitude to the many members of the editorial board who have generously allowed me to use their scholarly status in association with Nidān and for giving their scholarly support for the work of Nidan. Those who are continuing to be on the editorial board, and those who have left it at various points in time, I thank them all most sincerely for their support and collaboration with

Nidān. I am pleased to see Nidān taking off to new destinations under Dr. Dandekar's new leadership. and I wish her every success in the future, especially as the journal finds its new home at Heidelberg University. I will continue to be associated with the journal as its academic advisor, and hope to offer my support for the new phase of Nidān.

As we say in South Africa, Hamba Kahle. Thank you!

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Introduction: Ontologies of Relational Space in South Asia

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Relational space is an entity that does not exist on its own.[1] While space, conventionally understood, is an a-priori condition for the existence of entities, "relational space" is nothing unto itself prior to the exchanges between its constituents. Its contours and outlines are contingent upon the particular ways in which communities and materialities enter into relation. In other words, relationships have causal efficacy.[2]

But what distinguishes "relational space" as a category in the South Asian context? How are spaces in the subcontinent transformed by the emergence of new relationships or antagonisms between social groups that collectivize or self-identify along the lines of ethnicity, class, caste, language and religion? Why are particular spatial forms sometimes reified by the emergence of the very relationships that they are expected to discourage? Our special issue is an attempt at answering some of these questions.

Existing spatial categories and boundaries in South Asia, whether historical, religious or administrative, begin to reproportion themselves in the most unexpected ways when viewed through the specific vantages of relationality. No sooner do we make interactions between communities and objects ontologically central to the way we perceive *Bastis, Qasbas, Paras, Purs, Pods, Vadis, or Pattis,* we find that these terms loosen their grip on our imagination as pre-given administrative apparatuses for ordering everyday experience. Instead, we cast a beam on the relationships that necessitated their invocation in the first place; relationships now become causes for all kinds of spatial effects.[3]

[1] The emphasis on relational space here draws from extensive conversations with Preeti Sampat (October 8, 2022), whose more recent work addresses relationality in spatial terms in South Asia.

[2] One way of addressing the causal efficacy of relationships is to draw on the anthropologist Bernard Cohn's arguments on 'regions' in the nineteen sixties. In his now classic *Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society*, Cohn rallied against a purely geographical or physical approach towards regions in India: "the conceptualization of regions," he observed, "involves basically non-physical phenomena, which I might term historical, linguistic, cultural, social structural, and/or the interrelations among these kinds of variables" (1987: 102). Regions, Cohn observes, are also ephemeral. The phenomenon known as the region, "no matter how we define it, exists through time and we must constantly be aware of the danger of reifying what might be a set of contingent choices by some individual or groups within the society we are studying and of elevating the contingent choices into an absolute" (Ibid.: 132).

[3] David Harvey has written extensively about the causal efficacy of capitalist relations. He has argued that capitalist relations often serve to compress space and make it less of "a barrier to communicative action" (1994: 130). In capitalism we bear witness to the emergence of a new ideology of space whose very existence hinges on relationships structured around the speeding up of the circulation of capital and the acceleration of capital's turnover. Capitalist relationalities, in short, produce entirely new spatio-temporal rhythms (Ibid.: 131).

As the contributions of this special issue demonstrate, however, acts of relating and collectivizing, particularly in the context of everydayness, are heavily mediated in the South Asian context. For instance, caste, gender, religion and other social markers of subordination coordinate the assembling and movement of bodies within the sphere of everydayness. As the political scientist Gopal Guru (2012: 71-106) demonstrates in relation to caste, socially dominant groups often affirm their power by producing specific kinds of tormenting experiences. They mobilize space in terms of purity and impurity "in order to give Dalits an experience that pushes…[them] beyond the pale of social civilization" (Ibid.: 116). In other words, dominant groups imprison the marginalized within a "symbolic universe" in which the periphery comes pre-designated for them as the space of habitation (Ibid.: 73).

The victims and the dominated, on the other hand, need not passively submit to the symbolic universe of their tormentors. They can annihilate existing hierarchies by intensifying their own experiences through the lenses of a language of morality that exists outside the symbolic universe of their tormentors. For instance, those who are dominated can reflect on their own experiences through the auspices of powerful political and moral categories such as self-respect, dignity, equality and freedom, and social justice (Ibid.: 74). These categories then become the grounds for new mobilizations, solidarities and relationalities among the dominated, and consequently reformulate the grounds for a renewed conception of equality.

There is, therefore, a social landscape that is at once sustained or reproduced by dominant groups, and resisted or trans-valued by those who are dominated by them. This perpetually transitioning and evolving landscape, or "socially codified space," or what Henri Lefebvre once titled "representational space," intercedes powerfully in the ways in which people collectivize (1991: 39).[4] No matter how people may be predisposed towards being with each other, representational space or socially codified space all too often has a bearing on the ways in which they relate or associate.

This volume, therefore, proceeds along two simultaneous and seemingly unconnected lines. On the one hand it emphasizes the ontological centrality of relationships to our comprehension of physical or mental conceptions of space. On the other hand, it also simultaneously emphasizes the ontological centrality of socially codified spaces or representational spaces to our comprehension of the ways in which people relate with each other in the South Asian context. The census town, the *Firka*, the *Naamghar*, the *Tirath and* Mughal imperial architecture as we shall see in this volume, are at once both: the effects of particular contingent acts of relating and associating, and localizations of representational spaces that pre-configure the ways in which people relate and associate with each other. A rich history of such localizations of representational space already exists. Guru's writing, for instance, has already shown us the manner in which emerging and abating impressions of socially codified spaces refract the way we approach relationalities in the context of temples, factories, villages and Sarais (Guru 2012: 95-106). The essays in this volume, therefore, are an attempt at extending our comprehension of such refractions to a wider range of spatial

[4] According to Lefebvre, representational space "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, though again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs" (1991: 39).

configurations encompassing the census town, the *Firka*, the *Naamghar*, the *Tirath and* Mughal imperial architecture. While from the vantages of fields such as urban studies, architectural history and religious studies we've come to accept these spatial configurations as significant epistemological categories in their own right, the essays in the first volume of this special issue undertake the laborious work of microscopically examining how socially codified space or representational space overlays them and oftentimes saturates them.

Essay Descriptions

Socially codified space and its refractions are palpably in evidence in Yaminie Sharma's paper on the presence of Swangla migrants, a Scheduled Tribe from Himachal Pradesh from the Pattan Valley of Lahaul in the town of Kullu. Sharma writes against dominant conceptions of the urban as a space for the fostering of organic solidarities. For instance, far from serving to enfeeble family bonds and caste-based kinship associations, a growing sense of accretive citizenship in Kullu town reinforces them, and in some instances, reconfigures them. The existence of urban space, in this distinct sense, is not so much predicated on the distribution of labour in the modern context, as it is constituted by and oftentimes even reinforces a kind of representational space in which ethnic affinities and caste-based affinities dominate. Sharma's findings are paradoxical. City-form is reified and made to endure by precisely those relationships and forms of discrimination that it has historically been seen as undermining. City-form, in short, hosts relationships that are entirely different from and antithetical to the very hegemonic idea of the city as the space for the dissolution of mechanical forms of solidarity.

At a distinct remove from city-form and its physicality, relational space in KV Cybil's essay on the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan KV, manifests itself more in the realm of ideas and memories. Cybil engages with the *Firka*, a revenue division within a taluka of the British Malabar, not so much in terms of its validity as an administrative unit in the historical sense, but rather with shifting recollections of the way it existed prior to 1956. Cybil locates the *Firka* and the death of Sardar Gopalakrishnan within the domain of rumours which endlessly proliferate and within which there is no "positivity or finality in terms of a given telos." Putting it differently, the rules governing the discourse surrounding the status of the *Firka* and the event of the martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan are not so much situated in an a priori authority of historical knowledge or experience, but rather in social discourse itself as it contingently unfolds in local conversations on martyrdom. As Cybil shows, this field of social discourse, "with its own laws of development," challenges dominant a-priori conceptions of martyrdom.

Snigdha Bhaswati draws attention to social reconfigurations of a dominant historical a priori in an entirely different context. Her paper delves into the religiosity of the followers of Sankaradeva, a saint leader in Assam. Bhaswati writes about Sankaradeva's religious ideology referred to as *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, or *Naba boishnab-baad*, particularly in the context of the *Naamghar*, which is a physical space for congregational practices and worship. The paper interprets divergent sectarian interpretations of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, with an emphasis on the influence of

the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, an organization formed to address practices of caste-based discrimination, and the propagation of Brahmanical rituals among the followers of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharm*a in Assam. Bhaswati particularly draws attention to the functioning of the *Naamghars* in the site of Dikhowmukh in Assam. The growing influence of the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha* in Dikhowmukh resulted in the erosion of commensurability and horizontal relationships between the Sangha members and other followers of Sankaradeva who did not associate with the Sangha. Nevertheless, the physical space of the *Naamghars* is configured within a socially codified space that enables a shared existence for the followers of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* irrespective of their sectarian affiliations.

While Bhaswati's paper draws attention to the ways in which the *Naamghar* is socially emplaced within regional discourses, Yogesh Snehi writes about *Valmiki Tirath*, a major pilgrimage centre for the *Valmiki* community in contemporary Punjab, as a relational space in a trans-regional sense. Beginning with an account of the demographic spread of the *Valmiki* community in Punjab, Snehi subsequently delves into the sacred geography of the Ramayana and the significance of *Valmiki Tirath* within that geography. The affective power of *Valmiki Tirath* surges through its association with events associated with epics and legends that resonate in a larger, more general, trans-regional tradition. At the same time, Snehi also chronicles the rise of trans-regional *adi* traditions—linking the spaces of very local association, such as *Valmiki Tirath,* to transregional critiques of dominant brahmanic traditions and symbols. Socially codified space is therefore constituted through wholly incommensurable but simultaneous invocations of a sense of territory that extends beyond the local. These invocations in turn come to have an impact on the manner in which relationalities are configured locally at the V*almiki Tirath.*

Socially codified space sometimes also mediates the ways in which the past is invoked. In "Mansions of the Gods and Visions of Paradise," Pushkar Sohoni proposes a relational comprehension of the Marathas' deployment, in the 18th century, of specific Islamicate architectural forms, such as the nine-bay mosque plan, the enclosure wall for gardens, and the *hasht bihisht* plan. In particular, Sohoni examines three Maratha temples, the Omkareshvara temple (c. 1738 CE), the Naro Shankara temple (c. 1747 CE) and the Ganesha temple at Tasgaon (c. 1799 CE). At the time of their creation under the auspices of the Marathas, the Islamicate forms of these temples may not so much have harked back to cosmology, eschatology or divinity, but rather to a representational space that enfolded within itself a more immediate Mughal imperial past. In other words, the causal relations underlying the emergence of the three temples can be squarely situated within a more immediate, profane Maratha desire to invoke Mughal imperial power. Equally, Sohoni argues, it is only through the creation of "a sub-Mughal court, in etiquette, manners, and indeed architecture and painting" that Mughal architectural space survived or flourished in the time after the death of Aurangzeb. "Mughal social and visual culture was ironically promulgated by the very polities that were catalysts of Mughal political downfall." What, then Sohoni asks, is Mughal space, if it isn't the relationships that re-enunciate it and reify it long after the passing of the Mughal imperial age?

The papers we have chosen for this issue contribute to our comprehension of the ways in which space supervenes upon relationality. The papers do not so much reify the census town, the *Firka*, the *Naamghar*, the *Tirath and* Mughal imperial architecture as enduring verities, as reveal how they are configured contingently through particular forms of relating and associating at particular moments in time. At the same time, the papers draw our attention to the unique configurations of socially codified space that, in the South Asian context, reproportion relationality. No attempt at historicizing relationality, it would appear, is adequate without a near simultaneous attempt at engaging with the broader field of power within which relationships emerge in the first place.

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From *Ram Tirath* to *Valmiki Tirath*: The Making of *Valmiki* Religious Identity in Amritsar

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This paper contextualises the emergence of the *Valmiki Tirath* as a major pilgrimage centre for the Valmiki community in contemporary Punjab. Its inauguration in 2016 has a longer history of contestation and association. Before it was officially established as a '*Valmiki*' *Tirath* through an Act of the state legislature, the site was popularly known as '*Ram*' *Tirath*, associating it with the legendary figure of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. This was despite the site's well-known legendary status as the abode of Sage Valmiki where Sita lived in exile with her two sons. Besides, most important shrines at the *Tirath* were under the control of non-Valmiki *mahants*, which was also the major reason for long-drawn political and legal contestation. However, the recent state recognition given to the site as a *Valmiki Tirath* needs to be placed within the broader contours of *Valmiki* social and political aspirations which can only be understood by paying attention to their demographic spread broadly in Punjab and specifically in Amritsar. This spatial context gets placed in the broader legendary association of the site with the sacred geography of Ramayana and the complexity of contemporary caste politics within which a variety of *Valmiki* castes—*Majhabi, Chuhra, Bhangi, Balmiki*—are placed. Its emergence, therefore, deviates both from the given template of the emergence of *tirthas* or as little traditions getting subsumed into dominant symbols.

Amritsar, Ramayana, Ravidasia, Tirathas, Valmiki

Introduction

On December 01, 2016, the then Chief Minister of Punjab, Prakash Singh Badal inaugurated *Bhagwan Valmiki Tirath Asthan* at village Kaler, 11 kms from Amritsar. This event assumed immense significance since it gave the *Valmiki*s their first major pilgrimage in Punjab. The only other such major pilgrimage site in Punjab is *Dera* Sachkhand at village Ballan near Jalandhar, which is a major pilgrimage shrine for the *Ravidasia*s of Punjab. Both shrines are a product of twentieth century self-respect movements among the oppressed castes who had been placed outside of the four-*varna* division of Indian society and therefore called 'Untouchable'. Though historically, Brahmanism has always been weak in Punjab, particularly the practice of untouchability in the strict sense, caste hierarchies nevertheless operate along the *jajmani* (patron-client) relationship in rural Punjab, where landholders dominated and exploited the labour of 'Untouchable' castes (Jodhka 2017: 239-41). Colonial census enumerators struggled to place these communities within dominant religious categories as they 'switch religions from one decade to the next' (Lee 2011: 43). Their populations could be placed as *Chuhra, Bhangi, Balmiki* among the Hindu and Sikh castes or *Majhabi* among the Sikhs, *Musalli* among Muslim populations and *Masih* among more recent Christian converts. Yet, their religious affiliations were always

fluid.[1] However, religious consciousness in the late-nineteenth century led them to emphasise a separate self-identity for themselves, articulated, for instance, as *Ad Dharmi*s. In the post Partition period, the Indian state chose to classify erstwhile Untouchables as 'scheduled castes', and abandoned the previously used official terms, and social and political nomenclatures like depressed classes, Harijan, *Achhoot*, etc.

The influence of the self-respect movement from the colonial era among scheduled castes continued in the post-Partition period and so did an articulation for a distinctive identity for themselves. These two castes are identified by varied names—*Chamar*s, *Ramdasia*s or *Ravidasia*s and *Chuhra*s, *Bhangi*s, *Mazhabi*s or *Valmiki*s. While the terms *Chamar* and *Chuhra* are used in a pejorative sense by the upper castes, the latter is a self-given identity used for 'modern' self-expression. If we account for all the other scheduled castes of Punjab, a total of 39 communities, they comprise one-third (32 percent) of the total population of the state, and constitute the largest group in entire India (Jodhka 2017: 241). This significant presence of scheduled castes, now dominantly self-expressed as Dalits across India, is juxtaposed to the dominant-caste presence of Jat Sikhs, predominant agriculturist, in the everyday social and political spheres of Punjab (Puri 2003: 2698). Not surprisingly, the Dalit population according to the Census 2001 is also significantly located in rural areas, constituting 75.66 percent of the total scheduled caste population, while only 24.34 percent live in urban areas (see Image-Table 1A and 1B below). This scenario has rapidly been changing owing to depeasantisation of landless agricultural labourers in the last few decades and their migration to urban areas.[2] Image-Table 1A and 1B reflects this transition as the proportion of urban population of dominant scheduled caste population has increased by roughly four percent in 2011. The scenario was not very different in the pre-Partition period, when in addition to Sikh Jats, Muslim Jats also constituted a dominant group.

This dominance was, however, more marked in the rural areas. In the urban context, the dominant groups consisted of *Arora-Khatri* Hindu-Sikh mercantile communities, and a variety of, predominantly Hindu but also Jain castes. In some cases, like that of Amritsar, which was a Muslim-majority city before Partition, and Hindus were not demographically dominant, their political and economically powerful and upper caste-class hegemony nevertheless prevailed. This demographic complex hasn't changed much in the post-Partition scenario—barring the migration of Muslims to West-Punjab (now Pakistan) where Jats similarly dominate the social and political spheres of life. Juxtaposed against these prevailing structures of social and political dominance, the articulation of a Dalit self-consciousness on the Indian side of the Punjab has found expression in the veneration of religious icons and the imagination of a sacred geography that reorients dominant religious frames. Significantly, these reorienting discourses utilise familiar patterns of sacred expressions to invert dominant articulations of religiosity and identity. Among the two major caste communities of Punjab, the '*Chamar*s' (leather tanners) and '*Chuhra*s' (manual scavengers), this self-

[1] Cf. Joel Lee (2021: 43-48) for a historiographic review of debates on conversion among scheduled caste populations.

[2] Cf. Singh and Bhogal (2014) for a recent study on depeasantisation among landless labourers in Punjab.

expression has manifested in a *Ravidasia* identity in the case of the former, and a Valmiki identity in the case of the latter.

Demography and Contours of Identity

Table 1A- Population of two major Scheduled Castes in Punjab										
Census 2001										
			Total		Rural			Urban		
Broad caste category		All Scheduled Castes (SCs)	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total ARC*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total ARC*
			7,028,723	**	5,318,254	**75.66**	**	1,710,469	**24.34**	**
Ad-Dharmis, Ravidasia & Chamars (ARC)	**1**	Chamar etc.	1,839,032	26.16	1,378,295	19.61	**76.83**	460,737	6.56	**23.17**
	2	Ad Dharmi	1,045,126	14.87	837,632	11.92		207,494	2.95	
		A. Total (1 & 2)	**2,884,158**	**41.03**	**2,215,927**	**31.53**		**668,231**	**9.51**	
			Persons	*% age of total SCs*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total BC*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total BC*
Balmikis & 'Chuhras' (BC)	**3**	Mazhabi	2,220,945	31.60	1,864,984	26.53	**79.02**	355,961	5.06	**20.98**
	4	Balmiki etc.	785,464	11.18	510,588	7.26		274,876	3.91	
		B. Total (3 & 4)	**3,006,409**	**42.77**	**2,375,572**	**33.80**		**630,837**	**8.98**	
		Grand Total (A & B)	**5,890,567**	**83.81**	**4,591,499**	**65.32**	**	**1,299,068**	**18.48**	**

Table-Image 4.1A: Population of two major Scheduled Castes in Punjab (Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011). Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

Ravidasia and *Valmiki* identities have a significantly rural presence. Since the *Ravidasia* were traditionally associated with leather tanning and the skinning of dead cattle—a profession considered unclean, their settlements were located on the margins of rural or urban settlements. In the Census enumeration of 2001, the *Ravidasia* communities in rural areas comprised 31.53 percent of the total Scheduled Caste population of Punjab, constituting 76.83 percent of the total *Ravidasia* population. This rural dominance remains consistent in the Census of 2011 (72.68 percent). During the First and Second World Wars, the leather tanning profession profited the *Ravidasia*s, particularly those from the Doaba region. An increase in the spread of education and rising educational status also opened-up the possibility of their migration to Europe (Juergensmeyer 2009: 36-37). This had a deep impact on the community's ability to reorient and assert their self-identity, in which the medieval *bhakti* saint, Ravidas's identity played an important role (Juergensmeyer 2009: 83-91). Known as the *Ad Dharm* movement, it's leadership emerged from the rural areas of the central Punjab of colonial times (Juergensmeyer 2009: 35). Largely, these 'Untouchables' of colonial Punjab had small land holdings and mostly worked as tenants in the fields of upper-caste landlords. Economic prosperity and rising educational status created a new sense of political and social capital among the *Ad Dharmi* leaders, who were now relatively independent of their traditional social and economic ties to rural areas. The centrality of Sant Ravidas, his teachings and identity, gave them a *Ravidasia* identity.

This movement also emerged as a social response to the Sikh identity, a fact that became clearly articulated when the *Ravidasia* installed an *Amrit Bani Granth* (holy book) that had extracted the poetry of Sant Ravidas from Guru Granth Sahib, which is the sacred *granth* of Sikhs. This assertion was strongly opposed by the supreme representative body of the historical Sikh *gurdwaras*, the *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak* Committee (SGPC), but the *Ravidasia*s nevertheless went ahead and installed their separate holy book at Dera Sachkhand Ballan in the year 2012, at the *Guru* Ravidas *Dham* in Jalandhar.

Table 1B- Population of two major Scheduled Castes in Punjab

Census 2011

			Total		Rural			Urban		
Broad caste category		**All Scheduled Castes (SCs)**	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total ARC*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total ARC*
			8,860,179	**	6,496,986	**73.33**	**	2,363,193	**26.67**	**
Ad-Dharmis, Ravidasia & Chamars (ARC)	**1**	Chamar etc.	2,078,132	23.45	1,450,607	16.37	**72.68**	627,525	7.08	**27.32**
	2	Ad Dharmi	1,017,192	11.48	799,229	9.02		217,963	2.46	
		A. Total (1 & 2)	**3,095,324**	**34.94**	**2,249,836**	**25.39**		**845,488**	**9.54**	
			Persons	*% age of total SCs*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total BC*	*Persons*	*% age of total SCs*	*% age of total BC*
Balmikis & 'Chuhras' (BC)	**3**	Mazhabi	2,633,921	29.73	2,152,231	24.29	**76.36**	481,690	5.44	**23.64**
	4	Balmiki etc.	866,953	9.78	521,099	5.88		345,854	3.90	
		B. Total (3 & 4)	**3,500,874**	**39.51**	**2,673,330**	**30.17**		**827,544**	**9.34**	
		Grand Total (A & B)	**6,596,198**	**74.45**	**4,923,166**	**55.57**	**	**1,673,032**	**18.88**	**

Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011.

Table-Image 4.1B: Population of two major Scheduled Castes in Punjab (Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011)
Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

The *Valmiki*s were also a product of the same identity conundrum that marked the 1920's. Mark Juergensmeyer notes how the *Valmiki Sabha* predates the *Ad Dharm* movement. While both the movements can be classified under the broad rubric of *Ambedkarite* movements, the *Valmiki Sabha*'s discourse also sought to chart a unique identity for them. According to the Census report of 2001, more than one-third (35 percent) of '*Balmiki*s' (check Table 2 below) lived in urban areas. This proportion has increased by roughly five percent to 39.89 percent in the Census of 2011. Among them the 'Hindu' *Balmiki*s constituted 32.06 percent of the urban Scheduled Caste population. Their rural population of 39.18 and 38.80 percent in the Census of 2001 and 2011 respectively has remained stable in the last one decade. The equal distribution in rural and urban areas in the 2011 Census also indicates a scenario where an increasing number of them would identify themselves religiously as *Balmiki*s—a jump of five percent in a single decade. It is among these *Balmiki*s that the Valmiki consciousness is dominantly expressed. Due to this strong urban location of the *Valmiki*s and their requirement in the task of fulfilling municipal administration, the

social and political character of the *Valmiki* identity movement became significantly urban. The religious expression of the community also evolved out of the broader contours of the urban 'Hindu' caste identity. Rural *Valmiki*s, like their '*Ravidasia*' counterparts, on the other hand, remained either small peasants or landless agricultural labourers. The legislation against manual scavenging (The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013), that particularly concerned the disposal of dry toilets, coupled with the introduction of wet toilets, led to partial removal of the overwhelming stigma of 'Untouchability' against the '*Chuhra*' community. But they continued to be employed in tasks that entailed the manual cleaning of sewers, a task which had been a rallying point for a lot of *Valmiki* self-respect movements in urban areas. The unique locations of *Ravidasia* and *Valmiki* self-expression thus provides a fascinating entry point into the making of rural and urban contours of religion in Punjab.

Census 2001						
Balmikis	Total	% age of Total	Rural		Urban	
			Persons	% age of Total	Persons	% age of Total
All religions	785,464	**	510,588	65.00	274,876	35.00
Hindus	559,617	71.25	307,768	39.18	251,849	32.06
Sikhs	223,885	28.50	201,997	25.71	21,888	2.79
Buddhists	1,962	0.25	823	0.10	1,139	0.15
Census 2011						
Balmikis	Total	% age of Total	Rural		Urban	
			Persons	% age of Total	Persons	% age of Total
All religions	866,953	**	521,099	60.11	345,854	39.89
Hindus	657,715	75.87	336,418	38.80	321,297	37.06
Sikhs	207,650	23.95	183,906	21.21	23,744	2.74
Buddhists	1,588	0.18	775	0.09	813	0.09
Source: Census of India, 2001 and 2011.						

Table-Image 4.2: Population of Balmikis in Punjab (Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011). Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

The articulation of a distinctive identity among the *Valmiki*s and *Ravidasia*s is a modern expression. According to the Sikh narrative tradition, there have been significant intersections between the dominant castes and '*Chuhra*' and '*Chamar*' individuals.

Articulating an 'Originary' Moment

There has been a significant amount of scholarship on the making of the *Ravidasia* identity in Punjab which started as *Ad Dharm* movement for the recognition of a

separate identity (*qaum*) among the '*Chamar*s' of colonial Punjab under the leadership of Mangoo Ram. Some important scholarly contributions in this regard come from the seminal works of Mark Juergensmeyer (1982 [2009]), Harish K. Puri (2003), Surinder S. Jodhka (2016), Ronki Ram (2012), Paramjit S. Judge (2018) and more recently Santosh K. Singh (2017). These research enterprises have explored and critiqued the dominant scholarship concerned with the making of religious traditions in India. In the Pan-Indian scenario, there is a plethora of works that approach the discourse of the Dalit-Ambedkarite movements from an anti-Brahmin perspective. While this important element was in vogue mostly in the Madras and Bombay presidencies, in the Madras presidency, the self-respect movement of 'Untouchables' was also articulated as the claim of being '*Adi*' *Dravidian*s. In the Bombay presidency, this self-respect politics was expressed through demand for temple entry, and later through rejection of Hinduism and mass conversion to Buddhism (Leslie 2018 [2003]: 53). Conversion to Buddhism remained marginal in the case of *Adi Dravida* movements as well as in Punjab (refer Table 2). One of the major shifts in the works surrounding *Ravidasia* and the *Valmiki* movements, was the shift in the discourse from a generalised anti-Brahmanic expression, evident in the works of Mark Juergensmeyer, to a deeper appreciation of the peculiarities of Punjab's historical context where Brahmanism had never a been a dominant social and political force. The *Valmiki* association with Sikhs, for instance, goes back to the leading figure of Jaita (d. 1704) who courageously retrieved the severed head (*seesa*) of the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur (d. 1675) from Delhi, after the latter was executed on orders issued by Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (d. 1707). It was Jaita who delivered the severed head to the child Gobind, who later became known as *Guru* Gobind Singh (d. 1708). However, Jaita's contribution has remained peripheral within the discourse of the Sikh memory. Similarly, Ditt Singh (d. 1901), who despite having been born in a *Chamar* household, contributed immensely to the Singh *Sabha*'s print culture during the late 19th century, also remains unrecognisable within the dominant Sikh narrative (Hans 2016: 131-151).

Therefore, as Ronki Ram explains it (2012), while arguing for a distinctive religious identity, the Ad Dharm movement did not place itself within the frameworks of upward social mobility expressed through theoretical tropes like that of Sanskritization propounded by M.N. Srinivas (1956). Instead, the *Ad Dharm* movement uses the prevalent early twentieth century debates on Aryan invasion that argues for a native identity, pre-dating the arrival of Aryans and their religious traditions, variably expressed as Vedic religion, Brahmanism or Hinduism (Trautmann 2005). Imagined in terms of the distinctiveness of an *Ad Dharm qaum* (religious community), this conception envisioned a prehistoric paradise—a place in North India where the original (*adi*) inhabitants of the subcontinent dwelt in amicable equality. Mark Juergensmeyer (2009: 47) quotes from the Ad Dharm Report (p.6):

> In the beginning, when nature created human beings, there was no discrimination. There were no differences and no quarrels. In particular, there were no such concepts as high and low. God [*ishwar*] was meditating; all was in harmony.

Interestingly, the Aryan invasion theory continues to remain in vogue as an important reference of the originary moment for the construction of *Ravidasia* identity, despite

the fact that both historians and geneticists have questioned the veracity of this theory, and have instead looked for more plausible explanations that privilege gradual migration and assimilation, and not invasion (Thapar, et.al. 2019). According to Juergenmeyer (2009: 48-49):

> The Ad Dharm myth [thus] continued beyond the arrival of the Aryans. It reported that the original people (later Untouchables) were subjugated with "so much cruelty and injustice" that they "forgot their own identity".

The *Valmiki* movement, as stated previously, evolved more in an urban context and the urban counterpart of their caste experiences take shape predominantly in an upper caste Hindu-Sikh milieu. The municipal life of urban centres is regulated around norms of purity, hygiene and cleanliness and compared to rural areas; it is in cities that *Valmiki*s are primarily hired in their traditional role as sweepers. Their caste fellows in the village on the other hand serve largely as landless labourers since the availability of fields for sanitary purposes renders caste-based sanitation tasks largely unnecessary (Juergensmeyer 2009: 169). The first *Valmiki Sabha* was established in Jalandhar in 1910 and the Arya Samaj played an important role in stimulating its growth. Although in the initial years *Valmiki Sabha* leaders like *Mahatma* Fakir Chand and Gandu Ram worked in close alignment with Ad Dharm, but yet, they evolved independent religious notions and concepts about the community's identity formation (Juergensmeyer 2009: 171). Along with their traditional veneration of Bala Shah, Lal Beg, and various shrines associated with Sufi saints and popular 'Hindu' deities (Snehi 2019: 183), the association with *deras* and *jatheras* (Singh 2019) co-constituted a dominant political and social identity for them, they found expression in the figure of 'rishi'/ sage Valmiki, a legendary figure who authored *Ramayana*, dated variedly from between the fourth century CE to the sixth millennium BCE (Goldman and Sutherland 1985: 14).

Julia Leslie (2018 [2003]) has explored Valmiki's narrative in detail, which includes their association with the *Valmiki*s in Britain. Her scholarship emerged out of an interesting debate. On February 21, 2000, the Central Air Radio Limited (Birmingham, UK) broadcasted a Panjabi phone-in programme by Vikram Gill. Responding to a letter from a listener, Gill referred obliquely to a widely believed story about saint Valmlki, about how he was once a 'dacoit'. The British *Valmiki* community representatives subsequently made a formal protest at the radio station, demanding an apology for the disrespect shown to them as the worshippers of Valmiki. They also demanded that a public retraction of the dacoit legend relating to their God—*bhagwan* Valmiki be formally made (Leslie 2018 [2003]: 1). A similar case was filed at the Punjab and Haryana High Court (P&HHC) in 2020 when a 'Sikh' lawyer Simranjit Kaur Gill, while addressing a political audience, compared Valmiki to a Punjab gangster-turned-reformer called Lakha Sadana. This led to the registering of an FIR complaint under the Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code and section 3(1)(v) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. This was followed by the lawyer surrendering herself to the police, and being remanded in police custody. The case lingered on for more than a month and the lawyer was finally released on a regular bail. The case did have a similarly important bearing on claims about Sage Valmiki's ancestry and his association with the Valmiki community that considers him a Godly

figure (*bhagwan*) and not merely *rishi* (sage). Within the *Valmiki* community, Sage Valmiki is revered as a divinized poet-saint, who composed two of the most important sacred classical Sanskrit texts of India: The *Valmiki Ramayana* and the *Yogavasistha Ramayana* (Leslie 2018 [2003]: 7).

A Sacred Geography for the *Valmiki*s

Temples associated with *Bhagwan* Valmiki are widespread across the urban areas of Punjab. However, Baba Gian Nath's *Valmiki Ashram at Ram Tirath* (now *Valmiki Tirath*) near Amritsar constitutes a major pilgrimage centre for the *Valmiki* community in Punjab. Juergensmeyer describes this place as a Valmiki Ashram that is situated (2009: 172):

> …at the side of a clean, attractive, bathing tank and near other ashrams occupied primarily by higher caste holy men. People of various castes stop at the small Valmiki temple there, which includes representations of various Shaiva and Vaishnava deities as well as an icon of 'rishi' Valmiki. Comfortably settled among the gods, Valmiki receives garlands and offerings of food, incense, and money in the Hindu manner.

Table 3: Population of major Scheduled Castes in Amritsar district

Spatial distribution		Population totals		% age of total in each section		% age change
		1991	2011	1991	2011	
Punjab	Total	5,742,528	8,860,179	**	**	**
	Rural	4,562,442	6,496,986	79.45	73.33	-6.12
	Urban	1,180,086	2,363,193	20.55	26.67	**6.12**
Amritsar	Total	701,444	770,864	**	**	**
	Rural	539,471	464,984	76.91	60.32	-16.59
	Urban	161,973	305,880	23.09	39.68	**16.59**
1. Ad Dharmi	Total	841	1,109	**	**	**
	Rural	499	254	59.33	22.90	-36.43
	Urban	342	855	40.67	77.10	**36.43**
2. Chamar, Jatia Chamar, Rehgar, Raigar, Ramdasi, Ravidasi*	Total	22,127	30,349	**	**	**
	Rural	5,711	3,378	25.81	11.13	-14.68
	Urban	16,416	26,971	74.19	88.87	**14.68**
3. Balmiki, Chuhra, Bhangi [Valmilki]	Total	23,500	30,757	**	**	**
	Rural	2,440	1,131	10.38	3.68	-6.70
	Urban	21,060	29,626	89.62	96.32	**6.70**
4. Mazhabi **	Total	583,222	526,333	**	**	**
	Rural	493,465	354,655	84.61	67.38	-17.23
	Urban	89,757	171,678	15.39	32.62	**17.23**

Source: Census of India, 1991 and 2011

* Census 2011 has expanded the scope of this category and now also includes caste denominations like Ramdasia, Ramdasia Sikh, Ravidasia, Ravidasia Sikh under this category.

** Census 2011 has expanded this category and now also includes Mazhabi Sikh.

Image-Table 4.3: Population of major Scheduled Castes in Amritsar (Source: Census of India 1991 and 2011). Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

It is important to have a broader understanding of the reasons for the emergence of the *Valmiki Tirath* and the sacred geography around which the place was situated, imagined, claimed and transformed. Situated close to the city of Amritsar, the shrine has figured for a long time among the holy places of Hindu and *Valmiki* religiosity. Its transformation in the last decade needs to be placed in a socio-demographic and contemporary political context. The *Valmiki* population of Amritsar district is mostly urban and if we were to take into account the Valmiki population of the entire district (3.35 percent of the total SC population of the district in 1991), 89.32 percent of them lived in urban areas in 1991 and 96.32 in 2011. The largest population of scheduled caste in the district is that of *Majhabi*s (83.15 percent in 1991), out of whom 84.61 percent lived in rural areas in 1991 and 67.38 percent in the 2011 Census. These *Majhabi*s have originated from the same caste—of '*Chuhra*s'. This spatial spread of (Hindu) Valmiki and (Sikh) *Majhabi* population is curious to note. There are very few *Ad Dharmi*s in the district—most of them being known as '*Chamar*s', etc. who also mostly live in urban areas. Between 1991 and 2011, the district has experienced a significant migration of its scheduled caste population to urban areas. This pattern is consistent among all, but is prominently marked among *Majhabi*s, who have the largest population and 17.23 percent of them migrated to urban areas in the last two decades. *Balmiki*s in the 2011 Census are overwhelmingly urban. The *Valmiki*s, therefore, plays an important role in the urban socio-religious context of Amritsar and their identity follows from their placement in a predominantly urban context that is predominantly Hindu. It is in the experience of the immediate and dominant Hindu or Sikh hegemony that *Valmiki* or *Majhabi* identities emerge.

Before the emergence of *Valmiki Tirath*, Amritsar city already had two major pilgrimage sites, namely (a medieval) *Darbar Sahib*, also known as the Golden Temple, founded by *Guru* Arjan in the year 1588, and (a modern) *Durgiana Tirath* catering to the needs of the Sikhs and the Hindus, which was established in the mid-1920's. There were several smaller shrines as well—*takias, dargahs, mandir*s*, gurdwaras, shivalas* and *thakurdwaras*—spread in and around the walled city. *Valmiki* settlements in contemporary Amritsar are predominantly located on the periphery of upper-caste colonies. These settlements are mostly spread along Hall Gate, Hathi Gate, and Lahori Gate, and are located on the edge of the various *Katra*s (internally segmented localities) of the walled city. Many of these *Katra*s, like the Islamabad *Katra*, were Muslim settlements before the Partition in 1947. This indicates to the fact that many of the *Valmiki*s in these *Katra*s are post-Partition migrants from the Pakistan side of Punjab. The walled city also contains a large number of *Valmiki* shrines.

The emergence of the self-respect movement among the *Valmiki*s has been expressed through an appropriation of the extant legend that surrounds Ram Tirath, a site believed to be the abode of *Rishi/Bhagwan* Valmiki where Sita, the wife of Rama took refuge. It is here that she apparently gave birth to Rama's two sons, Lav and Kush. The legend also associates the emergence of Lahore and Kasur cities in today's Pakistan Punjab to Luv and Kush respectively. The *Gazetteer of the Lahore District, 1883-84* narrates this legend in the following manner:

> By local Hindu tradition the origin of Lahore, like that of most of the princely houses of India, is traced to Rama, king of Ayodhya (Oude), the hero of the Ramayana, whose two sons Lav or Loh, and Kash, are said to have founded the neighbouring cities of Lahore and Kasur. (1894: 264-65)
>
> From the above and other similar traditions of Rajput origin it may be inferred that the founders of Lahore were of the Rajput race, and that the city was probably the capital of one of the earliest of the Rajput States established in the west of India; and this inference is corroborated by the fact that, at the earliest dawning of reliable Indian history,—the period of the Musalman invasions in the seventh and tenth centuries,—we find Lahore the capital of an important Hindu principality, exercising a kind of feudal superiority over other States. (1894: 266)

This *Ramayana* legend has been in vogue for a long time and was invoked to claim a Rajput ruling lineage in Punjab even during the Mughal period. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh (2005) contextualises this legend and traces its origin in the genealogies of the Sikh *Guru*s, articulated in a discussion on *Bichitra Natak*, a work authored by *Guru* Gobind Singh. She explains how the *Guru* contextualises himself within the framework of the Valmiki *Ramayana*, and traces the origins of the other cultural centres of the Punjab—Lahore and Kasur—to Lav and Kush, the "sons of Sita". She elaborates as follows (Singh 2005: 21):

> In cantos 2–6 of the *Bicitra Natak*, the author traces the lineage of the Sikh gurus to King Aju, who is known to have descended from Raghav, a brilliant star of the Solar dynasty. Guru Gobind Singh describes the forefather as "a fabulous warrior and a fabulous archer" (*BN*, 2:20). But the guru admires King Aju for leaving behind all his wealth and power to King Dashrath and retreating to the forest to meditate. The combination of secular and spiritual aspirations is the striking characteristic of all the ancestors he mentions in the *Bicitra Natak*, be they Sodhis, Bedis, or the forefather King Aju himself.
>
> Sita surfaces in the Sikh guru's memoir as the progenitor of civilization in northern India. He praises those cities of *madra desh,* the region between the Rivers Beas and Jhelum: "[S]uch is the grandeur of Lahore and Kasur that Lanka and Amravati were put to shame" (2:24). Sita's offspring gave birth to new cultural centers that would draw people from different geographical, linguistic, religious, and social backgrounds…. He reminds us that "It was [Dashrath's] first wife who gave birth to Prince Rama" (*BN* 2:22).

The *Bhatt*s, the genealogists of the Sodhi *Guru*s provide an interesting discussion on the genealogy of *Guru* Ram Das, the founder of Amritsar. They compare these *Guru*s to Ram, identified with the *Raghu* lineage. Hardip Singh Syan details this association further (*Adi Granth*, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*, cited in Syan 2017: 496-497):

> Guru Ram Das is described as '[He Guru Ram Das is Ram] the handsome scion (*tilaku*) of the Raghu lineage (*Raghubansi*) born in the house of Dasratha; the rishis (*muni*) seek shelter [with Guru Ram Das]'. In laudation of Guru Nanak, the *Bhatts* say that Parasurama's pride was subdued by

> Ram: 'his [Guru Nanak's] praise is sung by Parasurama, the son of Jamdagani, whose axe (*kutharu*) and passion (*teju*) were snatched by *Raghu*'. In another *Bhatt* hymn, 'Ram of the *Raghuvans*' is recalled as the major incarnation of the second *Yuga*. As discussed earlier, Raja Janak was integral in the *Bhatt* compositions. There was an association with the Sikh Gurus and the great kings of the solar dynasty, especially Ram, in the *Bhatt* compositions. Taken together with the pride of place, the Sodhis held in the Guruship for the *Bhatts*, it could be inferred that there was a belief that the Sodhis belonged to the solar dynasty.

The urban sacred geography of the Majha region—Amritsar, Lahore, Kasur—is interspersed with Sikh and Hindu inheritances. While the *Valmiki* claim recognises these inheritances, it seeks to invert them by foregrounding *Rishi* Valmiki and elevating him to the status of God or *bhagwan*. Rama, therefore, becomes peripheral in this narrative, despite the fact that his genealogies remain critical for Hindu and Sikh inheritances in the region. It is *bhagwan* Valmiki, who is foregrounded as the creator and caregiver of Sita and her two sons. Before the site's emergence as *Valmiki Tirath*, *Ram Tirath* was predominantly a large water tank—a desolate site that became active only at the times of major festival celebrations associated with Rama and Valmiki. There are extant shrines associated with Sita and Valmiki that express long-standing disputes between the *Valmiki*s and *Sanatani*s, and *Nirmala*s, *Udasi*s, etc. who seek to control the entire site. A major part of the site is now under the management of the Punjab *Bhagwan Valmik Ji Tirath Sthal* (Ram Tirath) Shrine Board, instituted by the Government of Punjab through an Act issued by the Punjab Legislature in 2016. The emergence of this site intersects with the long-pending demand of the *Valmiki* leadership, and Gian Nath's *Valmiki Ashram*, through which a predominantly urban community of *Valmiki*s managed to transform this neighbouring rural site into a *Tirath* (a pilgrimage).

Centre and Periphery of the Sacred Tank

The *Valmiki Tirath* site is set around a large tank (*sarovar*), and is a place of expression of a variety of religiosities. Interestingly, such sharing of *sarovars* and wells in Punjab does not invoke violent reactions as it does in the Gangetic plains. The water bodies, particularly wells, rivers, ponds and oceans are considered to be a source of purity and immortality in Punjab and Sindh. Ranging from the indigenous belief in Varun *devta* to transoceanic belief in Khwaja Khizr, the belief that these water deities are source of healing and immortality allows the sacred spaces, particularly those associated with water bodies to be appropriated and reconfigured into mainstream beliefs. It is therefore interesting to note that all the three significant religious places of Amritsar—*Darbar Sahib*, *Durgiana Tirath*, and *Valmiki Tirath*—are all located in the midst of a sacred *sarovar* associated with ritual bathing by a variety of religious communities. The *Gazetteer of the Amritsar District, 1892-93* records this place as the site of an annual religious fair which is known to be "more a Hindu than a Sikh fair, and is largely attended by Hindus from the city [of Amritsar]" (1893: 42). In contrast to how the historical site of *Ram Tirath* earlier remained desolate for most part of the year, and was attended to mostly by pilgrims during the four-day fair held annually on a full moon night (*puranmashi*) in November, the place now bustles with pilgrims and tourists

throughout the year. It has become similar to the two other major pilgrimage sites—Golden Temple and *Durgiana Tirath*, located in Amritsar city.

Image 4.4: Ram Tirath before Valmiki Tirath. Image Source: Punjab Tourism[3]

As mentioned earlier, the site is traditionally linked with the hermitage of sage Valmiki who is said to have composed *Ramayana* epic over here. Despite this traditional association, the site has generally been of lesser significance in both the religious and political landscape of contemporary Punjab, coming alive mostly during the annual fair. *The Punjab District Gazetteer: Amritsar* (1976: 606) in fact states:

> … the origin of [the site] ... is obscure. There is a big tank of a peculiar shape which is said to have been dug by Hanuman- the famous devotee of Shri Ram Chandra. He is said to have dug it with *dhai tap* (i.e. with two and a half cuts), two lengthwise and a half breadthwise. The circumference of the tank is about three kilometres. There are some small temples on its sides. There is a *baoli* [step well] after the name of Sita, the wife of Shri Ram Chandra.

Extolling the narrative of the *Ramayana*, the *Gazetteer* further states that after Rama returned from exile, Sita apparently spent her life in exile at this place, in the cottage of *Rishi* Valmiki. The *Valmiki Ramayana*'s *Uttarkanda* details how Sita gracefully accepted the sage's hospitality. Here Sita gave birth to her two sons, Lav and Kush, and the great epic *Ramayana* was composed. Twelve years later, her sons confronted Rama while he was performing the *ashwamedha* ritual (a ritual that establishes kingship). The site was also associated with skirmishes between Rama's army and Lav

[3] Surkhab Shaukin photographed *Ram Tirath* for the Punjab Tourism department (Government of Punjab) in 2013-14: https://punjabtourism.punjab.gov.in/ram-tirath.php. Accessed 05 November 2021.

and Kush. Finally, Sita returned to Rama, and Valmiki attests to her utter blamelessness, and to the legitimacy of her twin sons (Goldman and Sutherland 2016: 20). *Maharaja* Ranjit Singh (d. 1839) got the site renovated in the first half of the 19th century. A big fair (*Turki Mela*) is also held, about a fortnight after the *Diwali* festival (*Punjab District Gazetteer* 1976: 606). The *Ram Tirath* Improvement and Development Committee (Amritsar) carried out yet another construction in 1961 that entailed the renovation and electrification of the bathing *ghat* for women. During the 1990's, a saint popularly known as Baba Bhuri Wala started staying at this site and built a *serai* (inn) for pilgrims. Over a period of time, the temples, and the tank along with its surrounding structures were renovated, and the site developed as a place of pilgrimage tourism. A clearer picture of the *Turki Mela* held at the site and nature of pilgrims who attended it, emerges from the *Supplement to the District Gazetteer of Amritsar* published in 1992. According to the *Gazetteer*, there is a lot of significance attached to the holy dip in the sacred tank, supposed to be undertaken at the early hours of the *puranmashi* (full moon) night. This is followed by a thirty-feet wide circumambulation (*parikarma*) around the tank, all the while chanting *mantra*s and exchanging the salutations "Rama-Rama". On the same night, women light lamps (*tullas*) made out of kneaded flour and place them on leaf plates or boat-shaped carriers so that they can be released in the tank. The place is abuzz with charity, entertainment and the congregation of religious and social organisations.

In 1992, around one lakh pilgrims visited this fair. A large number of *jatadhari* (matted hair) *sadhu*s also attended the fair and sat here in meditation. A considerable number of Sikhs, mostly from rural areas, and *Balmiki*s from all over the state took special interest in the celebrations and took out a special procession on the concluding day of the fair. According to the *Supplement to the District Gazetteer of Amritsar (*1992: 38-39): "Women outnumber[ed] men because of the popular belief that issu[e]less women beget children if they take a dip in the *baoli* [step well] known as *Mata Sita di baoli* on the full moon night". The Punjab Roadways operates special buses between Amritsar and *Ram Tirath* and a large number of hawkers put up stalls. The tank occupies a central place in the ritual practice among followers of the different religious traditions here, and the most important sites of worship are located along the tank. The *parikarma* or circumambulation of the tank takes place in the clockwise direction and starts from the left of the first shrine (*Mandir* Shri Jagannatha Puri), a small temple, managed by the incumbent *mahant* (priest) Vaishno Dass. The *parikrama* route then progresses to the *Prachin* (ancient) *Mandir* Radha Krishna *Ji*, possibly also managed by *mahant* Vaishno Dass. Both these *Sanatan* (Hindu traditional) temples situated 'on' the *parikarma* route, can be dated back to the early 20th century. Moving further, one notices the temple of *Siddh Shri Baba* Balak Nath *Ji*, managed by the *gaddi nishin* (presiding priest) *Bhagat* Jagat Ram *Ji* and located on the edge of the *parikarma*. This temple also runs a *langar* (community kitchen). Adjacent to it is the Gaugopal *Mandir*, and a *Ramtirath Gaushala* (menagerie for cows) managed by the institution (*dera*) established by *Nirmala Sant Baba* Har Singh *Ji Maharaj* (*Bhaudewale*). As one turns ninety degrees from the *Gaushala*, one encounters a fairly large temple dedicated to *Mata* Lal Devi *Ji*, managed by a trust based in Model Town, Amritsar. Further on, comes a vacant plot of land, and adjacent to it, a large institution named *Gian Ashram Valmiki Tirath*, established by Gian Nath *Maharaj Ji*, a revered figure from the *Valmiki* community. The current head of the institution is the fourth successor *Sant* Girdhari

Nath *Ji*. This institution is important in order to understand the transformation that the site, *Ram Tirath* underwent in recent times. The institution contains congregation halls, a shrine for Gian Nath, a *langar* hall and a large open space. All these monuments belong to the latter half of the 20th century.

Image 4.5: Gian Nath Ashram, Valmiki Tirath. Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

Right opposite to the Gian Nath *Ashram*, on the *parikrama* route, one encounters the small shrine *Kutiya* Sita *Mata ji*. It contains a small shrine for Sita *Mata* and is managed by *Pandit* Devkalash Tiwari. The next institution is the *Valmiki Dharamshala* (public rest house) and the *Bridh Ashram* (public old age home), managed by *mahant* Malkit Nath *Ji* who is the *gaddi nishin* of the *Dhuna Sahib* Trust that runs a *langar* during the time of the *parikarma,* situated right opposite the second entrance to the shrine complex. Adjacent to this *Bridh Ashram* is a set of three shrines from the 19th century. The first one is identified as Lav Kush *Pathshala* (school). The Sita *Mata* ki *Kutiya* which is also considered the *Janamsthan* or birthplace of Lav and Kush. This is followed by a *Valmiki* temple known as the *Valmiki Dhuna Sahib* said to be the place where *Sant* (Sage) Valmiki apparently penned the *Ramayana*, followed by a stepwell, and two smaller votive shrines. The stepwell and votive shrines are managed by *gaddi nashin mahant* Manjeet Giri and his control of these shrines has recently been under legal dispute. Right across these shrines, along the *parikrama* route, there is another temple dedicated to Sita, identifying it as her place of meditation. This shrine is located under a large Banyan tree, also identified as the site where Lav and Kush tied Rama's *Ashvamedha* horse, when confronting Rama and challenging his claim to sovereignty.

There is another small Sita shrine, adjacent to this shrine which looks like a 19th century structure.

Image 4.6: Ambedkar, Valmiki, Luv and Kush in the Courtyard of Gian Nath Ashram. Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

There are a few more *Sanatan* shrines along the last section of the *parikrama*, one of which is the *Sanatan Dharma Mahabir Dal* that houses a cave temple dedicated to Hanuman and containing a 55 feet-high statue of Hanuman within its premises. The statue was inaugurated on November 13, 2007, by Vijay Chopra of the Punjab Kesari Group (a Jalandhar based news agency). Further on than this are shrines and institutions related to popular religious traditions that originated in Amritsar. The first one is a temple dedicated to *Baba* Lal Dayal *Ji*, managed by *sevadar* (caretaker) Raj Kumar Das. The second one is the *Sachkhand Ruhani Satsang Dham*, dedicated to the female saint figure of *Shri* Aarti Devi *Ji Maharaj*. This temple houses a shrine, an old-age home and a *serai*. This temple is in addition to another shrine-temple that is dedicated to *Mata* Lal Devi *Ji*, mentioned earlier and having roots in Amritsar. The right side of the *parikarma* is vacant. The last major shrine on the route is *Mandir Gufa Mata* Sita *Ji*, managed by the *Shri Ram Tirath Sudharak* Brahmin *Sabha*. The shrine is believed to be the place where *Mata* Sita was engulfed by the earth. It has a *tap asthan* (place of meditation) that organises the worship of *Mata* Sita. The last temple on the *parikarma* route is a small shrine dedicated to the Ram *parivar* or family (Ram, Sita and Lakshman).

Image 4.7: Tall Idol of Hanuman erected by Sanatan Dharma Mahabir Dal. Image Source: Punjab Tourism

Emergence of the *Valmiki Tirath*

The *Ram Tirath* site is thus a kaleidoscope of various sacred shrines, situated around and along its *parikarma* route. Ranging from *Nath*, *Nirmala*, *Valmiki* and *Sanatani* institutions, the site has also been the centre of various community-based struggles for the control over older shrines. Several of the *Sanatani* shrines may not fall under the category of typically Hindu religiosities, these are mostly local cultic centres that

revolve around modern saint figures like *Mata* Lal Devi, *Baba* Lal Dayal, *Shri* Arti Devi *Ji Maharaj*, etc. Most non-Valmiki shrines are controlled by 'Hindu' *mahant*s, or religious trusts based in Amritsar. However, the site has also been claimed to be the sovereignty of *Bhagwan* Valmiki and therefore the Valmiki claims have been central to the demands of converting the shrine into a Valmiki Tirath. Even before the large contemporary temple dedicated to *Bhagwan* Valmiki in 2016 had been constructed, a votive shrine of the saint figure that had been instituted in the centre of the pond was already extant for some time (Image 5).

Image 4.8: Valmiki shrine in the midst of the pond with the Gian Ashram seen in the background. Image Source: Punjab Tourism

The earliest plan to imagine a large *Valmiki* temple in the midst of the tank dates back to the year 2003, when the then Chief Minister of Punjab, laid the foundation stone for it. The project design was prepared by an Amritsar-based architect Sarbjit Singh Bahga and submitted in 2004. But this project did not take off. Meanwhile a two-decade old conflict over control of the *Dhuna Sahib* (supposed to be the place of meditation of *Bhagwan* Valmiki) and Lav Kush *Pathshala*, continued to linger between the existing *mahant* Baldev Giri and *mahant* Malkeet Nath of the *Bhagwan Valmiki Dhuna Sahib* Management Trust, despite the 'Hindu' *mahant* Baldev Giri winning a legal battle in 1993 that gave him legal possession of the shrine that was hitherto occupied by *mahant* Malkeet Nath. This resulted in anger among the *Valmiki* organisations who demanded that the shrines be handed over to the *Valmiki*s. The *Valmiki*s received support in September 2014 from Om Prakash Gabbar, a councillor of the Municipal Corporation in Amritsar, who was affiliated with the then ruling party—the *Shiromani Akali Dal*. A compromise was finally reached between both the groups with the intervention of Amritsar police. According to this compromise, the Lav Kush *Pathshala* and Sita's place of meditation would be henceforth managed by *mahant* Baldev Giri, while the *Dhuna Sahib* (the place of meditation of *Bhagwan* Valmiki) would be handed over to *mahant* Malkeet Nath. This arrangement was not acceptable to the *Valmiki* organisations. It is, however,

interesting to note that in the current scheme, all sites associated with *Bhagwan* Valmiki are now being managed by the *Valmiki* community.

Image 4.9: Sanctum Sanctorum of the new Valmiki Temple. Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

In 2013, the then Chief Minister of Punjab Sardar Prakash Singh Badal paved the way forward for the construction of *Valmiki Tirath*. A large temple of *Bhagwan* Valmiki now stands in the centre of the *sarovar*, (Image 9), housing a larger-than-life sized idol of the saint as a Godly figure (Image 10). This state-sponsored project entailed the rechristening of the site from *Ram Tirath* to *Valmiki Tirath*, and the enactment of The Punjab *Bhagwan Valmiki Ji Tirath Sthal* (Ram Tirath) Shrine Board Act, 2016. The Board comprises the representatives of the state government, as also of various religious organisations. In addition to its official members, the Act made an additional provision to nominate seven non-official members of the *Valmiki*/ *Majhabi* Sikh community in the Board. This was a significant departure from several other religious institutions and their managing committees in Punjab, where only exclusive religious communities were represented, the SGPC being one such example. The recognition of both the *Valmiki* and *Majhabi* Sikh community and their inheritance of *Bhagwan* Valmiki reorients the separation of these communities that had taken place on religious lines since the late 19th century, and instead, foregrounds the caste genealogies that are shared by both these communities. The fact that the state sought to recognize these overlaps should also be seen as a corrective measure to mitigate a potentially controversial electoral risk to the government, affected by derecognizing *Sehajdhari* Sikhs in the SGPC elections. A large constituency of these *Sehajdhari*s are *Majhabi*s and this correction was attempted in order to consolidate the *Majhabi* vote in the 2017

elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly. But in this process, the *Majhabi*s were distanced from the Sikh tradition.

Conclusion

There is a long history of claims and contestations that inscribe *Ram Tirath* and *Valmiki Tirath* in the vast complex spread around the sacred pond at village Kaler near Amritsar. Recent academic interest in the study of *Valmiki*s has led to the emergence of some significant studies on *Valmiki*s in the diaspora. To mention a few, the scholarship of Eleanor Nesbitt (1990), Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2016), and Julia Leslie (2018 [2003]) have helped us to understand the shaping of *Valmiki* identity in the diaspora, and its relationship with dominant Hindu and Sikh traditions. Takhar (2016), for instance, investigates the fractured histories of the *Valmiki* and Sikh-Hindu identity, indicating a community trend towards expressing an exclusive *Valmiki* identity that is distinctive from Sikh and Hindu narrative traditions. It might be tempting to state that the diaspora informs the shaping of *Valmiki* identity in the Punjab religion, due to the diasporic influences on the home region. However, the fact is that the movement had roots in the colonial contexts and took a strong footing after the end of the Sikh militancy. The rise of charismatic leaders like *Guru* Gian Nath (d. 1998), is therefore fundamental in this process. While his *ashram* at *Valmiki Tirath* isn't the only symbol of *Valmiki* identity in Punjab,[4] its persistent presence has definitely contributed towards the consolidation of the modern *Valmiki* identity. One of the main contentious issues, however, concerns the question of *Valmiki* sacred texts.

Valmiki temples affiliated with the *Gian Nath Valmiki Ashram*, both in the diaspora and in India, venerate the *bani* (poetic compositions) of *Guru* Gian Nath and the *Valmiki Ramayana*. Both these texts are placed inside the respective *palkis* (palanquin-alter) of their temples. *Bhagwan* Valmiki as the progenitor of Rama's tale, a benevolent being who gave protection to Sita, brought up her brave sons Lav and Kush, and who defeated Rama's army and even tied up Hanuman, places the sage Valmiki above the narratives of the Hindu tradition. This transcendence of *Valmiki* narrative shapes *Valmiki* temples in the diaspora too. The *Valmiki sangat* (community congregation) at Birmingham in the UK, which was registered in 2011 had also actively engaged with the *Ashram* in Amritsar for a very long period.[5] In fact, the earliest video recording of *Guru* Gian Nath is related to his visit to the UK in 1982 and must have been recorded by the *sangat* over there. Interestingly, the bodily identity of *Guru* Gian Nath is conflated with that of a *Nath jogi*: sporting matted hair locks, *rudraksha* necklace, and ears adorned in the *kanphata* style (pierced ear lobes). He lived the life of an ascetic and his *Ashram* follows the practice of spiritual succession. A living *Guru* is central to

[4] There are other organisations such as the *Bhartiya Valmik Dharma Samaj, Jai Valmiki Majhabi Sikh Sanstha*, *Dhuna Sahib Trust*, and *Adhas Samaj* to name a few.

[5] *Jagat Guru Valmik Ji Maharaj Mandir Gian Ashram* (UK) was registered as a trust on April 19, 2011 and it states the following as part of its charitable objectives: "To advance the Valmiki religion in the UK for the benefit of the public through the holding of prayer meetings, lectures, public celebration of religious festivals, producing and/or distributing literature on Valmiki teachings to enlighten others about the Valmiki religion with particular emphasis on the works of: Bhagavan Valmiki (Ramayana and Yog Vasistha); and Sri Sri 108 Sat Guru Gian Nath Ji Maharaj (*Dharm Shastar*)." Register of Charities, Charity Commission for England and Wales: https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/5024893/governing-document. Accessed 05.03.2023.

the practices of the community, with the Punjabi vernacular being used as the medium of his teachings. *Guru* Gian Nath's *bani* and *Dharm Shastar* have been composed in Punjabi. Valmiki here is imagined as an omnipresent monotheistic God.

The shaping of the *Valmiki Tirath* is also attributed to the efforts made by yet another important institution: the *Aadi Dharm Samaj* (*Aadhas*) based in Jalandhar. The movement came into being in 1994 and has ever since been playing an important role to ensure educational progress among the *Valmiki*s in the past several decades. It states the following among its major objectives:[6]

> This movement is built around weaving an aboriginal past, similar to Dravidian movements of South India & Naagvanshis of North India, whereby section of Valmekins through reformulating the ideas about past seek to renegotiate their present which is rooted in their everyday experience. It is being accomplished through writing of a new tract, a new flag [sky blue], a new symbol Aadi Paavan Satya, new rituals Yogamrit (Satsang), Aatamyog (Vivah-Nikah marriages) and inventing a new calendar through naming the days and months of year more in tune with the Aadi-Culture. This process of reformulation of the past involves the repositioning the figure of Lord Valmeki as Aadi-Guru, Srishtikarta Valmeki Dayavaan, the first among the lineage of the Aadi-icons from the Aboriginal Golden Age when the 'Aadi' people ruled before the advent of Aryans in India.

Evidently, *Aadha*s aims to organise itself along the lines of the *Adi* movement. We are already aware of such strong movements in the Madras presidency called the *Adi-Dravida* movement (Trautmann 2006), the *Adi-Andhra* identity, and the strong anti-caste movement among the *Mahar*s of Maharashtra, all of which are based on a colonial narrative of the Aryan invasion in India (Jaffrelot 2003). Unlike the *Guru* Gian *Ashram* tradition of venerating Ramayana, the *Aadha*s leader Darshan Ratan Ravan believes that the *Valmiki Ramayan* that centres on Rama's figure—an Aryan, and the demonisation of Ravana—an aboriginal figure, renders the text ineffective in terms of the function of articulating a respectable identity for *Valmiki*s.[7] Instead, Ravan centres the movement around a lesser-known text called *Yoga Vashistha* which was also written by Valmiki. *Aadhas* has published a summary version of the text calling it *Adi Nityanem*, and made the chanting of the text a mandatory part of everyday rituals among followers. *Yoga Vashishtha* has been dated to a period that is as early as the sixth or seventh century BCE and on the other hand, to a period even as late as the 14th century. It contains over 29,000 verses, and the principal protagonists of the *Yoga Vashishtha* are Rama and Vashishtha. The text consists of spiritual instructions that are given to Rama by the sage Vashishtha. In the beginning of the text, Rama laments that there is no pleasure to be found in the world. Disgusted with the prospect of continuing in his worldly duties, he approaches Vashishtha for knowledge and to gain the

[6] Cf. 'For dignified acceptance of Dalit identity': http://aadhasbharat.com/about-us.php. Accessed 05.03.2023.

[7] Cf. Yogesh Kumar (2022) for details about the role of Darshan Ratan 'Ravan' in raising *Valmiki* consciousness in Punjab. The latter also authored a book on the status of the *Valmiki* community (Ravan 2010).

experience of liberation.[8] The text, therefore, humanises Rama and unlike the Ramayana which identifies him as an incarnation of Vishnu, the *Yoga Vashishtha* places him as a pupil of sage Vashishtha.

Image 4.10: The golden idol of Bhagwan Valmiki holding a pen. Image Source: Yogesh Snehi

[8] Cf. Chapplel's "Introduction" (1984: ix-xi), in Venkatesanand's *The Concise Yoga Vasistha* (1984).

Among the major tasks of the organisation, the *Aadhas* seek to liberate all such Valmiki *tirathsthalas* (pilgrimage sites) in India languishing under 'the bonds of orthodox Hindus' and help these to adopt titles and identities from their own aboriginal pasts. It is in this role that the *Aadhas* emerges as an important player in the imagination of the *Valmiki Tirath*. Darshan Ratan Ravan is an important figure supporting the emergence of the *Valmiki Tirath*. Even *Sardar* Prakash Singh Badal attended his congregation in 2016 that took place just one year before the assembly elections.[9] It is through Darshan Ratan Ravan's intervention that the *Yoga Vashishtha* and not the *Ramayana* found a place in the *palki*, along with the institution of a life-sized idol of *Bhagwan* Valmiki in the central hall of the *Valmiki* Temple situated in the midst of the *sarovar* at the *Valmiki Tirath* (Image 7). Thus, it was both the Gian Nath *Ashram* and the *Aadhas* that played an important role in the emergence of *Valmiki Tirath*. In fact, there has already been a significant circulation of ideas and ideals concerning the *Valmiki* identity mediated by Dalit intellectuals. Mention should be made over here of Omprakash Valmiki's book *Safai Devta* (2019) and Sanjeev Khudshah's book *Safai Kamgaar Samuday* (2005), in which they both lament the dormant status of the *Valmiki*s. They further lay out a forward direction, facilitating the articulation of a distinctive aboriginal identity for *Valmiki*s. The emergence of *Valmiki Tirath* as part of the *Valmiki* self-respect movement, is now also included in the imagined sacred geography of Amritsar, as a shrine that transcends the *Ram Tirath* identity.

The emergence of such *tirthas* in India follow the recounting of repetitive tales that are associated with epic and *puranic* texts and each such place is inscribed in a regional (*sthala*) *puranic* tradition. As Diana L. Eck states, it is often in the rendition of its *mahatmya* (exaltation of the greatness of a particular place) that a local *Tirtha* will subscribe to the larger all-India tradition, by linking its sanctity to the great events of the Epics and *Purana*s. She adds (Eck 1981: 336):

> This might be seen as the geographical equivalent of Sanskritization. The forest sojourn of the Pāṇḍavas or the adventures of Rāma, Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa are especially suited to this kind of local subscription …. In this way countless local *tīrthas* claim their part in a larger tradition. And in each case, the stories told recount not a generalized sense of divine presence at the *tīrtha*, but a very particular sense of the circumstances, the crisis, the place, and the person involved in the appearance of the deity there. Every *tīrtha*'s tale is of hierophany, the residents of heaven breaking in upon the earth.

Valmiki Tirath, while placed within the same generalised pattern of its emergence, however, deviates from the above stated pattern. In its placement as the abode of Valmiki, both the *Guru Gian Ashram* and *Aadhas* do not subscribe to the scheme of the Sanskritization of the sacred complex. Instead, *Valmiki Tirath* can be placed as a critique of dominant Brahmanic tradition. The ritual practice at the shrine departs from Brahmanic ritualism, as well as its sacred symbols. The shrine complex appears to be

[9] Cf. 'There is no need to make an appeal, community knows whom to vote for', in *Indian Express* (Chandigarh Edition), 02.12.2016: https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/valmiki-temple-prakash-singh-badal-there-is-no-need-to-make-an-appeal-community-knows-whom-to-vote-for-says-darshan-ratan-ravana-4406047/. Accessed 05.03.2023.

closer to the *Nath panth*, a medieval tradition that was also critical of Brahmanic ritualism, before it became *Sanatan*-ized in the 20th century. Except for the *Guru Gian Nath Ashram*, the temples dedicated to *Mata* Lal Devi *Ji*, the shrines associated with Lav, Kush and Sita, and the two smaller temples towards the entrance of the *parikrama* route, and all the other mostly *Sanatan* spaces, have mostly emerged during and after the 1990's. While the parallel imagination of *Ram Tirath* and *Valmiki Tirath* might still continue to be articulated along the periphery, it is the identity of *Bhagwan* Valmiki that has found its central place in the *Tirath*.

Valmiki Tirath, thus, subverts the majoritarian project to box Dalits as *Sanatani* Hindus. However, in the Sikh majority state of Punjab this self-expression also makes a space for *Majhabi*s whose exclusion from The Sikh Gurdwara (Amendment) Act 2016 inversely explains their continued association with the Valmiki self. Assertion of *Valmiki* identity also offers a critique of what Joel Lee (2021) terms as 'deceptive majority'. Thus, despite the reformist attempts to dissuade the scheduled castes of north India form venerating their Muslim patron saints, mystics and ancestors like Lal Beg, and subsuming them within the broader contours of Hinduism, the 'Untouchables' castes continue to articulate an independent identity which is facilitated by the broader contours of representative democracy in India. In addition to this, unlike Mircea Eliade's schematic argument on the 'process of infantilization' that marks the subsuming of the popular/lower traditions in the dominant symbols (1967: 443-44), the emergence of *Valmiki Tirath*, on the contrary, destabilises the all-subsuming *Sanatani* discourse. This articulation is embedded as much in the trans-regional expression of a Dalit self, as much as local/ regional contours of socio-religious and political space of Punjab.

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Region as a Mnemonic: Rumour and the Republic Day in Nattika *firka*

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This article contributes to the idea of the Republic in contemporary India. More specifically, it tries to contextualize the idea of the Republic within the locational frame of *firka*, an organized revenue unit of sixteen villages in erstwhile Malabar (Madras presidency), at the eve of the first Republic day of India, in 1950. The *firka* has, primarily, a mnemonic-function as a revenue division that was dissolved after 1956, after the formation of the new state of Kerala and the incorporation of the erstwhile Malabar district of Madras Presidency into Kerala. The article additionally explores the conceptual word Sardar, defining its associations with martyrdom, and in particular, with Indian politics. It deals with a discourse of death, that is materialised today as an event, with distinct political overtones, periodic demonstrations, rallies, meetings, and a cultural fete known as *Sardar dinam* that commemorates the death of K.C. Gopalakrishnan: a *maashu* (teacher), an Air Force veteran, a communist leader, and a volunteer captain of the Pouravakasajatha—the rally for Citizens' Rights organized by the local branches of Communist Party of India, Beedi Workers Union and Harijan Sangh on January 26, 1950, in the *firka*. This article shows how Gopalakrishnan can be considered the first martyr among Communists in the Republic of India.

Mnemonics, Historical, Rumour, Martyrdom, Communists

Introduction[1]

The martyrdom of Sardar Gopalakrishnan in Nattika *firka* (Thrissur district, Kerala) is primarily a discourse that functioned as a corollary to what was a larger and evolving global mnemonics of freedom, liberty, and various rights-based movements in India that resulted out of India's inclusion within a larger territorial agglomerate of upcoming postcolonial nation-states in the Global South. The rally for Citizens' Rights (*Pouravakasajatha*) that Gopalakrishnan led on the 26th of January 1950 in Nattika *firka* is a reminder of this participatory and global discourse of freedom. Ambedkar in his reports about caste violence in Malabar in 1945 used Nattika *firka* as an example: "something like a Harijan hunting is taking place every day as a result of the Harijans trying to wear gold ornaments and use clean clothes and umbrellas" (Ambedkar 1989: 51).The police took no action to stop this violence, and their inaction pointed to how

[1] I would like to acknowledge the editors of this volume Dr Venugopal Maddipati and Dr Deepra Dandekar for their valuable interventions in the shaping of this paper. These arguments have matured with me over the years from the time my Ph.D. thesis was completed in 2003. I remember gratefully all those who have collaborated with me from the start. As it is impossible to name all of them here I stop with thanking the two editors along with the anonymous reviewers of my paper. Notwithstanding all, any errors if there will be, are mine.

anti-people events escalated within this rally that was being organized in defence of citizenship rights in 1950.[2]

The Context of Events

Gopalakrishnan was a fabric worker in the Royal Air Force and stationed in Kohima (according to his nephew's testimony) during the Japanese assault in 1945—a crucial win for the Allies on the eastern front. He returned home to his native village once he was demobilized after the war. The World War II had brought together people from all over the world in many ways, especially through the course of military deployment. This mobilization of armed forces had moreover resulted in many drastic changes. The most significant of these changes was "ideas of freedom and democracy, social and individual rights seeped into the discourse—not just of the elite but also of the marginalized" (Raghavan 2016: 461). The rally, *Pouravakasajatha*,[3] that Gopalakrishnan led was as equally, a reminder of his deployment in the Air Force, just as it served as a reminder about his activism in the Communist Party. The demobilized veterans of World War II who had returned to their villages after the country became independent, were thereafter, immediately thrown into the struggles surrounding Partition and the role these veterans played in the ensuing riots has been widely recorded. Sometimes, as instruments in the hands of communalists, who organized riots, and sometimes as saviours that led Hindu and Muslim brethren towards safety and sanctuary on either sides of the border (Marston 2014: 200-239). The surname and honorific Sardar by which Gopalakrishnan is addressed in the *firka* today is a reminder of his courage, which he displayed in marshalling a defence of the marginalized and poor on behalf of the Communists, the Beedi Workers Union and the Harijan Sangh against attacks from the police, especially the MSP (Malabar Special Police).[4] The form which it takes becomes political in a singular way, differentiating itself from the narratives of the state, in charting the course of its history, in the form of a rumour. It is this pre-emptive realm of ideas that became the subject of this paper not necessarily subjecting them to any positivity or finality in terms of a given telos.

Gopalakrishnan comes from a village in Nattika *firka* called Edathiruthy.Nattika is also renowned as *manappuram* or the 'sand bank' indicating the sand deposits from sea which was given a geographical identity of its own as expressed in this local usage. A *firka* was a revenue division within a Taluk of British Malabar. Before 1956, Nattika *firka* was a group of fourteen villages.[5] In the Nattika *firka o*f today the villages that originally constituted the *firka* was already split between the two *firkas* of Nattika and Kodungallore, in the Taluks of Chavakkadu and Kodungallur respectively. From our

[2] All the incidents that form the subject matter of this article are sourced from interviews, besides taken from souvenirs and other literature. These resulted in a Ph.D. (Cybil 2002): https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8443/jspui/handle/10603/29118. Accessed 14.06.2023.

[3] These details have been ethnographically collected, especially in engagement with K.K. Abhimanyu who was a friend and comrade of the Sardar and a volunteer for the rally. I also interviewed Mohammed Yunus and P.U. Gangatharam who were the vice-captain of all the volunteers that day, and a student volunteer at the same rally respectively (Cybil 2002).

[4] Cf. the memoir by K.K. Abhimanyu (2000).

[5] These were the villages or *amsams* of Engandiyur, Vatanappilly, Thalikkulam, Nattika, Valappadu, Edathiruthy, Chenthrappinny, Kaipamangalam, Perinjanom, Koolimuttam, Pappinivattom. PadinjareVemballur, Panangadu and Aala.

point of study it is the mnemonic function that the *firka* serves which is more important and hence our reference to the *firka* is the way it existed prior to 1956. Gopalakrishnan was born to Ezhava (or Thiyya as they were addressed in Malabar) parents—Chathunny and Kothamma, in September 1914. He was the third youngest in a row of nine children. His father made his living writing deeds of land agreements in addition to farming on private as well as leased property. He was often quoted as a well-respected man who earned distinction in being a middle man for settling disputes-mostly related to land, in the village. Although Gopalakrishnan lost his parents early in life, he completed his education under the guardianship of his elder brother and joined teaching early in life. He is also remembered for the library that he helped build in the school where he taught. For this he collected money from people working as immigrants from *firka* as far away as Ceylon. Sparing the less than two years that he spent in the Air Force, the rest of his life was spent in his native and neighbouring villages all within the *firka* region, teaching in different schools. He was one of the school teachers whose certification to teach stood cancelled on grounds of political involvement (communism) at the time of his death in 1950. He was considered an organizer-par excellence for the movement, who could single-handedly organize rallies and demonstrations in the *firka* when the need for such skill was especially demanding in the days of the underground. Gopalakrishnan and a host of other school teachers gathered at Perinjanom a village in the *firka* at the school in which Bhaskarapanicker was a teacher,[6] for continuing their education and qualifying matriculation while beginning with the Communist movement in the *firka.* This, notwithstanding singular exceptions like D.M. Pottekkatt who given his exposure to the literature of Communism early in life, had the daring to give demonstrations and speeches with the red flag in the streets of the *firka*'s villages all by himself.[7]

The *firka* had begun showing signs of political movement with the Khilafat in 1919 itself, when arrests took place.[8] It intensified with the *Guruvayur Satyagraha* in 1936 and the beginning of the Communist movement in the 1940s.[9] The Chirakkal Taluk Harijan

[6] P.T. Bhaskarapanicker (originally from Sreekrishnapuram, Palakkad) was later the President of the Malabar District Board in 1952-56, that won Prime Minister Nehru's recognition for constituting a model government. P.K. Gopalakrishnan was elected representative from the Nattika *firka* constituency in the same Board. T.K. Raman and K.S. Nair were both to be the future elected members to the Kerala Legislature. Mohammed Younus whose father was a Congress party member, was arrested along with Khialafat Nambuthiri during the time of the Khilafat struggle, P.A. Prabhakaran, member of a Nair household in the village of Edathiruthy whose home was raided several times following the Citizens' Rights Rally by the police, shifted home to the safety of the Cochin state across the river. Kochupennu a Dalit (Harijan in those days) woman who fought elections to the Malabar District Board as early as 1952. V.K.Chathan a Dalit who was badly assaulted by the police following the Rally. These were some of the important faces of the Communist movement in the *firka* at the time of Gopalakrishnan's death in 1950 (Cybil 2002).

[7] Gleaned from an interview with respondent Satish Nawaz from Chulur village from the same *firka*. Satish was a young comrade of the CPI-M in 1998 and also a student of law. He was part of the group that published an independent souvenir *chirasmarana* (2000), dedicated to Sardar himself on the behalf of the Sardar Memorial Study Centre (Cybil 2002).

[8] Though strident in the North Malabar region, arrests were limited in the Nattika to a few *khilafat* leaders in 1921-1922, identified by respondent Mohammed Yunus as Koorikkuzhy Ahmed, Abdul Qadir Master, Nambuthiri, and Moideen Kutty Sahib (Cybil 2002).

[9] Cf. E.V. Gopalan (1985) for a detailed discussion of the impact of this satyagraha on Sardar as a teenager.

Conference 1945, in a resolution, made this appeal to the Government of India as well as to Dr Ambedkar, asking to put an end to upper caste and police violence: "instances where poor Harijans were even beaten by the Police for their coming forward to give evidence". It also mentioned leaders from the Thiyya community like P.C. Ramakrishna Vaidyar, C.S. Gopalan, and M.S. Sankaranarayanan for joining the Harijans in defence of their rights (Ambedkar1989: 51). While P.C. Ramakrishna Vaidyar was a member of the Communist Party,[10] C.S. Gopalan was a volunteer of the *Guruvayur Satyagraha* finding mention in the autobiography of the famous Communist leader A.K. Gopalan (1973). Towards the 1950s the movement was at a point of chaos following the ban enforced by the Madras Government on the Communists. This locked the Communists and the police in an intense fight that took the lives of many. In Northern Malabar it was the fiercest. In the South of Malabar, the incident involving the death of Gopalakrishan stands singular. His death is often reported to be a result of the desire to emulate the heroism of his comrades in the North of Malabar.[11]

In the *firka*, the first Republic Day was transformed into a day of bloody violence that challenged its very grounds of citizenship through a denial of its basic freedoms by the M.S.P. (Malabar Special Police commissioned for stopping the Communists), locally perceived as an agency that was external to its Citizens. The rally that Gopalakrishnan led on the 26th of January called the *Pouravakaasajatha* was thus a rally for the Rights of the Citizens. All those claimed to have witnessed or reported to have participated in it spoke of it with an inner feeling of terror. This terror continued in the villages of the *firka* even after the custodial death of Gopalakrishnan. The police raids continued in the houses especially of lower caste peasants: Pulayas, Pariahs, Ezhavans and also of a few Nair homes (but excluded landlords) for hiding Communists, or for being their family members.[12] Matters of speculation as to what exactly caused his death are rife to this day. Did he die bleeding from a wound in the fore head, did he die in the police van itself while being transported to the police station or did he die in the make shift camp of the police where he was brutally assaulted by the cops of the M.S.P. are questions that will remain forever unanswered in the absence of a medical report.[13] As if in reply to this, there was the generation of a space that was affirmative of life, that overcame police reprisals, encapsulated by the singularity of the *firka*'s defiance of death as a punishment. I further argue that this violence constituted a field of rumour of which Sardar's martyrdom formed virtual boundary, separating it from the monumentalization of a total history of the Indian Republic (Foucault 1972). It has the potential of giving rise to knowledge (about nation, state and its sovereignty), but without acknowledging the rules by which empirical forms of knowledge come to be drawn. Paul Rabinow (1984) describes how Foucault looked at the emergence of discourse as practices, especially divisive practices of modernity that constituted

[10] Based on interviews with P K Gopalakrishnan, Kalarikkal Narayanan, Mohammed Yunus, and others who were members of the Communist party at that time. P K Gopalakrishnan, later deputy speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly, had inaugurated the rally for Citizen's Rights (Cybil 2002).

[11] Cf. Menon (1992) for a discussion of the event that led to an intensified organization of the Communist Party leading to its ban in September 1949 that resulted in the jailing of many of its leaders.

[12] While there were numerous accounts of this violence (Cybil 2002), Perumpully Bhaskaran (2000) also recorded these events.

[13] Gleaned from interviews with P.U. Gangadharan and Sankaran, the former Panchayat president of Anthicaud, who had been arrested along with Sardar (Cybil: 2002).

different forms of subjectivity. One also reads in Foucault that these discourses also introduced a new sense of the *a priori* in thinking called the historical *a priori*. The space of which the different discourses are constituted uses the historical *a priori* as essential condition for reality of statements which is also different from a priori in a formal sense which means a condition for validity of judgements (Foucault:1972:143). The field of discourse centred around this uses it as a positivity with its own laws of development which is to say that rules of discourse (or rumour in this case) cannot be located neither in *a priori* authority of knowledge nor in experience, but in discourse itself (ibid: 89).

Initially when I began work in the *firka* the martyrdom of Sardar was introduced to me marked by the persistence of a denial of conventional rules of signifying death. This denial in itself marked the first rules of its discursive formation based on a displacement of the idea of death. It was a manner of speaking and experiencing a new idea of death as well. On the first anniversary of his death, the discourse came to be constituted into a materiality, when in the context of the continuing ban on the Communists two of his comrades went underground on the 26th January in 1951 and risked their lives to plant a flag of the party at the beach where his body was presumed to be found (Ravi 2001). This enunciative function marked the beginning of this discourse which differentiated itself significantly from the celebrations of the Nation's Republic day, and also from the rites of mourning traditionally practised for any dead man/woman in the *firka*. It created an event or made a statement (which Foucault calls the atom of discourse) which though is representative of one of the summits of modern political existence of the country as its Republic day does not inherit structurally its laws of representation.

Image 5.1: Red Flags put up by Communists on the beach where Sardar's body was believed found. The flags go up here on 21st January every year celebrated, both as Lenin dinam (anniversary of Lenin) and the flag day (pathaka dinam; a curtain raiser for the Sardar dinam). They stay on till the 26th of January. Image Source: K.V. Cybil

Theoretical Background: Death as Discourse

Conceptualizing the discursive, in terms of the accidental and untimely demise of individuals, has been a major task of anthropological, social and historical disciplines. Alan Klima (2001) argues that Buddhist monks in Thailand perform expiatory rituals for those people killed in political conflicts. There is a special kind of ritual that is conceived exclusively for treating corpses that are forsaken and they are given a decent burial/cremation following these rituals. In doing this, the Buddhist monks perform *asubhakammatthana*, a ritual whereby they contemplate the repulsiveness of body parts when in decay. Klima argues that such contemplation through meditation practiced by the Buddhist monks offer a counter-intuitive metaphor for thinking about the body, especially of the lives lost due to violent or unnatural causes. Klima comments on the simulacrum (as opposed to sensorium) that visualizes the body in a postmodern stage. Alienation of the body from the sensorium and its entry into a hyperreal world of simulation is a work achieved through media within contemporary society. Thai Buddhist monks and nuns while contemplating the body parts in a gruesome, but organic manner attach corporeality to the hyperreality that is flaunted by the media. The photographic reality of the media as Klima argues is deemed to be an arche-presence, or a realm prior to the realm of *Being* or its metaphysics of presence in these rituals. This realm helps absorb forms of deaths due to unnatural causes into mass mediated culture which are expiated through religious (Buddhist) rituals. James Martel (2012) on the other hand, places the concept of anarchism at the root of political imagery in relation to the public imagination of unburied bodies. He finds the politics of sovereignty, order and hierarchy to be forms of the power and violence of the state, which may be called archism or the contrary of anarchism. Archism as a concept is used by Martel to indicate the narratives of order and sovereign which is conceited and projected as "natural and self-evident, the only possible form of politics" (Martel 2018: 9). Archism often takes the form of state, but not merely the state as it refers to any authority powerful enough to control and hold off death. Martel counterposes "to the authority of archism…….the authority of the dead" (ibid: 10). Anarchism is a power set against the state using subtler forms of human agency such as of the unclaimed corpses of people, whose lives were lost in resistance to the state. To illustrate this, Martel (2012: 218) makes a distinction between the concepts of mythical violence and divine violence. Drawing from Walter Benjamin (1996), he identifies the former as human in conception and comparable to state violence which is meant to enforce order and hierarchy. The latter (divine violence) is deemed a result of divine intervention in human matters and amounts to the annihilation of claims made against the power of god. Such violence distinguishes itself in leaving absolutely no trace of fetishism behind in its truth like in the story of god swallowing up Korah and his followers into the earth for their idolatry (Martel 2012). Divine violence is also messianic in nature, as opposed to mythical violence that humans are capable of. While divine violence destroys mythology, freeing us from our own imagination about the divine, it annihilates without warning, stopping short of nothing but annihilation, and in this annihilation, it also expiates (ibid.). Martel uses the dialectical imagery of archism/ anarchism and mythical/divine to counter the challenge of politically neutralizing the victims of state violence. As he says: "resistance to state violence must come not from within the realm of what Benjamin calls state

violence…but rather from its failure, a failure that becomes visible in unburied bodies" (Martel 2018: 6).

Politics of the unclaimed body can be seen also as the opening theme of ghostly vitality. Selen Islekel (2017: 339) observes how people are made aware of the state's necro-politics through mourning practices surrounding victims who die violently and are not even given a proper burial. Islekel here draws from Achille Mbembe's concept of necro-politics that describes how the modern state does not merely create a power that is wielded over a population by investing in life (biopolitics), but it does so also by demarcating spaces earmarked for death, making "the murder of its enemy its primary and absolute objective'' (ibid.). Such spaces earmarked as she identifies for the necro-politics of the state may be called a "death world" (Mbembe cited in Islekel 2017: 340). In such cases, as Islekel argues (as also in the case of Türkiye, Chile and Argentina), places where people have disappeared and are not to be seen again, are neither models of sovereignty (medieval), and nor are they modern biopolitical realms. Exhausting the relationship between death and power, such spaces produce subjugated knowledge—a term borrowed from Foucault, which is produced at the expense of those that are disqualified from the realm of knowledge production for not having enough evidence (ibid.: 344).

Studies on the treatment of unclaimed corpses may also take an instrumentalist view of the idea of death (Tomasini 2017, Tarlow and Lowman 2018). Here, these bodies are called criminal corpses that fall under the description of the law of the state. One way of putting them in perspective, provided by Tarlow and Lowman (2018) includes gibbeting, anatomisation, and the dissection of criminal corpses in England according to the Murder Act of 1752-1832. Another way to look at the criminalization of the corpse, is through the policy where one would be shot at dawn, prevalent in the British military during the early 20th century (Tomasini 2017). This was a form of capital punishment imposed on army deserters , especially those who were court martialled for the lack of obedience and discipline. These acts converted death into a domain of ethical discursivity, its political content finding space only in the perspective of the state. They do help us to understand how modern practices of law have created a positive domain in terms of the political representation of the corpses of outlaws, criminals and rebels. Nonetheless in facing up to the questions of violence, anarchy or spectrality by which, one may comprehend the milieu of meaning-making, such as a discursive realm, or in the case of rumour-making as in my study, the instrumentalist view may be seen as lacking. In conclusion, neither the instrumentalist nor the dialectical imagery (Martel), or the post-structuralist (Klima) perspective gives us any satisfactory explanation for a political conditioning that constantly switches positions from facts to discursivity. While Klima and Martel do argue about how death violates the forms in which human violence renders corpses into the equivalent of vermin, and also describe how such corpses claw their way back into the memory of people, Martel is also emphatic about the anarchic and resistant role corpses assume in the face of state violence and politics. Selen Islekel in her concept of the subjugated knowledge comes closest to this paper's discursive analysis of death as a rumour in the *firka.* It is by the way of situating subjugated knowledge in relation to rules about its formation that includes concepts, subjects, objects and materiality (Foucault 1972) that this paper turns towards making a discursive analysis. In the transformation into discursive,

of the fact of a death treated as a subjugated knowledge, the rules of transformation are contingent on the context of their own formation. We shall briefly analyse them in the next three sections.

Martyrdom and the *Firka:* Concept and Context

There is an ambiguity that emerges in recollecting the experiences of Sardar Gopalakrishnan's loss, i.e., his death. That is to say it invokes images of the death of a Communist, rather than a person or an individual who at the same time was also a teacher, a beloved of his friends and family, a local enthusiast of books who set up a library in the school in his village, and a strong follower of the principles of equality in the lines of the social reform movement in Kerala. This ambiguity is a discontinuity in its regional presence as part of a historic event. Violence is the metaphor that separates the region from the rest of the country on an eventful day. The badge of a Communist often glosses over the numerous tensions that Sardar lived through in his life before he even became one. He was an early nationalist (also recalled as a Congressman immediately after his return from Kohima, i.e. 1945)[14] from within his own ranks (the educated youth) with a wide experience of travel across different parts of India, apart from being a bachelor who lived a carnivalesque and heroic life of passion. Above all, he was a man with human vulnerabilities who often broke down, sat alone and cried out aloud, whenever he felt isolated amongst his Communist comrades.[15] All these things were erased in the moment that his life was taken. He was wanted, arrested, assaulted and killed by the police only for being a Communist. All the other aspects of his life were overlooked as he became overdetermined by this identity, with death or martyrdom being the only way to conceive of his self.

The name by which he is renowned today, i.e., Sardar, is a name that is appended to the anniversary of his martyrdom that is also commemorated as Sardar *dinam* or Sardar day in Nattika *firka*. Parallels to this discourse surrounding him can be found in the long history of the Akali or the Sikh community's uprising against the colonial rule. It has been argued for example by Uberoi (1996) that the prominence of martyrdom today is a response to Shi'ite Islam on the one hand, and Gandhi's philosophy of *swarajya* or self-rule on the other hand. The Sikh idea of martyrdom was seen as a sign of modernity since it combined the Sikh faith with self-rule. The name Sardar (an honorific in contemporary Malabar) was used to address anyone who had served in the British Army, especially the auxiliary units that were involved in activities such as cutting roads, building bridges etc., it never had the meaning associated with Sikhism as a religion. With the case of Gopalakrishnan, it was his stint as a fabric worker in the Air Force during World War II that had earned him the surname of Sardar. It is interesting that following his death, the association with the name Sardar has vanished from the region of the *firka* and the only person known as Sardar is conflated with the persona of the martyr. Here one can argue that martyrdom emerges as a distinctive feature that is characterized by a name, although its association to something as specific as the Sikh faith is difficult to substantiate. This is not to deny the Sikh-Islamic-Christian symbolism of martyrdom, which may have been quite blatantly present in the discourse of martyrdom in India. In establishing the death of Gopalkrishnan as

[14] According to interview with K.C. Unniappan Master, Sardar's brother (Cybil 2002)
[15] According to interview with Panikkettil Chandru, Sardar's brother (Cybil 2000)

martyrdom, the Communists have employed tropes to give his death a secular and national character in which they plotted their own political and electoral strategies subsequently. Thus it was not so uncommon to find newspaper articles authored by political leaders such as E.M.S. Namboodiripad (1998), the then General Secretary of the CPI-M, comparing the martyrdom of Gopalakrishnan with that of Gandhi, although by no stretch of imagination was it be feasible to compare the latter's murder by right wing extremists with the murder of the former, killed by the police of his own state. Both kinds of murders became subsumed within an undifferentiated variety of nationalist discourse that was disinterested in nuances that did not serve a sectarian goal. Gopalakirshnan was hunted for being a Communist, and was considered a threat to the Congress of which Gandhi was an important part. Gandhi was a free person when he died. He was already a national hero, and his death was the political consequence of the nationalist struggle that included his *satyagraha*. The two martyrdoms were thus singular, separate, and unequal in terms of their political inspiration. Moreover, not a single state authority documented this event of the rally or his death in that rally. The responses to Sardar's death from the *firka* were so restricted, that made it impossible to link the story of his death to a history of the nation and the state. On the contrary, there was every effort made to shy away from documenting the story of his death.[16] Martyrdom hence turns towards the creation of a discursive realm which is at odds with everything considered to be basic about the definition of death, be it religion or ideology. In the *firka* it makes an impact politically as the mnemonic of its struggle for a rights-based democratic society, of a person who went missing in this struggle. Namboodiripad's comparison nonetheless points to the catachrestic deviation inherent to the discourse from the idea of the Indian Republic as a finite historical entity.[17]

Subject and Authorial Positions in the Discursive Field

The multitude of lives Sardar lived and how he died became subjects in fields as diverse as literature, art and politics to theatre from the *firka*. It was the writing of a biographical novel by E.V. Gopalan (1985), a school teacher from the village of Mathilakom in the *firka* that marked the inclusion of the event into the discourse of literary modernity. It charts the path of a heroic life that revolted against the social evils of caste and class exploitation that intensified in the *firka* following the famine days after the rainstorm in the year 1942, and the scarcity of provisions and rations imposed by the Second World War. The only similarity that the novelist offers with the life of Gopalakrishnan with that of Gopi, the hero of the novel is in the manner of his death. Else, the carnivalesque figure of Sardar as is represented in the local accounts, has nothing in common with the modernized figure depicted in the novel.

[16] Documentation here implies, entering the event of Gopalakrishnan's death in official records. His nephew K.R. Suvarnan told me how his revoked teaching certificate was dispatched to him (as he was then headmaster of the school where Sardar taught) after his death from related authorities in the 1950s. Any clarity about this or on whether the dispatch was initiated based on government records of his demise, is absent (personal communication).

[17] Udaya Kumar (2008:175) uses the term catachrestic deviation to indicate assemblages formed out of human society not identifiable with an enumerated or finite series.

A short story written by a playwright and one of the first initiates into Communism in the *firka* region D.M. Pottekatt (1997) by its title suggest the profound significance of rumour as a pre-emptive realm of ideas in narrating the event of his death: *penaparanja katha* (the story as told by the pen). The pen belonged to the *maashu* (teacher) the other synonym by which Gopalakrishnan was known. The pen speaks as a mute witness from its hold on his shirt after he was killed in custody. The writer brings forth the tragedy of a leader whose death would go unrecorded in writing. Therefore it is the pen speaking on its own, without an agency though with full of potentials of becoming one, about the events that usurped the life of the *maashu*. *Manal mozhi* (Voices of the Sand) by Sreelatha (2020) is a novel that uses spectral voice, in its attempt to capture the subjectivity of Sardar. The novel tries to capture the life of Nattika *firka* as a coastal region—*manappuram* (sand bank), which has seen cycles of migration, agitation and segmentation in its population. Written as a novel it has real life names for its characters and this includes Sardar Gopalakrishnan. Other notable characters include Adiparambil Raman who was an elected representative of the *firka* in the Malabar District Board in the 1940s and Ramu Kariat the famous filmmaker to win a national award for *Chemmeen,* the best feature film in 1965. The novel dwells on the peculiarity of the *firka* as a region that is alternatively hostile and warm to its population because of its landscape covered mostly in beach sand. There is a certain conviviality in the lives of the characters who appear as visions to the actual protagonist of the novel who is writing a history of the *firka.* They were all geniuses though native to the Nattika *firka* made it their home only after wandering the world in many roles. In the company of these characters Sardar Gopalakrishnan's martyrdom figures as the most remarkable political event ever witnessed in the *firka*. The novel details certain vignettes in his life recollected as memories of a bygone generation but eventually making an authorial statement in the form of a spectre/spirit of Sardar.

How the novel allows a reconciliation to take place in the death of A.P. Raman who represents the liberal face (the Congress party) of the region's politics and Sardar its radical and revolutionary face as spirits roaming the skies of the *firka* and its adjoining Arabian sea while discussing and listening to each other's voices is an imaginary finale to his martyrdom taking a representative position on developments in the *firka*, in a period post the statehood of Kerala in 1956. The spirits/spectres discuss for instance the reasons for the closing of the cotton mill in the *firka* which was a profit-making and bread-winning enterprise for several poor inhabitants. The closing though blamed on workers' unrest, was also a sign of the changing politics of the times. In discoursing the political, the authorial subjectivity in the field combines with all the elements excluded in his death conceptualized as martyrdom, be that of family, caste, friendship and love. Gopalakrishnan's nephews wrote and staged an amateur play (*charitrathintechiri*, History or a Satire),[18] a critique of the Emergency rule by Indira Gandhi. This play is of interest for the fact that it demonstrates the functional understanding of the frame of Gopalakrishnan's death, evoked in traditional institutions like joint families or kinship. The play with no direct significance on the life or death of Gopalakrishnan, yet made its affirmative clear that it had transformed the rumour of

[18] This play though scripted by his nephews was directed by Kazhimbrom Vijayan, an award-winning theater personality. The play was staged several times at various places and was shortlisted for a state academy award but failed to qualify as it had one professional artist in one of the roles. The awards were given only to amateurs (personal communication with K.U. Arunan, Sardar's nephew).

rebellion into a stage performance. One of his nephews went on to write a biography of Sardar (Kishor 2023) with the publishing house of the Marxists in Kerala called *Chinta*. This has created a new dimension to the discourse, because as a biography of Sardar, it is the first of its kind. It's symbolic potentials are much lesser than of the previous works because of the shades of ideology that restrict the depiction of grey areas which resist documentation and create diversification of details in the field. Yet if read as a testimony in itself it soars far above the rest of literature collected in the oeuvre of Sardar and his life by the sheer intimacy of its dialogue with the discursive space of martyrdom, including the closest of his comrades, friends and kin. Written from collected descriptions of survivors of the period, the biography comes that close to pulling curtains down on all speculation regarding who Sardar was or what he did, but leaves it incomplete as his biography cannot escape the theatricalization in moments depicting scenes of violence in the death of Sardar. All said and done it stands out as another affirmation of life in the *firka* which has kept coming after the conversion of the *firka* into a 'death world' (Mbembe cited in Islekel 2017: 340).

The anniversary souvenirs released on the day of martyrdom (January 26th), carry essays about noted personalities from the locality, recalling experiences from the Communist movement and their roles, along with the memories of Gopalakrishnan that make him into a leader.[19] The souvenirs are often released as propaganda material for the organized Left, yet also serve as a setting for the expression of dissent within the Left. They serve as an example of the series or the multiplicity of historic documentation and its dispersion within the discursive field. The interiority of feeling in sharing of such a discourse gives the *firka* a face that rises above the confines of geography. The many stories of migration from the *firka* as the period from 1940-50s were, especially to Sri Lanka (or then Ceylon) and to Bombay are rendered as documentation of tales of exile for fear of police persecution or surviving the penury of the disaster wrought by the storm in 1942.[20] The *firka* remained a mnemonic entity in all these accounts and the death of Sardar as the suppressed, but significant presence within their testimonies. His death was not reported by any press in India, and the first printed communication on it came out through a daily (Navsakti) in Ceylon which was published by the Leftist groups comprising mostly of immigrants from Kerala. Sardar's nephew who worked in Colombo at that time, told me how he took initiative for this, considering the strict ban in Malabar enforced on the press for reporting on any news related to the Communists.

The subject or authorial positions in death as a discourse creates a history of ideas which represents "the history not of literature, but of that tangential rumour, that everyday transient writing that never acquires the status of an oeuvre, or is immediately lost: the analysis of sub-literatures, almanacs, reviews and newspapers, temporary successes and anonymous authors" (Foucault 1972: 136). I could say that the field of rumour which I have studied reconstitutes ideas about martyrdom that operate within the same regional domain but are at the same time informed by

[19] The CPI and CPI-M are major contributors to the printing and publication of these souvenirs, and the newspaper *Deshabhimani* contains a supplementary sheer on most occasions, and Chinta, a publishing house has released a biography of Sardar as well (cf. Kishor 2023).

[20] A graphic description of the storm in Nattika *firka* can also be evidenced in the novel *Innaley* (Gopalan: 1985).

disparate notions that are not defined by clear boundaries. The reason why the most powerful narratives to emerge from this region—a novel and a short story—defied all possibilities of creating a historical subject with a name, or a life, or history was perhaps due to this context that has history being displaced by fiction and rumour, with the process of this displacement itself assuming archaeological and structural overtones. The Republic day as a day of mourning in the *firka* produces in its wake these archaeological and structural shifts/displacements. A new set of concepts including discursive formations and discursive practices transform its subjects from a historical to a new inventory of subject positions. The field of discourse centred around these produced statements uses it as a positivity with its own laws of development, which is to say that rules of discourse cannot be located neither in the a priori authority of knowledge nor in its experience, but within discourse itself (Foucault 1972: 89).The presence of Nattika *firka* as a marker of the discourse on death on the eve of every other Republic day of India finds its positivity within the realm of these authorial and subject positions. It does not look towards the positive affirmation of a totalizing entity as the state in conceptualizing those ideas of freedom, sovereignty etc which laid the groundwork in its mourning for the loss of Sardar.

Objectifying the Absence of a Body, Discursive Materiality, and Performance

Death as a discourse seeks to envelop the body of the martyr through the ritual offering of departure of the martyr's soul to the world of ancestors (offered by his family treated as a kinship) and the story of passions in his life. The former was done in the absence of his body. The body is usually burnt and the ashes after a period of abstention by the family of the deceased is confined to a pot and later poured into the sea.[21] This is followed by a meal in which the dead is also offered its last share of the meal of the mortals. The crows that represent the departed man/woman's soul here partakes of the common meal shared amongst the clan and the affinal relatives of the deceased. In the case of Gopalakrishnan, the absence of his body for the rites prescribed offered an obstacle to the holding of ceremonies. The cremation rites for him were done twice and not once. The first time it was held, the crows that represent the ancestor's soul refused to eat off the shared meal. Hence it was presumed that the soul was restless and yet reluctant to leave the living for the dead. Therefore a younger lineage, emotionally closer to Gopalakrishnan took the initiative once again to repeat the rites. This time impressively enough for the rest of the clan the crows did feed off the common meal, and it was subsumed that the deceased soul was peaceful.[22] The commemoration of violence on the birth of the Indian Republic that took Sardar's life by the community of mourners for Sardar in the *firka* also opens with his stories of passion. The desire to get married and live as a member of one's own community/kinship, an intense desire for a return to normal life is also deemed basic to his actions on the Republic day. These actions were expected to be a finale of sorts to his underground activism. No occasion other than the Republic day or the day when every Indian became a Citizen with his/her/their own rights and freedoms was better

[21] L.K. Anantha Krishna Iyer (1909) observes that amongst the Izhuvans, only the rich burnt their dead, while the poor buried theirs. I think what he suggests when saying rich or poor indicates sub-caste hierarchizations like Thanda, Panikkan, Karuppan, Choan etc.

[22] Interview with K.C. Unniappan Master, Sardar's brother (Cybil 2002).

suited to end his underground life. As he reportedly told some of his close relatives,[23] he was waiting for a watershed in his life before he settled down and married a woman, a teacher colleague and also a distant relative with whom he was already in love. Nonetheless he also expressed anguish if he would survive this watershed moment and therefore feared giving false hopes to anyone. But, for some others the heroism was even counted a punishment for the crime of transgressing the taboos of a traditional society. This included indulging in acts such as spreading of communism, underground activism etc., or related aspects of the life that Sardar led.[24] The heightened feelings of love and passion as narrated in his love for a woman who was also from a close kin relationship, often evoked representations of his death as a result of the transgression of the rules/norms of alliance.[25] Themes of love and revolution therefore run parallel to the corporate body of the clan today when the members of his clan mourn him on the Republic day.

Image 5.2: Posters put up by different Communist parties on Sardar dinam at the venue of one of the meetings. Image Source: K.V. Cybil

It is within these collectives (family, caste, community, party etc), thus, that one might find the anniversaries of martyrdom *rakthasakshidinam* circulate and find meaning. Every anniversary or *rakthaskshidinam* on the 26th of January, affirms the materiality

[23] Referring here to K.C. Unniappan's wife Sardar's sister-in-law.
[24] Velayudhan, a peasant-worker, and once a close comrade of Sardar, serving a stint with him in the auxiliary units of the Military for cutting roads in Assam recounted in an interview, how Sardar's death was marked by the way he chose to live his life, as if it were destiny (Cybil 2002).
[25] Interview with K.G. Sudhakaran, Sardar's nephew (Cybil 2002).

of this discourse. According to Foucault, the materiality of a discourse constitutes the institutional framework of rules within which its statements are contained (Foucault 1972: 116). But in the repetition of their commemoration, they also reveal the thresholds or limits that such discourses are defined by, that lead to newer discourses being formed. For example, an occasion in the year 1976 during Emergency, when there was a ban on political rallies, a situation emerged wherein the celebration of this anniversary event was revoked by traditional left-wing parties. This marked the emergence of a new event, and a new statement within the discourse that had Naxalites stage a protest against this reversal or revocation by traditional left parties, and in their role as revolutionaries, raise a red flag at the memorial pillar.[26] This was a new threshold crossed, and since then Naxalite groups started commemorating these anniversaries quite regularly.[27]

Being also a victim to a murder there are strong sentiments of a retributive kind in the discourse of his death. Thus the Congress party of which Sardar Gopalakrishnan had reportedly been a sympathizer once, had never had any stake to claim for power in this discourse.[28] It was the Congress which governed the state of Madras in 1950, and the deployment of the Malabar Special Police was its decision. The Communists, who have been traditional rivals of the Congress in the state, by making Sardar Gopalakrishnan the first martyr of the Indian Republic, made him a hero of the very system he fought against. The discursive analysis shows that since the absence of a corpse or the body of the martyr is not open to interpretation, such absence has radically transformed the nature of statements in the domain as being not affected by categories such as new and old, average and deviant. On the other hand these statements have a self-established repetitiveness of its own, by means of which it can erupt into a genre previously unknown to it, and yet retain its regularity in terms of its enunciation. They are indeed repetitive and in search of a justice that can answer for the lives of people lost in the course of political struggle.

A play titled *charithrathintechiri* (History, or a Satire) written and staged in late 1970s after the Emergency in India, which was meant as a critique of Emergency also revolved around this theme. The play speaks through the mother-character of a martyr who is killed by a dictator *ekarajan* (symbolic of Emergency). The mother challenges the dictator's opposition to building memorials for all of those who lost their lives fighting for freedom. She rhetorically wonders whether his country would have any space left in the future, after pillars would be built for every martyr. The potential transformation of the martyr's death, into a banality is an immanent critique of the discourse of martyrdom itself, which becomes the hallmark of this play. A death which as an idea is original and innovative in this discourse, can also be banal, or traditional

[26] Interview with Ravi (Ravichettan) Sardar's friend and comrade, and Kochupennu, Sardar's comrade who was an activist of the Communist Party (Cybil 2002).

[27] Image 2 shows posters of the different leftist outfits in the *firka* on the 26th of January. CPI–CPM (the traditional, organized ruling Left), the CPI-ML one of the many factions that grew out of the schism in the Communist movement after the Naxalite movement in the 1970s, and the CP-M, a faction that broke off from the local branch of the CPM decided to hold its own commemoration in the year 2001, at the time when these photos were taken.

[28] In my interview with Kochappu (in Edathiruthy village) who was a Congress sympathizer and childhood friend of Sardar, he recollected how Left-Right polarizations had cost him a friendship, as there were hardly such feelings between Sardar and himself, when the former was alive.

and conforming. This view, points otherwise to a decadence of discourse over the years, especially also with the current ideological crisis in the Left which is only a shade of its revolutionary vigour of the 1950s. In connection with the celebration of the seventy years of Indian Independence in 2022 the ruling Communist faction (CPI-M) in the state decided to hoist national flags in their party offices.[29] This was challenged by the emergent Right-wing politics in the State by saying that the Communists never supported nationalism or respected the Indian flag in the past. In one of the numerous social and visual media debates that followed,[30] a spokesperson of a nationalist party, in order to prove his point that the Communists never supported nationalism went to the extent of alleging that Sardar Gopalakrishnan was lynched by the public for carrying a black flag on the first Republic day of India in Nattika *firka*.

I argue that the totalizing effect of cultural notions such as nationalism attach positivity to the representation of death (in this case lynching as a positive way of doing justice) within discourses about martyrdom that eclipse the coexistence of other diverse discourses. The distinction between the original and banal as the crucial distinctions identified by Foucault according to which the domain of history of ideas operates (Foucault 1972: 155), is also a way in which ideas are valued in this discourse. In establishing the death of the martyr in history, the Rightists were partaking of the rumour, but what they achieved was the substitution of history of ideas, for history itself, without noticing that the latter was being driven into a banality in coming to terms with history. The discourse of death so far opposed to any reductive cultural fashioning (ethnic, communal or nationalistic or of any such kind outside its own domain) for the first time, evoked fears of obliteration, erasure. Once denied the multiplicity within which it voices its speech the discourse faces dissolution. It was in a knee jerk reaction to this possibility that the Communists published through *Chinta* the biography of Sardar written by his nephew (Kishor 2023), the first ever attempt so far to make it factual as opposed to previous attempts which were discursive/fictional. Still we need to acknowledge that in the discourse rather than a culturally reducible notion of positivity, there is a "region of inter-positivity" (Foucault 1972: 176) where different networks may be created by associating different discourses that are not essentially related to martyrdom or to the *firka*. The allusion made to the overcoming of discrimination, poverty and starvation in the Nattika *firka* that the discourse holds as fundamentally positive extends beyond the confines of demands placed on resources by a growing population. This positivity reaches out to the discontented younger generation in different ways. Positivity here is represented by a complex network of alliance and activities expressed in diverse genres. Most of all this feeling of positivity is neither reducible to political economy nor to culture. The network of positivity can be examined in diverse fields that produce discourse such as theatre, literature, and even politics and government. The analysis of it can be laid out only through "not a unifying, but a diversifying effect" (Foucault 1972: 177). In all these realms, positivity can be seen as inter-discursive, and cannot be argued to be the privilege of any one thing in particular.

[29] Cf. “CPI(M) hoists Indian Flag for the first time in 57 years” https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/cpim-hoists-indian-flag-for-first-time-in-57-years-101629054501453.html.

[30] This video is no longer available now, originally aired on the News Channel: *Mathrubhumi News* in August 2021.

Conclusion

In the theoretical backdrop I made it clear that this paper is trying to approach the politics of unclaimed bodies of victims of state violence from the viewpoint of discourse analysis. I discussed the main pillars of discourse formation in the previous three sections. These were attempts to grapple with the modalities by which specific genres of articulation, such as novel, short story, theatre, biography and political demonstrations (studied here as performances) plot themselves into articulation. I have analysed them on the basis of their internal unity, how they are concept forming, subject forming, objectifying and also institutionalizing the discourse by framing their own rules. The main reason for departure from the previous works that tried to study the representation of unclaimed corpses was to identify the politics peculiar to state violence. It was the question of historicity and the nature of its discursive formation such as circulated in rumours paving for movements between facts and discursivity that led me to Foucault (1972). Foucault introduces his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (ibid.) with an interesting problematic of how history began with a study of monuments, and became a monument itself, caught in the deluge of documents with which historiography engaged itself as the primary site of knowledge production.

A historical subject that is marked by an inability to speak, or to be part of a discourse is often the product of such a historiography, its drive towards monumentalization. The formation of historical *a priori* is important here to understand general histories, as opposed to total histories of monumentalization (ibid.). Historical *a priori* is distinguished from formal *a priori* whose jurisdiction extends without contingence, a great, unmoving and a purely empirical figure that exercised over men's thoughts a tyranny that none could escape (Foucault 1972: 128). Historical *a priori* exist at a deeper level, forms the milieu in which the differential positions and functions of a subject are assigned, serving to displace the memory of total history, and marking its initiation into the discourse of the nation-state. In the historical *a priori*, there is a production of a counter memory that Foucault argues, delinks history from memory and transforms "history into a totally different form of time" (1984: 93). In this paper the concepts of general history, as well as historical a priori have been used to bring out the peculiarities of a diversifying effect that Sardar *dinam* in Nattika *firka* has on the Republic Day of India as a monumental history of sovereignty and freedom. When the celebrations of the Republic Day tend to increasingly become part of a total history or raising itself to the form of a temporal continuity sans the contingencies of history of ideas of the Republic, of discontinuities in its sovereignty, freedom etc., Sardar *dinam* using the tropes of martyrdom, sacrifice etc seeks to build an internal and discursive unity for a counter memory in Nattika *firka*.

Epilogue

Ravi or Ravichettan as he is known in the *firka*, one of my key respondents told me about an incident from his life with Sardar. As a teenager, he looked upto Sardar as not just a fellow Communist, but also as a mentor and also a guardian. One of those nights when they were halting in a committee office of the party after fund-raising for workers on strike in a tile factory in Edathiruthy, Ravi who had gone to sleep early had a dream. In the sleep he was martyred for the Communist cause, and he shouted red

salute to the first martyr of Nattika *firka* that was followed by his name, comrade Ravi. Sardar who sat up late discussing local issues with his comrades heard him and scolded him: "damn you, kid. Go to sleep. If there will be a martyr from the *firka*, I will be the first." Sardar is no more, and neither is Ravi now, who lived until his seventies but kept the memories of his comrade alive till the very end. That desire that they shared, of becoming the first martyrs of the *firka*, continues to live on, as vibrant as ever, creating subject positions in its wake that are in relation with the martyrdom of Sardar as a pre-emptive realm—a rumour that is heard no sooner than it is told.

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Negotiating Spaces for a Shared Social Existence: Blurred Boundaries of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* in Assam

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This paper delves into the idea of space, primarily at the level of a constructed, physical space of *naamghar*. *Naamghars* are prayer halls made expressly for the devotionals of the Krishna *avatara* of Vishnu, popularised in the 16th century by Sankaradeva, a saint leader of Assam. In addition to the physical space of the *naamghar*, the paper deals with the spiritual space that encompasses Sankaradeva's religious ideology referred to as *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, or *Naba boishnab-baad* (Neo-vaishnavism). This study is located in the region of Dikhowmukh, a group of villages in the district of Sivasagar in Assam. Within the ambit of the above-mentioned spiritual space, the paper examines the relationship between the followers of the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha*, an organisation formed in the 20th century around the teachings of Sankardeva, and others, who follow Sankaradeva's mode of Vishnu worship but are not members of the *sankardeva sangha*. The article further explores how these groups navigate the space of *naamghar*. Finally, the study also engages with how the people of the region in general, navigate the complex boundaries between and within these spaces to create a shared-existence. The *naamghar* and the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* are not restricted to being the backdrop for action to unravel, but are distinct entities that shape and influence ways in which people orient their everyday lives and social relations. The interaction between these two spaces in Dikhowmukh provides avenues for the study of implications for evolving social dynamics within the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* in the broader context of Assam.

Sankaradeva, Neo-vaishnavism, naamghar, Assam, Sangha

Introduction

The association of the sacred with the spatial is perhaps as old as the notion of the sacred itself. Spaces have often been associated with elements of religiosity, piety and devotion, and give a material base to spiritual practices. This materiality substantiates belief, giving it a more concrete base for consolidation. The connection between spatial and the notion of sacred is not just restricted to particular spaces and objects of veneration. It also includes the ways in which people inhabiting an area make their own flexible and imaginary boundaries that are negotiated every day in order to co-exist. In the studies of religion and religious practices, spaces are now looked upon as active and dynamic, and not just limited to being the backdrop for people's activities (Knott 2010: 33-37). The research for this article is located in the larger Dikhowmukh region of the Sivasagar district of Assam. This area provides an interesting microcosm for an understanding of the Sankari-vaishnavite population of the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam that sees the coexistence among followers of the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha*, a 20th century organisation that emerged to follow the principles of the 16th century Vaishnavite saint-leader of Assam—Sankaradeva, and his other followers that are not associated with the *sangha*. Both these communities co-exist in Dikhowmukh by maintaining distinct forms of religious affiliations. This paper focuses on the

background of this bifurcation and explores how this is reflected in the lives of people on an everyday basis. This study uses primary and secondary texts, and while engaging with the region of Dikhowmukh in particular, the paper relies heavily on the oral accounts of people who live in and around the region to compensate for the absence of relevant academic work. The people interviewed have requested anonymity, and I have thus identified them as Interviewee A, B, C etc. The temporal focus of the paper is limited to the 20th century and early half of the 21st century. For denoting the specific form of Vaishnavim developed by Sankaradeva, the terms Sankarite Vaishnavism, *Naba boishnab-baad* and *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* have been used interchangeably. The central aim of the paper is to construct a narrative of Sankarite Vaishnavism in the Dikhowmukh region, situating it historically in the larger picture of the role and outreach of the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha* in Assam.

The idea of space here is primarily discussed at two levels: First, I will look at the spiritual space provided by the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* in Assam and its demarcation into various categories through the years since its inception in the 16th century. By spiritual space, I am referring to the non-territorial space created by Sankaradeva's *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* that is defined by words, rituals, symbols, and physical structures in the form of prayer halls and shrines that allow all of the above constituents to converge. We look at space here as an entity that interweaves "built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life" (Molotch 1993: 888). This spiritual space is, hence, not confined to a particular territorial boundary, but is created by the followers of Sanakaradeva. It is a way of understanding the collective practices that define their allegiance to the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*. To what degree were these ritual practices observed strictly? Were there differences in the ways the various groups of followers practiced the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*? Were the demarcations within this space blurred, and how far was this space porous to other religious practices? These are some of the questions that this paper will seek to look at. At the second level, the idea of space will be analysed in the specific context of the constructed, physical space of the *naamghar*. The *naamghar* technically consists of a prayer hall in the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* tradition, but practically also functions as a community centre that facilitates social interaction at both the urban and rural areas of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam. This space while being a Vaishnavite sacred structure where the rituals of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* are practised, however, has a more overarching and profane function of social organisation and interaction. In this paper, I look at how the different denominations of the spiritual space of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* come together in the congregational, physical space of the *naamghar*. It is, in fact, in relation to the *naamghar* that the different groups of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* become a part of one unified spiritual space. Thus, I argue that the relationality between the physical space of the *naamghar* and the spiritual space of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* is the crucial defining factor of the nature of both the spaces. To understand this relationality, I am focussing particularly on the region of Dikhowmukh. There are primarily two reasons for this - first, this cluster of villages provides an interesting microcosm for the study of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* as it consists of multiple organisational expressions of different denominations of this spiritual space. The second and more important factor is my physical proximity to the region, which has allowed me to observe the relationality of these spaces for a prolonged period of time, and understand how it is expressed every day. Structurally the paper is divided into three

major sections apart from the introduction and conclusion. The first section traces the trajectory of evolution of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* in the broader context of Assam. The second section deals with the manifestation of this spiritual space in the region of Dikhowmukh in particular, and finally the third section entails a discussion on *naamghar*s. The aim is to explore the relationality between the physical space of the *naamghar* and the spiritual space of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* in the religiosity of the Dikhowmukh region.

Perceiving Sankaradeva and the Contested Spiritual Space of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*

Sankaradeva, the 16th century saint-leader, propagated a novel form of Vishnu worship in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam that was termed *Naba boishnab-baad* (Neo-vaishnavism) within the 20th century scholarship.[1] The *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* that Sankaradeva propagated, involved a simple method of worshiping the Krishna *avatara* (or incarnation) of Vishnu, executed through *naam-kirtan,*[2] devoid of complicated rituals, or the use of incomprehensible Sanskrit (Bhaswati 2021: 68). After the demise of Sankaradeva, his disciples gradually split into four groups or *samhati*s: *Brahmo, Nika, Purusha and Kaal*. Their differences primarily consisted of the questions of how to correctly follow and interpret the teachings of Sankaradeva, and to determine who their leader would be. Planned physical structures called *satra*s began proliferating across different parts of Assam under the aegis of these *samhati*s. A *satra*, headed by a *satradhikar* or *satriya*, includes a sanctum-sanctorum, a prayer hall (*Naamghar*), and residences for monks. The *satra*s became the primary custodians of Sankarite Vaishnavism, around which the practices of followers revolved. Many *satradhikars* accumulated considerable wealth and authority that was bestowed onto them, both by the people (devotees), and the ruling powers on different occasions (Nath 2012: 107-108). In a way, thus, the *satra*s became the physical rallying points around which the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* consolidated. Scattered across different parts of Assam, these *satras,* nevertheless, created a sense of a community of believers that formed a single, spiritual space. It is to be noted here that while *naamghars* are essential within the *satra*s, they also exist independently in almost each broader neighbourhood in both rural and urban areas. Therefore, it is the *naamghars* that became the most accessible areas where the followers of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* could congregate, since the *satra*s were not always within their territorial proximity. In a way, these *naamghar*s acted as a more localised form of the sacred authority of the *satra*s and allowed for the everyday manifestation of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma.*

By the 20th century, Sankaradeva's *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* began to be seen as the most defining religious practice of Assam. Lakshminath Bezbarua, a prominent early 20th century Assamese author, wrote extensively on Sankaradeva and his primary

[1] Vishnu is one of the most important deities of the Hindu Pantheon, with various devotional cults surrounding his veneration that exist throughout India. The element of the 'new' in Neo-Vaishnavism is an indication to its difference from the previous forms of Vishnu worship in Assam that involved elaborate and expensive Brahminical rituals (Bhaswati 2021: 68).

[2] *Naam-kirtan* may be understood as prayers involving the repetition of the name of incarnations of *Vishnu*.

disciple, Madhavadeva, highlighting stories about them that depicted their divine and blessed lives, their charisma and spiritual control over people. In addition to being identified as a spiritual leader, Sankaradeva came to be associated with the consolidation of the modern Assamese language. In a historical account of the development of Assamese, the author, scholar and civil servant, Gunabhiram Barua, described a marked and distinctive phase in the evolution of Assamese as comprised in Sankaradeva's writings. However, as noted by Sanjib Pal Deka, it was in the 20th century that writers began identifying Sankaradeva as the birth-giver of the modern Assamese language (Deka 2022: 33-35). This development was preceded by the consolidation of a print culture in Assam during the 19th century that was primarily manoeuvred from Calcutta (Kolkata). Young men from Assam moved to the British educational institutions in Calcutta to avail themselves of modern education, where a rising linguistic resentment among these students against Bengali hegemony developed. The assertion of a strong linguistic heritage also escalated with the increasing segregations and census categorisations that were implicit within colonial rules, identifying, emphasising on, and documenting the differences between groups of people within Assam. Consequently, many Assamese periodicals began to be published in the late 19th and 20th century, some of which were: *Orunodoi*, *Jonaki*, *Bijulee*, *Banhi*, *Sadhana* etc. The major task involved in generating publications, however, was in raising the required funds. It was here that the resources of the *satras* came to be mobilised by the intelligentsia for publishing these periodicals. Additionally, a significant number of religious texts pertaining to Vaishnavism, and writings of Sankardeva and Madhavadeva, were also published by the *satras* at this time (Sharma 2011: 150-190). These periodical articles and religious texts on Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and their form of Vaishnavism, resulted in exalting the status of Sankaradeva as the central spiritual and social figure of Assam. Sankardeva was now portrayed as someone who unified the people of the Brahmaputra Valley with his systematic, simplified veneration of Vishnu, and simultaneously formulated the beginnings of a common language for the Assamese people through his devotional writings. This exalted status of Sankaradeva further contributed to the growing interest of the people in *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* and the ritual practices that marked this spiritual space.

In order to create a sense of a unified community of people around the figure of Sankaradeva, the writers in the 20th century periodicals and magazines, first began identifying the existing problems in the ways Sankaradeva's teachings were being followed. Thus, the schisms within Sankarite Vaishnavism that were in the form of *samhatis*, now came under sharp scrutiny. In other words, the heterogeneity of the everyday performance of this spiritual space was now being written about with a critical vigour. This was especially true for the *Brahmo samhati*, founded by Damodaradeva, a Brahmin disciple of Sankaradeva. To explain the schism between the *Damodariyas* and other sects better, one can carefully look at the census reports of the early 20th century, which reveal interesting patterns of religious identification and practices, especially of those who claimed to belong to the Vaishnava sects of Hinduism. In 1901, for British Assam, the selected sects for tabulation within Hinduism included Vaishnava, Shaiva and Shakta. Interestingly, it was only within the Vaishnavas, that a further identification of the sub-sects of the *Mahapurushiya* and 'Other Vaishnavas' was recorded. The 'Other Vaishnavas' primarily consisted of those who came to be

known as *Bamuniya*, who were the followers of the Brahmin disciples of Sankaradeva. The *Bamuniya satra*s could only be headed by a Brahmin *satradhikar*s.[3] On the other hand, the others who accepted non-Brahmin *gosains* or *satradhikars* were all grouped as *Mahapurushiya*s (Allen 1902: 39-59). The British noted how it was hard to distinguish between a Vaishnava and a non-vaishnava in the *Bamuniya satras*, given that the *Bamuniya* Vaishnava *gosains* frequently carried out animal sacrifices combined with the worship of different deities that are otherwise not accepted in the Sankarite form of Vaishnavism. (Allen 1902: 39-50, McSwiney 1911: 44-45)

The activities in the *Damodariya satras* were repeatedly attacked by writers in the early 20th century periodicals. They questioned the *Bamuniya*s' Brahmanical practices, which according to them were against the very grain of Sankaradeva's teachings of equality of all before God. In a conversation that I had with a group of potters in Majuli, a river island in Assam, stories of discrimination in the *Damodariya satra*s came up. They recounted their parents not being allowed to sit together with other devotees in the *satra* owing to their 'lower social status.' Whenever they were allowed a seat at a distance from the rest, the places where they sat were mandatorily washed and cleaned later. Moreover, in the 20th century periodicals, there were pointed criticisms levelled against the growing wealth and misuse of power by the *satradhikar*s. An article published in *Banhi* by Lakshminath Bezbarua, under the pseudonym Kripabor, contains a satirical account of a fictional *satradhikar* that highlights the lavishes, worldly desires of wealth and status, and the abuse of authority by *satradhikar*s (Kripabor 2008: 821-825). In a periodical named *Sanatana Dharma Mukhapatra*, Pitambara Devagoswami, the *satradhikar* of the *Garamur satra*, in the early 20th century, self-critically introspected on and identified the various areas in which the *guru*s following Sankaradeva after his demise faltered.[4] He listed their mistakes, and suggested possible ways of remedying the same so that the society could become better organised under the *satras*, especially in the face of growing criticism. His list included matters such as hostility among the followers of the four *samhatis* that was perpetuated by the *guru*s, the treatment of *shishyas* or disciples who were treated as if they were the personal property of the Gurus, the sense of self-assumed superiority among the latter etc. According to Pitambara Deva Goswami, if the *guru*s and followers of the *satras* could not contain and undo these mistakes, it would be difficult to sustain the essence of the *satras* and Sankaradeva's Vaishnavism (Deva Goswami 2007: 34-37).

An analysis of the articles in the periodicals uncovers a rising resentment, led by the belief that the Vaishnavism developed by Sankaradeva was gradually being 'led astray' by the *satradhikar*s. Thus, a need to remodel the *ek-sharan-naam-dharma* was repeatedly articulated in these periodicals: "For the construction of a unified society, a neat and compartmental arrangement of the ritual realm was deemed important, and it was this consciousness that provided the grounds for the formation of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha" (Bhaswati 2022: 183). Therefore, the *srimanta sankaradeva sangha*, formed in 1930, was, in a way, a response and culmination of this situation. The criticism and counter-criticism observed in the print media was a reflection of the ways in which society was engaging with Sankaradeva and his *Ek-sharan-naam-*

[3] These comprise the *Brahmo samhati* that can be considered almost synonymous to the *Bamuniya*.
[4] The *Garamur satra* is one of the four most prominent *satra*s of upper Assam

dharma. There was a growing momentum to the opposition against the *satra*s and this created grounds for further schisms within the Sankari Vaishnavite practices in Assam. In addition to the four *samhati*s, now there was an institutionalised structuring of a consolidated attack (in the form of the 'Sankaradeva Sangha') on the entire style of Vaishnavism as practiced by the *satra*s functioning within the loose demarcations of the *samhati*s. Thus, a broad bifurcation between *satra*s and the *sangha* was created within the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, wherein all the social and religious practices that the *sangha* did not deem to be Vaishnavite enough, came to be associated with the other camp.

In the 27th Annual Convention of the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha* held in 1958, its president Lakheswar Saikia, explained that the formation of the *sangha* was a result of a situation wherein, those who were supposed to uphold Sankari Vaishnavism, began to work against the primary principles of the *dharma.* This was a clear reference to the *satras* (Saikia 2005: 67-75). In the 1962 Annual Convention, Haladhar Bhuyan, one of the founding members of the *sangha*, narrated the tale of its formation. He highlighted the ironical situation where the *satras* that were envisioned as spaces which would perpetuate Sankaradeva's messages of inclusivity in the spiritual sphere, began indulging in practices of caste-based discrimination, and propagating Brahmanical rituals. In the late 1920s, a platform of a few of such people who wished to redefine the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* situation in Assam started taking shape. At a public meeting in Nagaon, held in 1930, this platform first came to be called *sankara sangha* with the nomenclature eventually changing to *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha* (Bhuyan 2005: 79-88). The *Sangha* aimed to redefine 'Assamese' society by perpetuating what according to them were true messages of Sankaradeva, propagated primarily through educational ventures. It has established its own schools and in 2014, it founded a university called *Mahapurushiya Srimanta Sankaradeva Vishwavidyala* (Bhaswati 2021: 73-74). Within the spiritual space of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma,* defined by porous borders with other forms of religious practices, the *sangha* was setting out to draw fresh boundaries and define its territory anew.

Organisations around *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* in Dikhowmukh

Sivasagar is a district in the region along the upper stretches of the Brahmaputra in Assam (or Upper Assam). Dikhowmukh is technically one of the *Gram Panchayat*s (village level local governments) of the district, located at the confluence of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, Dikhow and Darika (also known as Gariajaan). According to the common lexicon, however, Dikhowmukh is a large area that goes beyond its formal identification as a Panchayat. A sizeable number of villages located around the confluence or *tribeni sangam* are all broadly identified as part of Dikhowmukh, while according to official documents, many of these areas actually fall under other Panchayats. This broader Dikhowmukh region provides an interesting platform for observing the fine negotiation of everyday spaces by people. A significant influence here is that of Sankaradeva's *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, further segregated into streams. For example, interviewee A (an eminent, retired educator of the region, and also closely associated with the *sangha*) notes that in Dikhowmukh, the *Sankaradeva-janmotsava* (birth anniversary) was first organised in the 1950s by the people of the area. The celebration was attended by a large number of people

including some associated with the *Sankaradeva Sangha*. An *Anchalik Vaishnav Samaj* (which would roughly translate to Regional Vaishnav Society) was created thereafter to celebrate the *Sankaradeva-janmotsava* annually. The members of the *Sankaradeva sangha*, active within this *Samaj,* eventually began propagating the ideals of the *Sangha* in Dikhowmukh during the subsequent period. Interviewee B, another senior septuagenarian member of the *sangha*, recalls the initiative of a certain individual of Goalgaon village who started the first *prathamik* (village unit of the *sangha*) in Dikhowmukh. His son carried the task forward, and now there around eleven *prathamik*s in the region, which comprise one Dikhowmukh *anchalik*.[5]

The *sangha*, being an already well-established organisation, came with its own set of rules and prohibitions, which the newly inculcated members of Dikhowmukh were expected to abide by. For instance, the followers of the *sangha* (known as *sangi*), explain the special *sangha* norms regarding marriage. While there are no restrictions on inter-caste marital unions among *sangi*s, marriage with someone outside the *sangha*, even if from the same caste, is a matter of dispute, especially if the marriage rituals are not conducted according to certain specific rules laid down by the *sangha*. In case of any digression, the family in question must undertake ritual purification to ensure that their membership within the organisation remains intact (Bhaswati 2021: 77-78). Thus, newer forms of regulations emerged in Dikhowmukh now, a region that was hitherto immersed in *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, but not accustomed to *sangha* norms. Interviewee A reflects on how locals, who joined the *sangha* in its early days in Dikhowmukh, did so without being completely aware of what it would actually entail. Thereafter, once they understood better, they refused to follow *sangha* rules, especially those that pertained to eating practices, which in turn led to disappointment and confusion in the *Sangha*. The eating practices referred to especially implies the consumption of meat, fish, eggs etc. As the interviewee notes, Sankaradeva was a follower of Vedantic Philosophy, and thus for the *sangha* too, understanding the essence of Vedantism was important: the belief that God was present in all his creations, and that divinity could be found everywhere. Since the whole world was included in his field of creation; one was disallowed from harming God's creations that include killing animals for consumption. To quote from another interviewee, interviewee B: "Socially we are all vegetarians. At home people may choose to eat non-vegetarian, but not in public gatherings. The idea is not to hurt animals."

Interviewee C, a non-*sangi* in his late sixties, spoke about the growing influence of the *sangha* in the original *Anchalik Vaishnav Samaj*, wherein it was the opinion of *sangha* members that primarily prevailed in making all the significant decisions. Eventually, the discontented others formed a *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj*. When Interviewee B was asked

[5] Like most other institutional initiatives of its time that were primarily influenced by the colonial and missionary style of working, the *sangha* created a structured system of hierarchical functioning that designated the *prathamik* as its lowest unit, comprising a number of families. A few *prathamik*s are organized under one *anchalik*, and a *zila* committee is formed by a sizeable number of *anchaliks*. Representatives from *zila* committees thereafter form the *mool* or *kendra.* Members of the *sangha* (known as *sangi*s) pay an annual contribution and membership fee (in cash or kind) to the organization for its maintenance. Several branches within the *sangha* are given the responsibility to ensure the smooth implementation of its decisions in the spheres of culture, education, literature etc. The *sangha* has established its own schools and in 2014, it founded the *Mahapurushiya Srimanta Sankaradeva Vishwavidyala* (Bhaswati 2021: 73-74).

to describe how the *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj* differed from the *Sangha*, he noted that the *Samaj* was more influenced by the *satras* in their approach. In his response to the same question, Interviewee C explained, as opposed to all the rigidities of the *Sangha*, the *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj* actually facilitated the inculcation and memorialisation of Krishna as was espoused by Sankaradeva, while also maintaining associations with other multiple forms of religious traditions. He gave an interesting example by narrating a hypothetical situation wherein a follower of Vaishnavism has colleagues—other employees at his office, who wish to celebrate a *puja* that comprises idol worship, for instance, a *Saraswati puja* involving worshipping the idol of the Hindu Goddess *Saraswati*. As a colleague following the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, the concerned person cannot participate in the *puja*. However, since the *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj* teaches one to take the name of Krishna, the *avatara* of Vishnu, even while bowing to another deity, they can continue to maintain their affiliation to *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* without upsetting their colleagues. Thus, the *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj* allows for the possibility of an amicable balance in situations where one might have to partake in ritual practices that are not prescribed by the tenets of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* for the sake of social courtesy. In Dikhowmukh, thus, there were three organisations that grew around *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*: the *Anchalik Vaishnav Samaj*, the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha* and the *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj*. The *Vedic Vaishnav Samaj* identified itself with the *satra* mode of functioning, which allowed for a more fluid association with forms of ritual practices that are outside the fold of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*. The *Anchalik Vaishnav Samaj*, on the other hand, is a shared platform, which included all followers of Sankaradeva. While the two were local in terms of their inception and character, the *Sangha* was a bigger and more of a trans-regional organisation across Assam.

Naamghar as a Space of Shared Existence

To further explore how the people navigate these complex layers of veneration within the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, it is important to understand how they access the space of the *naamghar*. Scholars have understood the *naamghar*s as the central structure of the *satra*s, where the main prayer congregations are held (Neog 2018: 314). Nevertheless, *naamghar*s are not confined to the s*atra*s alone and their presence in the society is far more numerous as compared to the *satra*s. The latter are larger constructions comprising other structures like housing units for monks, storehouses etc. On the other hand, the physical plan of a *naamghar* is rather simple with a large, rectangular hall supported by rows of pillars, and the size of the hall depends upon the number of devotees in the area that it caters to (Sarma 2016: 101). The simplicity of the construction is understood as a reflection of the nature of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* itself, which aims to make the practice of religious rituals non-complicated and accessible to the devotees. Dr. Pitambar Deva Goswami, *satradhikar* of the *Auniati satra* gives a detailed description of the physical components of these prayer halls in the preface of the volume on Assam's *naamghar*s published by the same *satra.* He writes, the first structure that we encounter as we cross the main gate of the *naamghar* is the *raangali sora*, upon entering which we are supposed to be infused with the *rang* or colour of devotion. It is a smaller construction that functions as an entryway to the main *naamghar.* Thereafter, we reach the central space for prayers—*naamghar* or *kirtanghar.* The *manikut* is at the other end of the *naamghar*, which is the most sacred

part of the structure. It houses the important texts of Sankaradeva that are believed to be the source of divinity (Kalita 2020: x-xix).

*Naamghar*s perhaps plays the most crucial role in the social fabric of both urban and rural localities in Assam. Pitambara Deva Goswami, of the *auniati satra,* explained the social role of *naamghar*s as not just Vaishnavite prayer halls, but as community centres that provide a multifaceted space, which is ideally inclusive of all people irrespective of their caste, gender, and economic status. The *naamghar* also creates a platform for dispensing justice and solving local disputes (Goswami 2021: 1-10). Interviewee E, a sexagenarian woman, who was a former member of the Dikhowmukh Panchayat talked about the financial aid provided by Panchayats to *naamghars*. According to her, Panchayats provided funds for the maintenance of *naamghars*, by building community halls for Youth clubs within *naamghar* boundaries, and by constructing urinals and providing tube wells among other things. The state hence identifies the *naamghar*s for their crucial social role in providing a space for the community to perform their collective activities. Each village in the region of Dikhowmukh has at least one *naamghar*, and in villages where the population is denser there are more. The *naamghars* have a committee (*parichalana samiti*) that looks after its maintenance and organises activities, ruled at the helm by a President and Secretary. Additionally there is a *naamgharia*, a person deputed to carry out everyday rituals within *naamghar*s that include lighting the lamp etc. Interviewee E continued to say that both the *naamgharia* and the *parichalana samiti* members are chosen after discussion with *naamghar* members in the village. The *naamgharia* also receives remuneration based on donations made by villagers, but recently, the government has also begun to provide a nominal annual salary for *naamgharia*s.

Interviewee C shared an interesting narrative explaining the social role of *naamghars.* This was about a local shrine, popularly known as Ramkhapeeth Devalaya (temple), in Deogharia village of Dikhowmukh. To provide more context here, there are many contested legends associated with the *devalaya*, the history of which is yet to be studied systematically. While local beliefs identify the *devalaya* as a *shakti peetha,*[6] Sabharam Rajguru believes that the origin of this *devalaya* preceded the coming of the *Ahom*s in this region, and was probably a sacred space significant for some tribal community here (Rajguru 2009: 22-25). Another author provides a more specific but conjectural theory when writing that the shrine belonged to the Kachari tribe before the *Ahom* ruler Sukapha discovered and systematised the management of the place.[7] Succeeding *Ahom* rulers created designations for those people who maintained the shrine, and exempted it from taxes. Eventually worship at the shrine was incorporated within Brahmanical practices that essentially meant a Brahmin priest carrying out the rituals therein, though how this merge exactly took place has not been ascertained or

[6] The *shakti peetha*s are shrines, which according to the *Kalika Puran* came up in places where parts of the goddess Sati's severed body fell. However, Dr. Sabharam Rajguru observes that the *Kalika Puran* does not mention the Ramkhapeeth Devalaya (Rajguru 2009: 22-25).

[7] The *Ahom*s were a dynasty that ruled over parts of Assam for about 600 years until the British takeover of the region in early 19th century. Maheswar Neog writes that the *Ahom*s belonged to the 'Tai or Shan sections of the Siamese-Chinese branch of Sino-Tibetans, who descended upon the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 under the leadership of Sukapha. The Kacharis, on the other hand, were one of the powerful tribes ruling over the area towards the south of the Brahmaputra. The capital of their kingdom was at Dimapur, now in the state of Nagaland (Neog 2018: 58).

documented (Handique 2009: 12-21). Irrespective of the authenticity of these origin stories, one can conclude that the *devalaya* is an old and significant sacred space within the region that is now associated with Brahmanical rituals and the worship of the Goddess or Shakti. Animal sacrifices are regularly practised here, like at most other Shakti shrines and temples. Interviewee C narrated that until much recently, the *devalaya* and a *naamghar* were located at the same premises. The *naamghar* in fact provided space for *devalaya* committee meetings. This is a crucial detail, since on principle, Sankaradeva's Vaishnavism or the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* is quite the opposite of Brahminical goddess worship. As the name itself signified, the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, propagated devotion towards the one true God—Vishnu. In fact, its inception can be understood as a protest against worship of multiple deities and elaborate, Brahmanical rituals especially since they entailed animal sacrifices. Thus, for the *naamghar* and *devalaya* to have shared the same space reflects the multi-layered role of the *naamghar*. The *naamghar* is primarily a community space that provides a functional platform for people to gather and celebrate social and cultural occasions besides regular prayers. At times, thus, the *naamghars* may also accommodate discussions around ritual practices that are not associated with the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*. However, it is essentially the spirit of congregating as a community of devotees under *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, which as an extension, allowed the *naamghar* to develop as a space for more generalised social gatherings. In Dikhowmukh, nevertheless, the story began changing with the growing influence of the *sangha.*

Interviewee C continued to recount how in 2009, the *devalaya* celebrated the 240th anniversary, of its re-establishment by the *Ahom* ruler Lakshmi Singha.[8] The discussion about the arrangement for a grand celebration took place at the *naamghar*, which was not only attended by the people of Dikhowmukh, but from many places across Assam. At this time, however, the *Sangha* had begun being popular in Dikhowmukh, and there was resistance from those who were primarily influenced by it, to the sharing of spaces between the *devalaya* and the *naamghar*. Thereafter, the two were separated by a wall, and *sangha* families from the village split to form a new *naamghar* at the nearby village of Seujpur. The *naamghar* in Deogharia continued to be used by the others in the village for prayer. Why this spilt occurred in 2009, so many decades after the *Sangha* consolidated its influence in the region, is yet to be explored. The presence of people from outside the village, unaccustomed to its style of social interaction may have led to some discomfort regarding the proximity between the two sacred spaces that were principally supposed to remain at loggerheads with one another. The process of change, according to interviewee C, had begun gradually after the formation of the *Anchalik Vaishnav Samaj* and the celebration of the *Sankara-janmotsav*, after which people started discussing the essence of Sankaradeva's ideals with a renewed vigour. This was further strengthened by the *sangha*'s emphasis on restoration of the true essence of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma.* While the Deogharia villagers continued the practice of animal sacrifices in the *devalaya*, they nevertheless

[8] The *Ahom* ruler Lakshmi Singha ascended the throne in 1769 and ruled until his demise in 1780 (Gohainbarua 2019: 118, 127). He is said to have re-constructed the *devalaya* and given it a definite structure.

stopped performing the sacrifices on their own, and instead invited Brahmins from outside for the purpose.

This signified that the growing discussions around Sankaradeva and the system of faith that he formulated, had different degrees of impact on the people. To begin with, there was no definite, separate community that did or did not practise *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*. The same people visited the *naamghars* for prayers as espoused by the Sankaradeva, and also partook in rituals in the *devalaya.* As the *sangha* slowly consolidated its base, the spiritual space of the *ek-sharan-naam-dharma* began to be demarcated more definitively. Even people that were not associated with the *sangha* perhaps came to internalise this and the wall that was built between the *devalaya* and the *naamghar* can be seen as tangible evidence of the same. It may be perceived as reclamation of the physical space of the *naamghar* and an affirmation of its functionality in relation with the spiritual space of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*. To take it a step further, the *sangha* families of the village distanced themselves from this shared premises altogether and associated with a separate *naamghar* in the neighbouring village of Seujpur. In Seujpur, the *naamghar* was especially established for members of the *sangha*. While there was no restriction on people from outside the *sangha* on entering the *naamghar*, according to interviewee C, people did not usually go there in the absence of a particular occasion. In addition to this, there is another s*angha naamghar* in Dikhowmukh, at the village of Nakatani, and all *sangha prathamik*s in the Dikhowmukh region have one *anchalik naamghar*, where *anchalik* level events and discussions of the *sangha* take place.

However, as also described by interviewee B, in all other villages of Dikhowmukh, the same *naamghars* are used by both *sangis* and non-*sangis*. They just ensure that the dates of their meetings or other occasions to be held at the *naamghar*s do not clash. On occasions of the *naamprasanga* (prayer session for chanting the name of Krishna) organised by the *sangha*, non-*sangis* could be present and vice-versa. Only the organisation and management of events remained separate. The *naamghar* provides a platform for people to congregate. It is a community space, evolved within the ambit of *Naba boishnab-baad*, particularly used for expressing devotion towards God through prayer and the chanting of the *naam* (in keeping with the name *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*). While the *naamghar* constitutes the single-most crucial space for the social performance of a shared existence, this produces the physical space as something more than just a prayer hall. Most importantly, the people who construct, maintain, pray and take part in activities at the *naamghar*, are not bound only by the devotion towards Vishnu or his Krishna *avatara*. They also take part in other rituals that include the worship of the many deities of the Hindu pantheon. However, taking the name of Krishna, as is done during prayers at the *naamghar*, has been imbibed within their consciousness in a way that cannot be ignored. As interviewee D said: “We take the name of Krishna before eating, before sitting, as an exclamation, as an affirmation and in everything that we do.” Despite the fact that the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* is marked by different denominations, all of these ultimately manifest as one unified spiritual space when inside the physical space of the *naamghar.* Even when there are examples of creation of exclusive *naamghar*s by the *sangha,* the *naamghar* by and large remains a platform that creates the space for a shared social existence.

In Conclusion

The region of Dikhowmukh consists of numerous villages that provide scope for understanding the relationality between *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* and *naamghar*s. Within the spiritual domain of the region, it is hard to define who the followers of the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* are. Are they members of the *Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha*, who strictly follow the regulations given by the organisation, or are they the non-*sangih*s who bow in front of an idol of Shiva but take the name of Krishna? Amidst this fluidity, the physical space of the *naamghar* provides a fascinating intersectional domain. Besides congregating for ritual purposes, the *naamghar* also becomes a meeting point where important decisions are taken, where justice is dispensed, and where people are required to be present, irrespective of personal differences. The *naamghar* binds the society, while retaining a distinct Vaishnavite flavour. It thus produces Sankaradeva's *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* as more than just a spiritual space. The *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* also becomes a powerful social reality that is lived and performed every day, and in most situations without restricting or limiting people to any one form of veneration. It becomes the defining character of society, as observed in Dikhowmukh. The *sangha*, which began as a way of redefining Sankardeva's Vaishnavism, by restoring, what according to them, comprised his true message, can nevertheless be understood as only one of the ways of observing and practicing *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*. While this paper is limited to Dikhowmukh, the complex interaction between the physical space of the *naamghar* and the spiritual space of *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma* may be understood as applicable to the broader area of the Brahmaputra valley in Assam. Same is the case with the internal dynamic of the spiritual space within Sankarite Vaishnavism, which can be primarily categorised in terms of the *sangha* and *satra* divide. Despite this broad bifurcation within the *Ek-sharan-naam-dharma*, the spiritual space comes together as one entity within the physical space of the *naamghar*, where they do not just meet for prayers, but also for other crucial social discussions. These spaces are in constant interaction with one another, creating a relationality that shapes a shared social existence for the people.

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"When in Rome do as Romans do": Experiencing Kullu as a Swangla Migrant

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The presence of Lahaulis in Kullu is well-documented within early colonial records as those "squatting seasonally in various parts of the town, as labourers and for trade" (Harcourt 1871: 244). In the 1970s, Lahaulis from the Swangla community in the Pattan Valley began to earn enough to invest in building permanent homes in Kullu. This paper highlights the complexities of urbanization in Kullu and the experiences of Swangla migrants, who negotiate their identities and place within the town (Kullu), while navigating traditional practices and cultural norms. The paper focuses further on the presence of Swangla migrants (a Scheduled Tribe from Himachal Pradesh) from the Pattan Valley of Lahaul in the town of Kullu and analyses the dynamics of urbanity in Kullu through their experiences. Metropolitan amenities and pleasant weather constitute a major pull factor for Swanglas. However, their aspiration to shed off traditional identities and prejudice is not achieved with migration as Kullu maintains its connections with rural heritage, reflected in the traditional values and cultural codes that are still adhered to by its inhabitants. The Swanglas respond to these dynamics in various ways, demonstrating their agency in posing their own identity and community in relation to the region. Hence, this paper investigates the dynamic position that Kullu constitutes as a case study of an urbanizing town that reinforces and upholds traditional practices of caste, as part of its lifestyle.

Kullu, Swangla, caste, subaltern, urbanization

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is one of the Himalayan states of India. It falls in the northwest region of the country. Himachal Pradesh consists of twelve districts. It has a total population of 6,856,509 people, of which only 688,704 live in urban regions, which means around 89.97 percent live in the villages of rural areas. Kullu, a town in Himachal Pradesh, is known for its scenic beauty, cultural heritage, and religious significance (Mehra 2016: 117, Census 2011). It is a small town with a population of approximately 18,306 people, according to the Census Report of 2011. The town serves as the district headquarters of the Kullu district and houses all district-level government offices and state institutions. The town was founded by King Behangami Pal in the 1st century C.E. (the Census district handbook of Kullu District 2011). Lyall (1874: 109) draws a pedigree tree from *Vanshavalli*s (generation rolls) retrieved from Kullu Rajah's family history, which identifies Sudh Singh as the founder of the Singh dynasty. According to estimations, there were fourteen generations before Sudh Singh, whose reign was dated approximately to 1500 AD. Despite its small size, Kullu town is a well-connected region that externally encompasses metropolitan urban features, even while simultaneously holding on to traditional norms and values that contribute to the uniqueness of the region.

I arrived in Kullu town with the intention to understand the experiences of the Swangla community from the neighbouring Lahaul region, who had a history of migration and settlement in Kullu. Beginning with the demonstrative case of Nitish, twenty-nine- year-old Nitish had, for example, always considered Kullu a town where everyone was welcome. But one day, his belief was shattered. At the village Dawara, located along the Kullu-Manali highway, Nitesh recounted a significant event. He narrated an incident that left an indelible mark on his psyche. Nitish recounted one afternoon when Dawara was bustling with activity, with devotees flocking to the Vishnu temple for the *bhandara* (community kitchen). Ideally, everyone was welcome to eat at the temple. As the aroma of food filled the air, people began to line up for their share eagerly. Something caught Nitish’s attention amidst this chaos, as he saw two young men looking as though they belonged to the Sipi community[1] being singled out and asked to leave the temple premises. Detailing the incident, he exclaimed:

> *Dawara me Vishnu Mandir me bhandara tha. Sab prasad lene aate hai, kafi rush tha. Jaise hi do Sipi ladke pehchane gaye, sabke samne, nikale gaye. Itna jativaad hai Kullu me, humare Lahaul me bhi aisa nahi karte, mandir, sabha sabki hoti hai.*
>
> There was a *bhandara* at the temple in Dawara and everyone gathered to take *prasad*. In a rush, two young Sipi men were identified and were asked to leave the premises. This is the extent of casteism in Kullu. In our Lahaul we never saw this, as temple and public spaces are for everybody.

Nitish was shocked to see the young men being asked to leave because of their caste status. He had never seen anything like it before, and it left him wondering about such caste practices that had become so normalized in Kullu. As I talked to other Swanglas, I discovered that Nitesh’s experience was not a stand-alone experience and that the Swanglas were largely viewed as outsiders in Kullu. Since they were migrants, they were unaware of such caste practices. Their migrant status made it difficult for them to navigate the rigidity of the caste system that was deeply ingrained in the town’s culture. These experiences evolved into moments that evoked conversation within the Swangla circles about experiences of building identity and status, experiencing caste, and the degree of severity of caste practices in Kullu. They had witnessed or heard about how Dalits were not allowed into the temple premises or were barred from accessing public spaces equally. But what was particularly interesting, was that despite the challenges that they faced, the Swanglas had a deep attachment to Kullu. For many of them, it was a place where they had grown up, or had family connections. They saw the town not just as an urban space but as a relational space that held onto its rural linkages and kept up with traditional values.

Through their experiences, I began to see Kullu in a new light. A town that was changing rapidly, with new buildings and emerging infrastructure. However, the town’s metropolitan features were also intertwined with its rural linkages and traditional values, creating spaces that were simultaneously modern and caste-restrictive. In my

[1] Sipis were communities traditionally associated with drum-beating, in the Lahaul region. They, along with Lohars comprise of Dalits among the Swanglas.

conversation with Swangla interlocutors, I learned about their experiences negotiating identity in Kullu and their experiences of working around the rigid caste system of Kullu characterized by the struggle to carve out their own space. This paper explores the experiences and everyday negotiation of being identified as an outsider, which necessitates working around the rigid caste system of Kullu. The Dalit Swanglas negotiate the casteist mentality in Kullu and respond to discrimination in multivalent ways to adapt to and situate themselves within Kullu. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting on their multivalent responses to discrimination, which involves navigating their own identity and relationality with Kullu town and its social structure.

Kullu: A Brief History

Kullu is a small town located in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Its history dates back to ancient times and is shrouded in mythology and legends. The historical records of the town trace back to the reign of the Kullu Kings. Initially, the kings ruled from Jagatsukh for twelve generations until Raja Visudh Pal shifted the capital to Naggar. The capital was later shifted to Sultanpur by Raja Jagat Singh. According to legend, a Brahmin cursed Raja Jagat Singh during his reign, causing him to suffer from grievous illness. Jagat Singh moved a revered image of Lord Raghunath from Ayodhya to Kullu in an effort to alleviate the ailment. After placing the idol on the throne and offering himself as a sacrifice in God's service, the curse was lifted. Thenceforth, the Kings of Kullu governed the state in the name of Raghunath, who became the primary deity of the Kullu Valley. In the British era, Kullu was designated as a Tehsil under the Kangra district, Punjab. Following India's independence in 1947, Kullu became a part of the Indian Union.

Today, Kullu is a town known for its scenic beauty, apple orchards, and handicrafts. The town is surrounded by snow-capped mountains, with the Beas river flowing through it. Kullu is also known for its annual Dussehra festival, which attracts thousands of tourists from all over the world. The Singh dynasty of Kullu was said to have fought many battles with neighbouring kingdoms, especially with Chamba and Ladakh, to establish its hold over Lahaul region. Thus, for most of its written history (Hutchison and Vogel 1933, Shabab 1996, Balram 2017), the Lahaul region was under Kullu kings and later on, briefly under Sikh rule in 1839. In March 1846, after the first Anglo-Sikh war was concluded, the trans-Sutlej states of Jullundur Doab and the hill country between the Sutlej and the Ravi were ceded to the British by the Sikhs (Harcourt 1871: 39). Kullu with Lahaul and Spiti became part of the new district of Kangra. It was only in 1960 that the Kullu district and the Lahaul and Spiti district got separated from Kangra.

Of the total population of Himachal Pradesh, around 89.97 percent live in rural areas. In the Kullu district alone, 90.55 percent of the population lives in rural areas as per the last census report (Census of India 2011). Kullu district has five towns: Banjar, Bhuntar, Kullu, Manali, and Shamshi. Apart from Banjar, all the other four towns fall under Kullu Tehsil and are located on the 50-kilometre stretch of NH-21 highway—the Kullu-Manali highway. In fact, Kullu, Shamshi, and Bhuntar form a single stretch of approximately 10km referred to as the metropolitan region by Mehra (2016, 2017).

Mehra, who was part of ‘Suburbin’,[2] a research project on subaltern urbanisation in India used Kullu town as her case study. Denis and Zérah (2017: 53) define the term subaltern urbanisation as “the growth of settlement agglomerations, whether denoted urban by the Census of India or not, that are independent of the metropolis and autonomous in their interactions with other settlements, local and global.” They further argue that subaltern urbanisation reconstitutes the agency of small towns to reveal unique forms of urbanising. Graded inequality in terms of accretive citizenship, new migrants, old/settled migrants, and natives, has been studied by Mehra (2016, 2017) who conducted a detailed field study in Kullu. However, it misses out on the deep-seated, caste-based, and regional/ racial biases of Kullu town which can only be understood through an analysis of perspective, and the recounted experiences of subaltern communities like the Swangla migrants.[3] Kullu has a mixture of rural and urban features, reflected both in form and spirit. The narrow lanes of Raghunathpur, Sultanpur and Akhara Bazaar, are a reminiscent of the old town. At the same time Dhalpur market, and the peripheral neighbourhoods of Ramshila and Hanumanibagh are crowded with new residential constructions. The town constantly resounds with the noise of construction machinery, as new buildings are built every day, with the town’s growth seeming almost exponential.

From Lahaul to Kullu: Tracing the Swangla Migration

The term Lahauli is commonly used to identify people native to Lahaul. The origin of this regional identity dates back to the rule of Raja Man Singh of Kullu, 1672 to 1717, when he created separate administrative units called Waziris- Lahaul, Ujh, Parol, Rupi, Lag Sari, Lag Maharajha and others. Each Waziri was under the charge of a separate Wazir (Harcourt 1871: 34; Hutchinson and Vogel 1933: 413). According to Lyall (1874: 166), the acquisition of the Lahaul Waziri of Kullu was first made during the reign of King Bidhi Singh from Chamba. It is speculated that the king of Chamba had annexed Lahaul into his territory that was at the time under the influence of Ladakh. However, Lyall also takes note of another somewhat unlikely story of Bidhi Singh of Kullu receiving Lahaul in dowry after he married the daughter of another king from Chamba called Chattar Singh (ibid.: 166).

Despite coming under Kullu’s direct rule in the colonial period, Lahaul continued to be governed by local chiefs known as Thakurs and Ranas, who paid hefty tributes to the King. Lyall further observes that Thakurs, along with one man from each holding in royal *Kothi*s,[4] were compelled to attend to and serve the king of Kullu for six months, entailing a wide range of tasks from menial to military (ibid: 170). Thus, Lyall implies that this was probably “the origin of the yearly emigration of a very large population of Lahaulis in Akhara, a suburb of Sultanpur” (ibid: 170). Early colonial records also acknowledge the division of Lahaul into the three valleys of Gara or Bhaga valley,

[2] for more details, cf. project website: https://suburbin.hypotheses.org/. Accessed 05.01.2023.
[3] Notably, a large section of Swanglas claim and enjoy a Hindu upper-caste Hindu status. But in Kullu, they are the Other. In terms of this relationality Swanglas can be seen as subaltern for their intersectional identity: Swangla as a Scheduled tribes, Swangla migrants, etc..
[4] Waziris were subdivided into revenue estates called *Kothi*s (Shabab 1996: 36). Lahaul *Waziri* comprised of 14 *Kothi*s.

Rangloi/Tinan or Chandra valley, and Pattan or Chandrabhaga valley (Lyall 1874, Harcourt 1871, Hutchison and Vogel 1933). There is ambiguity though, in the description of the people living in Lahaul. Lyall (1874) notes the presence of Tibetans, Brahmins, and Kanets (ibid). Harcourt (1871) provides further details by providing numbers that are probably incorrect. Nevertheless, all documenters point to the presence of Brahmins and Hindus in the Pattan valley. However, it shall be noted that even colonial administrators and scholars have identified and written separately about the Hindus of Pattan Valley and the Bodh/Tibetans of the remaining region.[5] Many recent scholarly works (Kumar 2004; Mehra 2016,2017) have used the term Lahauli/ Lahaula which is generalising and popularly used. Such generalizations invisibilize the differences between the Scheduled tribe communities residing in the region which often leads to the exclusion of the Swangla identity.

Swanglas who are classified as an ST (Scheduled Tribe), are considered native to the Lahaul and the Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh. The Census of India, 2011 report records a population of 9,630 Swanglas, with a majority of the community (6,856) residing in Lahaul and Spiti. The highest number of their settlement outside the district (2,626) reside in neighbouring Kullu district. Swanglas follow Hinduism and claim to be upper-caste. While marrying a man of the Bodh caste would change the wife's caste to Bodh, marrying a woman of the Bodh caste would lower the status of the Swangla husband to that of Garu caste (a sub-caste of Swanglas). Swanglas are known to distance themselves from the Sipis, Lohars (considered the Dalits of Lahaul), and do not inter-marry. Swanglas are primarily engaged in subsistence farming and pastoralism, with seasonal migration to Kullu or Chamba for work, which typically entails physical labour. Bhots engaged in trade, while Swanglas were agriculturalists and worked as agricultural labourers when they came to Kullu. In general, the agricultural lands of Lahaul are dry, and constitute a desolate terrain with a minimum of green pastures when compared to the dense deodar, oak, and pine forests of Kullu, situated across the Rohtang Pass.

However, the Pattan valley also stands out as it is known for its greener and more cultivable lands, which are well-maintained and appreciated by Lyall (1874: 159). Additionally, the Pattan valley is home to Brahmins and other Hindus communities that identify themselves as Swangla. They were primarily engaged in subsistence farming and pastoralism. Interestingly, none of the Swangla interlocutors interviewed during field investigations remembered their kin or other villagers who would earlier go to Kullu for transhumance and wool trade. It is possible that mentions of Lahaulis as wool traders and transhumant community (Mehra 2017: 305, Singh 2018: 170) point to Bhots and not Swanglas. However, at least one family member, usually male Swangla, seasonally migrated to Kullu or Chamba for work. Historical records have confirmed that Lahaulis were traders who crossed through Leh and carried borax, wool, salt, and precious stones across Leh and Kullu, which constituted the gateway to the plains of Punjab. The State Gazetteers and other settlement reports have also documented the traditional involvement of Lahaulis in trading activities (Kumar 2004, Singh 1998,

[5] The present Bodh/ Bhot Scheduled Tribe was enumerated as Tibetan in The Constitution Order of 1950, which was changed to Bodh/ Bhot in the Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act in 1956 along with Swanglas being enumerated as Scheduled Tribe in Punjab.

Mehra 2017). Furthermore, Mehra (2017), in her research has also discovered an old and traditional business community of Lahaulis in Kullu. However, traditionally speaking, it was the Bhot community that had also engaged in trade, while Swanglas of Pattan were mainly agriculturalists, who were seasonal labour migrants and smaller tradesmen. While the colonial records do not use the term Swangla but call them Brahmins or Hindus (Harcourt 1871, Lyall 1874, Hutchison and Vogel 1933). The first list of Scheduled Tribes through Constitutional Order of 1950 only had Tibetans as Scheduled Tribes on the list in Punjab, while the entire Himachal region was given Scheduled Tribe Area status. This was also a result of the agitation led by local leaders and activists of Lahaul, who demanded this Scheduled Tribe status from the government for their region. Since the Hindus were the only group left over that did not have any constitutional protection, Balram (2017) notes how Basant Ram of Ruding village took a delegation asking the government to give the Hindus a Scheduled Tribe status that was equivalent to the Buddhists of the region. Hindus were hence given the nomenclature of Swangla, which was a colloquial term for Brahmin in the Manchand dialect, spoken in the Pattan valley of Lahaul.

According to Kumar (2004: 222), the post-China War era in Lahaul valley saw a setback in trade with Tibet, and the flourishing of agriculture with support from government intervention. Swanglas, who were primarily agriculturalists, experienced growth over time during this period. Kumar divides this period of economic development in the Lahaul valley into three phases: the Kuth phase in the 1950s and 1960s, the potato phase from the 1960s onwards, that matured in the 1970s, and the peas, hops, and other cash crops phase from the 1980s onwards. These phases also applied to Swanglas. In the early 1950s and 1960s, it was predominantly the Bhots who settled in Kullu leading to an improvement in their social status, but with an agricultural surplus, Swanglas also caught up with this affluence. The entire population of Pattan was recognized by the state, when according them the Swangla Schedule Tribe status, and thus the government did not differentiate or recognize castes that were within the community.

Therefore, it is quite surprising that even colonial reports had a detailed record of Swangla castes, although slightly inaccurate in number and estimation. The fact that caste divisions were present was completely ignored by the government. Harcourt (1871:127) documents the presence of 216 Brahmins, 502 Kanets and 4,566 Daghees, including Lohars *(*blacksmiths) within the community. He also mentions the presence of 10 Sawyers (goldsmiths) and three Hesis (Sipis or musicians) within the Swangla community. At present, the social stratification of Swanglas of Pattan includes Brahmins or Swangla at the top of the caste hierarchy. Swanglas or Brahmins did not intermingle with other castes, and this correlates Harcourt's estimations with my field observation, though I do think he confused Garus with Daghees (a term used for Dalits). Next below them, came the sub-section of Swangla Garus, born out of Swangla masculine and Bhot/Bodh feminine union. If two consecutive generations of Swangla or Garu men bring Bhot/Buddhist women into the family through inter-marriage, the entire family is considered Buddhist-Swangla, a section that is located below the Garus in their caste hierarchy. The lowest rung is inhabited by the Dalit castes: the Sipi and Lohar. The Sipis are musicians and artists, also responsible for funeral-related

processions and ritual organization, while Lohars are blacksmiths who make, and repair implements. Both are considered hereditary occupational castes and receive cash or kind in return for their services. They are considered to be outside the commensal circle of upper-caste Swanglas, and are victims of untouchability practices followed in the region. Comparing caste practices of Pattan valley to those of Kullu town, reveals that untouchability practices are followed in both regions. However, in Kullu town, caste divisions are more pronounced, and the practice of untouchability is more severe.

The region of Lahaul is known for its harsh climate and limited resources, which contributed to its perceived 'backwardness'. Until the 1960s, the only access to the area was through walking paths for passengers and mules. However, following the India-China war, a motorable road was constructed that connected Lahaul to Manali-Leh in 1964 (Sahni quoted in Kumar 2004: 226). Due to the area's history of struggle and poverty, the seasonal migration of Lahaulis to Kullu transformed into permanent settlements. Kullu was a well-known region for Lahaulis in any case, even before the British era, serving as their administrative headquarters. *Chandertal*,[6] a regional magazine run by the *Lahauli Kala Manch*, often features articles on folk songs and tales, that include stories about how news from the Kullu king's court would take days to reach Lahaul. British records also indicate that due to the difficulty of managing Lahaul directly, the Kullu king would grant controlled sovereignty to local chiefs or Thakurs in exchange for heavy tribute and the eliciting of military services from them (Singh 2018: 13-14). The challenges of Lahaul's remote location and difficult environment have led to a history of struggle and poverty for its inhabitants, and Lahaulis have found innumerable ways to adapt to their challenges and develop despite of them.

Spatial Organization of Tribe and Caste Neighbourhoods in Kullu

The Swangla migrants' journey to Kullu valley begins with their crossing of the Rohtang Pass. The descent to the valley is marked by a transition from sparsely populated villages and hamlets to a lush green but crowded region, including the tourist hub of Manali and the much sought-after Kullu metropolitan region. According to Mehra (2017: 299), most Lahauli (Swanglas) migrate to urban regions to spend or invest their income surplus, and to seek educational facilities, health care, job opportunities, and eventually a place to settle down permanently.

In the 1960s, there was a large pull trend for students to enrol at schools in Manali, which offered free hostel facilities, especially for the Scheduled Tribes. A few houses belonging to Swanglas served as transit homes during this period, and over the decades, there has been a proliferation of Lahauli and Swangla residential pockets emerging throughout the region. While the oldest settlements of Lahaulis in Kullu consisted of Bodh traders, the Swanglas also managed to build exclusive Swangla residential pockets. Generally, it can be said that Lahauli neighbourhoods are exclusive and also peripheral, consisting of a mix of Bodh and Swangla households. Kullu town

[6] A regional magazine in Hindi (Devanagri). The online repository of the magazine can be accessed through: http://chandertal.com/. Accessed 12.12.2022.

has several neighbourhoods that consist of substantial Lahauli populations. The Swanglas interviewed for this paper, resided mostly in Sultanpur, Hanumanibag, and Ramshila localities of Kullu. Many of them had kinsmen and families in the nearby villages of Katrain, Dawara, and Gadori, or belonged to inhabitations that were part of the larger urban stretch between Kullu and Bhuntar. As a result, the entire region enjoyed a close-knit network of kinship and commensality. Sultanpur constitutes the oldest settlement out of the three, while Ramshila has the newest constructions. Swangla Dalits have mostly built their residences in Ramshila, migrating to the locality at a later stage. The separate village of Bashing is known to be a Dalit village, where Dalit Swanglas have settled in fairly good numbers. Bashing village consists of fourteen Dalit Swanglas (Sipi and Lohar) households.

Sultanpur and Ramshila are located at the two extreme peripheries of the town across the river Beas, and both have pockets of exclusive neighbourhoods that are inhabited by Swanglas. As they are at a larger distance away from the town, they sport newer urban constructions and broader roads. Hanumanibagh is another Swangla neighbourhood that is located right below the Kullu Hospital in Dhalpur. As a space, it is very crowded and houses only people from Lahaul-Swanglas and Bodh/ Bhots. As migrants collectively sharing a migrant identity within the neighbourhoods of Kullu with Bodhs/ Bhots, Swanglas become identified as Lahauli or Lahaule. Having exclusive Lahauli neighbourhoods hints on spatial segregation present in Kullu, either the Kullu*walah*s only give peripheral lands to Lahaulis, or Lahaulis prefer to buy affordable peripheral lands together to create exclusive pockets, either way, a clear distinction is maintained between Kullu*walah*s and Lahaulis. Furthermore, the Dalits of Kullu and Lahaul seem to live together in separate neighbourhoods.

Kumar and Baraik (2021: 156) in the context of Jharkhand states that “the preference for tribal habitation has mostly been in and around the already existing tribal localities”, he even noticed a few rich affluent tribal homes present within impoverished tribal colonies. Even when the region undergoes urbanisation, urbanism in the terms of Wirth (1938) is not achieved where he assumed “the weakening of bonds of kinship and family, there will be undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity” (Wirth 1938: 195). The belief that urbanization can help overcome ethnic segregation and traditional biases of caste prejudice has been flouted by various studies done on Indian cities and towns (Mehta 1969, Vithayathil and Singh 2012; Bharathi et al. 2021, Gattupalli 2022).

Till date even in urban areas, Dalits in large proportions are employed in manual scavenging jobs like cleaning septic tanks, which is a form of structural violence against them (Darokar 2018). Spatial segregation is also practiced in the name of keeping the neighbourhood ‘neat and tidy’ where ‘only good people’ is the phrase used to discriminate between castes (Vithayathil et al. 2018: 64). In the neighbourhoods of the Dalits and destitute there is also corresponding dearth of better facilities of healthcare, nearby schools and water (Sidhwani 2015: 55) It is still maintained that in urban spaces overt forms of caste practices are minimised which is challenged in this study where Swanglas notice anomalies which would have been missed if narratives of subaltern experiences were not taken into account.

Migration with Prosperity: Settlement with Habit

Mehra's (2017: 306) research affirms the saying that "one who comes to Kullu remains." She provides examples of Punjabi shopkeepers, Prajapati Kumhars, migrants from other parts of Himachal such as Mandi, Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Shimla, and even Lahaulis who find Kullu accommodating and accepting. Mehra argues that the appeal of Kullu lies in its peaceful atmosphere and unique urban character that is not driven by aggressive accumulation or corporatism. The town's values stem from its close connection to the rural areas surrounding it, as it experiences an exchange of horticultural products between the urban and rural regions. The resultant surplus is utilised to construct modern urban infrastructure to expand the metropolitan expanse of Kullu.

The significance of Mehra's research in this respect lies in highlighting the influence of the town's geographical proximity to rural areas and the interactions between urban and rural communities on the development of value systems and identity formation. Moreover, Mehra (2017: 303) underscores the significance of accretive citizenship in cultivating a sense of belonging and feeling of inclusion. The concept of accretive citizenship refers to the progressive incorporation of immigrants into their respective host societies, leading to their eventual complete integration and active participation as members of the community. The process involves integrating economic and social factors to stimulate the local economy and strengthen neighbourhood connections. The phenomenon of mutual benefit is subject to the influence of multiple factors, including but not limited to power dynamics, migration histories, and socio-economic conditions. Mehra's study of Kullu exemplifies the concept of accretive citizenship. Swanglas have found success in Kullu's construction industry as carpenters, masons, and labourers, secured employment as teachers, bankers, or government officials (Mehra 2017: 305). Their upward mobility can be attributed to their accretive citizenship, as they gain access to material resources and develop a stronger sense of belonging through adopting Kullu traditions and identities.

However, Mehra also acknowledges a complex relationship between Lahauli migrants and Kullu*walah*s (those from Kullu). Some Lahaulis express mistrust towards Kullu*walah*s, perceiving attempts to hinder their progress (Mehra 2017: 306). While many Lahaulis still maintain summer residences in their hometown or the countryside of Kullu, an increasing number choose to make Lahaul their permanent home, driven by Kullu's milder winters, particularly appealing to former government employees (Mehra 2017: 299). Mehra's argument on accretive citizenship adds complexity to this dynamic, as Lahauli migrants who become part of the local community gain an extended sense of belonging and ownership, contributing to the community's development and earning acceptance from Kullu*walah*s. Wealth and mobility play significant roles in the process, as those with accumulated wealth and positions of power are more readily accepted as community members. Kumar (2004) examines Lahaulis' experiences in Kullu, focusing on development and social mobility. He observes that Lahaulis employ spatial mobility strategies not only to sustain their lives but also to achieve upward social mobility. Migration to locations beyond Lahaul enables them to acquire new skills, adopt modern ideas and techniques, access higher

education, and engage in diverse occupations and economic activities. Kumar's research underscores the importance of spatial mobility from Lahaul to Kullu as a strategy for community self-development and social mobility, particularly in challenging ecological conditions

Experiencing Rigid Caste Practices

The Swanglas consider themselves to be fairly settled in the region of Kullu town, as they participate in the religious functions that take place at the temples and participate actively in electoral politics. But they are aware of how in Kullu they needed to behave in a certain way, to indicate that they agreed with the caste practices of the region. A complex web of caste relations and practices exist in Kullu town. Despite attempts at assimilation and participation in local customs, Swanglas, a community that includes two Dalit castes (Sipi and Lohar*)*, still struggle to integrate, and often face discrimination from dominant caste groups, as reported by Ajai Kumar, in the late 1990s. More recently, in 2021, I interviewed 83 Swangla individuals from all castes, across different age groups to have a cross-generational understanding of the experience of being a Swangla in Kullu: 13 individuals between the ages of 18 to 25; 28 individuals between the ages of 26 to 40; 26 individuals between the ages of 41 and 60; and 16 individuals who were above 60 years of age. A key observation made during interviews was the fact that the caste system of Kullu was much more rigid compared to that of Lahaul, the native place of most Swanglas. Not a single informant disagreed with the premise about Kullu’s caste system being more ossified. Shaina, a twenty-year old Garu girl, said that while there were no Dalits in her village back in Lahaul, she emphasized how the two Dalit students that came to school from the neighbouring village never faced any discriminatory practices. On the other hand, when talking about Kullu she remarked:

> *local log baithte bhi nahi hai Daghee ke sath*
>
> kulla*walah*s will not even sit next to a lower caste person

Similarly, Nisha, age twenty-one, claimed that she witnessed the same anti-lower-caste behaviour that Nitish had recounted that is quoted above in the introduction section, when she said:

> *humare Lahaul me aisa nahi hota. Mandiro me sab ek hai. Islie shayad wo ladke bhi ander aa gae. Local logo ne kafi bada scene bana diya*
>
> In our Lahaul, everyone is one in the temple. That must be the reason the boys entered the temple. The Local people made such a big scene of it

Similarly, Shipra, a school teacher in Kullu, in her thirties, who said she was born and brought up in Kullu, claims that though she is more familiar with Kullu culture and language, she still gets taunts for being a Lahauli. She candidly said:

> *ke tumare toh nepalion jaise koi lag-chaar ni hot*e

> Like Nepalese workers you have no culture

I wonder whether the reference to Nepalese is due to the fact that Swanglas are seen as a labouring class or due to their facial similarity in racial and physical characteristics with persons of Nepali origin, or both. The interviewee in this case spoke about their own 'progressive' mindset and their willingness to let their children befriend anyone they wished. However, Palmo, a mother of two in her forties living in the Ramshila neighbourhood claimed that this same progressive thinking could not be extended to Harijans, and that Harijan friends would not be allowed to enter their homes due to the fear of a social boycott by locals. Donning modern thinking and an urban Swangla identity, Palmo blatantly ignored the fact that in rural and traditional Swangla homes, other lower castes such as Sipi and Lohar were also not welcomed inside, and were relegated to the outside gallery where shoes were kept. Hence, following Mehra's argument, that accretive citizenship is a form of belongingness that is built over time and is based on the accumulation of experiences, practices and identities, Swanglas in Kullu often begin to follow local practices that entail caste-ism in order to assimilate themselves into the town. Interviewing college-going Swanglas, I noted that they had a mixed circle of friends. Though they also had *caste*-friends (a term used for Dalits), they avoided eating their food with them or bringing them home. They also knew that marrying Buddhists was possible, as was inter-marriage with other high-castes of Kullu, Mandi, neighbouring towns and cities. But marrying a Dalit was prohibited and unheard of. Sumant a resident of the Shamshi neighbourhood in his late sixties, and a Garu from Jundha village, shared an incident during his interview to explain the prevalent caste-discrimination practices of Kullu. When Swanglas moved to Kullu, they initially attempted to transcend caste and stick together, as they shared an identity. In that vein, he noted,

> I am told of Raghu, who was appointed to a Rajput village school in the Anni region of Kullu. When Raghu arrived, Omi, a Sipi from Raghu's village, was already working there. Raghu did not want to reveal Omi's status as an untouchable because he knew Omi would be treated differently, forced to sit outside, no one would share meals with him, and no one would rent him a room because the hamlet was made up of only high caste people. During gatherings, Raghu would consume the first serving before Omi and stop after he had finished. Someone saw this happening often, called attention to it, and revealed that Omi must be of an untouchable caste. He was beaten and thrown out of the village. Raghu tried his best to avoid this situation, but he could not eat from where a Sipi did.

Dalit Experience in Kullu: A Radical Collective and a Close-knit Community

The Dalit experience of Kullu among informants is distinct from that of other Swanglas. When the Swanglas initially came to Kullu for work, they stayed in the vicinity of their landlords or the contractors that hired them. The Dalits would rent a room and live together in the town. On the other hand, the Dalits did not have memories of sharing space with 'locals'. Sipis and Lohars living together in Shishamati (in Kullu) remember the social activist Lal Chand Dhissa, when talking about the initial migration of Dalits to

Kullu. They said, it was caste affinity that worked in Kullu, compared to regional affinity. So a Daghee (Dalit castes of Kullu—the Hesis, Kolis etc.) in Kullu was more likely to help them than a Swangla from their own village. Gradually, as Dalits also began earning well and saving enough money to buy land in Kullu, they settled in neighbourhoods located at the peripheries of Kullu, away from upper-caste Swangla settlements. Lal Chand Dhissa, a Dalit Adivasi activist from Jahalman village of Lahaul and a resident of the Bashing village mentioned above, shared details of how life in Jahlaman entailed the internal segregation of lower-caste communities from the main village of upper-castes. This form of spatial segregation resulted in the formation of a separate neighbourhood of Dalits known as *Jahalman-Gadbog*. Bashing was exactly such a separate settlement nearby Kullu, where Dalits lived as an independent community in a distinct locality. Dhissa recounted how it was always nice to have one’s own people around, especially for purposes of *jeena-marna*.[7] There was also a separate organization called *Dalit Janajatiya Sangharsh Sangathan*, loosely translated as Scheduled tribe Dalit Struggle Organization, which is a united political platform for Scheduled Tribe Dalits across Himachal Pradesh.[8] He discusses the problems of Dalit *jeena-marna* and further adds here:

> *humari biradri number me kam hai isliye humne clubs bana rakhe hai. Bhuntar se Manali tak pehle ek hi tha, ab Bhuntar se Kullu alag hai, Kullu se Raison ek, aur ek Raison se Manali. Ek awaz pe sab ekatthe ho jate hai*.
>
> Our community is less in number, and so we have formed clubs. Bhuntar to Manali, we used to have one club, now it is divided into three: Bhuntar to Kullu, Kullu to Raison, and Raison to Manali. At one call, we all unite at once.

He further describes how Lohars were smaller in number when he first came to Kullu; and how Sipis and Lohars stayed together for the first two decades of their life in Kullu. They were also part of the same clubs and associations and shared a similarity in their language and in their experiences with caste discrimination. But these incipient groups also started breaking-up, as the number of community members increased. Another interlocutor Pushpa, aged forty-five, who I interviewed in Jahalman village in Lahaul, stated that though there were a smaller number of Dalit households in villages: only five households in Jahalman village and three in Shansha village, matters looked different in Kullu. In Kullu, Dalits had their own neighbourhoods consisting of around 40 to 45 families that lived together, and hence were not that small in number. In relation to the population settled in Kullu town, she demonstrated the close connections and belongingness that people from the same community within the region had with each other. Rina, another interlocutor, and a friend from the Sipi community who recently moved to Kullu to her relatives for furthering the education of her children, flaunted her family networks in Kullu. She proudly recounted that her brother worked at the post of S.H.O. (Station House Officer) in the police force in Kullu. Her uncle worked as a college lecturer, while her sister’s husband ran a grocery shop in Dohlnala village, located on the Kullu-Manali highway. Another interlocutor called

[7] *Jeena-marna* is idiomatic for the rituals of birth and death.

[8] Scheduled Tribe Dalit is not a recognised category by the State. For more details cf. Christopher (2020), on Dalit Gaddis in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh.

Ramlal, a person from the Sipi community in his early fifties, who assisted his younger brother with transporting material from towns like Kullu and Mandi, to their village shop in Jahalman market, spoke on similar subjects. He travelled to and fro frequently, every other week, and shared how the Sipi community, which used to depend on the mercy of upper-castes was forced to accept defiling jobs. He shared his belief about the community originally hailing from an upper-caste background, who were forced, due to their poverty, into occupations that reduced their caste status to that of untouchables. He substantiated his point by sharing an origin myth of the Sipi community that identified the Sipis as the children of the brother of an upper-caste man, who had chosen to eat beef while hungry and trapped in the desert. But because he consumed beef, he became identified as *Sipi* or a person of an untouchable status, while the younger brother who had suffered no such privation, remained pure, with his children being identified as Swangla. The second point he made challenged the general belief that the untouchable community could not access the Sanskrit language. Surprisingly, most words in the language spoken by the Sipis have Sanskrit origin. It could therefore be concluded according to him that Sipis were also of high-caste origin and later accorded outcaste status by Swanglas in the remote countryside of Lahaul that was dominated by Swanglas. Further, Ramlal and his brother Sumit shared many stories about community prosperity in the interview, describing how this prosperity was gradually pouring into their community. They also shared how, even though they have received benefits from the reservation system of the country, which was quite late due to their poverty, their community did not understand the value of education as quickly as was perhaps required. He explained how reservation was tricky: if one were classified as SC (Scheduled Castes), one had to compete with other SC from towns and cities. If one became enumerated as an ST, then the upper-caste STs of Lahaul had the advantage. It was only through sub-reservation in Lahaul and Spiti that the Sipis leverage their own position. Now, as their community members were gradually taking to education, they were attempting to help and reform their community. Sumit remembered how, at social gatherings like weddings earlier on, their urban kinsmen would discuss the benefits of reservation and education. They attempted to convince everyone of their caste in the village to give up their hereditary drum-beating profession as it was a defiling job[9]. The villagers were threatened by the superstition that God will punish them if they quit drum-beating in village and temple functions. It was with gradual understanding that the struggle to organise and participate in the pan-Himalayan *Janajatiya Dalit Sangathan* gained traction, discussing various social issues concerning Scheduled Tribe Dalits in the state.

According to Ainley, Coleman, and Becker (1986), an important aspect in understanding the process of how stigma and discrimination take place is by examining the efforts that are taken towards de-stigmatization. They suggest that these efforts can be classified into two categories: those that focus on similarity and those that focus on difference. For Dalits in the Lahaul region, who experience the double-stigmatization of being both Dalit and Lahauli, there have been a few instances where

[9] Drum-beating is considered a defiling job as the skin of the drum is traditionally made from hide which is considered ritually impure in Hindu society. This is why the profession and those connected to it are considered to belong to a polluted/ defiled caste who are capable of polluting others on physical contact.

individuals have tried to transcend the stigma by utilizing an ambiguous self-identification when in urban settings. During my fieldwork, I spoke on similar matters with Raj, a 61-year-old man from the Sipi community who was a retired government employee. The village Raj is from is called *Yambe*; consequently, everyone from the village should be called Yamba. But only one influential upper-caste family uses this title. He chose to use the same title with his name as a way of asserting his identity and negotiating the stigma and humiliation he faced. It was not uncommon for Dalits in the region to cope with caste stigma by either dropping their last names or adopting an upper-caste surname. Swanglas in my fieldwork region expressed frustration with this recent trend that had Sipis and Lohars use Swangla as their surname.

Conclusion

For the Swanglas, especially for their lower-caste communities, living and working in Kullu can be a challenging experience. They are confronted with the challenge of negotiating their identity as migrants while facing the realities of a town that is structured around strict caste hierarchies in its socio-religious interactions. They encounter prejudice and are denied access to communal spaces, such as temples, within the locality of Kullu. While this underscores the critical importance of dealing with casteism and spatial segregation, the lived experiences of Swanglas in Kullu town reveal the challenges of doing so. They must negotiate their identity as migrants, as well as their position in the rigid caste system that governs the sociality in the town. The entrenched social norms that regulate social interactions in Kullu have exhibited a high degree of rigidity and have demonstrated resilience against legal reforms that seek to foster inclusivity and egalitarianism. The Swanglas residing in Kullu town face challenges in comprehending their social identity and encounter obstacles in integrating with the dominant castes while simultaneously asserting their own distinct social identity. The Swanglas' efforts to mitigate the stigma attached to their social status are evident in their actions, which oscillate between emphasising their similarities with the dominant castes and their practises, and equally asserting their differences. The narratives surrounding the Swanglas serve as a testament to the lived experiences of a subaltern community within the town of Kullu. This community's stories highlight the ongoing tension between longstanding cultural traditions and contemporary social ideologies.

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Mansions of the Gods and Visions of Paradise

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The culture of the Mughals left an indelible stamp on South Asia, particularly in court ceremonies, architecture, and visual arts. Many of the architectural elements that form their legacy were emulated by successor states to the Mughal empire. Some of the new state formations were merely splinters of the Mughal state, where the new rulers nominally claimed to be vassals. Others, like several Maratha states, had histories wherein they saw themselves as a resistance against the Mughals. However, while the empire was slowly being dismantled, every successor accepted the legitimacy of Mughal rule. In their quest to portray themselves as political descendants of the Mughals, they adopted the court culture and imperial architecture. Therefore, the Mughal political decline is also a period of cultural ascendancy. The most unlikely venue for Mughal architectural features was the Hindu temple, which had a long history of architecture, including its own logic and morphology. However, even the temples of the Marathas, possibly to keep up with the latest architectural trends and emblems of political power, and to enhance their prestige, borrowed Mughal architectural elements. Studies in the visual culture allow for nuanced counter-narratives, wherein the common binaries of religions, or political states completely dissolve into a single cultural matrix.

Maratha, Temple, Architecture, Mughal, Deccan

Introduction

Space-making through the use of architecture, often inadvertently embodies political and social relationships. There is also often the deliberate use of an architectural form for its cultural fashion. Even if architectural formations have their own historic and ontological genealogies, they are appropriated and naturalized into new contexts, formulations, and settings. Such is the case of several Mughal architectural forms that are used by the parvenu Maratha states in the 18th century. Bereft of an imperial architectural tradition, the Marathas appropriated Mughal forms for their mansions and domestic buildings, albeit with local materials. Thus, Mughal multifoil arches, baluster columns, and curvilinear ridged pavilions—all signature elements of post-Shah Jahan architecture, are ubiquitous in Maratha architecture of the 18th century. This imitation of Mughal architectural elements has been attributed to increased Maratha contact with Malwa and Rajasthan in the 18th century, and as Mate (2002: 146) writes: “The Marathas accepted these features and used them on such a vast scale that they can be said to be the chief characteristics of the Maratha architecture of the 18th century.” But that is the mere incidental explanation. There is also a purposeful appropriation of Mughal elements: in the second half of the 18th century, the high period of Maratha political expansion and architectural expression, we notice a great fascination for things from Hindustan (north India). A person no less than Balaji Bajirao (Nanasaheb) Peshwa (1720-1761 CE), the de facto ruler of the Maratha confederacy, expressed such a taste, and Kulkarni (2020: 36-37) quotes letters by the Peshwa in which he is completely taken in quotes letters by the Peshwa in which he is completely taken in by

north India, its people, fashion and manners. Architectural elements, motifs, and aediculas that were borrowed from a north Indian Mughal style were used in mansions and palaces, in administrative and residential buildings. The Mughals remained central to Maratha imagination in terms of material culture and memory in equivocal ways, depending on periodic and political anxieties and aspirations.

Maratha temple architecture followed a slightly different trajectory, with three prominent styles used in the *shikhara*s: the revival *bhumija*, the revival *shekhari*, and the newly formulated Maratha style that was a curious amalgam of *kutina* temple composition with sultanate and Mughal aediculas. But that visual language was limited to the building elevation. An important element of space-making was the temple plan itself—not to be seen as an architect's drawing, but experienced as one moved through the building or site. In terms of architectural form, the temples were completely innovative, breaking the classical rules of a temple plan and elevation. The consistent and enduring nature of older principles of planning of temples have been expounded by earlier scholarship (Meister 1979). In this essay, we examine three cases of Mughal architectural forms used in the creation of Hindu temples. At Pune, the nine-bay mosque plan was used for the Omkareshvara temple (c. 1738 CE), whereas in Nasik, the design for an enclosure wall of Mughal gardens was utilised as an enceinte for the Naro Shankara temple (c. 1747 CE). The common Persian building typology of the *hasht bihisht* (eight paradises) was used for the sanctum of a Ganesha temple at Tasgaon (c. 1799 CE). In all three examples, the origins of the architectural forms and the history of their cultural and literary allusions would have been completely lost, but for their meaning and valence in the immediate Mughal past in the light of which, they would have been understood. Thus, the borrowing of these ideas signified Mughal imperial power of the 17th century.

The argument here is that the commissioned buildings were not accidents of design or common fashion, but deliberate messages of patronage and power. For example, one can see an "acute awareness that patrons had, of the power of architecture in consolidating their social positions" in correspondence between Gopikabai (Peshwa) and Ahilyabai Holkar (Sahasrabuddhe 2017: 69). The latter was refused permission to build *ghata*s in Nasik by Gopikabai who saw the development of the site as her personal legacy, not to be infringed upon by anyone else. It is evident that in this period, patronage and its perception were taken seriously—embedding cosmopolitan, exotic, and political motifs within architectural design that would have been conscious decisions, and not simple mimicry and repetition by craftspeople from other regions of South Asia. Several Islamic architectural forms were already popular among the Marathas and their early period was marked by the architecture of the Deccan sultanates, which provided models for the markers of high fashion and political power (Sohoni 2018). By the end of the 17th century, as the Mughals emerged as the most powerful force in the Deccan, their architecture would have been worthy of emulation. Yet, the Maratha kingdom founded by Shivaji (1630-1680 CE), and culturally allied with the Deccan sultanates, largely refrained from using the architectural language of their *bête noire*, the Mughals.

The Maratha antagonism to the Mughals changed after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 CE, when Shahu (1682-1749 CE), the grandson of Chhatrapati Shivaji, was released

and became the king of the Marathas at Satara. He had been captured as a child and was raised at the Mughal court as one of Aurangzeb's proteges, and was steeped in Mughal culture. From the early 18th century onwards, the Marathas under Shahu derived their legitimacy from being representatives of the Mughals in the Deccan as they received *firman*s from the Mughal court in Delhi to that effect (Kulkarni 1971). It thus became imperative for the Marathas to operate as a sub-Mughal court, in terms of etiquette, manners, and indeed also in terms of other aesthetical concerns like architecture and painting. Mughal architectural elements were now used widely, subject to regional modifications caused by available material and craftspeople. The entire architectural vocabulary of Maratha residential and state buildings in the 18th century was thus, at least partially, derived from Mughal architecture.

The architectural elements and building modules that were definitive of the Mughals would subsequently be picked up by almost all the states that emerged in the post-Mughal power vacuum, Maratha or otherwise, and in many ways would come to encompass the language of commensurability between different powers. While Mughal architectural elements would be used by the Marathas, their gardens too would emulate the quadripartite gardens of the Mughals. Such gardens can be seen at palaces, like Motibagh belonging to the Rastes in Wai, and at Telangakhedi belonging to the Bhonsales in Nagpur, many of them accompanied by temples in their vicinity. But to use identifiably Mughal forms in the religious architecture of temples was rare, suggesting some deliberation and active agency of the designers and patrons.

Mughal architecture: sources and reception

Over the latter half of the 16th and most of the 17th centuries, under a succession of Mughal emperors from Akbar to Aurangzeb, there had been incremental changes in the architecture of the court. Moving away from a north Indian sultanate architectural language, elements from newly conquered regions also played an important role in informing Mughal architecture. For example, the campaigns in Gujarat and Malwa were influential in the design of Fatehpur Sikri (Koch 1988a). The heavy cornices, serpentine brackets, and lattice screens were some of the architectural elements learned from these campaigns, just as European and South Asian architectural phrases entered the lexicon of Mughal architecture under Jahangir and Shah Jahan. The baluster column, the *bangla* roof, and pietra dura techniques were assimilated into a new architectural language of political power (Koch 1982, 1988b). An earlier architecture of the Timurids with their gardens, and that of the Delhi sultanate with several features from Central Asia were already a part of the Mughal palimpsest of architecture. These strands were woven into an architectural language that represented the Mughal state, the court, its grandeur and courtly culture, and were emulated by most courts in South Asia, to emphasise their positions either as rivals or as vassals.

Omkareshvara Temple (c. 1738 CE) and the Nine-bay Mosque

A common pre-Islamic Iranian architectural form consisted of the nine-domed building (Azad and Kennedy 2018: 289). As a building typology for a mosque, it quickly spread across the Islamic world between the 10th and the 12th centuries, and could be found in several sites through Iran, North Africa, and Iberian Peninsula. For example, both

the Noh Gumbad mosque in Balkh, Afghanistan (late 8th century), and the Bab-ul Mardum mosque in Toledo, Spain (999 CE), essentially share the same plan (O'Kane 2006). The latter is known for its nine differently decorated brick domes. This building typology has been used for several architectural programmes, but rarely as a Hindu temple. While in its simplest form, the space could merely be a square room with four columns arranged with bi-axial symmetry in the middle, creating nine bays, it could also be quite elaborate with multiple pilasters on the walls, and intersecting arches creating lively geometrical complexities (Image 1).

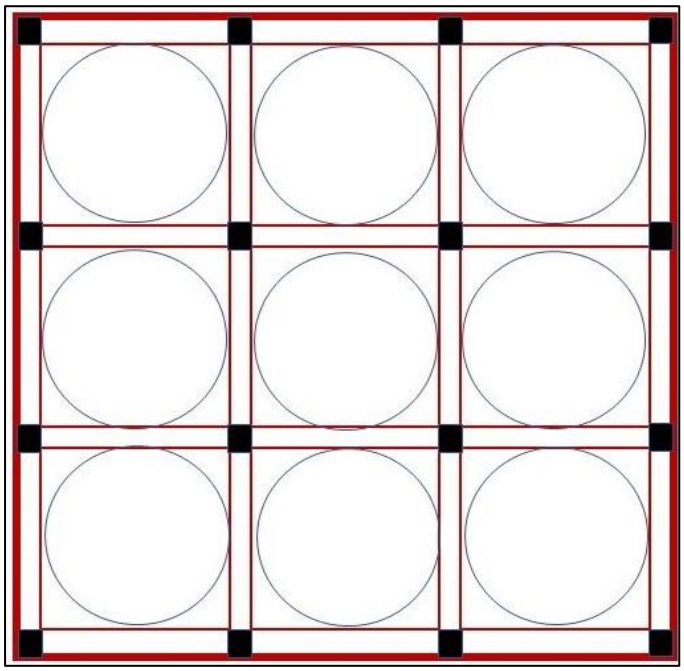

Image 8.1: The Nine-bay Plan used for Mosques. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

This architectural form fully encompasses and articulates a space characterized by nine bays that are explicitly marked by various vertical elements of interest, especially as the style became popular as one of the modules that are encountered at several Islamic complexes. As a stand-alone building, it was used as a mosque and adhered to the architectural typology of a mosque, such as the one we can see used in the mosque of Afzal Khan at Afzalpur, or the nine-domed gateway to the *dargah* of Shaikh Siraj al-din Junaidi at Gulbarga (Merklinger 1981: 110, 127, plan 32). Mughal architecture itself has very few examples of such nine-bayed mosques with domes situated above each bay, given that Mughal rulers mostly commissioned large imperial *jami'* mosques, instead reserving this building and architectural typology for their *baradari*s. Already, with the Mughal adoption of the plan for entirely different functions, its signification had changed. An important Mughal site where this architectural type is encountered, is at the camp, and place of death of emperor Aurangzeb Alamgir that is near Bhingar, which includes a *baradari* for the emperor's use, characterized by nine vaulted bays (Image 2). Several other towns such as Aurangabad, and many Mughal forts include *baradari*s of this type. Whether inspired by the nine-bay mosque or by the more proximal Mughal *baradari*s, exposure to such designs led to the production of an unusual temple plan in the capital of the Peshwas, not too far from their headquarters in the fortified mansion of Shaniwar Wada.

The Mahakali temple in Chandrapur, built by the local Gond rulers, though inspired by Mughal architecture, sports a similar plan, with the central bay and its walls constituting the actual shrine or the sanctum sanctorum of the temple according to its architectural plan (Dengle et al: 256). Closer to Pune, the Ganapati temple of the Purandares at

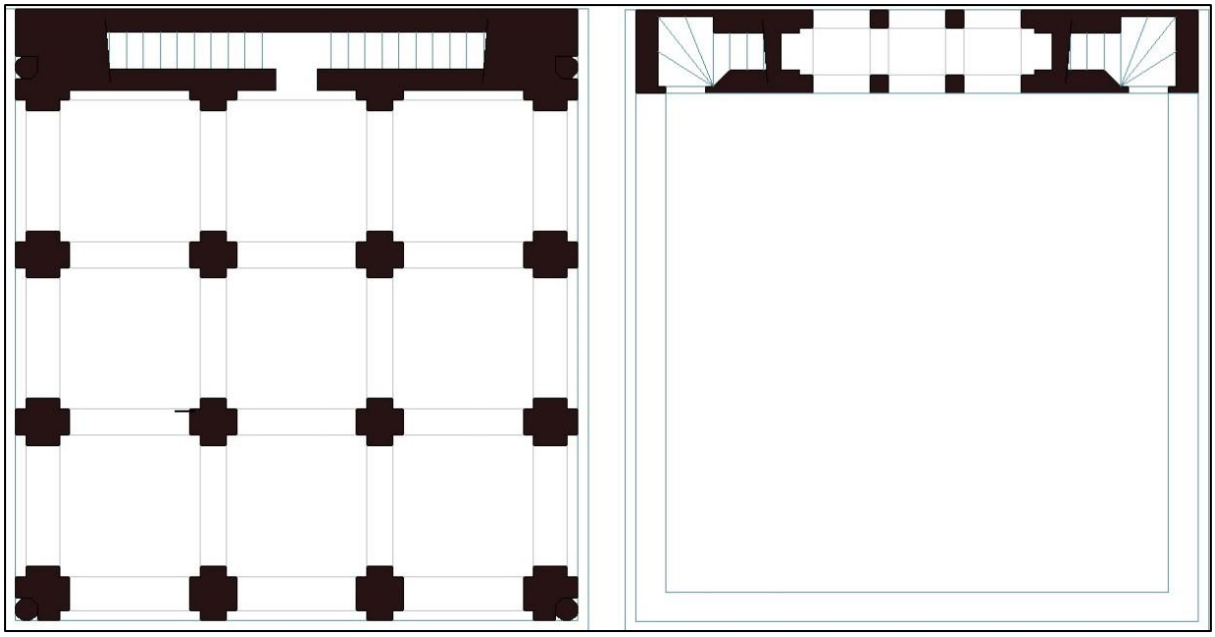

Image 8.2: The Plan of Mughal Emperor Alamgir Aurangzeb's baradari Near Bhingar. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

Saswad also demonstrates a similar plan. But it must be noted that all these unusual temples were also built after sustained contact with the Mughals. According to the nineteenth-century *Gazetteer*, the Omkareshvara temple was built between 1740 and 1760 by Krishnaji Pant Chitrav with funds from public subscription, a large portion of it additionally funded by Bhau (Sadashiv Chimaji) of the Peshwa family (Campbell 1885b: 338-339). But original documents also inform us that the foundations for the temple were already laid in 1736 CE, with Shivarama Bhat Chitrav being entrusted with the work, which was completed in 1738 CE (Karve 1942: 29). Here, we find that the patronage was still very closely connected with the political power centre of the Marathas.

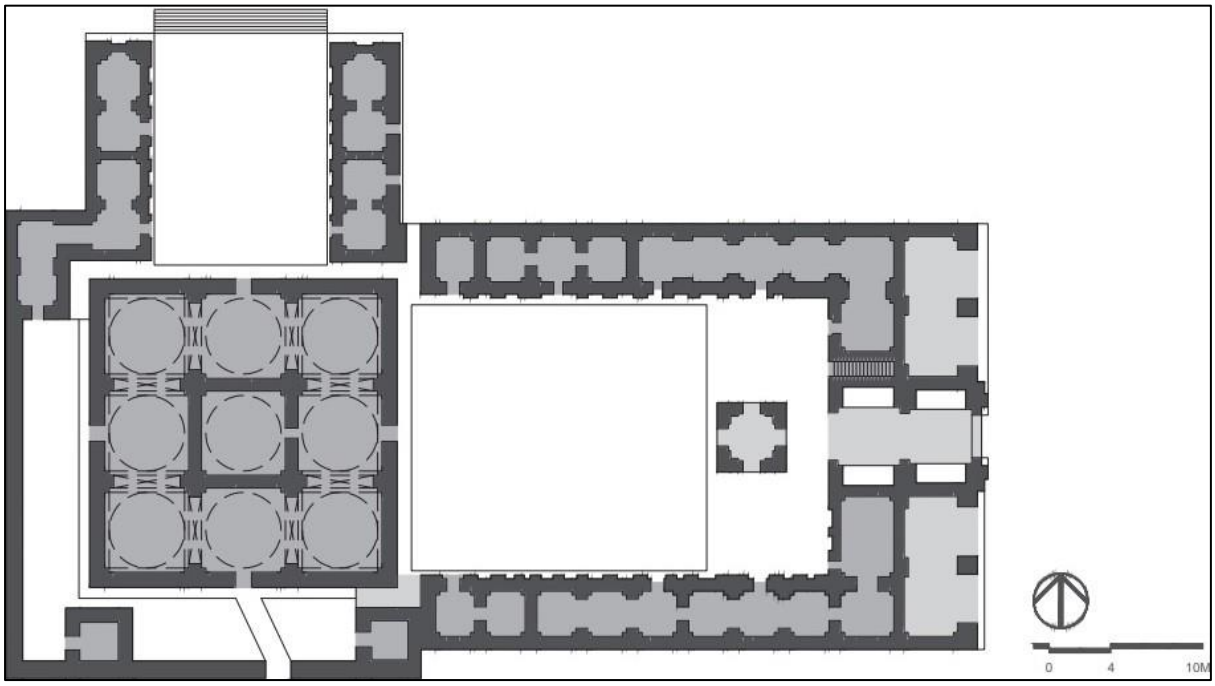

Image 8.3: Plan of Omkareshvara Temple, Pune. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

Set inside a walled courtyard, the temple itself is a nine-bay plan, with blank walls and small central entrances on all four cardinal sides (Image 3). The internal bay is additionally walled and serves as the sanctum with only a single entrance to it on the east. All nine bays, including the sanctum, have ceilings that are vaulted by domes built in stone masonry, with the vaulting patterns all being different. Externally, the tall brick superstructure over the sanctum has little to do with the vaulting inside and the other eight bays surrounding it are all roofed with decorated domes. The northern courtyard leads to the river. While nine-square plans were already widespread in South Asia in the 18th century, imbued with magical and mystical meaning, these architectural designs were celebrated in the planning of the city of Jaipur (founded c. 1727 CE), the proximity of the court of Jaipur to the Mughal court is also well-known.

Naro Shankara temple (c. 1747 CE) and the Mughal Garden Enclosure

The Arabic word used for the after-world in the Qur'an is *al-janna* and represents an idealized after-world, for which gardens constitute a popular metaphor . The reason for employing the metaphor of gardens may be explained by the "… concept of space in a culture evolved from the desert … by necessity based on protecting living space" (Petruccioli 1998: 351). Paradise, on the other hand, is a pre-Islamic Persian concept that idealizes the garden form. While its metaphorical origins may be the same as in the Arabic, their conceptual origins are different. It is possible that the formal attributes of Persian gardens were subverted by an Islamic philosophy in which "…the Qur'anic notion of the natural world and natural environment [are] semantically and logically bound up with the very concept of God; …this notion is [also] linked with the general principle of the creation of humanity" (Haq 2001: 146). The Mughal gardens for instance have long been associated with various spatial images derived from the idealized Paradisiacal garden: symmetrical quadripartite water channels, divisions with raised walkways and water channels, and last but not least, square enclosure walls (Wescoat 2011: 229). The layout of a Mughal garden has often been ascribed to "…a combination of the ancient Persian prototype, and the Gardens of Paradise as described in the Koran [sic] and the sayings of the Prophet" (Clark 1996: 63). Islam conceives of paradise as a garden, with the Quranic al-Janna being the garden par excellence; therefore, being buried in a garden suggests the anticipation of paradise (Dickie 1985: 131). The analogy of a garden being the paradise of the after-world was believed to be effective, if it was in conformance with the Quran. Thus, even the Taj Mahal and its gardens were modelled along Quranic descriptions of paradise (Begley 1979). Mughal nobility thus chose to be buried in quadripartite walled gardens, usually at the central crossing which was marked by a raised platform on which the cenotaph was placed. The enclosure wall thus came to signify the presence of a model of garden paradise contained inside it, with the burial of one or more important people placed in the centre. Such gardens were built in the Deccan through the 18th century, and examples of this can be seen at the tomb of Bani Begum Bagh in Khuldabad, and at the tomb known as Daulati Begam near the village of Abdi Mandi in the vicinity of Daulatabad. However, such a compound wall was also curiously built by a Maratha patron as the enclosure for a temple in the 18th century.

Built in 1747 CE by Naro Shankar Raja Bahadur on the banks of the Godavari river at Nasik, the temple cost the princely sum of 1,800,000 rupees; artisans from Gujarat and

Rajasthan were invited to Nasik in order to construct the temple (Campbell 1985a: 519-520). The temple itself was built in a style that saw the revival of the *shekhari* architectural form that was popular during this period, seen for example at the nearby temple of Trimbakeshvara (built by Peshwa Balaji Bajirao in the mid-eighteenth century). While the patron clearly chose this conservative revival style for the main temple itself, a compound wall that was built as an enclosure around it, was exactly like that of a Mughal garden, complete with corner kiosks and a large *bangla*-roof, vaulted chambers over the entrance (Image 4). This wall is over three meters high, and the entrance has a large Portuguese bell hung over it; this bell was captured by Maratha armies led by Chimaji, brother of Bajirao Peshwa, from the fort of Vasai in 1739 CE. The patron of this temple was one of the commanders in that war, and had the honour of claiming the bell, won in victory, for his own temple, thus enriching the palimpsest: an 18th century Hindu temple with a revivalist design from the 12th century, an enclosure wall of immediate Mughal inspiration but with a lineage of paradisiacal gardens of West Asian origin, completed by a European church-bell from a Portuguese settlement.

Image 8.4: Enclosure Wall of the Naro Shankar Temple in Nasik. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

The enclosure wall of a Mughal garden as a container for a revival style of temple architecture acted in this case as a signifier, irrespective of whether the garden performed a commemorative or funerary function. It conveyed several eclectic meanings, both worldly and esoteric that included the accessing of high culture, courtly fashion and wealth, while also being connected with connotations of the other world, whether divine or eschatological. While such enclosure walls were commonly found for temples, using a Mughal architectural vocabulary so explicitly deserves attention.

Ganesh Temple at Tasgaon (c. 1799) and the hasht bihisht Plan

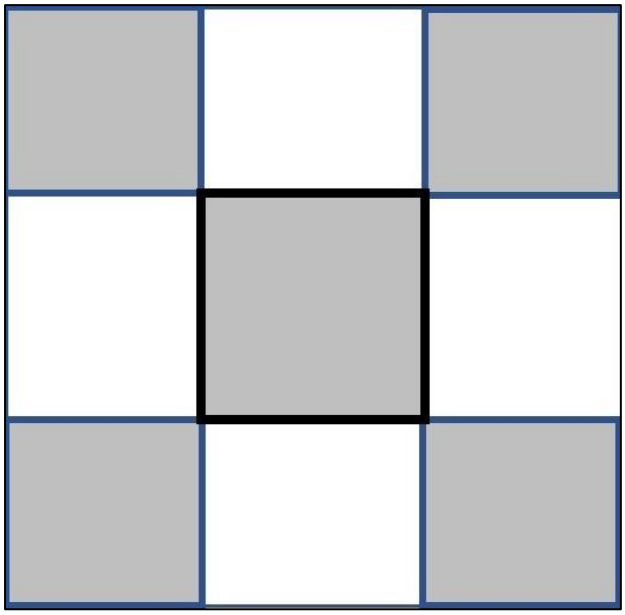

Image 8.5: Schematic of hasht bihisht Plan with four iwans. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

Not unconnected in principle with the nine-bay plans, a building type of nine blocks is common in Iranian and Timurid construction. The logic of a grid of three squares on each side generates nine square spaces, of which the corners are heavily built, with the central portions open, functioning either as entrance portals (*iwan*s) or merely as loggias or frontal halls (Image 5). The central space excluded, the eight spaces surrounding it are called the *hasht bihisht*, or the eight paradises, a metaphorical allusion to an Islamic cosmological and eschatological concept, in which paradise is conceived as having eight gates and eight spaces.

This plan type was given literary importance by Amir Khusrau Dehlavi in his work called the *hasht bihisht* dated to the 1301 CE, that is believed to also "refer to an architectural typology, presumably still existing in the Sasanian period" (Bernardini 2003). In Mughal India, this style was celebrated in several palaces and at important tombs, including all the major imperial mausolea of the royal family, ranging from Humayun's tomb to that of Safdar Jang, both in Delhi. It was clearly a common sub-imperial design, as Shah Quli Khan, Mughal governor of Narnaul, also built a palace, the Jal Mahal, using the *hasht bihisht* plan (Image 6). In the Deccan, barring Rabia Durrani's tomb in Aurangabad called Bibi-ka-Maqbara, there are few Mughal monumental buildings of this type, though several smaller tombs and pavilions can be seen sporting it. Some of these buildings, such as Pir Ismail's tomb in Aurangabad, are also understood as *baradari*s because of their modest scale. It was a common plan for palaces as well, as seen in the Govind Mandir of Datia, wherein the second, third, and fourth stories of the five-storied building clearly show a *hasht bihisht* type of architectural plan (O'Kane 2006: 237). Clearly, the plan conveyed proximity to imperial power, in the life and death of royal patrons.

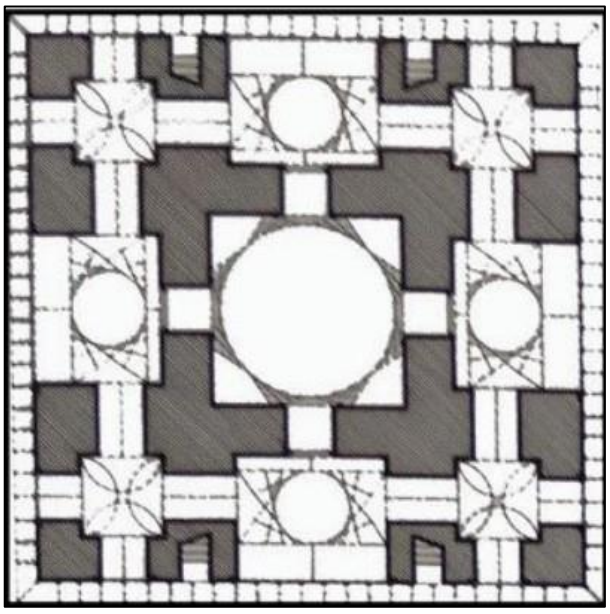

Image 8.6: Jal Mahal of Shah Quli Khan in Narnaul. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

The Ganesh temple at Tasgaon was built by Parshurambhau Patwardhan, who was an important chieftain of the Peshwas in Sangli. It was built over a period of twenty years, and was

completed in 1799. Significantly, what would have been the temple sanctuary is divided into nine portions, of which the central one houses the main deity, with the other four corners constituting the *sancta sanctorum* for other associated deities (Image 7). This quincunx arrangement is very similar to a *hasht bihisht* plan, especially because the central portions on each facade just form loggias. While two of them provide access to the subsidiary shrines, the front one acts as a porch with the rear one not connecting to any other space at all. The plan and scale are comparable to those of some tombs in the Qutb Shahi necropolis, situated below Golconda.

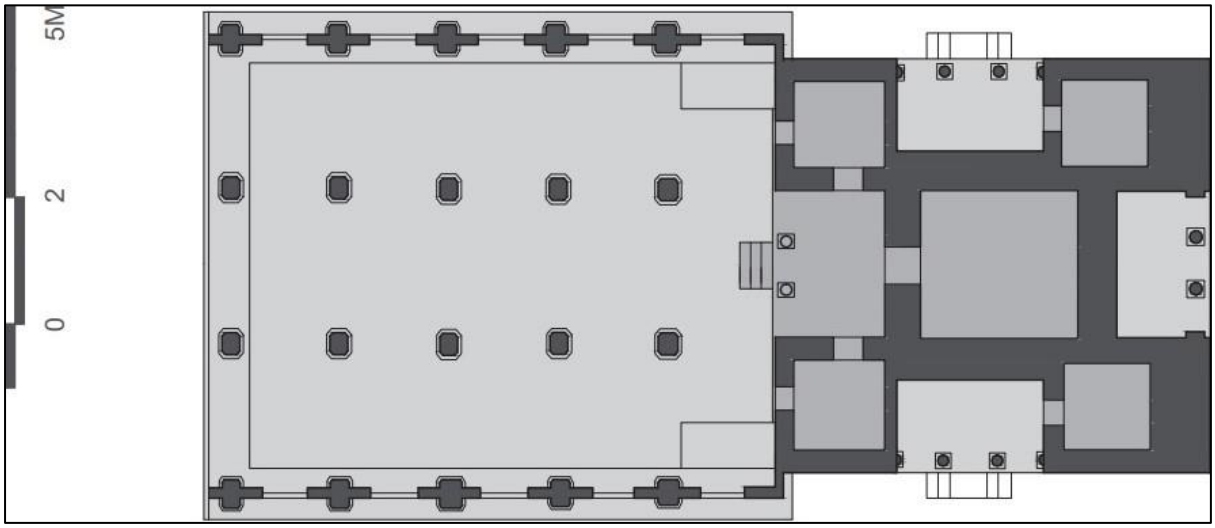

Image 8.7: Plan of the Ganesh Temple in Tasgaon. Image Source: Pushkar Sohoni

Conclusion

The 18th century was important for Maratha expansion, and within less than a hundred years, they conquered, raided, and sometimes settled provinces across South Asia. Seeing themselves as the rightful claimants to the Mughal imperium, they attempted an Indo-Islamic mode in later Hindu architecture, as a way to showcase their prowess and patronage (Sohoni 2011: 72). Borrowing from Mughal forms in small modules, was a way they saw as habilitating of themselves as the successors to Mughal political power, and their application of Mughal architectural forms to Hindu temple architecture constituted a radical move. As Henri Focillon wrote, architectural formations have their own lives, and in every age they only bear the meanings that are imposed upon them. According to his argument about architectural style: formal architectural elements "have a certain index value and which make up its repertory, its vocabulary and, occasionally, the very instrument with which it wields its power" (1992: 46). Using an assemblage of Mughal architectural elements was therefore a display of ambition and aspiration, and while the history and lineage of the forms may have been forgotten, their immediate signification was deployed in the service of the Marathas. All three forms: of the garden wall, the nine-bay building, and the device of the 'eight paradises' may have originally had cosmological, eschatological, and divine meanings, but over time, they came to signify different desires. They were not out of place even in the temple architecture of 18th century Marathas. Temples were understood to be *prasada*s or palaces for the gods (Meister 1988-89). Irrespective of whether the original conception of temples or of the any forms they borrowed were truly understood or not, the heavenly mansions of the gods could be easily conflated with the models of

paradises originating from within the Islamic world. Using a system of style, idiom, and mode articulated by Michael Meister, we can describe architectural processes: in which 'style' is understood as "accumulation of general characteristics that reflect a broad cultural grouping", 'idiom' as "the operational traditions of artisans and guilds that persist beyond political changes" and 'mode' as the type of configuration of a building (Meister 1993). Here we see the development of a Maratha style that, apart from Mughals, also uses idioms from Malwa and Rajasthan in temple-building mode. Thus, the forms and resultant spaces in Maratha temples, while appearing to be eclectic, are engaged in a much larger context pertinent to their creation.

The Mughals had created an architectural style and courtly etiquette; these attributes would continue to flourish under new sub-Mughal courts. Already, in the period of the first Mughal emperors in the 16th and early 17th centuries, Mughal courtly culture was perpetuated through sub-imperial courts as those of the Rajputs (Asher 1993). The emperors Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan were emulated across Hindustan, in terms of their ceremonials and architecture. The Marathas and newer groups in the 18th century perpetuated this Mughal culture in the aftermath of Aurangzeb's death, particularly once Shahu came to power. Under his reign, the Maratha empire expanded enormously, covering large parts of central and south India, filling in the vacuum caused by a rapidly weakening Mughal empire. Thus, Mughal social and visual culture was ironically promulgated by the very polities that were catalysts of Mughal political downfall. As the economic and political power of the Mughals waned, they ceased to be a threat, and therefore their material culture was adopted by everyone who wished to replace them as the masters of South Asia.

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The (Im)possibility of Winning the Untouchables: Ambedkar, Gandhi, E. Kannan, and the Depressed Classes Movement in Colonial Malabar

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The present paper discusses the fundamental dynamics of provincial-national politics and the struggle of the Depressed Classes for equality and political freedom through the correspondence between BR Ambedkar and E. Kannan of Malabar. This article examines the efforts made by the Depressed Classes to maintain their autonomy in the face of societal prejudices based on caste, exploring the contributions made by the Oppressed Classes to the process of reshaping political discourse in India. This paper also aims to situate the Ambedkar-initiated Depressed Class movement, the local Depressed Class movements, and Congress interventions within the political context of Madras and Malabar, shaped by British colonialism. The most perceptive and intellectual insights on caste oppression, ideas of autonomous anti-caste movement, dynamics of political space, and emancipatory potentialities from Ambedkar and Kannan confront Gandhi and the Congress, while providing concepts and viewpoints about how India's Depressed Classes could forge ahead and become recognized as a political force. This study investigates the power of resistance, mostly against caste oppression, and investigates the omitted histories of the Depressed Classes to demonstrate how they were key participants of the struggle, given the specificities of their social and political settings. The purpose of this article is to bring Dalits from the peripheries of South Asian history to the fore as intellectual leaders whose work rewrites and shifts the ideas and struggles of contemporary India, instead of merely being seen as regional political actors.

Depressed Classes, Caste, Malabar, Kannan, Ambedkar

Introduction

Colonialism changed the pre-modern institutions of India, although its effects were uneven and diverse in various regions. Under colonialism, seemingly, there was also an emergence of conflicting views about community, nation, and nationalism (Aloysius 1998). While colonial Modernity fostered anti-colonial nationalism, it also allows for the articulation of many oppressed identities. Nationalism idealises and seeks to create a homogeneous 'national community' (Anderson 2006) as the only legitimate path to progress and modernity. The oppressed masses, on the other hand, engaged in social movements of 'self-help and collective action', especially because the 'imagined nation of equal citizens' was not meant to provide them with equality (Rudolph 2010). The concept of community, then, is opposite to the concept of nation, as it engages in the 'de-imagining (of) nation' (Reghu 2010). So, the question is: How did someone like Ambedkar respond to the national question and at the same time, forge together a political community? By examining the connection between Ambedkar and South India, notably Malabar, this paper attempts to address and explores this question. While considering the case of South Indian politics, Aloysius notes the existence of social crises within subaltern life, given the impetus for organised activities in the mid-nineteenth century (Aloysius 1998). In the Madras presidency, Dalits were organized

under the nomenclature Depressed Class, Adi-Dravida, or Panchama. By forming caste associations, they expanded the discourse of justice and civil rights (Arnold et. al. 1976, Jeffrey 1974). Demands for access to public spaces, higher varna status, and equal treatment under the law were raised through petitions or memorandums addressed to the government. In 1891, for instance, the *Dravida Mahajana Sangam*, an organization of Pariahs, filed a petition demanding specific rights and provisions (Rajadurai and Geetha 1998). Given the context of the Malabar, many Dalit leaders joined nationalist, socialist, and communist movements; but their contributions remain overlooked within the public sphere. As Aloysius (1998) points out, these little-known figures have been waiting for writers and thinkers to discover and place them in history.

The assertions made by the lower-castes, particularly the Dalits, have not been adequately captured by historians, whether they be nationalist historians, neo-colonialists, Marxists, Subaltern Studies scholars, or those who emphasize the importance of postcolonialism within historical analysis (Jangam 2015). In fact, the influential framework of scholarship on Dalits in India, such as the frame of the Gandhian Harijan ideology, the colonial historiographical approach, the nationalist view of Indian society, and Nehruvian developmentalism, have all excluded Dalits and their perspectives from entering academic debates (Rawat and Satyanarayana 2016). Rawat and Satyanarayana also note that Ambedkar's criticism of Indian society and the Gandhian nationalist movement remained on the margins until the 1990s. Similarly, Dalit resistance to untouchability and upper-caste oppression was usually depicted in Indian historiography as sectarian, pro-British, and anti-national. Chinnaiah Jangam (2016) notes that recent writings, however, have placed Dalits at the forefront of South Asian histories, not only as political actors but rather as thinkers who tried to rewrite and transform ideologies and struggles in modern India (Gundimeda 2016, Rao 2009, Rawat 2011, Viswanath 2014a).

In keeping with this trend, this essay examines narratives of resistance, mainly against caste oppression, and analyses untold stories of the depressed classes as key players in the social and political spaces. This paper is based on letters written by B.R. Ambedkar to E. Kannan, who was the General Secretary of the All-India Depressed Classes Congress, between 1930 and 1945. With the exception of scholarship that explores Ambedkar's communication with A.V. Thakkar, the letters he wrote to others seem to have received little attention (Srivatsan 2008). These letters are important, as they present ideas and debates on how to transform India's depressed classes into a political force, and perhaps even critique Gandhi and the Congress. These texts certainly contain some of Ambedkar and Kannan's most profound and nuanced view on caste inequality, an autonomous anti-caste movement, dynamics of political space, and emancipatory potentialities. In addition to the letters, I have also used ethnographic field notes, interviews, biographies, and archival materials.

Depressed Classes in Malabar

Between 1920 and 1935, the British used the term ‘Depressed Classes’ to describe people who were politically, culturally, and socially oppressed by the dominant castes. But, within the group of “depressed classes,” there were also many others including

hill tribes and criminal tribes (Ambedkar 1990,Viswanath 2014b).[1] The depressed class movement had a tremendous influence over the Malabar district between 1920 and 1940. Formed under diverse regional/ national political factions, such as the Congress and Non-Brahmin groups, the key contention was: who represented the depressed classes of India. The Malabar district was a hotbed of religious orthodoxy, in which caste had gained foothold, and this had various repercussions on human life in the region (Baden-Powell 1892). The region's distinct social system, fuelled by caste ideology, reduced many castes and communities to a lower social position. Similarly depressed classes were subjugated to the position of agrestic slaves. Colonial regimes were sympathetic to local power structures rather than to the plight of the scores of labourers and slaves in their dominion (Rao 2009).

Until the middle of the 19th century, depressed classes comprised the category of agrestic slaves, forced to work on lands owned by their masters belonging to upper castes (Hjejle 1967, Mohan 2006). The depressed classes movement in Travancore and Kochi on the other hand, is well-documented (Basu 2016, Chentharassery 1970, 1979, Raamadaas 2009). But then, there is also not too much of historical evidence, as to the leadership of the depressed classes that were first organized in Malabar. As early as1900, there were many prominent communities in British India that initiated a collective effort towards social progress by forming sabhas, sanghams or caste associations (Arnold et al. 1976, Jeffrey 1974, Rudolph 2010, Rudolph and Rudolph 1960). These efforts first proliferated in Madras and thereafter arrived in the Malabar, but there was hardly any such exclusive *sabha* of any of the Dalit castes in Malabar.[2] Shanmugam Mudaliar, Depressed Classes Mission leader, worked among depressed classes in Palakkad as early as 1918 in South Malabar. He attempted to put an end to the practice of women wearing a brass bracelet as a caste marker. Before 1918, they could not have thought of not wearing metal bracelets since not wearing metal bracelets was considered unacceptable. Cheruma women stopped wearing metal bracelets as a result of the Mudaliar-led social movement. In 1919, the *Panchama*s assembled at Kalpadakkal in Kannadi village for a meeting.

The conference passed resolutions and sent memorandums to the government, demanding that the *Panchama*s and other lower castes be provided access to public roads, wells, and schools and the first South Malabar Harijan Conference was also hosted in Kannadi in 1936. Dakshayani Velayudhan, the first Dalit woman graduate, presided over the prestigious conference, that was also attended by Kochi Member of Legislative Council, K.P. Vallon, and the Malabar District Board member E. Kannan (Chami 1936). The Depressed Classes leadership of south Malabar accessed multiple political resources for the cause of their community. For example, Chathan Master, a social reformer and educator, initially supported Congress. Similarly to his predecessor Shanmugam Mudaliar, he fought in the 1930s to end the practise of

[1]In some scholarly works, the category of Depressed Classes have included Panchamas, criminal tribes, and aboriginal and hill tribes (see Viswanath [2014b]). While giving evidence before the Simon Commission, Ambedkar suggests that both ‘hill tribes’ and ‘criminal tribes’ fall under the category of the 'Depressed Class’ (See Ambedkar [1990]).

[2] In 1907, Ayyankali initiated the formation of the ‘Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam’ in Travancore. In 1913, the Kochi Pulaya Maha Sabha was also formed. There is no record of a similar organisation being formed in Malabar during the colonial period.

women wearing brass bangles as caste markers, and to defend Dalit women's right to wearing upper-body clothes (the breast-cloth controversy). In the early 19th century South Travancore, Nadar women launched the Channar revolt, also known as the Maru Marakkal Samaram, to defend their right to wear upper-cloth (Hardgrave Jr. 1968). Due to his efforts, Dalit women began wearing jackets in defiance to upper-caste mandates, despite the hostility faced from them. In Thenkurissi village of south Malabar, where the Dalits were the least educated, Chathan also founded a Panchama school (Manorama 2019). Following Chathan's invitation, M.K. Gandhi visited this school and addressed a huge crowd comprising Depressed Classes in 1934.[3] Gandhi travelled all the way from Palakkad to the venue with Ambad Kombi, a devoted Congress worker and freedom fighter.[4] Chathan eventually joined the Congress Socialist Party and maintained close ties with Jayaprakash Narayan.

The Congress had the support of prominent Dalit farmers from the Malabar area, like Karutha Eacharan of Kothodu village, Palani of Mannam village, and Kandan Kunnukadu. Although less in number, they sought to improve the social standing of their community by resisting upper-caste domination and violence. Karutha Eacharan also built an elementary school in Kothodu, served as Bench Magistrate, and was President of the Palghat Depressed Class League.[5] In fact, the founding of schools, it was said, "altered the social fabric and power relations in villages" (Kumar 2019). Later, in 1956, Karutha Eacharan was elected to the first Kerala Legislative Assembly from Chittur (Reserved). Vella Eacharan, who was the ex-Minister for Harijan Welfare and Community Development and the former Member of Parliament, became the President of the Depressed Class League in Malabar, and a member of the All India Working Committee.[6] Thus, the Depressed Classes collectively transformed their caste habitus and marked their presence in the social space by becoming anti-caste leaders, activists, and educators.

At first, the Depressed Classes movement was a charitable and social service endeavour led by upper-caste elites, with the aim of elevating 'Untouchables'. There was no united political organisation for the depressed classes that could demand autonomy, rights, justice, and political recognition. The Depressed Classes were organised into a variety of associations, some of which even appeared to be rivals. Narayan Chandravarkar, the president of the Depressed Classes Mission Society and an ex-president of Congress who visited Calicut in January 1915, and Vitthal Ramji Shinde of the Depressed Class Mission Society who visited Malabar on many occasions, wielded substantial influence over the Depressed Classes (Shinde, 1919), as the latter were divided into separate interest groups, rather than being unified under one political umbrella. The All-India Depressed Class Association was the first such united body that was founded in Nagpur in 1926 with M.C. Rajah as its first president. Following this, the All-India Depressed Classes Congress was formed in August 1930 at Nagpur, with Ambedkar as President and E. Kannan (from Calicut) as its General

[3] The reception venue was a huge structure made of bamboo, wood, and palm leaves set up in the school compound. Because of 'Untouchability' and debasement, all the work for this was done at night. (Vella, interview: 17.11. 2017, Lakshmi and Surendran, interview: 01.06.2017)
[4] Vella, interview: 31.10.2017, Nagan, interview: 8.11.2017.
[5] Velayudhan, interview: 17.06.2017
[6] Mani, interview: 17.01:2018

Secretary. Ambedkar had left the earlier All-India Depressed Class Association initiated in 1926 after realising that the 'Untouchables' could only end their oppression if they all stood together and united. So, he set out to create a pan-Indian movement enabled by the formation of the All-India Depressed Class Congress that, Ambedkar wished, would successfully run as the central association of all Depressed Classes in India. The conference passed many resolutions to the effect of demanding immediate dominion status, rejecting the Simon commission report, and calling for universal suffrage with protectionary provisions made for 'Untouchables', that would secure their inclusion in the various legislative councils, and ensure reservation for them in public services (Omvedt 2017).

Since 1910, the political sphere of the provinces was dominated by organisations that claimed to serve the interests of caste-based communities, and soon, appeals for caste solidarity became deeply ingrained within the modern political discourse (Washbrook 1975). The non-Brahmin leaders, in their attempt to establish greater political alliances, strongly supported the Adi Dravida claim to social equality just before the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. Prominent non-Brahmin leaders also conducted many conferences to get the Adi Dravida groups close to their own doctrine. The non-brahmin movement opposed Brahmin monopoly and caste oppression. A dyarchy system of governance was introduced after the Montagu–Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. The size of provincial legislative assemblies therefore also increased. The Madras government designated some members of the Depressed Classes to the newly formed Legislative Council (Washbrook 1976). The Act of 1919 dramatically enhanced representation and leaders like M.C. Rajah, R. Veerian, and Rettamalai Srinivasan vehemently voiced numerous issues that concerned the Depressed Classes at the Council. Lower-caste groups such as the Ezhavas also always sought cooperation from the representatives of this Council, before raising demands and protesting their grievances (Viswanath 2014a). The dyarchy constitution encouraged the rise of associations claiming to represent specific communities (Jeffrey 1974).

Depressed class representatives nominated to the Madras Provincial Legislative Assembly after 1919 constantly exerted pressure on the government to establish their right to access public places (Viswanath 2014a). The government granted all 'Untouchables' the freedom to walk in the village streets and to use all public wells, canals, and buildings in the Madras Presidency in August 1924, following a bill that was introduced in this regard by Rettamalai Sreenivasan (Kumar 2021). The Ezhava community in Palakkad, which had spent years fighting for the right to walk in the streets—with these public spaces being dominated by upper-caste Hindus, also decided to exercise their rights as established by the new law. During the car festival, they ventured into the Kalpathy Brahmin Street, and this immediately incited the rage of Brahmins. There was a subsequent government ban on lower-caste entry to these areas.

A few Ezhavas in protest became Christians, Arya Samajists, Muslims, Buddhists, and Brahmo Samajists (Chami 1936, Vijayan 2016). Several presidency districts reported Depressed Classes uprisings, protesting against their social disabilities in this period (Armitage 1921), with such incidents demonstrating the extent of upper-caste Hindu animosity against *avarna*s across the country. The lower-castes continued their fight

for civil rights, but it is worth mentioning here that none of these struggles received any substantial support from Gandhi or the Congress—the main political force at the time. Between 1924 and 1930, Gandhi and the Congress did not take any significant steps toward the abolition of 'Untouchability', and neither did they appear to have undertaken any ventures that were beneficial to untouchables. As Ambedkar stated, the 'Untouchables' had initiated Satyagraha (nonviolent protest or peaceful resistance) that would establish their right to draw water from public wells, and enter public temples. The Satyagraha at Chowdar Tank in Mahad and at the Kala Ram temple in Nashik for example were accompanied by many other similar struggles (Ambedkar 1991).

There is a popular theory that the Depressed Classes movement in Malabar was dormant and lacked political leadership. In contrast, Erikkittaparambath Kannan (E. Kannan) who worked closely with Ambedkar, was also a member of the Madras Legislative Council, belonging himself to the untouchable Kanaka community. He was elected to the Malabar District Board from the town of Chevayur in 1932 and 1940.[7] Since Ambedkar had little clout among the Depressed Classes of the Madras presidency, it was likely that he learned about the problems of the 'Untouchables' in Malabar from the letters sent to him by E. Kannan (Meloth 2018). C.C. Kunjan preserved Ambedkar's letters sent to E. Kannan and published them in 1983 in a book titled *A Bunch of Letters by Dr. Ambedkar* (cf. Kunjan 1983). This collection of forty-three letters written between 1930 and 1950, reveal the compassion and intellect of the two prominent leaders, demonstrating their shifting political views during a time of political turmoil.

Kannan, in fact, served as an organic link between Ambedkar and Malabar. Just a few weeks before the Depressed Class Congress meeting at Nagpur, Ambedkar urged Kannan to contact all the leading men, "all those who are worth having in the Madras Presidency, and to ensure their effective cooperation" (ibid: 28).[8] Kannan suggested printing the conference papers in both English and in the vernacular and Ambedkar, for his part, enthusiastically accepted Kannan's proposal to launch an English periodical. Given the diversity of organisations, Ambedkar assumed that widespread dissemination of knowledge about the Congress's political position could serve as a corrective measure for the many 'misguided' members of the Depressed Classes (ibid 1983).[9] Ambedkar on many occasions recognized and praised Kannan's work, lauding his determination to keep the 'flag flying.' This is demonstrated by Ambedkar writing to Kannan from London, from where he was attending the Second Round Table Conference, acknowledging Kannan's contributions by saying: "you are a great worker, and I am sorry that the Depressed Classes have not given you enough field to display your activity" (ibid: 58).[10] During the debates of the Constitutional Assembly, H.J. Khandekar also mentions E. Kannan, along with B.R. Ambedkar, R. Srinivasan, Munisami Pillay, and M.C. Rajah, praising them for their work on abolishing 'Untouchability' and caste-oppression in India (Official Report 2014).

[7] Fort St. George Gazette Online Archive, 06.02.1940, Issue Number: 5, Part: I A: 102)
[8] Ambedkar to Kannan, 1st August 1930.
[9] Ambedkar to Kannan, 1st September 1930.
[10]Ambedkar to Kannan, 11th November 1931.

Conversations about Political Safeguards

Ambedkar's efforts to secure special protection for 'Untouchables' has a long history. When Ambedkar was invited to testify before the Southborough Committee in 1919 (Berg 2020), he was invited for being the only 'Untouchable'-caste person, who had earned a graduate degree in the whole Bombay presidency (Jaffrelot 2006). He argued for universal franchise, Dalit access to public spaces, and demanded that 'Untouchables' be regarded as a separate category within the future constitutional framework (Verma 1999). Ambedkar primarily claimed that because 'Untouchables' were a disadvantaged group, in terms of their education status and access to economic opportunities, their suffrage should be arranged in a specific way, and kept distinct from the other castes of Hindus (Kumar 1985).

Nevertheless, the bulk of letters, as this section explores, were written in the context of his involvement in the Round Table Conference that greatly influenced the trajectory of the Depressed Classes movement in India. An important and emergent political question at the time was: which Indian leader had the maximum followers from the Depressed Classes. These letters highlight Ambedkar's selection as the leader of the Depressed Classes at the Round Table and also highlight his attempts at establishing a separate electorate for all 'Untouchables'. The significance of the Round Table Conference lay in the British recognition of the right of Indians to be heard on matters relating to the Constitutional framework of India. The Depressed Classes were allowed to be represented separately by their delegates for the first time (Ambedkar 1946) and the Governor of Bombay expressly invited Ambedkar to the first Round Table Conference (1930) for having "the largest following of the depressed classes in India" (Kunjan 1983: 35).[11]

Rettamalai Srinivasan was the other Depressed Classes leader to be invited to the Conference, and the other Depressed Classes leaders of Madras: Srinivasan, M. C. Raja and R. Veerian worked diligently both inside and outside the Legislative Council to secure the civic rights of the lower-castes and 'Untouchables'. Srinivasan has proposed a bill that would give the Depressed Classes access to public spaces and he has pushed for a revision of the Indian Civil Service recruitment eligibility criteria (Kumar 2021, Rajangam and Rajasekaran 2020). Munuswamy Pillai, a Depressed Classes member in the Madras Legislative Council in 1926 was already associated with Ambedkar. Because there was no pan-Indian front for 'Untouchables', Ambedkar attempted to forge this unity anew, instructing Kannan and Pillay to meet with Srinivasan, and emphasizing upon him the significance of this unity, as outlined at the Nagpur Congress. Ambedkar's participation in the Round Table Conference was not well received by the Indian National Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha. Ambedkar was concerned that these organisations could try and divide the 'Untouchables', and create political confusion about caste in India. So, he cautioned Kannan: "important leaders of the Depressed Classes stand by Nagpur resolutions and give me full support in any stand I take at the Conference" (Kunjan 1983: 39).[12] Seeking support, Ambedkar briefed Srinivasan two or three times about the 'stand the representatives of the

[11] Ambedkar to Kannan, 8th September 1930: the 'Depressed Classes Congress' meeting in Nagpur appears to have elevated Ambedkar to the position of a mass leader of the 'Untouchables'.
[12] Ambedkar to Kannan, 17th August 1930.

Depressed Classes should take', hoping to 'bring Srinivasan down to his point of view. The two teamed up on their concern about the cause of 'Untouchables' even though their age gap kept them from becoming friends.

Ambedkar met with the Secretary of State Lansbury, Graham Pole, the Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, and with Philip Chetwood, who was the Commander-in-Chief of India, on issue surrounding the recruitment of Depressed Classes in the army. Military services provided 'Untouchables' with tremendous social mobility. The demand for the inclusion of 'Untouchables' in the army has a long history, but as a result of internal army reorganisations, their service as sepoys had decreased, and was subsequently discontinued (Cohen 1969, Constable 2001, Kumbhojkar 2012, Omissi 1991).

Ambedkar wrote a small presentation entitled *The Untouchables and the Pax Britannica*, referring to the case of untouchables in the army (Ambedkar 2011). The Depressed Classes were outraged by their lack of representation at the Conference and sensing their rage, Kannan wrote to Ambedkar, advising him to push for greater representation of members from the Depressed Classes in London. Ambedkar realised that "this error was now irreversible, particularly because it was too late to raise such an issue" (Kunjan 1983: 44) and the officials were of the opinion that "there were no qualified persons to represent the Depressed Classes" (ibid.). For Ambedkar, the reason for the lack of a wider representation lay in the fact that "the Depressed Classes movement is yet a weak movement that has recently emerged and is has attracted the attention it deserves" (ibid: 43). He hoped that the organisation would gain ample prominence as it continued to expand. Following the Montagu Chelmsford reforms, the people of Malabar were given the right to elect two representatives to the Legislative Council.

In 1930, Kannan ran in the elections for a seat in the Madras Legislative Council but was not nominated; instead, a Brahmin was chosen. Kannan shared his indignation with Ambedkar about nomination systems and schemes that limited the opportunities of Depressed Classes groups from being elected. Depressed Classes members were barred from sending members of their castes to the Council and they therefore believed that the system would soon, only serve the needs of Malabar's dominant Hindu castes. If the government continued in this direction, then most Hindus too, would be denied representation. The lower-castes of south Malabar approached the government with memorandums and petitions highlighting the problem of their under-representation and the shortcomings of the nomination system (Chami 1936). The Members of the Parliament on the other hand promised to help Ambedkar, when he explained to them the "position of the untouchables in the future constitution of India" (Kunjan 1983:47). In addition to his memorial address about the entry of the Depressed Classes into the military, delivered at the Conference on the Protection of the Depressed Classes, Ambedkar also offered to publicly distribute copies of his memorial address. By then, he also urged Kannan to call meetings across India and to storm the Prime Minister with telegrams containing "irreducible, must be granted requests" (ibid: 50).[13] As Ambedkar was scheduled to arrive in Bombay on 27th

[13] Ambedkar to Kannan, 6th January 1931.

February 1931, he proposed to convene a session of the Depressed Classes Congress Committee members to discuss a possible action plan that would diplomatically resolve the 'Untouchable' issue, for which he was prepared to travel to the United States and to the Secretariat of the League of Nations. Although the Congress chose not to participate in the first Round Table discussion, Ambedkar was interested in the Congress' reaction to the Nagpur meeting of the Depressed Classes Congress. Kannan sent a letter to the Secretary of Congress, enclosing the memorandum and soliciting their feedback. Jawaharlal Nehru, who was supposed to stop-over at Calicut on his way back from Ceylon responded to the question of the status of 'Untouchables' by saying: "I know this, however, that I want every kind of social exploitation, humiliation and tyranny to be put down and stamped out, and I propose to fight for it until I succeed", and he reiterated "the struggle against untouchability has always been at the forefront of the congress program" (ibid: 89-90).[14]

Again, Ambedkar was invited to the Federal Structure Committee, of the second session of the Indian Round Table Conference (1931). By this time, Ambedkar had won the support of the Depressed Classes in several provinces. Before departing from Bombay, Ambedkar wrote to Kannan that he had received telegrams from members of the Depressed Classes from all over India "displaying their trust in him and condemning the view of Gandhi and the Congress."[15] Srinivasan and Ambedkar drew up another supporting memorandum, defining the requirements for the special political representation of the 'Untouchables' (Ambedkar 1982). Surprisingly, M.C. Rajah, the president of the All-India Depressed Classes Association also wrote to Kannan during the preparations for the Round Table negotiations. Rajah, a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, was present at the ongoing Council session of Shimla. Rajah supported separate electorates, while Ambedkar wanted a joint electorate for all 'Untouchables' with adult suffrage and seat reservation. Rajah seemed to have praised Ambedkar's work at the Round Table Conference and managing to meet the Viceroy and Reforms Commissioner, he discussed the necessity of sending at least one person from the Depressed Classes to the Round Table Conference, and tabled a motion to that effect in the Assembly (Kunjan 1983).[16] Instead of Srinivasan, Rajah thought that Munuswamy Pillay would represent the Depressed Classes and agreed with Kannan's proposition that a joint representation should be signed by the leading members of the 'Untouchable' community from all districts. Rajah sent two telegrams to the Manchester Guardian and the Times of London, refuting Gandhi's claim that the Congress was the leader of the Depressed Classes, and mailed separate memoranda to that effect, at the Round Table Conference. He did so with the hope that it would help Ambedkar in London. Ambedkar was amused by Raja's gesture, writing: "it is something when it comes from a man who is jealous of maintaining his leadership" (Ibid: 59).[17] Ambedkar sent Kannan a copy of the Manchester Guardian report containing Raja's statement. In statements to the Manchester Guardian and the Times of London, Rajah refuted Gandhi's claim that the Congress is the champion of the Depressed Classes. Contrarily, Rajah wanted Ambedkar "not to demand joint electorate, but instead to stand for a separate electorate even if the depressed

[14] Jawaharlal Nehru to Kannan, 2nd July 1931.
[15] Ambedkar to Kannan, 11th November 1931.
[16] M.C. Rajah to Kannan, 26th September 1931.
[17] Ambedkar to Kannan, 11th November 1931.

classes are not given an adult franchise" (ibid: 60-61).[18] When Ambedkar was designated to the Indian Franchise Committee (1932), tasked with gathering evidence from the Depressed Classes and conveying it to the Committee, Ambedkar sought Kannan's assistance to tour the region with the Committee, asking him to work as "liaison officer between him and the leaders of the depressed Classes in each province" (ibid: 62).[19] However, while Kannan and Munuswamy Pillay proposed to submit their memorandum on behalf of the Depressed Classes Congress to the Franchise Committee, Ambedkar insisted that the memorandum "be read before it was submitted" (ibid: 63). And for reference, Ambedkar also sent Kannan a copy of the responses prepared on behalf of the Bombay Association.

Kannan decided to hold the second session of the Depressed Class Congress in Kamptee (near Nagpur). Regrettably, since the previous meeting was also held in the Central Provinces, Ambedkar was opposed to having the next session in Kamptee and due to this scheduling conflict, Kannan also decided to stay away. Interestingly, Kannan had not only taken steps to organize the session earlier on, but had also kept insisting that it be held. Ambedkar was saddened that Kannan would be unable to attend the session and reprimanded Kannan gently by saying: "if you want to maintain the public life of the community you all must take your responsibilities more seriously than you appear to do" (ibid: 65).[20] Annoyed by the attitude of his other colleagues, Ambedkar further reminded them: "if the support is so half-hearted, I am afraid I will sit at home and attend to my own affairs. Do not think it is only a threat. I mean it" (ibid: 65).[21] Finally, Kannan had no choice but to make a compromise and attend the conference, presided over by Munusamy Pillai on 8th May 1932 in Kamptee.[22] In the last week of May 1932, Ambedkar decided to leave for London as he had heard about the communal settlements that the Prime Minister was about to make. The proposal had separate electorates for Madras, Bombay, and the Central Provinces, and joint electorates for the rest of the country. Ambedkar figured "this would be disastrous not only to the Depressed Classes of those Provinces but to the unity of the Depressed Classes movement as a whole" (Kunjan 1983: 66).[23] It was at this juncture that Ambedkar started working on the task of establishing a collective Federation. Just a day before embarking for London, Ambedkar requested that Kannan send a telegram on his behalf to the 'All-India Depressed Classes Federation' committee, stating that "the Depressed Classes seek separate electorates and seats in accordance with the Minorities Pact" (ibid: 67).[24]

For scholars Kothari and Maru (1965), the Federation represented a step beyond the caste-associations, in the Indian development towards a political community. Thus, the Federation's inception was the first step in transforming 'Untouchables' into a political community. In addition, Ambedkar considered political action to encapsulate an

[18] M C Rajah to Kannan, 26th September 1931.
[19] Ambedkar to Kannan, 13th January 1932.
[20] Ambedkar to Kannan, 21st April 1932.
[21] Ambedkar to Kannan, 21st April 1932
[22] Babu Mangu Ram and N. Sivaraj also attended this session.
[23] Ambedkar to Kannan, 25th May 1932.
[24] Ambedkar to Kannan, 25th May 1932. However, the political front the Scheduled Castes Federation took shape only in 1942 at the Nagpur conference.

important instrument that the 'Untouchables' could use, that would take him towards emancipation" (Jaffrelot 2006). While the various religious minorities had separate political representation in the Central and Provincial Assemblies of British India since 1909 (Thorat 2019), the 'Untouchables' were never considered a 'minority'. The assertion that the Depressed Classes were a caste-based minority was defended by Ambedkar, since it was true that religious belonging was used as the primary demographical criterion for classifying a community as a minority, especially for the purposes of enabling political reservation. Nonetheless, Ambedkar insisted that it was the prevalence of discrimination, in addition to the size of the population, that determined whether a group was a minority or not. In his essay *States and Minorities* Ambedkar perfectly illustrates why 'Untouchables' should be classified as minorities, just like Muslims and Christians (Ambedkar 1979).

Gandhi, on the other hand, believed that the bond between Hindu castes and 'Untouchables' was so essential that its breakdown into a separate category would result in the collapse of Hindu society. For Gandhi, it was the moral duty of sensitive Hindus to correct the flaws of Hindu caste society. Contrastingly, Ambedkar highlighted some serious concerns about caste in his polemic *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), arguing that caste had eroded the very definition of Hindu ethics and morality. Gandhi and Ambedkar's opposing views on the prospect of attempting to reform Hindu society from within sparked a big political conflict. Ambedkar prepared a statement and presented it to the Prime Minister, and sent a copy of this declaration to be made available among the provincial branches of the Federation. When he came to know that the Hindu Mahasabha leader Moonje and M.C. Rajah were going to England to press for a joint electorate, he commented: "there can be no respectable hearing here" (Kunjan 1983: 69).[25] In fact, Dhananjay Keer, Ambedkar's biographer, discusses the decade's nuanced politics by saying (Keer 1971: 195):

> Dr. Moonje made a pact with M. C. Rajah on the basis of reserved seats and joint electorates. Rajah submitted to the British Premier his memorandum telegraphically giving details of his pact with Dr. Moonje. This pact put Ambedkar in an awkward position. It may be recalled that it was Rajah who had cabled to Ambedkar and supported his demand for separate electorates, saying that Gandhi evidently did not know their woes, and therefore he had tried to force joint electorates down the unwilling throats of the Depressed Classes. Originally, the Rajah Party stood for joint electorates with reserved seats. But he changed sides.... he had dropped the idea of joint electorates and insisted on separate electorates. And now he reverted to the original demand. Ambedkar too changed sides.... Ambedkar switched over to separate electorates.

Irrespective of these uncertainties, Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald issued the Communal Award on 16th August 1932, to protect the interests of specific social groups by establishing separate electorates. While the Depressed Classes were given two votes—one in the separate constituency and one in the common constituency, the 'Untouchables were recognised as a minority group outside of Hinduism. Gandhi

[25] Ambedkar to Kannan, 14th June 1932.

opposed Harijans being given separate reservation or preferential representation within the frame of the Depressed Classes, whether through joint or separate electorates, arguing at the Round Table Conference that they were Hindus, who should not be divided from Hindus.

Thus, immediately after the announcement of the Communal Award, Gandhi informed the Prime Minister that he would begin a 'fast unto death' beginning on 20th September 1932, unless the decision of making a special electorate for ‘Untouchables’ was revoked. Upon his return from London in August, Ambedkar suggested holding a meeting of the Federation's working committee and sent Kannan a copy of the statement issued to the press on the Communal Award in order to avoid any conflict of opinion. Ambedkar had assumed that the proposal, he and R. Srinivasan had made would be accepted with some variations during negotiations. Instead, the Communal Award downsized representations in the legislative bodies to a very negligible numbers. The demand for the representation of the Depressed Classes of Punjab had also been rejected. However, in contrast, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians were considered a special group and this according to Ambedkar was already a compromise. He commented: “The Communal Award satisfied those who wanted separate electorates and those who wished joint electorates” (Ambedkar 1991a: 314). Ambedkar sent Kannan a copy of the ‘The Statement- Depressed Classes and the Communal Award’, so he could form his opinion. In view of this injustice inflicted by the Government, the All-India Depressed Classes Federation registered their opposition to the award (Kunjan 1983: 72).[26] Ambedkar felt that The Round Table Conference had failed to deliver justice, and as he wrote to Kannan: “do not seek for any conference. In fact I am saying that there is no necessity for a conference. The conference will be a trap. We must insist on Gandhi disclosing his proposals first” (ibid: 73).[27]

Ambedkar proposed convening a meeting in Allahabad on September 24, 1932, in order to reach a final decision on the stance to be taken, as Gandhi had proposed a fast on September 24.Though Kannan was not keeping in good health, Ambedkar was trying to convince him of the vulnerable position they were in when saying: “in spite of all difficulties and anxieties, we must be firm as the fast is coming as the greatest challenge not only to our rising into a political force in the country but also to our very political existence” (Kunjan 1983: 74).[28] Ambedkar also sent a telegram to Kannan, requesting him to accept the proposed meeting date, but just two days later, he told Kannan that the Allahabad meeting had been cancelled, and instructed him to proceed to Bombay instead (ibid: 75).[29] India's most complex political crisis emerged following Gandhi's fast, and leaders from various backgrounds set out to resolve it. M.M. Malviya called an emergency conference of the Depressed Classes and other Hindu groups on 19th September seeking a “formula for the amicable settlement of Dr. Ambedkar's revolt against Hinduism” (Baader 1937: 417). Ambedkar yielded to pressure from political leaders at this time and agreed to a compromise, which resulted in the Poona Pact, signed on 24th September 1932. Gandhi applauded the move, which signalled

[26] Ambedkar to Kannan, 23rd August 1932.
[27] Ambedkar to Kannan, 17th September 1932.
[28] Ambedkar to Kannan, 18th September 1932.
[29] Telegrams sent by Ambedkar to Kannan, 19th September 1932, and 21st September 1932.

the end of his fast. Separate electorates were replaced by reservation within joint electorates under the Poona Pact, and by reserving seats for the Depressed Classes in both the central and provincial legislatures, the Poona Pact recognised 'Untouchables' as a political category in British India (Jaffrelot 2003, Verma 2019).

Despite upper-caste propaganda, Kannan was unanimously nominated for the Malabar District Board in November 1932, and this was despite of his facing a defeat in the Taluk Board (district subdivision-administrating body). In his capacity as the Joint Secretary of the All-India Depressed Classes Federation, he wrote to Gandhi about the hardships 'Untouchables' faced in contesting elections. Gandhi replied from Yerwada Central Prison by saying "I cannot solve individual suffering cases" (Kunjan 1983: 78) and suggested that Kannan meet with other local leaders to learn the reasons underlying this better. Gandhi forwarded Kannan's letter to the Malabar Congress leader Madhavan Nair, anticipating a coordinated response. Gandhi did not see any role of caste-discrimination in these hardships and added: "individual instances of suffering are bound to occur amid all the attempts" and claimed that "the Yerwada Pact was much better than the Prime minister's scheme in every aspect" (ibid), referring here to the Poona Pact of 1932. The response made by Madhavan Nair to Gandhi's suggestion is unknown, but Kannan was defeated by upper-caste leadership in the elections. Ambedkar too, was reluctant to claim the unanimous backing of all the oppressed classes, notwithstanding his rise to national prominence. Just using his debate over the Joint Parliamentary Committee (1935) report as an example, he really did not wish to make a declaration about any crucial issue involving the Depressed Classes. Instead, he called for a statement to be made on behalf of the Federation. Ambedkar felt unhappy because the proposed changes made by the Upper House of the Constitutional Committee significantly undermined any chance of the Depressed Classes ever having any political representation. M.C. Rajah in turn contradicted Ambedkar's vision by saying: "there is nothing for the Depressed Classes to worry about, in the report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee" (Kunjan 1983: 83).[30] Since Rajah's statement might have been misleading and given a false impression, Ambedkar prompted Kannan to clarify this. Though the Round Table Conference constituted a turning point for debates on 'Untouchability' and the political representation of 'Untouchables' in India, Kannan got recognition for working with Ambedkar. It is unknown if this debate sparked any further political discussions among the 'Untouchable' communities of Malabar.

Reflections on Depressed Classes and Swaraj

After the tragic events in Punjab, specifically the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre on April 13, 1919, Gandhi lost faith in the righteousness of British rule.. He called British rule "satanic" and declared the only way to end it was "Swaraj" (independence). Swaraj could be attained in a year, he imagined (Gandhi 2000: 278-281). For Gandhi, Swaraj was not just a question of who held the government reins; he saw Swaraj, or self-rule as a quality or state of life which could only exist when and where Indians would follow their traditional civilization, uncorrupted by modern innovations (Brown 1974: 14). Antithetical to Gandhian ideas, lower-castes conceptualised Swaraj as conditionally

[30] Ambedkar to Kannan, 6th January 1935.

real—real only if Depressed Classes elected their own representatives, and were able to send them to the legislative assemblies, and gradually transfer governmental power to natives. Swarajism was perceived as synonymous with Brahminism, and Brahmin politicians were accused of wearing the mask of Swarajism to conceal their inner selfish motivations, and maintain their rights, privileges, and monopolies (Mitra 1925).[31] Adi Hindu leaders believed that winning Swaraj for India would strengthen their enslavement (Rawat 2011). On the other hand, Gandhi felt that the Congress' call for *Poorna* Swaraj or full independence was the only reasonable answer to the Indian problem (Kumar 1985). Ambedkar alleged that Gandhi's move urged the 'Untouchables' not to join hands with the British against Swaraj, but to make common cause with Hindus and help them win Swaraj. Ambedkar writes to this effect (Ambedkar 1946: 198):

> On this analysis, Swaraj would make Hindus more powerful and Untouchables more helpless and it is quite possible that having regard to the economic advantages which it gives to the Hindus, Swaraj, instead of putting an end to Untouchability, may extend its life. That Untouchability is vanishing is therefore only wishful thinking and a calculated untruth.

Ambedkar thought that if Swaraj was to become a reality, Hindus would automatically become strengthened, and this would only strengthen 'Untouchability'. However, on the other hand, he did not take an oppositional stance to the Indian desire for autonomy either. While others criticized the fact that 'Untouchables' were not in political tandem with the nationalist demand, Ambedkar wrote to E. Kannan while attending Round Table Conference in London (Kunjan 1983: 49):[32]

> …the full solution to the problems of Scheduled Castes could be found only in independent India and it will be suicidal to the Depressed Classes to run away from Swaraj. It is their only Salvation, and I am happy to know that you and many of our people are in agreement with me.

He feared however that Swaraj could not be a blessing unless the Depressed Classes were given the political safeguards they deemed necessary. Ambedkar wanted adequate safeguards for all 'Untouchables' in independent India and the Congress project for Swaraj only angered the lower-castes in Malabar, resulting in them publicly campaigning against the Congress (Chami 1936). In 1942, like several other Harijan activists, Kannan joined the Congress.[33] Munusami Pillai had already merged with the Indian National Congress and was serving as the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in Madras. Ambedkar sought categorical answers from them asking: "When are you, the people who joined the Congress, going to open your eyes" (Kunjan 1983: 86).[34] Ambedkar's criticism was valid. Firstly, the Congress, which had been in power for about two years and seven months by then, had not achieved much in terms of the betterment of the Depressed Classes. In his book, *What Congress and Gandhi*

[31] In his speech to the Madras Non-Brahmin Confederation Conference, Bhaskarrao Vithojirao Jadhav, the Education minister of Bombay equated Swarajism with Brahminism.
[32] Ambedkar to Kannan, 6th January 1931.
[33] Depressed Classes leaders like Jagjivan Ram also joined with the Congress in 1930.
[34] Ambedkar to Kannan, 23rd December 1942.

Have Done to Untouchables (1991)*,* Ambedkar took a critical look at Congress attitudes toward the Depressed Classes. Secondly, Gandhi and the Congress considered the Muslim League to be a party that granted protection to Muslims, and yet, at the same time, the Congress never cared to accommodate the demands of the Depressed Classes. Gandhi rejected the recognition of Depressed Classes as a distinct political group eligible for specific political rights. Ambedkar felt disappointed with political leaders like Kannan who "still have confidence in Gandhi that he would do justice to the Depressed Class" (ibid: 87). He asks yet again: "it is up to you now to consider whether you believe that the depressed classes have the same political rights as the Muslims are demanding" (ibid). The political convictions of leaders like Kannan were reshaped by the strains of intra-politics within the Depressed Classes and the increasing complexity of regional and national politics. Their conversation sheds light on these shifting political patterns. Once Kannan even went so far as to say that the Harijan movement had completely dissolved. Ambedkar replied: "it was a political movement. It could never stand on its own, and I never expected it to do so" (Kunjan 1983: 80).[35] At this time, Ambedkar's political imagination also lost some of its initial steam due to increasing regional and national politics. At the time when Gandhi was being widely recognised, only two letters seem to have been written to Ambedkar from the Malabar, requesting his intervention in anti-caste activities. In the first instance, Kannan asked Ambedkar to accept the presidency of an organization called the Jathinasini Sabha, which Ananda Theerthan had established in 1933.[36] Ambedkar was unable to accept this position because he was in London at the time, but he indicated that he would consider the invitation after returning to India. Perhaps this already suggests that leaders of the Depressed Classes were turning towards anti-caste interventions that were spearheaded by upper-caste reformers. The second instance was that of Narayan Swami of the All Travancore Pulayar Cheramar Aykia Maha Sangham, who wrote to Ambedkar from Kerala, asking for guidance on the condition of the Depressed Classes (Ambedkar 1991b: 320).[37] There is ambiguity about the role played by Ambedkar in the South, and about whether he was resilient enough as a leader for the southern contexts.

Gandhi, Hindu Social Reform, and the Depressed Classes

Regionally, there are many facets to the influx of people into the Congress. Gandhi, as Ambedkar pointed out as well, simultaneously took up two movements in 1933. The first was the Temple-entry Movement, and the second was the formation of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. 'Untouchables' were given the name 'Harijan' by Gandhi, a word which meant the 'children of God' (Guha 2017). Gandhi urged 'Untouchables' to practise cleanliness, and exhorted upper-castes to change their attitudes toward the lower-castes. At the same time, Gandhi exhorted the Nayadis (a Dalit caste) and the Adi-Dravidas of Malabar to join the purification movement (Gandhi 1958a: 317). Aside from urging them to pursue education, he also demanded that they give up their drinking habits, adhere to hygienic practises, and maintain external and internal cleanliness. In this way, he attempted to make clear that untouchability had nothing to do with Hindu

[35] Ambedkar to Kannan, 23rd November 1933.
[36] Swami Anantha Theertha was an upper-caste reformer known for his crusade against casteism among Harijans. Congress leader K. Kelappan became the first president of the Jathinasini Sabha.
[37] Narayan Swami to Ambedkar, 24th November 1938.

religion, and was just a question of hygiene and purity of heart (Gandhi 1947b: 409). In Madras, Gandhi had a good reputation. For instance, during his famous fast in 1932, hundreds of meetings were held in support of him, and upper-caste politicians took up the problems of the Depressed Classes with attempts being made to enable their entry into Hindu temples. Gandhi received unparalleled attention, at the time when he toured for the Harijan Fund, a year later in the Madras province (Baker 1976, Gopalakrishnan 2012). The Civil Disobedience campaign and these two movements from 1933 bolstered Gandhi and helped him in garnering support among Malabar's lower-castes, who had previously been opposed to the Congress. The Congress, which had suffered since the Malabar Rebellion, was revived through the Civil Disobedience Struggle of 1930. Though the idea of Swaraj did not have an action plan to combat 'Untouchability', steps were taken to integrate the fight against caste discrimination with the nationalist movement that included the demand for temple-entry through the Guruvayur Temple Entry Satyagraha (Gopalankutty 1989). Regarding Malabar, Gandhi maintained: "the propaganda for temple-entry has to go on side by side" with other Congress activities (Gandhi 1958, 1974). The Civil Disobedience movement drew new social forces towards the Congress, and the party's social base spread and became enlarged to include the lower, and non-Brahmin castes in many towns and villages from between 1932 to 1942 (Kochanek 2015).

Between 1927 and 1937, non-Brahmins flocked to the Congress in large numbers. The reason for this progress, rather than the Congress's accomplishments, was a shift within non-Brahmin attitudes (Natarajan 1927).[38] As their efforts to create a distinct political community and ethnicisation failed, some lower-castes and Depressed Classes of Malabar sought refuge in Gandhi. During his trip to Kerala in October 1927, Gandhi met with two delegations. The first was the Depressed Classes Mission headed by C. Seshayya and the Ezhavas led by Sukumaran, T.M. Chamiappan, and P.C. Gopalan. Gandhi insisted on receiving both the delegations together, as this he thought would bring the Cherumas and te Ezhavas together.[39] The representatives of the Ezhavas asked whether there was still any hope of having a purified Hinduism (Gandhi 1958a: 264). Gandhi responded by saying: "Yes, otherwise I would not be a Hindu and could not live" (ibid: 265). When the Depressed Classes representatives sought support for their demand to access public spaces, Gandhi asked: "Why not temple entry also"(ibid: 266)? The economic dependence of the majority of Ezhavas on the upper castes kept them from fighting against caste (Aiyappan, 1965). Inevitably, Gandhi was able to effectively interfere in the agenda of the Depressed Classes and the lower-castes, by directing them to Congress.The Moplah Revolt (1921) and the struggle in Kalpathy in 1924 created an environment of fearfullness all over India, specially the fear of 'religious conversion' to Islam. As a result, south Malabar attracted the attention of Hindu reformers and leaders, religious and communal organisations, particularly Shuddhi and Sangathan movements (Gupta 1998, Natarajan 1925b). Hindu religious reform organisations realised the potential of Malabar: of how there was a "vast field for the work of social uplift in Malabar for those interested in the

[38] For instance, the Non-brahmin Confederation at Coimbatore decided to join the Congress.

[39] Chamiappan converted to Christianity and P.C. Gopalan joined Aryasamaj in response to Kaplathy struggles.

elevation of the depressed classes" which would avoid the conversion of avarnas to other beliefs(Natarajan 1925a).[40]

Interventions made by the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, and the Hindu Mahasabha brought back converts to Hinduism, and stopped further conversions from taking place. The alternative identity to 'Untouchables' that was given by Gandhi and the Congress—'Harijan' provided a competitive and collective range of religious and political ideologies, for the purpose of emancipating 'Untouchables' through their assimilation and incorporation into the Hindu tradition (Gooptu 2001). As Gandhi explicitly said in his Pakkanarpuram address: "We have to cease to be patrons. We have to purify ourselves from this taint of untouchability immediately and take the Harijans to our bosom" (Gandhi 1974b: 427) While the upper-castes embraced Gandhi's call to cleanse themselves of the stain of 'Untouchability', as Srivatsan suggests, this trajectory taken by the upper-castes, of providing services to the lower-castes "contributes to the marginalisation of initiatives and groups that either threaten or contest the hegemonic rise of caste-Hindu elite during colonial rule" (Srivatsan 2019: 23-24). In effect, the Gandhian Harijan ideology and the Hindu Social Reform movement served to effectively invisibilize the resistance of the lower-castes, erasing the caste questions raised by them. At this juncture, 'Untouchables', whom Ambedkar described as 'self-reliant and independent' had begun to follow the Congress and upper-caste reform movements (Ambedkar 1991).

Conclusion: Recognition or Misrecognition—A Post-Ambedkar Scenario

There is a commonly prevalent opinion that Ambedkar's works are undervalued and that he is only regarded as the author of the Indian Constitution. Although, as Taylor (1994: 25) asserts: "a number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand, for recognition." Here, I have presented some examples of misrecognition. For example, In 1957, when Kannan wrote to Rajagopalachari and to President Rajendra Prasad on the Silver Jubilee of the Poona Pact, Rajagopalachari retorted by saying: "This day, twenty-five years ago, was one of the most anxious days in the history of India. I'm glad you remember that at least. I've just written that week's story for All India Radio as the Delhi Broadcast Department" (Kunjan 1983: 84).[41] Rajendra Prasad, by referring to the Poona Pact as a land mark decision in the road to social progress further wrote (ibid: 85):[42]

> I recollect the very anxious times that we had to go through and the ultimate triumph of Mahatma Gandhi's Tapasya. There is no doubt that while untouchability has become a social crime there are still many things which need to be done to raise the normal stature and economic position of the Harijans.

[40] As word of religious conversion spread across North India, *shuddhi sangathan* activists flocked to Malabar.
[41] C Rajagopalachari to Kannan, 22nd September 1957.
[42] Rajendra Prasad to Kannan, 26th September 1957.

Interestingly, none of these national leaders even mentioned Ambedkar, who had a sizeable following like any other political figure in India. For Taylor (1994: 25) “nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” This level of distortion, and this degree of erasure and misrecognition is not accidental; it is the result of a biased consciousness of historical leaders, who refused to recognise leaders from the Depressed Classes like Ambedkar. Similarly, Kannan too, received little recognition as a Depressed Classes leader within Kerala's political space. This misrecognition has become extensive as Dalits have been portrayed in Kerala history as passive subjects with no history or autonomy, although having an archival presence. Re-inventing these figures as autonomous individuals may serve in eliciting social memory and historical trajectories of communities.

The politics of India's Depressed Classes was extremely diverse in terms of its worldview and political ideology, and it has not progressed in terms of a single and unified trajectory. Ambedkar became the national leader of the Depressed Classes, but due to the complexities of provincial politics, he was not generally embraced in Malabar. As local contexts, movements, and agenda differed from national politics, it is critical to look beyond Ambedkar, when writing a history of the Depressed Classes in India. Throughout his correspondence with Kannan, Ambedkar stresses the importance of consolidating caste organisations, and gaining support from the South. But Kannan and Munisami Pillai were unable to wield enough political power to demand that caste-divided depressed sections unite under one political umbrella. This estrangement from the people in Kannan’s case, hampered Ambedkar's political prospects and accelerated the pace of other political forces that gained traction among Malabar's ‘Untouchables’. I contend that the rise of provincial and nationalist politics under colonial rule, influenced the trajectory of the Depressed Classes movement, which in the Malabar progressed through a process of collaboration with the Congress, non-Brahmin, and other lower-caste, and socialist movements.

Finally, regional social formations, production and ownership relations, linguistic characteristics and vernacular diversity, the mode of governance, regional cultural peculiarities, colonial modernity, and the history of social reform, all influenced the ideology of the Depressed Classes movement, shaping its formation and struggles. Therefore, it is important to understand the historical context of these movements before suggesting that the Depressed Classes movement was ‘conflicting’ or ‘divisive’. The response of the Depressed Classes towards British colonialism, nationalism, and shifting provincial politics appears to challenge the depiction of lower-caste movements as pro-government. The politics of recognition is an important aspect here, and is required for an understanding of how “dominant groups tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcating an image of inferiority in the subjugated” (Taylor 1994: 66). Therefore, one of the chief interventions of a research article based on intellectual history is to provide a historical context that facilitates a deeper and fine-grained understanding of the struggle for freedom and equality, that cannot be complete without a review of their situated histories.

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Beyond Reformism: *Chhatrapati* Shahu and Hinduism Reimagined

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In this article, I investigate the intellectual contributions of *Chhatrapati* Shahu, who was the ruler of the princely state of Kolhapur from 1894 to 1922. Shahu was not just a prominent source of patronage for the non-Brahmin movement, but he was also an influential public speaker who shaped an alternative conception of Hinduism. Shahu attempted to reimagine Hinduism through the prism of the Arya Samaj and as this article explores, Shahu's creatively resolved the balance between this alternative idea of Hinduism while simultaneously retaining a staunch critique of caste practices. Instead of identifying him as a 'Sanskritizing Kshatriya' agent, I seek to study Shahu's gradual transformation of views on caste by calling him a 'radical reformist'. Furthermore, I argue that Shahu's public presence from 1890s to 1920 had a major impact on how the generation after Jotirao Phule imagined and responded to the discourses surrounding religion, identity and caste. Despite Shahu's status as the Maharaja of Kolhapur, his speeches delivered all across Maharashta and beyond, were instrumental in channelling the movement's trajectory during the early 20th century. Lastly, I suggest that even if Shahu's methods seemingly imitated Brahmins, more so with the adoption of the Kshatriya seat of authority as a counter to the Brahmin one, his conception of this parallel authority emphasised the significance of equality and individual autonomy.

Chhatrapati Shahu, Hinduism, Arya Samaj, Caste, Kshatrajagadguru

Introduction

> In his death, I have lost a personal friend and the Depressed Classes have lost a great benefactor and the greatest champion of their cause.
>
> Ambedkar on Chhatrapati Shahu.[1]

> I am against Satyashodhak Samaj, and this is what I clarify in all my speeches.
>
> Shahu's letter to his friend Khaserao Jadhav.[2]

Chhatrapati Shahu, or as his admirers lovingly call him Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, was the ruler of the princely state of Kolhapur from 1894 to 1922. For close to 30 years as the ruler of one of the largest princely states in colonial India, Shahu's primary focus was on the upliftment of the lower castes. From opening schools and hostels for lower caste communities to making historic political amendments like reserving 50% seats in the Kolhapur administration for non-Brahmins, Shahu's popular legacy has been crystallized over the years as a saviour of the backward classes and as a pioneering reformist. Shahu's popular legacy in terms of why he enjoyed veneration and respect from the lower castes is well documented. At the same time, it is also important to note

[1] B.R. Ambedkar, 10.05.1922 (Sangve 1978 [vol 9.]: 132).
[2] Shahu Chhatrapati (Phadke 2018: 186).

that Shahu goaded the masses to embrace the Arya Samaj and its call of 'Going back to the Vedas', holding strongly that the Arya Samaj's idea of Vedic Hinduism sans untouchability constituted 'real' Hinduism. In this article, I attempt to explore Shahu's role in reimagining Hinduism amidst his gradual evolution of views on caste and some existing scholarship on the subject already provides useful insights into the approach I wish to take. For example, Omvedt's chapter (1976 [2011, 2019]: 137-146) on Shahu provides a critical appraisal of him infusing a conservative role of religion in the state and broadly labels Shahu's reign from 1900 to 1920 as 'Kshatriya oriented aristocratic anti-Brahminism'. By describing Shahu's position as a merely Sanskritising Kshatriya ideology, Omvedt hints at the compromised position between his conservative ideology and the radical Satyashodhak ideology. Without fundamentally disagreeing with her critical insight on Shahu, I depart from Omvedt's propositions on two counts. Omvedt's limitations are that she fails to sufficiently explain and contextualize three critical terms, namely *Kshatriya*, *conservative* and *radical*. There is not enough deliberation on whether Shahu was a conservative merely in terms of his practices as a princely ruler or even in his philosophical thoughts as a public speaker. Omvedt fails to take into consideration the complexities of how Shahu's thoughts evolved over the span of two decades. Shahu certainly was not an anti-caste champion, in a similar mould as Jotirao Phue. However, to reduce Shahu to a Kshatriya ruler who was solely concerned with upholding Maratha pride and valour, is a disservice to the complex evolution of his anti-caste thoughts. Toward the end of his life, Shahu's evolving conception of non-Brahmin politics had sought to include non-aristocratic Marathas and as Jaywant (2023: 407) comments:

> The maharaj, who until then had closely guarded the category of Maratha for aristocratic Kshatriya families, now reached out to include those considered to be of 'common Kunbi origins' as well as Maratha sub-castes accused of varying degrees of 'illicit' mixing such as Kadu, Akkarmashi, and Kharchi Marathas. He also mingled with Maratha families who were believed to have 'impure origins', treated them as kin, and encouraged marriages between aristocratic and *varna sankara* Maratha clans.

Instead of seeing Shahu as a ruler with static ideas over two decades, I seek to argue how his staunchly anti-Brahmin stand in the initial phase of his time as a princely ruler was responsible for his rising awareness about the perniciousness of the caste system, evident especially towards the last few years of his life before his death in 1922. I argue that Shahu's anti-caste thought evolved *through* his anti-Brahmin-ness. The more recent scholarship on this by Rahul Sarwate (2020) provides a cogent analysis of this period by exploring the contradictory narrative enduring in Marathi intellectual culture for more than a century. He argues this position by investigating various forms of progressivism through textures of Modern Hindu-ness, articulated through discursive texts, nationalist schools and bodily practices. Even though Sarwate's formulations are meant to broadly explicate the emerging consciousness of non-Brahmin modern Hindu-ness, they are useful for our purpose to situate a princely ruler like Shahu in that intellectual context. For Sarwate, the non-Brahmin critique of caste was not a philosophical critique, constituting a cosmetic attempt at engaging with textual and material questions of tradition (ibid: 1-3). Sarwate also argues about how emerging anti-Brahminism was distinct from Phule-ite discourse (ibid: 15). Specifically on Shahu,

Sarwate describes how Shahu wanted to overthrow the British rule but without wishing to abandon Hinduism (ibid: 23). Instead of seeing his anti-Brahminism as a rupture from the Phule-ite discourse, I suggest that Shahu's constant engagement with the Satyashodhak Samaj must be understood both, in terms of how he supported the movement by providing material support to their activities, and also in terms of how he was influenced by the Samaj and their core socio-cultural principles. Even if Shahu himself clarified his stand about not being a member of the Satyashodhak Samaj, the evolving nature of his thoughts deserves an eclectic approach in order to further contextualize the influence that Satyashodhak Samaj exerted over him. As Madhavrao Bagal (1934: 7) pointed out in one of his essays titled *Satyashodhak Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj*:

> …the term Satyashodhak could be perceived as Shahu being a member of the Samaj but that is not the case. I am, in a broader sense, using the term as a *visheshan* (adjective) (emphasis mine).

Similarly, Shahu's proximity with the Satyashodhak Samaj also impacted and influenced prominent Satyashodhak writers from Kolhpur, like Haribhau Chavan in the 1920s, who formed the Satyashodhak Samaj in Kolhapur in 1911 and became its general secretary (Gundekar 2010: 561). More importantly, Chavan along with a fellow Satyashodhak leader called Ramchandra Babaji Jadhav, formed another organization called the 'Shahu Satyashodhak Samaj' (ibid: 562) in 1923, in honour of Shahu after his death. With the help of such examples, I argue that Shahu, without he being an active member of the Satyashodhak Samaj, nevertheless became a crucial figure who posthumously shaped and influenced the intellectual trajectories of the Samaj, spearheaded by leaders like Chavan. While I agree that Shahu did not abandon Hinduism, I nevertheless also argue that Shahu was proposing an alternative form of Hinduism which can be described as an *Arya Samajist Hinduism.* This form, then, influenced other non-Brahmin writers and leaders who did not necessarily, overtly take recourse to the Arya Samaj. This complex dabbling into defending and espousing the virtues of the Vedas, an unfiltered embrace of the Arya Samaj, and a relentless pursuit of saving Hinduism from Brahminical didactic intrusions has remained a curious blind spot in evaluating Shahu's intellectual legacy. The most comprehensive biography on Shahu was written by Annasaheb Latthe, two years after Shahu passed away in 1922. This biography, along with Dhananjay Keer's biography, remain the only two exhaustive accounts of Shahu's life in English which chronologically document Shahu's life events from his coronation ceremony in 1894 to his death in 1922 (see Latthe [1924] and Keer [1976]). While Omvedt's chapter (1976 [2011, 2019]) on Shahu focuses more on his socio-economic reforms, Ian Copland's paper (1973) establishes Shahu's connections with colonial bureaucracy. Bharat Patankar's recent chapter (2021) on the other hand provides a synoptic overview of Shahu's image as a material benefactor of the downtrodden along with briefly hinting at his streaks of conservatism. Marathi writings on Shahu have largely followed a similar trajectory by documenting Shahu's major life events and contextualizing these within his social milieu (Phadke 2018). Others have edited Shahu's speeches, letters and correspondences with British officers (Pawar 2010). The debate and discussion on Shahu's intellectual legacy, however, remains limited as most debates seem to revolve around intellectually limited enquiries that interrogate whether Shahu was an Arya Samajist (supported by Phadke

[2018] and Garge (1968 [2017]) or whether he had Satyashodhaki proclivities (as insisted upon by Jadhav [1992], Chavan [2022] and Pawar [2010]). Shahu's complex and seemingly contradictory social and religious positionality has seldom received critical assessment.

In this article, I seek to dwell on Shahu's rationale underlying his path that enabled him to become an alternative Hindu reformist. I will argue, that instead of labelling him a 'conservative', it would be more intellectually stimulating an endeavour to consider him a 'radical reformist' instead. Taking cue from Gramsci's views on religion and the need to glean positives from the incoherence and fluidity that religion has to offer (cf. Forlenza 2021), I argue that Shahu's religious articulation needs to be seen through his own philosophical moorings within Brahmin bureaucracy, the caste system, and the Arya Samaj. I believe that Gramsci's formulation is especially useful in this context, as it helps us explore Shahu's 'tricky phase' characterized by religious ambiguity, where he attempted to rescue Hinduism from Brahmin priesthood, and in the process, realized the perniciousness of the caste system. I would describe these nascent attempts at radical reform, Shahu's 'dharmic experimentation'. Exploring Shahu's emerging religious beliefs, I believe, is necessary for primarily two reasons: Shahu in his context was the most prominent face fighting for the rights of the lower castes after Jotirao Phule. This allowed him to occupy a space of reverence and respect among the depressed masses in general and among the Satyashodhaks in particular. Secondly, by contextualizing his image as that of a benefactor of the movement, it is crucial to analyse his role in shaping the Satyashodhak consciousness regarding Hinduism in this period. For our concern, this is especially crucial as I argue that Shahu's engagements with reformulating Hinduism in the early 20th century had a major impact on the non-Brahmin public sphere. Shahu's *darbar* (princely court) orders, his correspondence with British officials concerning Brahmins and non-Brahmins, and his public speeches strongly shaped the non-Brahmin print sphere and its involvement with the question of Hinduism. I begin this article by thematically categorizing it in terms of providing a brief background to the beginnings of when Shahu embraced the Vedas, followed by Shahu's public speeches and correspondences with the Kolhapur State's British officers that engage with his views on what he pejoratively termed *Brahmin bureaucracy*. This is followed by a discussion of Shahu's paradoxical-sounding commitment to the eradication of the caste system on one hand, and on the espousal of the merits of the Hindu *varna* system on the other. Shahu's reimagining of Hinduism through a distinctly Arya Samajist lens is significant in order to understand the impact it had on some of the prominent Satyashodhak newspapers. Towards the end of this article, I will attempt to demonstrate the extent of Shahu's posthumous influence in newspapers like the *Vijayi Maratha* that continued to publish articles and speeches of the *Kshatrajagadguru* (Kshatriya Pontiff Maxim), a Kshatriya world priest appointed by Shahu to resist the Brahmin dominance in religious affairs.

Vedokta Controversy: Reciting Vedas as an Ethical Right

The immediate backdrop of the *Vedokta* episode is in 1899, when Shahu went for his daily ritual bath to the *Panchganga* river. He was accompanied at this time by his brother, Bapusaheb Ghatge, his brother-in-law Khanvilkar, and by Rajaramshastri

Bhagwat, a learned Brahmin reformer and intellectual. It was Bhagwat who pointed out to Shahu that while bathing, Narayan Shastri, who was Kolhapur's appointed priest, was reciting Puranic hymns instead of Vedic hymns. After seeking instant clarification, Shastri stood his ground by stating that Vedic hymns were meant only for Brahmins and not for Shudras. It is interesting to note here that the practice of reciting Vedic hymns was discontinued only a few decades before Shahu was anointed the princely ruler of Kolhapur. In 1860, during the reign of Chhatrapati Babasaheb Maharaj, his family priest Pandit Raghunath Shastri Parvate convinced the Chhatrapati of the futility of Vedic chanting. He did this by squarely blaming unfortunate incidents like Chhatrapati's childlessness on his insistence of holding on to his right of use Vedic hymns (Sangve 1978 [vol 3.]: 3). However, Shahu was determined to reverse this situation and bring it back to where it was before 1860, not least because this was deemed to be the only way of reinstating the honour and respect of Chhatrapati Shivaji's legacy, but also because, for Shahu, Shivaji was not a Shudra but a Kshatriya who was a direct descendant of the Sisode family of Udaipur, and regarded as the highest family of Kshatriyas in India by all Hindus (ibid: 3). While the *Vedokta* controversy was used by some Brahmins to mock Shahu's *Vedokta* demand as a 'fad' or a 'passing whim', an 'absurd dispute' and a 'hobby' (ibid: 27), this reaction was devoid of historical facts. Rosalind O'Hanlon for instance has argued, that the Bhosale and other elite Maratha families had always been granted Vedic rites on the strength of their Rajput origins, right since the time of Shivaji's reign. O'Hanlon further notes how Chitpavan Brahmins feared that castes of all kinds would seize the opportunity to press claims to higher status, hitherto denied to them under Peshwa rule. During Pratapsinh's reign in Satara, Balajipant Natu, Chintamanrao Patwardhan and Nilkanthshastri Thatte had campaigned to limit the authority of Vedic ritual to Brahmins. They argued for this by stating that because Shivaji, Sambhaji and Shahu were not true Kshatriyas, they had never received proper Vedic rites. In 1835, Pratapsinh demanded a public debate on his *varna* status to settle the dispute, and the dispute was ruled in favour of the Bhosale families at Satara, Tanjore, Nagpur and Kolhapur. At the same time, Pratapsinh's demands were made to primarily privilege the Bhosale family and not the Gaekwad and Shinde families, who he identified as *kunbi*—an agrarian caste considered to be of lesser status (see O'Hanlon [2014: 25-49]) for more details on the upward social mobility of the *kunbi*s and the crystallization of the Maratha-*kunbi* complex in late 19th century.

If this was the historical trajectory of the demand for Vedic rights after Shivaji, Shahu's renewed push for Vedic rituals can only be seen as an immediate continuation of what Sayajirao Gaekwad, the ruler of the princely state of Baroda, had already demanded as late as 1891. Gaekwad's visit to the Jodhpur state made him realize that Rajput kings had access to Vedic religious rites (Sarwate 2020: 18) and this was the beginning of the *Vedokta* controversy, which not only ignited a fresh schism between Brahmins and the rest, but also sowed the seeds for *varna*-based tussles for power. Shastri, who felt robbed of his prestige and status, apart from feeling humiliated by being forced to heed to the demands of whom he identified as a Shudra king, pleaded his innocence to colonial officers. However, Shahu's close-knit connections with colonial officers across hierarchies meant that Shastri was forced to be at the receiving end of their rejection. These events could be contextualized within the mutual camaraderie and respect that Shahu shared with British political agents in Kolhapur. The example of this

quote is revealing, taken from a letter from S.M. Fraser, resident of Kolhapur and also tutor and guardian to Shahu, written around the same time in which Fraser congratulated Shahu (ibid: 21):

> I notice that Cambridge university is going to confer on you the degree of LL. D a great honour. No Brahmin in the State will be able then to touch you in the way of Academical honours! I am glad that you took strong action with them before you left and, though I know nothing about the details of the case, you may rest assured that the government will look after your interests in your absence.

Fraser continues, advising Shahu about needing to remain wary, and not make his victory sound like a vindictive ploy that would project Shahu as being against the entire Brahmin class, especially as Shahu was the ruler of both Brahmins and Marathas. This kind of a considerate support for Shahu was not an aberration, evidenced in the words of Lt. Col. W.B. Ferris, the political agent after Fraser in Kolhapur. Ferris informed Shahu of the conditions in Kolhapur whilst the latter was on a tour of England as (ibid: 22):

> All goes well here…. I see a newspaper has been started in Kolhapur, the *Brahmodaya*, I have written to the Acting Dewan to enquire if it was with your sanction and whether the provisions of Act XXV of 1867 have been observed for it appears to me that the paper has been started not as a bonafide venture but in order to champion the Brahmin cause in the Vedokta controversy and will last long as the trouble does.

This protective colonial shield helped Shahu navigate the Brahminical disdain, which was becoming part of the public discourse through Brahmin newspapers, literature, and loose talk that bordered on rumour and gossip. A newspaper called *Samarth*, started by Professor Vishnu Vijapurkar of Rajaram College, registered its staunch disapproval of granting Shahu *Vedokta* rights and instead demanded that a decision about this be taken by a tribunal that consisted of Brahmins. Many other Brahmin run newspapers like *Kesari*, *Modavritta*, *Kal*, *Gurakhi*, *Jagadhitechhu* from Poona, *Prekshak* from Satara, *Subodh Sindhu* from Khandwa, *Belgaum Samachar* from Belgaum, and *Brahmodaya* from Kolhapur (ibid: 19) lent their collective support to this demand that objected to granting Shahu Kshatriya status. The ensuing public discourse against Shahu became further emotively intensified, when it blamed Shahu for inviting the wrath of learned Brahmin priests. Going against Brahmins was projected as tantamount to going against God. From not allowing Shahu to visit the local *Ambabai* temple in Kolhapur, to the death of his adoptive mother, and the sudden outbreak of fire in his old palace—everything was being ascribed to as a direct result of the ‘anger of God’ (ibid: 17).

However, despite this backdrop of Brahmin opposition, colonial officers refused to budge from their position. From the resident of Kolhapur to the governor of the Bombay presidency. to Lord Curzon—all rejected Shastri’s appeal of revoking Shahu’s confiscation of his *Inam* gifts of land grants. The colonial authorities instead supported Shahu by highlighting the history of his leniency, and his approachability toward

Brahmins, and in fact accused Shastri of hatching a vindictive plot against Shahu. Finally, Brahmins along with the seat of the Shankaracharya had to accede to Shahu's demands wherein 'Kshatriya' Shahu was recognized as a rightful claimant to the right of Vedic hymns. However, these claims were agreed upon only for Shahu and not for all Kshatriyas, and certainly not for other non-Brahmin communities. It has been suggested that Shahu's assertion to recite Vedic hymns was more of a diplomatic ploy to maintain smooth societal relations rather than an act of religious deference (Pawar 2010: 57). However, Shahu's speeches after the *Vedkota* controversy, complicates our understanding of Shahu ideas about caste rights, caste equality, and religion. In one of his public speeches at Navsari in Gujarat in 1918, Shahu argued (Pawar 2008: 35): "After propounding that everyone has a right to Vedas, (I) was convinced of all humans being equal." Interestingly, having the right to avail of the knowledge of the Vedas was as much an assertion to equality, as it was a matter of reforming religion itself. In other words, the right to make use of Vedic hymns was a question of an innate and 'natural rights', and not just a matter of claiming superiority as a religious being. Furthermore, it can be argued that the term 'Shudra' was deemed inappropriate, specifically because of the negative class connotations attached to it, denoting mental slavery. Annasaheb Latthe, the first official biographer of Shahu,[3] translated the term Shudra as 'menial' and Ati-Shudra as 'super-menial' (Latthe 1924 [vol. 2]: 323). Latthe conjured up a class analogy, linking the plight of Shudras to Western slaves (ibid [vol. 2]: 374):

> The priest may look upon his Yajman—the employer and master—as a Shudra, a term which non-Brahmins hated as much as an Englishman would hate being called a slave and being accorded religious rites which were reserved only to a slave and which no freeman would ever think of adopting.

From a rights and equality-based framework, Shahu's *Vedokta* turn can also be analysed as an endeavour to convert the Vedas from being an exclusive Brahminical preserve to being considered an accessible, quotidian set of texts. The idea of making the Vedas accessible to all coheres here with his proposition of positioning all *varna*s on an equal footing. He urged (Pawar 2008: 43), "…I believe that when each individual becomes capable of internalizing the capabilities of *all* varnas, then the country will progress"[4] (italics mine). In order for this to happen, Shahu encouraged the masses to particularly imbibe the Satyashodhak Samaj's call for brotherhood, which he described as the 'cosmopolitan ethic' (Ibid: 58).[5]

Connecting *Vedokta* to the *Aryavrata*: Shahu's Liberation Philosophy

Shahu's admiration for the Vedas can be contextualized within the growing animosity between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Shahu believed that this conflict between the two rival Hindu groups to have reached an extreme. Remarking on how this situation

[3] Latthe was a close confidant of Shahu's. He worked with the Kolhapur administration from 1904 to 1914 as an educational inspector, and was also a professor in Kolhapur's Rajaram college.

[4] Shahu Chhatrapati's speech: *Ha Vidyecha Samay Aahe*, at the Akhil Bhartiya Kurmi Samajik Parishad Kanpur, 11.04.1919.

[5] Shahu Chhatrapati's speech: *Jati bhed modun apan sarva ek houyat*, at the inauguration of Shri Udajirao Maratha Vasatigruha Nasik, 15.04.1920.

was not ideal for the progress of the country, he explained how original Vedic Dharma had in fact declined only because of Brahminical Dharma, and this was the reason behind why non-Brahmins should not realize the benefits of real Dharma from Brahmins. For Shahu, this theory of decline was sufficient reason to conclude upon Kshatriya Marathas deciding to tread on an independent route of progress. This explanation included all the elements that later shaped Shahu's religious proclivities—deep longing for a pristine Vedic past, disdain for Brahmin bureaucracy, and Brahminical Hinduism. Based on this, he called for Kshatriya Marathas in particular to break free from the religious bondage of Brahmins, and reformulating Hinduism through their own Kshatriya lens. Simply put, Shahu regarded the Vedas as holier and higher than the Puranas. The Vedas were seen by him as those ancient scriptures whose authorship was *apaurusheya* (beyond human), whereas the Puranas were projected as sacred works, after being authored by the cunningness of later-day Brahmins. For Shahu, and in terms of their temporal position, the Vedas enjoyed a more mythical, transcendental aura that the worldly Puranas severely lacked. Shahu seems to have derived his reformist zeal from the Arya Samaj's core principles that emphasized the removal of untouchability and condemned Brahmin priests acting as middlemen between the almighty and masses. By staying within the fold of Hinduism, Shahu proposed a complete evisceration of allegedly degenerate Hindu practices and customs, and through this evisceration, reimagined a pristine Hinduism of yore. This stand directly echoed the core principles of the Arya Samaj stated in the *Arya Patrika* published in 1885 (Jones 2006: 113). While the Arya Samaj saw themselves in the middle space between orthodoxy and extreme radicalism, this path of reform, by going to the roots of Hinduism, was identified as a prudent sustainable mechanism that was more productive than uprooting the institution altogether. The implied claim made here by the Arya Samaj was that Hinduism was not found to be pernicious in its original state and Jones, in his in-depth study of the early days of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, explicates this position by pitting the Arya Samaj against the Brahmo Samaj (ibid: 94-95).

> Aryas refused to follow the Brahmo Samaj and move beyond the limits of Hinduism. They wished instead to find a place compatible with Dayanand's severest criticism yet still within the Hindu world. This they did through a slow, piecemeal process of experimentation. They moved forward in an uneven rhythm of boldness and timidity, of accommodation and innovation.

Shahu's embracing of the Arya Samaj must be seen in a specific context that allowed him to conceptualize the overlap between a pristine Vedic past, and the egalitarianism of the present proposed by the Arya Samaj, without jettisoning Hinduism altogether. In fact, amidst Shahu's efforts to reform Hinduism by propagating widow remarriage, female education, and offering financial assistance for writing endeavours that codified Hindu laws for the present, his fundamental drive surrounded identifying 'Arya Samajists' as 'Hindus'. This idea of reform accompanied by the piecemeal pace of reform carried out by the Arya Samaj allowed Shahu to gradually nudge the non-Brahmins into reoccupying a discursive space that allowed them to rearticulate and own Hinduism. Staying within the fringes of pre-existing Hinduism allowed the Arya Samaj to criticize its beliefs and practices as degenerate, without severing its ties entirely with Hinduism, as was the similar perceived case of Brahmo Samaj that was

seen as a 'distorted form of Christianity' (ibid: 114). Arya Samajists on the other hand remained critical adversaries of 'degenerate' Hindu practices, having an insider perspective to it. Being radically antagonistic here, in contrast, would be counter-intuitive, deemed tantamount to expressing enmity with Hinduism, and thereby siding with an alien force in the country—like in the case of the Brahmo Samaj.

At the same time, the conversion drive of Christian missionaries in Gujarat from the 1890s onward was not necessarily perceived to be a direct threat in Kolhapur either (Hardiman 2007). Unlike Gujarat where the Arya Samaj became prominent for its orphanages that housed untouchables in order to restrict their conversion to Christianity, the Arya Samaj came to the fore in Kolhapur, largely as a result of Shahu's personal quest for achieving a robust religious egalitarianism. Being the ruler of a princely state, Shahu was invited to many events organized both by the British administration and other socio-cultural associations spread across the country and Shahu's increasing presence in the public domain had begun to critically impact the shaping of a non-Brahmin consciousness, not just in Western India, but also in North and South India. His usage of all kinds of terms such as 'untouchables classes', 'backward classes', 'non-Brahmins', 'exploited castes', or simply 'masses' in his speeches delivered all over India, especially toward the latter part of his life, are testament to the fact that he spoke to and for *everyone* who had been oppressed. His concerted experiments with Hinduism, along with his gradually evolving views on the caste system, allowed him to expand the spatial horizons of his alternative articulation of Hinduism. He felt that his experimental Hinduism could only become expansive if it were to be linked with the 'national', whereas limiting it to a 'regional' issue would only make it parochial. This almost sounded as though Shahu was proposing a separate reformed 'sect' within Hinduism, which was certainly not the case. Addressing a labour rally in Parel (Mumbai) in 1918, Shahu confessed (Sangve 1978 [vol 8.]: 44-45):

> When in 1902, I was going to England by a steamer for the Coronation ceremony, I met on the steamer the great Kshatriya warrior Maharajah Pratap Singh and he explained to me in detail the views of the Arya Samaj. After some years, when I met Pandit Atmaram, I was attracted to Arya Samaj and recently I have become a follower of Arya Samaj … Just as it is important by organizing labour to remove the exploitation of capitalists, it is still more necessary to do away with the domination of the few over the others in the field of religion. This work is done by Arya Samaj and that is why I very much appreciate the Arya Samaj.

Shahu's public admission is indicative of how, even though the Arya Samaj was formed in 1918 in Kolhapur, Shahu was guided by its principles right from the period marked by the *Vedokta* controversy. This also forces us to rethink popularly-made connections between *Vedokta* and its purportedly direct, and only worthwhile linkage—the identity-centric assertion of *Kshatriya*-hood. Instead, the category of the 'Arya Samajist' was a more capacious term that not just included identity assertion, but also reformulated a compendium of Hindu beliefs, customs, and practices that germinated in the early 1900s. This argument can be extended by discussing how Shahu's insistence on moving away from being identified as Shudra and claiming Kshatriya lineage that connoted equality in terms of dignity and status vis-à-vis Brahmins cannot be entirely

identified with the fantasy of caste purity. Becoming an Arya Samajist made it possible for non-Brahmins to not only dissociate themselves from the dehumanizing context attached with the category 'Shudra', but also to stake their ownership and membership within a caste-free religion. It is interesting to note, that during his advocacy of the Arya Samaj, Shahu found the Satyashodhak Samaj to be severely lacking in a robust religious foundation. However, this did not mean that the Satyashodhak Samaj itself had no relations with the Arya Samaj. In fact, the earliest reference of the interactions between the two comes from as early as 1875, when Krishnarao Bhalekar, one of the founding members of the Satyashodhak Samaj and a close colleague of Jotirao Phule, defended Dayanand Saraswati, when the latter's procession was opposed by Sanatani Brahmins in Pune (Rairkar [no date]: 7). Bhalekar also managed to organize a speech, delivered by Saraswati, at a *Dharmashaala* (religious hostel) near a Rokdoba temple in Bhamburde, Pune (ibid). Nonetheless, Shahu made a strong distinction between the two and saw the Satyashodhak Samaj as being more of a 'social' movement. Curiously enough, Shahu did not engage with Jotirao Phule's reformulation of religious tenets in *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak* (The Public Book of True Faith), and in any case, Phule's attempt at radically revamping Dharma must have seemed inchoate and still in its nascent stage by Shahu.

It could be concurred here therefore that Shahu preferred religious grounding in Vedic antiquity, instead of mythical reformulations, that centred around the figure of King Bali for Phule. This lacuna in Shahu's deliberate shift away from the Satyashodhak Samaj on the issue of religious tenets, seems to be his general lack of engagement with religious incoherence among many members of Satyashodhak Samaj itself. Even during Phule's times, Satyashodhak members continued their experiments with Hinduism at both an individual and at collective levels. They did not convert to an alien religion as a group, and neither did they dissociate themselves completely from popular beliefs and customs encompassed within Hinduism. Perhaps for Shahu, identifying with the Arya Samaj provided a clearer path to resuscitate an ideal past. Even though Satyashodhak Samaj spoke in a similar language of ethics, equality, and truth, its reformism under Phule, and the uncertainty over the role of certain religious precepts convinced Shahu to opt for Arya Samaj. It must however be reiterated that Shahu's involvement with the Satyashodhak Samaj, both in terms of engaging with Satyashodhak principles and providing monetary support to the Samaj began from the 1890s itself. A brief timeline of Shahu's relationship with the Samaj will suffice to demonstrate this argument: Shahu appointed Bhaskarrao Jadhav and Khanderrao Bagal as first-class magistrate and Munisff respectively, in 1898. Both Jadhav and Bagal, along with Annasaheb Latthe who worked in the Kolhapur state administration between 1904 to 1914 were prominent members of the Satyashodhak Samaj. It can be said that Shahu's donations helped establish the Satyashodhak Samaj in Kolhapur in 1911 and in 1913, a Satyashodhak school was also opened in Kolhapur under the leadership of Vitthal Done (of the *dhangar* caste) and monetarily supported by Shahu. Shahu also provided generous grants to Satyashodhak writers like Mukundrao Patil and in 1912 even financed Patil's *Kulkarni Lilamrut* that critiqued hereditary *vatan* officers, demanding that they be replaced by a Talathi system[6]. Shahu also enacted

[6] *Talathi*, meaning a village accountant who was appointed based on merit, replaced the hereditary-based position of the village *Kulkarni*.

an ordinance in support of instituting the Talathi system in 1918 after reading Patil's work (cf. Sangve [vol 8.] 1978).

Brahmin Bureaucracy and the Caste System: Shahu's Twin Enemies

In 1921, the Resident of Kolhapur advised Shahu to refrain from giving any public speeches as they were resulting in Shahu being unfairly vilified along with his family members. Shahu demurred by saying (Sangve 1978 [vol. 9]: 23-24):

> Public speeches are badly wanted as they alone teach the ignorant masses about the real benefits from British government and also reminded the British government about his fight against Brahmin bureaucracy for the last 20 years. Another reason why I make public speeches is to show the public that I am not the sort of man the extremists paint me.

This quote helps us further delineate Shahu's decision to become an Arya Samajist. Firstly, Shahu's fight against what he called Brahmin bureaucracy was in tune with his belief in the theory of an absence of any caste hierarchy in the Vedic past. By that logic, and with examples of the roles played by the Kshatriyas, not just on the war front but also in the authorship of religious scriptures, Shahu was able to take an unequivocally anti-Brahmin stand that was nevertheless staunchly Hindu. However, even if that meant that a peculiar kind of identity assertion was inevitable for him, it did not necessarily move Shahu away from critiquing the caste system. There is no gainsaying the fact that Shahu was operating in a space that was informed by the grammar of caste. However, his identity assertion was not bereft of a gradual, albeit frontal critique of the caste system. In fact, his speeches and letters show how it was *during* his one-upmanship over Brahmins for 20 years, that Shahu realized the deleterious nature of the caste system in its entirety. For Shahu, the 'system' which he was fighting was Brahmin bureaucracy. To use S.M. Fraser's explanation: "(Shahu) opposed Brahmins as a *system*" (italics mine) (Latthe 1924 [vol.1]: 12). This point is crucial, as being anti-Brahmin for Shahu could not be without being against the caste system. Shahu's position can be analysed through a speech he gave at his Kolhapur *durbar* in 1905 (Sangve 1978 [vol. 3]: 29):

> It is a matter patent to every student of Hindu society, that all Brahmins have an innate desire to suppress all other classes, and thus to assert their supremacy over them. The lower the social status of an individual the greater is their influence. They would have greater influence over a Shudra than over a Kshatriya, who by following the same ritual with them would ascend much higher on the social ladder and be very nearly on a footing of equality with them.

Shahu's views on Brahmins became crystallized during the *Vedokta* controversy. Even toward the end of his life, Shahu was aware of the unending nature of the challenge he had undertaken to topple Brahmin bureaucracy. In a speech he made at the *Akhil Bhartiya Bahishkrut Samaj Parishad* in Nagpur in 1920 (30.05.1920), Shahu claimed that even if an oligarchy were to establish bureaucratic control over him, he would bequeath the rule of his kingdom to his son and dedicate himself to the service of the masses (Pawar 2008: 86). As discussed previously, the *Vedokta* controversy also

made colonial officers aware of Shahu's stand against the growing influence of Brahmins within colonial administration. Shahu's correspondences to the resident of Kolhapur and to the Governor of Bombay underlined his intention of making them aware of Brahmin self-conceit. He articulated his position clearly in a letter to Col. F.W. Wodehouse, the Resident of Kolhapur in 1918, by saying (Sangve 1978 [vol. 8]: 42):

> I want to break it (religious monopoly of Brahmins) by introducing Satyashodhak Samaj and Arya Samaj. The former has got no solid foundation while the Arya Samaj has got the foundation of the Vedas. I am thinking of teaching Vedas to other castes meaning to say, that is their religion which the Brahmins do not like at all, I tried my best by obliging the Brahmins and giving them all the good treatment, but I find that they are all incorrigible and if I were to leave the things as they are, their influence will never be loose. Government is helping Arya Samaj because they do not dabble in politics. They are a religious and social body and are helpful to government in counteracting the Brahmin extremists.

From the beginning of the *Vedokta* controversy till his death in 1922, Shahu impressed the rationale for his policies against Brahmins upon British officers. Shahu's equally passionate speeches on the perniciousness of the caste system complicates the imagery of his popular persona—one that was a conservative leader who spoke *only* on behalf of the Kshatriyas and someone, who as a result, cast a blind eye to caste discrimination. Laying the foundation stone at the Maratha Boarding school in Nasik in 1920, Shahu confessed (Shahu Chhatrapati and Bhosale 1975: 43):

> At one time, I confess, I was a conservative and as an upholder of orthodoxy believed in the perpetuation of the caste system. The idea that thereby I was obstructing the progress of others never occurred to me.

Shahu specifically expounded on how dissolving caste hierarchies was necessary, since upholding them would be tantamount to sin. By calling out the false binary of caste-enmity (purportedly considered a vice) while simultaneously upholding the caste system for its functional merit, Shahu condemned caste enmity calling it unsophisticated and reiterated that caste enmity was the effect of caste hierarchy. Interestingly, he encouraged non-Brahmins to critically reflect on the purpose behind holding caste meetings. For him, they were only means to an end. As he himself pithily stated: "The end of our caste meetings is to end the caste (system)" (ibid: 43). Shahu also consciously repeated this sentiment of restraining caste pride in other public speeches. For example, in his address at both the *Arya Kshatriya Sabha* in Kolhapur (15.08.1920) along with his speech at the Shri Rajaram industrial school, his principal message emphasized on 'caste pride must be kept under control' (Pawar 2008: 98-101). For Shahu, a limited extent of caste pride was inevitable, and he often drew its parallels with casting these as the sentiments of the many children of the same man, and through this mechanism, established a familial logic for legitimizing his mandate of limiting caste pride. However, in the same address, he also provoked the public to think beyond their own children. Whilst invoking restrained caste pride, his call was aimed at making a transition to a world that was beyond one's own caste community. His capacious outlook can also be gleaned from his views on other religions and their

treatment of the lower castes. By reiterating the perniciousness of the caste system, Shahu claimed that Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists and others treated their own backward classes kindly and sympathetically. Even if different creeds, Shahu declared that "they have endeared themselves to us" (Latthe 1924 [vol.1]: 156). To give one example, Shahu responded to their caste-based generosity by providing monetary support to Mohammedans, and by opening a Mohammedan hostel in 1906. He further organized Mohameddan educational conferences and had translated the Quran into Marathi (Patankar 2021: 78).

At this point, I would like to take a step back and argue that Shahu seems to have made a broad distinction between Kshatriyas and non-Brahmins, addressing them as two groups grappling with two separate questions. This is where Shahu's Kshatriya orientation becomes starker, as he envisioned Marathas as more worthy of enjoying certain social and political privileges when compared to Shudras. Shahu's commentary on Vedic rituals and practices could be seen as a caste right that he demanded only for the Kshatriyas. On the other hand, non-Brahmins seem to feature prominently in Shahu's public discourse, primarily when it came to issues pertaining to socio-economic schemes and education policies. There was an implicit hierarchical assumption here of the Kshatriyas enjoying superior social, economic, and educational status. For all his emphasis on primary education, Shahu hinted to the importance of education, as the source of power underlying upward social mobility. In Shahu's words (cf. S.S. Bhosale, [Gundekar 2010: 559]):

> In a country sunk deep in illiteracy, it can never produce excellent diplomats and warriors. And for that reason, Hindustan desperately needs compulsory and free education.

Simply put, according to this assumption, uneducated non-Brahmins could never lay claim to Shahu's own caste-rights to Vedic rituals and practices. Shahu's twisted argument implies that in order to become legitimate recipients of Vedic knowledge, communities would have to first prove themselves worthy of that reception by realizing the significance of attaining respectable educational status. For Shahu, the quest for humanity among Shudras was therefore primarily tethered to the question of education. Their passage toward respectability and a position of social status however also meant that Marathas did not receive any critical scrutiny for the social prestige that they had historically enjoyed. The importance of education to bring the masses to a certain degree of public awareness can be understood by Shahu's views on who deserved to champion the cause of 'Swaraj'. The following quote from Shahu's public address, delivered while laying the foundation stone of the Maratha Boarding school in 1920 is self-evident (Shahu Chhatrapati and Bhosale 1975: 49-51):

> You will no doubt understand that my efforts after education are motivated solely because I am most anxious to give self-Government as early as possible to my subjects. If all my subjects had reached the literacy test of the vernacular third, I would have very cheerfully handed over to them the responsibilities of Government and retired on pension sufficient to maintain myself.

Shahu continues with this thought of a caste-conscious Swaraj by further stating (ibid):

> I am desirous of entrusting my people with full and complete power as soon as they are advanced to understand its exercise. Till they grow up to this stage I feel great anxiety in handing over any political power for it may be monopolized by the few to the disadvantage of the many.

Shahu's ultimate conception of Swaraj must be understood through his drive toward establishing *aryavarta* (the Aryan domain), and of how he perceived the terms Kshatriya and Shudras vis-à-vis his critique of the caste system through the lens of his desire to establish an Aryan domain. Even if Shahu failed to provide a critique of Maratha supremacy, and in fact valorised its pride and status vis-à-vis Brahmins, his equally astute views on the caste system, and how that affected Shudras, provides us with crucial insights into his evolving views on both caste and identity. In order to foster an ethic of education among the masses, Shahu endeavoured to instil pride within them by preserving memory and heritage, facilitating this enlightenment further by commissioning grants for research and publishing. There are umpteen examples of how active Shahu was in sanctioning history projects. For example, Shahu issued a 2000-rupee grant for Arjun Keluskar's biography of Shivaji in 1906. He additionally sent copies of M.G. Dongare's two volumes on the Bhosale family lineage (*Siddhant Vijaya*) that traced the history of *Vedokata* rites for Kshatriyas in the 19th century, to big schools and libraries. Shahu befriended figures like Prabodhankar Thackeray by hiring him to work on the history of the *Chaturvarna* system and in 1920, Thackeray subsequently received a grant of 2000 rupees to publish a series of books titled *Vajraprahar Granthamala*. Thackeray in fact assured Shahu that he would leave no stone unturned to bring their mutual enemies to book. Shahu hired British legal experts like F.C.O. Beaman in 1922 to codify Hindu laws that would be in conformity with the progressive spirit of equality, that would treat all castes of the Hindu community equally. This was also a time when Shahu was himself working on publishing books on the British administration to compare it with the Peshwa regime (cf. Sangve 1978 [vol. 9]: 91–120). Even with his complicated stand on giving preference to Marathas and making provisions for Shudras to improve their social and educational positions, Shahu's image seldom remained fixed as that of a sole votary of the Marathas. His social efforts confronted caste discrimination, made operational through the Satyashodhak Samaj and permeating beyond. Along with being in contact with leaders like P. Tyagraja Chetti and Dr. T. M. Nair of the non-Brahmin movements in Madras, Shahu's presence contributed to the rise of various other organizations pertaining to different communities like Gujarati Untouchables, Depressed Classes, Mohammedan Samaj, Lingayat Samaj in Mysore, and the Madras Dravidian Association (Kavlekar 1979: 72).

Documenting *Kshatrajagadguru* in Vernacular Print

As previously observed, Shahu was influenced by the principles of the Arya Samaj from 1902 onward. This was also the time when the *Vedokta* controversy was at its peak. In the meanwhile, Shahu simultaneously engaged with another idea that would, in the future, polarize opinions, not just between Brahmins and non-Brahmins but also among non-Brahmin castes. This new idea was related to Shahu's conceptualization

of a *Kshatrajagadguru*, a Kshatriya Pontiff, a position that was in direct response to the Brahmin office of the Shankaracharya. In order to break free from the thraldom of Brahmin high priesthood, Shahu's nomination of a Kshatriya counter Guru was considered a viable resolution that would lead to the liberation of non-Brahmins. The idea of the *Kshatrajagadguru* germinated in 1904 and Pawar quotes Shahu saying (2013: 9): "Other castes like Daivadnya Sonar, Shenvi, Lingayat, Jains established their own Dharma gurus. Why should Marathas not do the same?" Latthe's biography on Shahu recounts how Shahu also made sustained enquiries into the notion and possibility of creating separate priesthoods at the Satyashodhak Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Theosophical Society, the Arya Samaj etc. (Latthe 1924 [vol.1]: 7). Interestingly, Latthe explains this turn in Shahu's thoughts as the 'spirit of Akbar', not only because Shahu himself drew parallels between himself and Akbar's secular approach of laying down guidelines for the incumbent sovereign Kshatriya leader, but also because he lauded Akbar's emancipatory measures that included recruiting the Mahar and Mang castes in his army.

It was as late as 1920 that Shahu decided to establish the separate seat of the *Kshatrajagadguru*, located in a small village called Patgaon in Kolhapur. Patgaon was special and chosen primarily because it was the place where a certain Mouni Maharaj had his *samadhi* (commemorative spot). Mouni Maharaj was known to be Chhatrapati Shivaji's Guru, whose blessings Shivaji sought in difficult times (ibid: 10). Shahu decided to look out for a young, promising Maratha man who would be a worthy recipient of the seat and identified a certain Sadashivrao Benadikar Patil from Benadi village in Kolhapur for the job. Patil was primarily identified, based on his intellect and hunger for knowledge while studying in Poona's Fergusson college. In November 1920, Patil was anointed as the inaugural *Kshatrajagadguru* at the hermitage or *muth* of Mouni Maharaj in Patgaon. In a letter Shahu wrote to the newly appointed Jagadguru, he advised him to become one among the masses. Paradoxically, the *Kshatrajagadguru* was also meant to embody the Kshatriya response to the hegemony of Brahmin middleman (priest) who mediated between the almighty and the masses. At the same time, Shahu believed that this situation of Brahmin priesthood could be rectified through the presence of a Kshatriya Guru who would act as a facilitator, instead of mediating between the two. After his appointment, the *Kshatrajagadguru* addressed multiple public events in Kolhapur, ranging from educational programs to Dharmic gatherings, and a majority of his speeches and articles were published in the *Vijayi Maratha*, a prominent non-Brahmin newspaper of the time based in Poona. Shripatrao Shinde, the editor of *Vijayi Maratha* was an influential voice from the non-Brahmin movement who supported the idea of a Kshatriya Guru, even while other members like Mukundrao Patil and Prabodhankar Thackeray categorically opposed the idea, saying that the seat of a *Kshatrajagadguru* was modelled on the seat of Shankaracharya and that it would merely imitate Brahmin high priesthood. Despite this discussion ensuing among non-Brahmins, Shahu was unfazed by it and went ahead with the appointment.

The founding of this new seat added a new dimension to the non-Brahmin movement. The publication of *Kshatrajagadguru's* speeches and articles by leading non-Brahmin newspapers implied a concrete validation of the seat's presence by at least one section of the Satyashodhak Samaj. Secondly, through the *Kshatrajagadguru*'s speeches and

articles demonstrate the overlaps and divergences inherent to the *Kshatrajagadguru's* thoughts on the self, questions of individual autonomy, the role of philosophy, the importance basic education in everyday life, and the contingent role of history in everyday life that included the core principles of the non-Brahmin movement itself. Shahu's letter to the *Kshatrajagadguru* made one specific suggestion that advised the latter to learn philosophy. The *Kshatrajagadguru* internalized this suggestion as a guiding principle, and also put that advice into practice in a very literal way. For example, while addressing what could have probably been an unlettered group of people at a *Brahmanetar Parishad* in Satara in 1923, the *Kshatrajagadguru* was seen quoting Aristotle to describe the basis of society and its functions (Pawar 2013: 52):

> Aristotle said once that society comes into existence from the formation of family and family comes into existence from marriage and thereby in any given society, the institution of marriage is considered as extremely pure.

More than seeking validation from the Western world on his views on female education and *stree atmavikaas* (progress of the female self), the quotation above followed a trajectory that was similar to other non-Brahmin writers of this period that used similar quotations as signposts of a wider philosophical argument. While most of the *Kshatrajagadguru*'s public speeches were replete with sermons on how to use the intellect to lead an informed life, similar to the genres followed by traditional *kirtankar* (religious performer), the *Kshatrajagadguru* wove his public addresses around metaphysical questions like: What was the purpose of life? How was one to achieve one's life goals? What were the different ways in which to increase the avenues of knowledge generation? How was one to place one's life at the service of those in need, among other similar questions. Although the frame of the *Kshatrajagadguru*'s speeches were metaphysical in orientation, there was also a strong emphasis in them on the importance of using one's intellect. The masses were warned against jeopardizing individual autonomy, by taking scriptural prescriptions at face value. This evidences how the *Kshatrajagadguru* was not merely meant to be a conduit of Shahu's thoughts. His endeavour included encouraging non-Brahmins not to think of his seat as a *Jagadguru* (world leader) as sacrosanct but consider him as a personage for whom *jag aahe jyacha guru*—the world was his teacher (Pawar 2013: 12). By reversing the intellectual gaze on the real world, the epitome of learning was no longer encompassed by the seat of the *Kshatrajagadguru*. This democratization was a significant marker that differentiated Kshatriyas from Brahmins, with the latter being notorious for concealing religious knowledge from non-Brahmins. For the *Kshatrajagadguru*, knowledge was meant to be mined from the world; a resource that was accessible to all, in contrast to the notion of religious knowledge being a repository of a few. As the *Kshatrajagadguru* exclaimed: *vaad vivaad karnyaat nehmi faydaach aahe* or, how it is was always beneficial to discuss and express dissent (ibid: 16). Along with access to doctrinal knowledge, the right to discuss and dissent created newer avenues of knowledge production was considered significant. The *Kshatrajagadguru's* insistence on relying on one's intellect over didactic teachings can also be seen as his refutation of the Arya Samaj's belief about the divinely ordained nature of the Vedas. For him, the Vedas were not written by the almighty at all (*vedas ishwar pranit nahi*)

(ibid: 81),[7] and debating with a few Arya Samaj members on the day of *Makar Sankraman*, the *Kshatrajagadguru* reminded them: *sarva kaame satya-asatyacha nirnay karun karne* (decisions must be taken based on the validity of truth and non-truth). Elaborating on critical intervention he further stated: "To say the world should agree with the idea of Vedas being written by God, as was the case with Dayanand, is like assaulting an individual's right to think" (ibid: 81). The term he used while reiterating how not all knowledge resided in the Vedas was *buddhi pramanya* (proof of intellect). This intellect in his opinion, in turn, was informed by the *Kshatriya* ideal of collective *karmayog* (constant work in the face of everyday challenges), as opposed to the Brahminical ideal of *sanyasmarga* (renunciation). The *Kshatrajagadguru* specially invoked this binary to deploy a counterintuitive spin that suggested how it was a Kshatriya-induced logic that undergirded the Bhagavat Gita's message of *karmayog*. He emphasized the validity of this mandate further by citing Tilak, who has also publicly agreed to the superiority of *karmayog* to *sanyasmarga*, and thereby indirectly validated the purity of non-Brahmins (ibid: 26).

While the *Kshatrajagadguru* persisted in reflecting on the virtues of dissent and encouraged non-Brahmins to make provocative interjections in the theory of divine authorship, this resulted in producing intriguing and contradictory claims about Vedic knowledge, *Kshatriya* penmanship, and the reconciliation of Brahminical Hinduism with the ideals of Maratha-Kshatriya way of life. Like other influential non-Brahmins of this period, the *Kshatrajagadguru* focused on reclaiming the mantle of an authentic interlocutor of Vedic Hinduism, and while doing so, he attempted to outdo Brahmins as the primary agents of Hinduism, substituting them with the idea of Kshatriyas as the original purveyors of the Vedas. "Vedas have been authored by Kshatriyas", he begins by saying and contextualizes his claim: "the reason why *Brahmanatva* (Brahmin-ness) comes into existence, is that Gayatri mantra has been authored by the Kshatriya Vishwamitra, wherein Kshatriya king Agnihotri helped Yadnyavalkya the Brahmin sage" (ibid: 15). The *Kshatrajagadguru*'s urge to instil reform was thus intertwined with the reimagining of Brahminical Hinduism through a Kshatriya lens. Addressing a *Brahmanetar Parishad* in Satara in 1923, the *Kshatrajagadguru* categorized Hindu *Dharmashastra* texts into three categories: the *Upanishad*s as a repository of philosophical knowledge, the *Smriti*s focused on societal laws, and the *Purana*s that described the 'history of Kings' (ibid: 51). For societal laws, he moreover suggested that rules no longer appropriate for the present day, be altered. However, at the same conference, he also proposed that Krishna was the original Kshatriya man, reminding his listeners about how according to Krishna's teachings in the Bhagavata Gita, *Parameshwara* or Supreme Lord resided in all human beings. Further elaborating on how *Sanatana Dharma* considered no-one to be superior by birth, he reiterated that there was no caste discrimination in Vedic times. The *Kshatrajagadguru* in fact, squarely laid the blame for caste discrimination on *Brahmani Vachane* or Brahminical mandates, that according to him, were interpolations—deviously inserted into scriptures at a later date. The *Kshatrajagadguru's* reformist zeal along with his prioritizing of individual intellect became positioned and emplaced as significant in the reimagining of *Sanatana Dharma* itself. Complimenting his paradoxical image of being a 'sovereign public intellectual', was the *Kshatrajagadguru*'s quest to further reconcile

[7] Kshatrajagadguru's speech *Kshatra Jagadguru yancha khulasa*, Satara. Vijayi Maratha, 09.03.1925.

Sanatana Dharma with the language of egalitarianism. This followed and almost replicated Shahu's ideological contradictions on caste and his religious conservatism.

Concluding Thoughts on Shahu's Intellectual Legacy: Conservative, Radical or Liberal?

In a speech that Shahu delivered at the *Kurmi Kshatriya Mahasabha* in Kanpur in 1919, he emphasized on the functional nature of the *varna* system. Shahu's position was similar to the growing non-Brahmin discourse in this period, of a pristine Vedic past that was being distorted by Brahminical illusionary infusions of a hereditary *varna* system over the years. There was a contradiction in Shahu's co-opting of the *varna* system that simultaneously retained his desire to fight against caste hierarchy. At the same event, Shahu was bestowed with the honorific title 'Rajasrshi', meaning regal sage. However, Shahu's socio-cultural positioning was not that of a sage at all, born with a blueprint on the ways in which to lead an ideal ethical life. As seen above in one of his speeches, Shahu admitted to being a 'conservative' in his early life. He moreover used the word 'conservative' in the English language even when the rest of his speech was in Marathi. However, it is also difficult to label Shahu a conservative in the early stages, which would entail describing him as a progressive in the latter stages of his life. Shahu also never labelled himself a 'progressive', especially when he described his transition from a self-avowed 'conservative' position. Shahu was not a political thinker either, who would articulate his position on conservatism as a strand of political thought. In that sense, he could be better identified as one among the many who did not reflect on his conservative journey in a sustained enquiry. As Sudipta Kaviraj argues (2018: 8-10): "Indian political thought of past two centuries hardly has any serious conservative tradition", and unlike Gandhi and other national figures, Shahu was clearly not a political thinker who offered nuanced reflections on the global political ideologies of conservatism through his speeches. Shahu's appeal for a liberatory politics couched in the Vedic idiom is therefore a conundrum, not just ideologically but also as part of his political grammar. While Kaviraj is concerned with the idea of liberal declaratory statements and its ambiguous relationship with the actual expression of their belief, my concern in this article is more complicated. Shahu started his public journey from a conservative position, expressed *during* his emancipatory work for the depressed masses. He embraced the Arya Samaj's call of 'Going back to the Vedas', which he used to argue about how this past was bereft of caste hierarchy and discrimination. Unlike Gandhi, who was against untouchability but attempted a seemingly contradictory reconciliation with *Sanatani* 'caste' order, Shahu's idea was to revive an egalitarian past which for him had no traces of caste hierarchy altogether.

Shahu's improbable reconciliation can perhaps be theorized in terms of Gramsci's views on religion where he specifically dwells on seeing religion of the people (and not of intellectuals) as an active mode of experiencing social and historical reality. Rosario Forlenza, in his paper on Antonio Gramsci on religion (2021: 49), captures this liberatory potential of religious incoherence when he argues:

> The lived and unstructured religion of the masses is fragmentary and incoherent, but it is intrinsically political, and in specific conditions, can challenge dominant hegemonies and create an oppositional and

> confrontational culture. Religion, in other words, possesses a counter-hegemonic, revolutionary and transformative potential as an incentive to action and mobilization.

Forlenza further outlines that even when religion was identified as an integral aspect of social life by Gramsci, the discursive relation between religion and society has remained a field of constant conflict and tension. In fact, antagonistic interpretations constitute a key element to discussions about whether the religion of the masses, especially and more so when the repository of religious knowledge has been thrown open to the masses after centuries of caste oppression, are a valid historical source of society. Instead of disenchanting the masses by coaxing them to move away from the socio-cultural grammar of religion that they are already aware of, Gramsci's idea was to highlight the inchoate religious sensibilities of the masses and connect it to a memory and imagination of an egalitarian past. A study of Gramsci certainly throws up questions for this article and its intellectual history of Shahu: Did Shahu indeed believe that the caste system (especially the hierarchy and discrimination associated with it) was a later-day invention, like some Satyashodhak leaders believed untouchability to have thrived on the religious mandates of Adi Shankaracharya in the 7th century? Was Shahu attempting a reformulation of Hinduism by prioritizing the Vedas and using the perspective to move the Puranas and Smritis to the discursive fringes of Hindu belief and practices? Perhaps Shahu's self-realization about his own conservative stand in the initial periods of his life can be seen as one of the key elements of what Gramsci termed 'common sense'. In his Prison Notebooks (Smith and Hoare 1971: 421) for instance, Gramsci argues how: "the starting point must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude, and which has to be made ideologically coherent", continuing to further say how: "Common sense is both 'crudely neophobe and conservative, and represents the raw beginnings of a genuinely counter-hegemonic narrative" (ibid: 423)."

Shahu's Dharmic puzzle constitutes a critical inflection point, not just because of his influence as the ruler of a princely state, but for us to specifically chart out the various intellectual trajectories through which Hinduism was sought to be reformulated for and by the non-Brahmin public. As Shahu's reflective analyses of the Vedas remained a continuous discourse from the early 1900s onward till his death in 1922, his intellectual trajectory needs to be contextually evaluated from the position he had as a princely ruler from a non-Brahmin social backdrop within which the subsequent period of the non-Brahmin movement and its print culture flourished. Shahu was considered the most influential non-Brahmin figure in the public domain of his times after Jotirao Phule, his views and opinions carrying a wider societal significance. His monetary contributions to Satyashodhak newspapers reached beyond his princely state of Kolhapur, and this is one of the tangible reasons for which his musings on caste and Dharma need to be critically examined as a signpost that reflects upon the impact it had on similar Satyashodhak enquiries on Hinduism in the early 20th century.

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Remembering Sharmila Rege

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Sharmila Rege (1964-2013), a feminist scholar from India is well-known for her seminal work on reimagining knowledges, pedagogies, political struggles, and higher educational practices (and interrelationships amongst these), from a Dalit feminist perspective. Ten years after her passing, we seek to commemorate her contributions and reinvestigate the possibility that her work offers for scholars in these troubling times. While an analysis and review of her writings is crucial at this juncture, this essay is a tribute to Rege's Phule-Ambedkarite feminist pedagogy, and her institutional practices at the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre (Pune), which proved foundational to her overall work. In this essay, we discuss her teaching-learning practices of the Women's Studies classroom in the state university, that recognizes, analyses and interrogates the complex politics of knowledge, its production, distribution, and consumption. By locating herself at the academic borderlands, Sharmila challenged canonical knowledges and the prevalent hegemonic cultures of teaching and learning, by devising new curricula, classroom practices, and resources. Women's Studies episteme for her, interwove the knowledge practices of both academia and activism. In this essay, we discuss her institutional practices of doing Women's Studies that she developed by confronting internal differences along hierarchical lines, social inequality, and through the building and enabling of collective work. Now, at a time when the university system seems to be in flux wrought through transformations and new tensions, Sharmila's insights and practices are critical for the struggle for radical equality.

Feminism, Pedagogy, Dalit, Ambedkar, Activism, Women's-Studies

Introduction

What does it mean to remember Sharmila Rege ten years after her passing, a well-known and widely read scholar whose work is of critical significance for the humanities and the social sciences in India? These have been challenging times for those in academia, committed to the goals of bringing about radical equality and transformative possibilities. The present changes in the university driven by a neoliberal logic of marketization on the one hand, and that constrains academic freedom on the other, is combined with an unsettling upsurge of regulatory right-wing forces. It is in this context, that we seek to remember Sharmila: a radical optimist and a feminist teacher, scholar, institutional builder, and fellow comrade in a collective democratic struggle. We are writing as Sharmila's students, mentees, colleagues and friends and comrades and our reflections are based on twenty years of working together with her and our team/ collective of teachers, researchers, students and friends at the Women's Studies

Centre at the Savitribai Phule Pune University. Our sense of doing academic, and women's studies in particular is constructed through this collective journey. How we remember Sharmila today is shaped by this journey; and also, by how we have remembered her in the last ten years, with others who knew her. This remembering is, hence, personal, collective, and also institutional all at the same time.

Image 11.1: Sharmila Rege by Rohini Shukla. Image Source at Instagram handle@acadoodles.

One can appreciate Sharmila's work and contributions in terms of an approach that promoted doing women's studies institutionally as a separate discipline, and also within the disciplines seeking to interrogate and reimagine those. Her passion and politics to build women's studies as an (inter)disciplinary and institutional episteme and space was integral to her work. She saw women's studies as a space to confront and counter the contemporary challenges faced by the field of higher education more broadly. We would like to discuss some distinct aspects of Sharmila's work over here: transformative pedagogies which she later defined as Phule-Ambedkarite feminist pedagogies. This pedagogic intention was foundational to her research and writing

that interwove the political with the intellectual. Traveling between these two worlds, she also sought to create the intersection between feminist and Dalit transformative politics. Further the central ethical spirit of Sharmila's institutional practices—of doing women's studies meant building a collective space with social difference (cf. Rege 1998). In this essay, we focus more on her pedagogies and institutional practices that she developed at the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre (now a department) that has been alluded to, in obituaries following her untimely death in July 2013.

Journeying and Intersectional Worldviews

Sharmila is one of those scholars, whose works and critical approach is primarily linked to them being teachers. Her teaching, politics, and institutional work is inseparable from, and rather constitutive of her research and writings. It is her journey between the worlds of teaching and research with questions that troubled her there, and the feedback that these worlds had for each other, that made her work distinct. Sharmila was anxious and deeply engaged for her everyday classroom lectures, at the same level as she would be, while writing a paper or a seminar presentation. She would become angry if she thought that we were not taking teaching as seriously as a seminar presentation or research paper, or not considering students to be as important as fellow academicians. Rather, her family would often wonder and joke about people who called Sharmila great, or who said that they liked Sharmila as a teacher, given the preparation she would make for her regular classroom lectures. She listened keenly and emphatically to her students, colleagues, comrades, editors, readers, and her academic community, and to everybody around her. And these multi-layered conversations across the worlds of teaching, research, and politics marked Sharmila's own academic and institutional output.

Not only are Sharmila's teaching-learning practices, her Phule-Ambedkarite feminist pedagogies discussed in her own writings, but they are also hailed in other scholarly works that critically analyse the pedagogies of doing women's studies (cf. Chauhan 2015). However, her institutional work needs further analysis. This essay is a preliminary attempt to discuss her teaching, politics, and institutional work in further detail that is inseparable from her writing and ponder on what it offers us at this juncture.[1] Sharmila's writings are path breaking in more than one way: a) interrogating disciplinary histories and reimagining sociology from feminist and Dalit perspectives; b) opening up the everyday and the politics of popular culture to the questions of caste, gender and labour; and significantly, c) unravelling the feminist disregard for intersection of caste and gender to build an integrated Dalit feminist standpoint that explores interdisciplinary epistemological possibilities (cf. Rege 2006).[2] Here, we seek

[1] An extensive analysis of Rege's reimagined and reworked institutional practices at the KSP Women's Studies Centre (Pune) is part of a larger project that maps the future and development of the women's studies episteme in India. This study named *(Im)Possibilities of Institutionalizing Women's Studies in India* investigates the challenges and possibilities of institutionalization and disciplinization of women's studies in India. We know that our friends and comrades that are part of the collective: researchers, students, and others may think, remember and write about these processes differently. And it is an analysis of these very different standpoints itself, that makes up the larger project.

[2] An anthology of Sharmila's writings is underway, edited by V Geetha and Uma Chakravarty with section introductions by some of Sharmila's colleagues and comrades at the women's studies centre. The

to remember Sharmila as a pedagogue and as an institutional builder, though this is admittedly, also a long-term and collective project.

Sharmila's work is fundamentally located in the public and within the state university framework, situated in the non- metropolitan context. She was conscious of what this location of our Women's Studies Centre implied from the very beginning, as the first non-metropolitan centre in Maharashtra that came after the two centres of Mumbai, housed at the SNDT (Shrimati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University) and the TISS (Tata Institute of Social Sciences). This awareness has shaped our vision as well, as it has, the practice of doing women's studies in Pune. Interestingly, our university (Pune University) is a state university that has an orientation towards, as well as a desire of internationalizing education from earlier on; Pune being considered the 'Oxford of the East'! And it is this location that has also shaped Sharmila's work, and of course her teaching, but also her research work and writing. There is a focus on teaching at the university department, rather than research, where majority of our students have studied in Pune or other adjoining districts, with many of them educated in the regional language: Marathi, even though the medium of instruction at the university remains English.

Many teachers, especially of the social sciences and humanities have been doing 'public sociology' in more than one way, connected with the new social movements of the region and the Marathi public sphere more broadly. There has been a significant presence of liberal modernist, leftist, and also anti-caste politics within and outside the university. There is additionally a strong regional sense to academic life. Yet, we have always also had a presence of international students in the classroom coming from different parts of the world; our larger academic community involving scholars from all over India and the world. It is in this ecology of a state university, where Sharmila located herself consciously and solidly. And we can see how her work was being shaped by this ecology.

A Phule-Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogue

Sharmila's pedagogic practices are attentive to how the classroom and the curriculum are spaces where power relations and social inequalities play out. Her classroom was her site of research and critical praxis, where she employed different strategies to introduce critical visions and perspectives regarding social inequalities and injustices. Sharmila engaged critically with the sociological tradition of knowledge and the politics of power therein, and strove to have a better understanding of how power structures were transmitted, legitimated and reproduced by different social institutions like higher education. Her teaching, research and her classroom were the sites where she addressed power relations, mainly in terms of the knowledges which are considered worthy of study, and the conceptions of different social structures which housed and perpetuated these power relations. Through her different pedagogic practices in the women's studies classroom, she tried to engage with the interlocking nature of gender,

volume brings out the many possibilities of analysing Sharmila's writings as well as her pedagogic and institutional politics. Sharmila's writings can also be accessed at http://sharmilarege.com/.

caste, and class in the construction of the self, and the structures within which the self was located.

It is moreover important to note how Sharmila as a feminist scholar travelled between the disciplines of sociology and women's studies. She saw herself on the disciplinary margins when introducing feminism in Sociology and understood her location of being a women's studies scholar, teacher, and activist as peripheral, while yet, also enabling when addressing the issues of power within the disciplinary framework where knowledge was grounded but also limited. While reflecting on her own location as a feminist teacher and researcher, Sharmila often underlined, that being on the 'academic borderlands' allowed her to inhabit both academy and activism, be interdisciplinary in her approach, and transgress the boundaries between disciplines, which often caused anxiety for the disciplinary regimes. This created an epistemic space to be located along with those, who were also on the social margins: those from different castes, classes, languages, ethnicities, sexualities, and politics; and a possibility to build alliances with them. As she wrote: "these socially contested borderlands are epistemological borderlands constituting the interface between different claims to knowledge" (Rege 2000: 56).

Sharmila's pedagogic experiments were located in the new times, when the presence of Dalit Bahujan women students was expanding, especially in the social sciences which brought a renewed vitality to academic margins by asking questions and challenging these very boundaries. She was extremely critical about the responses these marginalized students received from mainstream academicians who were mourning the decline in the quality of education which it seemed, 'accidently' corresponded with the entry of these marginalised students in the academic field. Sharmila was addressing these challenges along with other social scientists who were also reviving self-reflexive traditions within academia. However, for her, being located in the disciplinary space of women's studies while being trained in Sociology, was a more complex challenge. She was making efforts to establish women's studies as an (inter)discipline, and simultaneously answering questions about whether this would be rigorous enough, whether it was scholarly enough, or whether it was limited to just a political position or a doctrine, or then, too theoretical that would make it lose its political edge, or jargonistic and not relatable.

This context provides us with a window to comprehend how she navigated academics, movements, and spaces to address the hegemony of upper-caste, patriarchal ideas. Through her teaching, research, and innovative pedagogic practices, Sharmila challenged the hegemony of all those who exercised hegemonic power, by bringing in alternative resources, and by subverting the existing practices of teaching, and more importantly, by placing students from marginalised groups, at the centre of discourse-building. One encounters Sharmila's engagement with the various theoretical debates on standpoint theory, critical race theory, post modernism, and anti-caste theory on one hand, and counterbalance it against her struggle with democratisation, and her struggle against oppressive structures and unjust systems. Through her rigorous engagement with the academic, and other materials produced by those active in the rights movement, she could introduce new resources into pedagogy which were not just innovative or rich in content, but which also asked more fundamental questions

such as: what is knowledge? Who produces knowledge? And why the knowledges produced by those on the margins are never considered as knowledge? This is a consistent red-line of argument that passes through all her research and teaching, which demarcates her commitment to the politics of knowledge, oriented towards creating a democratic academic space. New entrants in higher education could now challenge existing structures, and those in the hegemonic positions would be concomitantly forced to realise the 'lack' that is created because of their non-recognition of resources and knowledges, that are from the margins. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss some of Sharmila's pedagogic practices in further detail that include her classroom exercises and her interventions in building a new curriculum for women's studies. This will help in understanding how she used the everyday world of teaching to subvert Brahmanical hegemony. This understanding will also help to bring out how she employed innovative practices to place 'disadvantaged' students at the centre and yet, maintained academic rigour while sustaining dialogue with those working at the grassroot level.

New Curricula

In the building of any discipline, the curriculum needs to be expansive, rigorous and updated. We will look at Sharmila's experiments with building curriculum at our Centre and her crucial role in an effort for building guidelines or model curriculum for women's studies at the national level. This process of curriculum building initiated by her, outlines the intellectual premise of women's studies by engaging a wide range and depth of feminist scholarship, as well as an engagement with the concerns of contemporary feminist politics. This exercise was challenging, especially as those registering for the women's studies course were more interested in its focus on the 'experiential' and its engagement with the concrete contemporary cases of gender oppression. Some were apprehensive and uneasy about its rigorous theoretical base, its research methodology, and its epistemological debates.

A further introduction to the forms of inequalities other than gender, including caste, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and region, and its intersection, sometimes made students more anxious. Thus, the main challenge for those engaged in curriculum development like Sharmila, was about how to deal with the diverse ideas that students had, about what they wanted to learn in women's studies, and how they would practice women's studies. This would build a curriculum that was intellectually rigorous and as yet accessible. Sharmila's writings about curriculum and the curriculum that she designed, tried to bring this rigour and relevance of the field, and the perspectives from the marginalised section to the centre. She designed extensive reading lists for the courses she taught and some of the references she listed underlines this fact, of how she was challenging the hegemony of established resources, while emphasizing the politics of knowledge production.

In her much-discussed article *Education as Trutya Ratna: Towards Phule-Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogical Practice* (2010), Sharmila pointed out how classroom teaching reproduces existing power relations. It is thus important to critically evaluate what we teach and how we teach and how it consolidates the hegemony of mainstream knowledge, and the power of the teacher. Sharmila commented on the power

structures within the classroom that emerged from seemingly routine everyday practices. Thus, she consciously experimented with the diversity of the classroom, and also with the resources used in teaching. This, rather than underlining the 'lack' experienced by students from marginalised backgrounds, analysed the structural roots of this 'lack', and shifted the burden of this 'lack' from the disadvantaged within the system that in turn, privileged a few.

Her effort was aimed at initiating discussion about how structures perpetuated exploitative conditions, and how it was not sufficient to merely acknowledge these privileges or disadvantages, but to also examine how these were produced, and to confront them openly and reflexively (Nash 2019). Her reading lists and lesson plans underlined her engagement with different domains of knowledge and bodies of theory which do not usually speak with each other (Brown 2005). This produced her teaching and pedagogic practices as not only student-centric, but also a practice that challenged existing power structures within and outside the classroom. While addressing this issue of power, Sharmila focused more on questions of language, resources, and classroom dynamics, weaving her pedagogic practices around these issues.

We will discuss three of her pedagogic experiments here: a) a bilingual book b) a bridge course and its manual, and c) the use of unconventional resources such as movement literature, regional materials, and popular audio-visual materials in teaching. Through this, Sharmila attempted to subvert power dynamics in the classroom and build bridges between diverse group of students that enabled them to understand and question their mutual inequalities (cf. Rege 2011b). Sharmila addressed the language question in terms of the social disparities and inequalities that it concealed, and sought to develop elaborate bilingual pedagogies (cf. Rege 2010b). As teachers, if we engage with the social positioning of the student from the marginalised background, it will allow us to understand how different systems of inequalities come together to produce a lack / disadvantage for that student (Collins 2000). And Sharmila attempted to make the exploitative structures visible to both teachers as well as students, so that they are able to analyse relations of power and hierarchies on their own.

In order to address the power implicit within language, and to make the classroom democratic, Sharmila developed a bilingual reader for her course which included a soft copy of reading material in English that was introduced and contextualized in detail in Marathi, to make it accessible through module-wise chapters. Then there were Marathi translations of key English texts that were brought out thematically. Another practice was to bring into public, some of the popular resources and discourses that were in languages other than English and were in Marathi. This included knowledge practices of different languages and different worlds, in terms of political and intellectual representation. Rather than the usual remedial English course that treated the language of teaching and learning as an individual problem for students, Sharmila designed a co-curricular bridge course. This bridge course involved practising diversity in the classroom by focusing and questioning structural differences and the unequal access to resources, capacities, and capital dictated within the modern educational system. She identified gaps between the worlds of undergraduate and postgraduate education, and the gaps between education and employment, designing

a course that would develop critical thinking, reading and writing among students. And instead of putting the burden of learning language and academic skills and capacities on individual students from marginalized groups, her bridge course fractured prevalent assumptions about 'good' English education that would wedge open the ignorance produced through limited knowledge. This course became "…… a collective effort to reinvent ourselves as teachers …..and a political intervention against an increasingly intolerant meritocracy that expresses itself through a rhetoric of choice and freedom without any reference to power and equality" (Rege 2011: 6).

It is further interesting that the bridge manual that was designed for students, started by introducing readers to the epistemological position that challenged scholars who lamented the loss of quality education, and then went on to discuss the different articulations of students about talking back to the system. In a very interesting way, Sharmila referred to the challenges faced by 'privileged' students, their ignorance about what they lacked, and underlined the need of this bridge programme 'even' for them. Her introduction ended with excerpts from different Dalit feminist writings about the language question; she thus drew from the Dalit imagination of language to propose an alternative to the official remedial programme.

The task here, as Sharmila saw it, was to understand the classroom as a site of struggle, and to transform it as a space for learning together for teachers and students. Education according to her was not just about the content, but about developing a critical eye, Phule's 'third eye',[3] and a capacity to dissent to dominant cultural practices that perpetuated exploitative structures. She was very critical about the everyday of the classroom in terms of what we teach, assume about the class, the resources we bring, and most importantly, the positionality of the students. Sharmila would come up with different ideas to make the classroom more democratic. For one of her bridge course sessions, she brought party hats in the class and requested students to actually wear those as 'thinking caps'. While everyone in the class were reluctant, they were curious as well. And so most of them wore these caps to discover the distinction between the thinking, routine, stock responses, rhetorical and binary understanding, and the critical, creative thinking process and what this would mean for doing social sciences. She not only used diverse resources such as audio-visual materials like films, documentaries, images etc. in her class to develop nuanced understanding of the structures, but also encouraged students to bring their own resources to the classroom. What students read, listened to, or watched would in turn enable the teacher to understand their life-worlds and the knowledges with which they engaged, in the world that was outside the classroom.

These methods disrupted the power equation between teachers and students, and subverted their ideas about who was the source of knowledge, and who its recipient. The diverse resources brought by Sharmila into the classroom, raised the confidence of marginalised students, encouraging them to participate and contribute to the classroom discussions, and to talk from their subject locations. Thus, for instance, through Iranian films, classic Bollywood films or documentaries, reading material on ethnic violence, or protests from different countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka,

[3] Jotiba Phule visualized education as *tritiya ratna* or the third eye that opens up a new way to understand the world by recognizing, challenging, and transforming the relationship between power and knowledge.

Nepal, or Iran that Sharmila brought into the class, she tried to bring a global perspective to deconstructing the assumed binary between local / global. The classroom became a space for both teachers and students for collective learning and the creation of knowledge.

Significantly, according to Sharmila, criticality of thinking and education could not be dichotomized to the concerns of student employability. She therefore also engaged with questions about the employability of students much before the significance of such a question came to be acknowledged and debated upon in the field of higher education. She was among the first few who questioned the assumed divide between critical thinking, and skills that were deemed important for employment. Today, when professionalization and skill-building has become integral to the neoliberal logic of universality, Sharmila's vision of linking critical thinking and working with diversity, developed in the social sciences and humanities translated into building student capacities that would result in their employability in diverse sectors. This was not only unusual but also ingenious. She enabled a dialogue between teachers, academicians, and potential employers through seminars, through networks with diverse organizations that the Centre created, through modular workshops of practitioners that was integrated into teaching, and through an elaborate internship and block placement programme. All these innovations need to be investigated further within the new context, and appreciated anew.

A Journey between Pedagogical and Political/ Academia and Activism

Feminism and women's studies are intellectual-political projects and the dangers and limitations, or the impossibility of merging these have been widely debated (Brown 2005). Sharmila also interrogated the common assumption implicit within women's studies that saw itself as an academic arm of women's movement, and sought to reimagine the relationship between feminist movements, feminist knowledges, and feminist pedagogies. Sharmila's work encountered in her lesser-known initial writings on the communal politics of Sati, Marxist opposition to gay rights, and the gendered nature of communalism in the context of Gujrat carnage to her widely-known later writings on the Dalit feminist standpoint, Dalit women's testimonios, and feminist reclamation of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar brings out this close and complicated relationship between women's studies and feminist politics. Sharmila continued to flag off these difficult conversations within the women's movement, within democratic struggles, as well as in academic-pedagogic debates, and within the spaces afforded by other social movements. These interactions include a wide range of engagements: from study groups, lectures for activists, articles in movement mouthpieces, publications and booklets, to mobilizing a students' group (*Samvaad* or dialogue), and putting together street plays, political skits, poster exhibitions apart from classroom lectures, workshops, and seminars that included activists and practitioners, and the introduction of movement-materials as resources in the classroom.

Though connecting the worlds of academia and activism has been intrinsic to the constitution of women's studies since its inception, such work is often seen either as a failure, or at least as a troublesome phenomenon. Sharmila's work goes much deeper in its efforts to bridge these two distinct and also divided worlds in more productive

ways, in epistemological terms, to integrate their knowledges and practices. She allowed knowledge practices of both the worlds to interrogate and reconstitute each other. Thus, the seemingly disparate genealogies of feminist perspectives to globalization that she identifies and maps in her EPW article in 2003 *More than just Tacking Women onto the 'Macropicture': Feminist Contributions to the Globalization Discourse* fractures the common frames of sociological debates on globalization, instead, drawing more from both the local feminist engagement with anti-globalization movement in that period on the one hand, while introducing and teaching the globalization question to students of women's studies on the other. Her work on the gendered character of communalization that analyses different 'unspectacular' moments of conflict, right from its mobilization to its resolution, significantly builds upon the fact-finding reports of these conflicts that include reports on the Gujrat genocide produced by feminist and democratic organizations. This analysis made by Sharmila sought to link the political knowledge practices that investigated the Gujarat carnage with feminist scholarship that underlined how women were treated as the battlefield of communal violence on one hand, juxtaposed against women's agency within right-wing politics on the other hand, that interact within multi-layered and ambiguous ways (cf. Rege 1996).

Firstly, she prepared the fact-finding report, while drawing from other such reports that questioned the political silence of local women's organizations on communal violence. Secondly, she wrote a book chapter that investigated historical and regional underpinnings of the unusual phenomenon of Gujarat pogrom to explicate gendered and sexual nature of communal violence (cf. Rege 2003b). Thirdly, she wrote a series of articles in a movement magazine *Shramikanche Aasud* outlining the feminist scholarship on communal violence that goes beyond seeing women in the binary of victimhood and agency.[4] Another instance marking her enriching travel between academic and political worlds is a series of her articles contained in another movement magazine called *Satyashodhak Sanghatak* that introduces the position of black feminism to *Satyashodhak* activists, and that enables rich dialogue between anti-race and anti-caste knowledges about gender and feminism (cf. Rege 2013b, first published during 2003- 2005). This further led Sharmila to map the histories of *Satyashodhak* and Ambedkarite feminisms in her later works (cf. Rege 2006). But more significantly, this engagement went into designing a course in women's studies teaching, *Feminisms: Beyond Local and Global* that explored the development of feminisms across the world in the relational and comparative mode, that situated but did not limit feminism to its location of origin. Apart from this, Sharmila produced many different teaching and learning resources on this theme. There is need for a more extensive analysis and unpacking of Sharmila's different works and academic projects to explore the productive though dialectical relationship between academia and activism.

Towards Feminist Institutional Practice

What does feminist institutional practice look like? Interrogating the gendered nature of institutions, feminists have identified alternative values, structures and practices to redefine their practices, while also articulating their dilemma about the effectiveness

[4] These articles are not available at present, since this was a short-lived magazine (personal communication: Anagha Tambe and Swati Dyahadroy).

of these practices. Some of the major ideas that have come to be debated in the context of movements and organizations, and then governmental and non-governmental organizations working with feminist goals are the following: instituting non-hierarchical collectivist structures that moderate internal dynamics, instituting participative democratic functioning, the inclusion of different people, fostering democratic and affective bonds that empower and transform participants, and attention provided to the embodied worker and their reproductive life and so on (Acker 1995). The institutionalization of women's studies in academia has similarly been viewed with suspicion.

Drawing from these debates, Sharmila sought to identify sustainable and ethical ways of being in the workplace, that focused more on the politics of experience and empathy to recreate a new collective imaginary of academia. Rather than being sceptical about the process of institutionalization, Sharmila consciously engaged in the politics of working collectively with a 'diverse' team, with a clear desire to reproduce the new imagination of academia and doing women's studies, rather than confining it to specific time and place, as a 'magic time' or an 'island of excellence'. Sharmila herself talked about these interventions in some of her later works (cf. Rege 2010, 2011). An elaborate documentation of this process, with a historical awareness of the practices of doing women's studies, and a radical openness to critique and change is underway at present, to take forward this struggle, albeit with new roadblocks that have resulted in new directions.

For Sharmila, ethical ways of doing women's studies while being in academics in general was crucial; not in a narrow sense but in terms of making a linkage between the political and the epistemological. For her, how we work was intrinsically related to how we think, write, and teach. Academics for her could not be 'mere work', but it was life; one never stopped being an academician in one's life, thus making ideas about 'work-life balance' irrelevant. 'Personal is political' meant reflecting and analysing on one's everyday, rather than making lifestyle into one's politics. Yet, to be an ethical teacher in a public university also meant being constantly accountable for the public funds one received, as part of a salary or as part of a departmental budget. Amongst a range of feminist ethical ways of institutional practice, working as a collective and with a consciousness of difference was central to Sharmila's work.

When we started working as a larger team of research scholars, research assistants who joined under the UGC supported women's studies centres under its 11th plan, we also worked with governmental and non-governmental research funds. It was thus critical that we ensured a democratic and non-hierarchical work culture, and a reflexive commitment and responsibility that was associated with our organizational roles. Not only did this extend to the more-commonly accepted ethical practices that included transparency, sharing, participatory decision-making, and academic freedom, but the focus continued to be on the collective movement forward within a larger intellectual-political journey of doing women's studies. Study circles, for instance that were organized around the reading and discussing of the key feminist works by Angela Davis or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, were one such tool in the forward journey as we sought to prepare ourselves to read within diverse teams, with many of us not having 'English as our First Language' of education. Sharmila brought in a model of teaching

assistance that was a space to create new connections and support networks for students and teachers that would train new scholars into teaching, specifically the new interdisciplinary field of women's studies. Creation of reading files or dossiers, signposts or teaching outlines, teaching reports made by teachers and teaching assistants were some of the other tools that were useful for working together and developing the teaching capacities of the team. These transparent and reflexive team appraisals opened up possibilities for revision.

But most challenging out of all this was working with 'difference' that entailed bringing our different subjectivities to one's academic space. As Sharmila discusses in her work on Phule Ambedkarite feminist pedagogies, our lived experiences located in our social lives were central to this intellectual-political project. The politics of difference was sought to be addressed by disentangling the complex intersection of our differences in terms of gender, caste, class, language, region, and spatiality. And this politics was mapped onto diverse spaces, from the classroom between teachers and students, and among the students from diverse backgrounds, and our workspaces within teams organized through a division of labour and affective ties among us. One of the significant 'products' of this churning was a booklet, 'research room diaries' where our researchers reflected on their relationship with the occasion of 'teacher's day'.

The anti-caste critique of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as the symbol of the ideal teacher has led to the countercultural commemoration of Jotiba Phule's death anniversary as teacher's day in Maharashtra. Sharmila would persistently share this politics with everyone who wished her on the mainstream teacher's day. The discussion in our research room over what teacher meant to each one of them in that diverse team, over their diverse educational pathways and life worlds led to the creation of this document of 'research room diary' where everyone reflected on their experience and politics of teacher's day. Another such space that continued to be troubling was the 'group work' in a diverse team. Reading and reflecting, discussing the politics of difference was one thing; but working together with a diverse team also meant many disruptions. Students could discuss the politics of seating arrangements and of comfort, of affinities and friendships that they made along the way; but working in a group where members were pre-selected by teachers according to a diversity criterion for grading an assignment was difficult to say the least. Similarly, for the research team, working in a diverse team with time-lines and goals was more difficult than reading and discussing difference. It was the recognition and confrontation of hurt guilt, anger, and a sense of betrayal that enabled us to build the politics of solidarity that has been argued by bell hooks (1994). Building upon these significant experiences, we are now trying to unpack the process of working with difference in which students, researchers and teachers have participated as a collective.[5]

[5] See research report (Anagha Tambe & Swati Dyahadroy) "Breaking through the Inter-Generational Cycle of Educational Inequalities: First Generation Learners, Stigmatized Occupational Groups and Sustainable Futures": https://tesfindia.iihs.co.in/breaking-through-the-intergenerational-cycle-of-educational-inequalities-first-generation-learners-stigmatized-occupational-groups-and-sustainable-futures/. This is a project supported by Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) India and the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS).

Conclusion

How can we work with Phule Ambedkarite feminist pedagogies and institutional practices in present times, when the idea of university is changing so drastically to become a space of either vulgar application, or a 'threat to the nation'? How do we relocate individual struggles in the classrooms, and think of critical pedagogies as a collective endeavour that includes diverse teachers, students, educationists, and activists, who are all committed to equality? How do we challenge the misconstrued opposition between critical feminist pedagogies and the institutionalization of these feminist practices; and explore democratic and collective possibilities that do not produce suspicion, but can work despite of the constraints of neoliberal university life and its modes that are claimed to produce efficiency and austerity? How do we seek to disrupt the boundaries of classrooms to rethink the politics of knowledge that bring in diverse knowledge practices—technological, digital, art-based, and creative, networked and collaborative for an embodied learning process? And how do we learn from the alternative modes of radical studying, not just education, but studying that takes place in unions and in speak-out groups, and in social protests more generally?

And who are these 'we'? Today, not only students and researchers, but also teachers coming from different socially marginalized groups are making their way into academia, unsettling the dynamics of the university and the classroom. The new marginalities, plural, intersecting and conflicting, are being mobilized within academia, as questions of gender and sexual ambiguity, mental and physical disabilities, a complex interplay of caste, religion and ethnicity have come to be foregrounded. The material uncertainties of the time have exacerbated this challenge, as the diverse social profile of academia intersects with neoliberal individualizing mechanisms.

In such a context defined by such multi-layered power dynamics, our times force us to think about not just collaboration but contention, confrontation, and the risk within the practice of critical pedagogy and collective practices. Sharmila's reimagination of critical pedagogies and institutional practices that focused on collectivizing as well as 'institutionalizing', into which contestation, debate and dialogue over the politics of difference are interwoven, constitutes a critical resource at this juncture. When social science departments are becoming more diverse in terms of students and teachers, the individual pursuit of critical pedagogies may become not just limiting but at best confusing, and at worst condescending towards Dalit Bahujan Adivasi students and teachers, making them illegible. Making it a collective project/ partnership as Sharmila did, may be a difficult but also rewarding struggle. The radical pedagogies we strive for is a public issue and not a personal one that we struggle alone with in our individual classrooms. We need to make it consciously and clearly, as a part of the broader struggle, and a collective action for social justice.

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Book Review

Ehud Halperin. (2019). *The Many Faces of a Himalayan Goddess: Hadimba, Her Devotees, and Religion in Rapid Change*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp. xx+297. Price: € 96.20. ISBN 9780190913588. Hardcover.

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Image 12.1: (From Book Cover) Hadimba's Palanquin carried on Devotees' Shoulders on their way to a Festival. Image Source: Ehud Halperin.

The Many Faces of a Himalayan Goddess: Hadimba, Her Devotees, and Religion in Rapid Change by Ehud Halperin explores the multifaceted nature of the Himalayan goddess Hadimba, the religious practices associated with her, and the impact of rapid societal changes on her worship. The book delves the rich mythology surrounding Hadimba and examines the various manifestations of her divine persona. The author analyses the religious beliefs and rituals of Hadimba's devotees, shedding light on their deep reverence for the goddess and their interactions with her through pilgrimage, offerings, and prayers. Examining the historical and cultural contexts in which Hadimba worship evolved over time, Halperin discusses the impact of globalization, urbanization, and modernization on traditional religious practices, as well as the ways in which Hadimba's devotees adapt to and negotiate these changes. Through a combination of fieldwork, interviews, and scholarly research, *The Many Faces of a Himalayan Goddess: Hadimba, Her Devotees, and Religion in Rapid Change* provides a

comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between Hadimba, her followers, and the evolving religious landscape of the Himalayan region. It also offers readers valuable insights into the dynamic nature of religious practices and the resilience of devotion in the face of societal transformations.

Chapter one, *Getting There*, provides readers with a vivid description of the journey to Kullu Valley, a popular tourist destination in India. Highlighting the significance of Kullu as the capital of the valley since 1660 and the role of the traditional royal family in the region, the author introduces Maheshwar Singh, the oldest male member of the family, who is referred to as the Kullu Raja, who is actively involved in politics and the religious rituals surrounding Hadimba. The chapter takes the reader on a scenic bus journey along the Beas River towards Manali, emphasizing the beauty of the valley with its snow-clad peaks, green forests, terraced fields, and apple orchards. The chapter describes the diverse weather conditions throughout the seasons, that attract tourists. As the bus travels further, signs of tourism become evident, such as shops selling local handicrafts, tourist resorts, and hotels. The author portrays the hustle and bustle of arriving in Manali, with passengers disembarking into a muddy parking lot where they are immediately approached by hotel guides.

The narrative then transitions to the exploration of mountain religion and the *Devta* system prevalent in the region. Halperin explains how the worship of goddesses and gods plays a central role in the lives of the locals. The *Devta* system encompasses various aspects of life, from household rituals and personal worship to village deities and larger temple structures. He provides examples of the different manifestations of the *devta*s, such as their presence in households, sacred locations, and temples. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the influence of *devta*s on religious, socio-political, economic, agricultural, and environmental dimensions of life in the Kullu Valley and even shares an anecdote illustrating the belief in the *devta*s' power to bring about significant changes, as witnessed during the time of the Emergency Rule in India. Overall, the chapter provides a descriptive account of the journey to the scenic Kullu Valley and introduces the readers to the vibrant religious and cultural practices that shape the lives of its inhabitants, through the lens of the *Devta* system.

In the second chapter, *Assembling the Ritual Core*, the author presents readers with an analysis of the goddess Hadimba's significance within the local community, describing the dancing *rath*s (palanquins) of Goshali Nag and Hadimba, the possessed man's actions, and the crowd's enthusiastic involvement. The narrative conveys a sense of wonder and curiosity about the events unfolding and the author's interaction with the locals, particularly Lotram that add depth to the narrative and provide readers with different perspectives to the goddess's rituals. One notable aspect of the chapter encompasses an exploration of the concept of complex agency. The author draws upon the work of scholars such as Ronald Inden (1998) and William Sax (2006) to analyse the gods as complex agents, capable of influencing and acting upon the world. This theoretical framework adds depth to the chapter and helps to contextualize the observations made during the rituals.

This chapter also delves the significance of *rath*s as vehicles of the gods, and explains the different types of *rath*s found in India with a specific focus on *devta* palanquins in the Kullu Valley. The author describes the rituals surrounding the *rath*'s building, its

maintenance, and the transportation of the palanquins used in the worship that represent Hadimba through historical and cultural theoretical frameworks and these details contribute to a richer understanding of the role of her *rath* as a ritual vehicle that manifests the goddess's presence and agency in the world. The collective participation of villagers in producing and maintaining the *rath*, as well as their engagement with it during processions, establishes Hadimba as a focal point and representative of the community. The *rath* becomes a platform for the expression of the community's collective consciousness and will, both internally to themselves and externally for the community.

Image 12.2: (From Book Cover) One of the Metal Faces covering Hadimba's Palanquin, most identified with Her. Image Source: Ehud Halperin

The episode described in the chapter, where Hadimba's *rath* halts and turns back due to conflicting communal desires, demonstrates the centrality of the *rath*'s movements and the negotiation of communal interests. The agreement reached and pronounced by the oracle reflects the goddess's will and leads to a small change in the intercommunal relationship. Furthermore, Hadimba, as a representative of her community, actively promotes social participation, solidarity, and communal identity. Her rituals demand the participation of all social groups, transcending caste, gender, and age divisions. While reinforcing divisions through assigned roles and responsibilities, the rituals emphasize the indispensability of each participant for the proper worship of the goddess.

The goddess and the movement of her *rath* defines the physical boundaries of the village, imbuing it with meaning, and associating her people with their territory. She serves as a protector of the public interest and inspires pride in her devotees, reinforcing their sense of belonging. The belief in the authenticity and divinity of

Hadimba's *rath* is crucial for gaining inclusion in the community. Those who accept the *rath* as the embodied *devta* and participate in the rituals are considered part of the group, while those who do not share this view are seen as the 'Other'. The rituals surrounding the *rath* exemplify religious material culture, shaping beliefs through objects, spaces, practices, and ideas. Additionally, the perpetual assembly and reconstruction of Hadimba, as the *rath* is disassembled and reassembled before each festive event reflects the goddess's essential nature and her multi-faceted aspects, that are represented by the many metal faces decorating her palanquin. Overall, this chapter offers a detailed exploration of Hadimba's role as a complex agent within her community, with the *rath* serving as a significant symbol of her presence, and her embodiment of communal agency that sheds light on her rituals, beliefs, and the social dynamics that revolve around the goddess and her ritual vehicle.

The third chapter, *Narrating the Local Web of Associations,* explores the narrative diversity surrounding the goddess Hadimba that highlights her dynamism shaped by history and influenced by various motivations and constraints. The stories about her emerge from within different contexts that develop divergently, carrying diverse meanings and implications for her role in the lives of her devotees. As a storehouse of fragmented memories and a product of interaction between deities, people, interests, and ideals, her stories reflect historical events, local mythologies, socio-political relationships, and shifts within the notion of divine supremacy. Her mythology also suggests connections with Buddhist and Tibetan religious streams that may have been downplayed over the centuries. Her relationships with various figures and dynasties reflect alliances, power struggles, and negotiations surrounding status and territory.

Furthermore, these mythological narratives show how Hadimba has been patronized and gradually Brahminized and Sanskritized by the rising rulers of the valley. The associated rituals surrounding her, serve to express and maintain local socio-political relations, while also commemorating historical events and processes. The narratives and rituals together document Hadimba's agentive involvement in initiating and furthering historical events and processes, positioning her as a really complex social actor. On the other hand, narrative inconsistencies within her mythology and the way locals explain these indicate the perception of Hadimba as a single, unitary being, despite the diverse stories surrounding her. This suggests a fundamental view of divinity as fragmented, assembled, and occasionally in tension, making it the task of humans to continuously gather these narrative pieces and carry them forward in all their complex forms.

The fourth chapter, *Encountering Epic India*, discusses the transformation of the goddess Hadimba in the context of her historical and cultural associations, particularly her identification with the epic Hadimba and her role as a *rakshasi* (demoness) in the Mahabharata. This mythological layering comes in addition to colonial encounters, followed by state institutions, and finally tourism in the Kullu Valley of India. The author highlights how the perception of Hadimba has evolved over time, shaped by external influences such as by colonial writers and the preference for Sanskrit textual sources. The rise of tourism in the region and the desire of the local people to assert themselves in the pan-Indian context has further contributed to the foregrounding of Hadimba's epic associations. This process has allowed her devotees to reinterpret and embrace her marginality and demonic nature as a source of power and attraction. The author

also touches upon the ambivalence of mountain people towards the plains, as they take pride in their own land and their own way of life that simultaneously seeks alliances and connections with lowlanders. Hadimba serves as a symbol of this ambivalence and the mountain people's fascination with urban, middle-class pilgrims who visit her. This seeming-paradox emphasizes the complex relationship between what is deemed 'periphery' (represented by Hadimba and the mountain people) and the 'centre' (represented by the plains and pan-Indian traditions). Hadimba, like the epic Hadimba, embodies the tension between these two realms, as she is both fascinated by the centre, seeking to become part of it, while at the same time retaining her unique identity as a mountain goddess. Overall, the chapter explores the interplay between local traditions, colonial influences, and the aspirations of the mountain people to establish their place within the larger Hindu and Indian context, constituting an insightful analysis of the transformation of Hadimba and the significance of her worship in its reflection of the socio-cultural dynamics of the Kullu Valley.

The fifth chapter, *Negotiating National Hinduism*, presents an analysis of the tensions between vegetarianism and the bloody sacrifices made to the goddess, significant in the postcolonial context of Modern India, specifically in the region of Kullu. The chapter highlights the historical coexistence of these practices and their supporting ideologies, suggesting an equilibrium that has been disrupted in recent decades due to external influences. The introduction of new material wealth, ideas, agents, and forces has led to a theological, moral, and practical attack on animal sacrifice, particularly the buffalo sacrifice to Hadimba, turning it into a battleground of various conflicts. The author identifies several key intertwined themes within the debate over sacrifices with cosmology, society, ethics, religious freedom, and political sovereignty all equally implicated in this struggle. The clash between traditional lifestyles and the transformative values of capitalist modernity, the challenge to caste-based social hierarchies posed by ideas of social mobility and egalitarianism, and the erosion of communal unity and solidarity through the rising trend towards individualism laced with self-interest, are some important emerging conflicts reflected in the worship of the goddess.

Moreover, this tension extends to the struggle between diverse indigenous forms of Hinduism and Brahmanical ideology, generating resistance from local agents against the criticism levied at it by outsiders and by the state. Hadimba, the goddess who receives these disputed offerings, serves as a symbolic ground for devotees to express and reflect on these multifaceted debates. She is portrayed differently by her followers, with some viewing her as a proud mountain goddess embodying bloodthirstiness, with others believing that she would willingly renounce such practices. The ritual struggles surrounding Hadimba and her devotees have wider implications for local identity and self-presentation with the sacrificial ground becoming an arena where locals present, debate, and reconstruct their identity. The way they perceive and interpret the sacrifice, as well as their level of participation in it, shapes their sense of belonging within the larger Hindu fold. These struggles over identity and belonging occur within the broader context of a clash between local worldviews and external ideals, cosmologies, and practices. Overall, this chapter provides a thought-provoking analysis of the various tensions between vegetarian and bloody sacrifices in the region of Kullu, while highlighting the complexities and multifaceted nature of the conflicts involving theological, moral, practical, and socio-political dimensions. The author effectively

demonstrates how the sacrificial arena becomes a site for negotiation and the reconstruction of local identity in the face of external influences and challenges to traditional practices.

Image 12.3: Hadimba's Palanquin carried on Devotees' Shoulders during Village Festival. Image Source: Ehud Halperin

The sixth chapter, *Confronting the Global*, discusses the perplexity and challenges faced by the devotees of Hadimba, framed by the changing socio-economic and environmental context. The author chronicles the transformations occurring in the region due to the shifts in market economy, tourism, and climate change that have brought both prosperity and hardships to the villagers, leading to feelings of alienation, competition, and moral decline. The followers of Hadimba continue to approach the ecological crisis from a traditional holistic perspective, according to which they interpret weather disturbances as a consequence of impropriety and declining values, and engaging in ritual action to restore balance and seek the goddess's intervention. If the ritual does not produce the desired outcome, this reinforces their opinion about the importance of human participation in maintaining the local ecosystem while endorsing a holistic worldview. The failure of traditional rituals to effectively address the broader climatic issues prompts devotees to question the validity of their worldview and they therefore feel compelled then to consider alternative ideologies that may offer better

explanations for the changes they are experiencing. Thus, the devotees engage in joint rituals to contemplate the nature of reality, the strength of their relationships, and their prospects for survival amidst the metaphorical and real storms they face. Throughout this process, Hadimba is portrayed as a complex agent who reflects the collective cognition of her community.

The rituals and sacrifices offered to the goddess demonstrate the followers' commitment to their all-inclusive worldview. However, during these rituals, various speculations about current conditions also emerge, ranging from attributing misbehaviour to divine desertion that threatens the collapse of the entire system. The notion of ‘science’ is viewed over here with scepticism, often associated with global warming and seen as a determinate and godless force that is beyond human influence. The author speculates on the uncertain fate of traditional holistic logic in the face of competing paradigms, wondering whether it will prevail, transform, or disappear over time. A growing sense of diminishing human agency and fatalistic worldviews may hinder the willingness of Hadimba's devotees to confront climate and environmental changes in their regions and this chapter provides a nuanced exploration of the challenges faced by Hadimba's devotees that highlight tensions between traditional beliefs and emerging paradigms, and the impact of these changes on individual and collective agency.

Overall, *The Many Faces of a Himalayan Goddess* provides a fascinating insight into the cult of Hadimba, highlighting the complex agency of the deities and the active participation of the community and the enduring power of its goddess traditions. Furthermore, the author explores the challenges and transformations of Hadimba as not only a deity but also a ‘way of being’ for her devotees, and how she serves as an index, platform, and agent within her community. The author discusses how Hadimba and her devotees engage in debates and negotiations concerning various cultural issues, reflecting on their conflicting interests and opinions, portraying Hadimba as both a conserving and changing agent, who upholds tradition simultaneously while she embraces progress. She is depicted as occupying multiple positions, from the local to the pan-Indian that reflects the influence of internal and external forces on the community. Through his study, the author demonstrates the unique ways in which modernity and capitalism are integrated into rural (non-urban) India, with Hadimba serving as an example of how traditional values and new realities coexist and interact. These broader insights emphasize the understanding of village deities as dynamic and ever-changing platforms for reflection, negotiation, and action. The book discusses the ongoing processes of shaping and reshaping Hinduism, suggesting that Hinduism is continually being invented and reconfigured. The author’s style of writing is clear and engaging, allowing the reader to visualize events and immerse themselves within the narrative.

Halperin effectively weaves together personal observations, theoretical insights, and cultural information to create a cohesive and thought-provoking piece. Overall, the book offers a captivating glimpse into a specific ritual and its cultural context. It effectively conveys the author's experiences and reflections while incorporating relevant scholarly perspectives in his writing that serves as an engaging and informative piece. I strongly recommend this book for every reader of religious and

area studies (Hinduism and India/South Asia) and anthropology students of under and post graduate levels as well as for all researchers and academic enthusiasts.

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Book Review

Anirudh Deshpande & Muphid Mujawar. (2020). *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. Pp. 160. Price: $ 13.40. ISBN-10: 9350027364. (Softcover).

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Anirudh Deshpande and Muphid Mujawar's compact tour-de-force, *The Rise and Fall of a Brown Water Navy*, presents an erudite examination of the Maratha navy and its eminent leader, Sarkhel Kanhoji Angre, set against the backdrop of South Asia's early modern period. By meticulously scrutinising a diverse array of primary and secondary sources, the authors furnish an intricate representation of the "Brown Water Navy's" political and economic ramifications within the Arabian Sea region. The noteworthy work, unveils previously unexplored dimensions of Indian maritime heritage concerning naval power, sovereignty, and security. The book audaciously challenges Eurocentric perspectives on naval history and illuminates the vital role those indigenous naval traditions played in sculpting South Asia's maritime narrative. The following paragraphs present a chapter-wise deconstruction of this scholarly endeavour.

The inaugural chapter furnishes a concise historical contextualization of the Arabian Sea region, encompassing the ascent of the Mughal Empire in India and the advent of European colonial entities like the Portuguese and British in the area. Subsequently, the authors probe the economic catalysts propelling sea-power development in the Arabian Sea, accentuating the pivotal role of trade and commerce in fashioning political and military stratagems. The notion of mercantilism emerges as central to the chapter, with the authors elucidating its fundamental principles and objectives. They delineate how mercantilism, typified by an emphasis on exportation and wealth accumulation through trade, engendered an intricate nexus of economic and political associations between European powers and Asian empires, such as the Marathas. A salient motif in the opening chapter is the emphasis on the criticality of naval power in safeguarding trade routes and exerting military influence. The authors explicate the strategic benefits of naval power, encompassing its capacity to dominate key ports and harbours, shield merchant vessels, and initiate assaults against adversary forces. The authors also offer a comprehensive overview of the naval technologies and tactics employed during this era, delineating the ship classifications utilised by European and Asian powers and the armaments and strategies adopted in naval combat. The next chapter titled *The Making of a Brown Water Maratha Navy* chronicles the Maratha Navy's genesis and expansion under Shivaji and his successors, concentrating on Kanhoji Angre's role. The chapter delves into the navy's organisational architecture, the enlistment and instruction of sailors and officers, and the allocation of specialised vessels for distinct purposes.

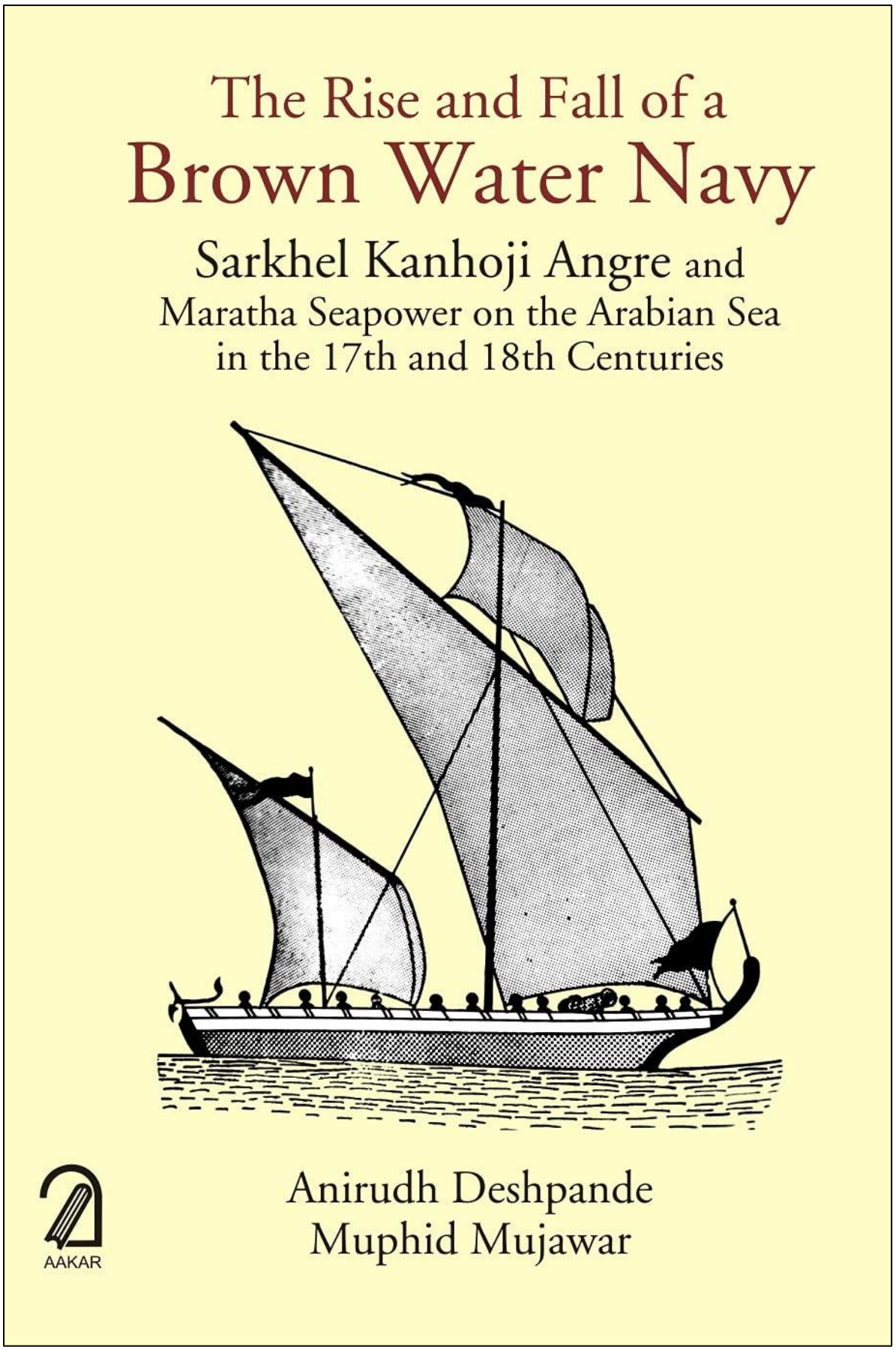

Image 13.1: Image Source: Anirudh Deshpande and Muphid Mujawar

The book's most noteworthy attribute is its scrupulous attention to detail. The authors painstakingly reconstruct the Maratha navy's history, tracing its metamorphosis from a humble coastal defence force into a formidable naval juggernaut that contested British and Portuguese hegemony in the region. Throughout the narrative, the authors explore the intricate interplay between maritime trade, commerce, military strategy, and political power, illuminating the multifaceted factors that shaped the region's naval prowess. Central to the narrative of this commendable study is the enigmatic figure of Kanhoji Angre, the legendary Maratha admiral who played a crucial role in sculpting South Asia's maritime trajectory. The authors meticulously examine Angre's life and career, crafting a riveting depiction of a multifarious individual who personified the dynamic and often tumultuous history of the region. From his formative years as a coastal captain to his later tenure as a formidable naval commander, Angre adeptly navigated an intricate labyrinth of alliances, rivalries, and power struggles that determined the fate of the Maratha navy and the Arabian Sea region as a whole.

In the book's third chapter, aptly titled *Kanhoji Angre*, the authors provide an exhaustive biographical account of this fabled naval commander, chronicling his ascendancy to power and his military and diplomatic achievements. Angre's success in thwarting European naval forces and his capacity to forge alliances with other regional entities are meticulously detailed. The chapter also offers insights into the Sarkhel's personal life and enduring legacy. The subsequent chapter, *The Military and Diplomatic Acumen of Kanhoji*, delves further into Angre's strategic and tactical prowess, emphasising his employment of guerrilla tactics and his adeptness at harnessing diplomacy and negotiation to attain his objectives. The chapter recounts several of Angre's most renowned victories, including his triumphant defence of the Maratha port of Kolaba against a British siege. The authors' sustained focus on the Maratha navy and Kanhoji Angre furnishes an invaluable perspective on the political, economic, and military history of the often-neglected Konkan coast. Through a rigorous examination of available sources, the authors present a nuanced and intricate portrayal of the brown water navy and its significance in the Arabian Sea region.

Chapter five, *Dastak and Sovereignty*, elucidates the concept of *dastak* as a system of passes that granted merchants permission to engage in trade within specific ports. The authors expound on how Angre and other naval commanders wielded this system of passes to exert control over trade in the Arabian Sea region. Additionally, they outline how *dastak* functioned as an instrument of diplomacy and sovereignty and examine the conflicts that ensued when European powers endeavoured to bypass or circumvent the system. A salient contribution of the book lies in its exploration of the multifaceted interactions between maritime trade and commerce, military strategy, and political power, underlining the ways these factors influenced the development of naval strength in the region. The authors also shed light on the role of *dastak* and sovereignty in the conflicts involving the Marathas, the British, and the Portuguese, adding a critical dimension to our understanding of the region's history and its position within global affairs. Transcending its focus on the Maratha navy and Kanhoji Angre, the book offers a wider perspective on the political and economic milieu of the early modern period in South Asia. The authors scrutinise the intricate interactions among the Marathas, the British, and the Portuguese, charting the mutable power dynamics that moulded the region's history. Specifically, they emphasise the manner in which conflicts over

maritime trade and commerce were deeply interwoven with matters of sovereignty and diplomacy, shedding light on the multifaceted interplay between economic, political, and military forces in the region. The authors' writing is characterised by a lucidity and finesse that render their analysis accessible to scholars and general readers alike. The prose is both engaging and insightful, immersing the reader in the complex and multifarious realm of the Maratha navy and its historical backdrop. The book's meticulous attention to detail and its discerning perspective on the interplay between maritime power, sovereignty, and diplomacy substantiate its value as a contribution to the fields of South Asian history and maritime studies.

Cumulatively, the book furnishes a comprehensive and detailed examination of the Maratha navy and the life and career of Kanhoji Angre. The authors vividly resurrect the enthralling history of seapower in the Arabian Sea region, delving into the organisational structures, tactics, and technologies employed by naval commanders during this era. This work is indispensable for those intrigued by the history of naval warfare or the role of trade and commerce in shaping political and military strategy. In summation, *The Rise and Fall of a Brown Water Navy* is an arresting and thought-provoking opus that defies conventional perspectives on naval history and enriches the fields of South Asian history and maritime studies. The book's emphasis on indigenous naval traditions and its discerning outlook on the interplay between maritime power, sovereignty, and diplomacy proffer invaluable insights for scholars and policymakers alike, culminating in an indelible literary experience.

Interview

What inspired you both to write this book? What was your intended primary audience with what likely takeaways compared to available literature on the subject?

As far as the indigenous Indian naval traditions are concerned not much historical work is available. Global naval history for a long time remained, and continues to remain, Eurocentric and our aim in this book is to delve into local history to challenge this Eurocentrism. Historians learn a lot from local histories which usually escape the grand narratives which inform the reading public in general. European navies triumphed in the ultimate analysis during the medieval and early modern periods but not before struggling against their local enemies. This contest is quite interesting from a variety of perspectives. The brown water navies based on the coastal forts used numerous local resources and geographical features to their advantage. This is historically relevant.

How does your study of the Maratha navy and Kanhoji Angre fit into the existing scholarship on this topic? What new insights or perspectives does your book offer that differ from previous works especially on Sea Power in Arabian Sea and its connection with maritime commerce and connectivity?

Our study of the Maratha Navy and the personality of Kanhoji Angre and later his successors, especially his son Tulaji Angre who remained defiant of English and Peshwa authority till the end, highlights the political, economic and military history of the Konkan coast, an area with which non-Marathi speaking people of India are unfamiliar. Our book

should be seen in the perspectives which guide what Ginzburg calls micro history. It is based on a rigorous examination of the available sources. The book also underlines the fact that the Peshwa played a crucial role in decimating Angre power on the Konkan Coast. Nationalist historians who eulogise the Peshwai are not expected to focus on the power struggle which ensued between the Peshwa and the Angres in the first half of the 18th Century.

What do you think were some of the most important factors that contributed to the success of Kanhoji Angre as a naval leader, and to the strength of the brown water navy during his time? How does that fit into lessons from the decline of the brown water navy in the early 18th century? Any contemporary applications that can be drawn for maritime strategy?

Brown water navies can survive only with the support of a major land power. As long as Kanhoji Angre was alive he used sea power to exercise sovereignty over a large coastal tract adjoining the west Indian coast of the Arabian Sea. In early modern India this was a rare achievement. He worsted the Sidis many times and became a thorn in the side of the English based in Bombay and Surat. The turmoil in the Maratha polity following Shivaji's death in 1680 was utilized by Kanhoji to develop a virtually sovereign domain on the Konkan. Angre was a daring and astute naval and land commander. His relation to the Maratha Navy is the same as the relation which binds the Maratha Swarajya and Shivaji. Our book points out why and how the personality of Angre rose to prominence in Indian history due to the peculiar political circumstances of the time. Shivaji's kingdom was in doldrums. The Peshwai was yet to be fully established and the English and Portuguese were not the masters of the coastal waters in the early decades of the 18th Century. This condition was exploited quite well by Kanhoji Angre, an experienced naval captain and prescient strategist.

The book discusses the role of dastak and sovereignty in the conflicts between the Marathas, the British, and the Portuguese. How do you think the legacy of Kanhoji Angre and the brown water navy continues to shape the history and culture of the region today?

The memory of Kanhoji Angre survives among the Marathas who know about him. In the recent past his exploits have been celebrated by history enthusiasts and also on social media. He has emerged as an inspiring historical figure especially among that section of the public which challenges the hegemony of the Peshwai in Marathi historical narratives. Whether all this is of some military or strategic value today is difficult to say because no brown water navy today, if such navies do exist, can survive an onslaught from air launched by ships of a blue water navy. Historically and technologically the days of brown water navies are over.

Apart from the primary focus on Kanhoji Angre and his Brown Water Navy, what are some fresh insights unearthed by you in the emergence of Indian maritime heritage in terms of naval power, sovereignty, and security? What are some of the key areas of research and inquiry that you think scholars should further focus on, in order to further deepen our understanding of the maritime history of South Asia?

Since 1992 I have written several research papers on the naval history of the Konkan Coast in an attempt to challenge the Eurocentrism inherent in the works of Western military and naval historians like Parker (Deshpande 1992). The point I have tried to make is that during the late medieval and early modern period of Asian history the victory of the Europeans was in no case guaranteed. Imagine a scenario in which the Peshwa would extend full support to Tulaji Angre. The English, in that case, would have found things very difficult indeed in Western India. Further, we know that Tipu Sultan had a plan of developing a powerful navy. His land defeat ensured that the plan did not fructify. History is an open-ended subject and that is why it is so interesting. Further, there are many areas on which historians can focus as far as coastal histories are concerned, recruitment, victualling, technology, armaments, local religious traditions and superstitions. The brown water navies followed syncretic traditions of beliefs and respect. They were not animated by the binaries foisted upon history by nationalism, especially religious nationalism. The modern Indian armed forces can learn a lot from all this.

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Book Review

Francis Xavier Clooney. *Saint Joseph in South India: Poetry, Mission and Theology in Costanzo Gioseffo Beschi's Tēmpāvaṇi*. Publications of the de Nobili Research Library, volume 39. Wien: Verein 'Sammlung de Nobili, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Indologie und Religionsforschung', Institut für Südasien-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde der Universität Wien, 2022. ISBN: 978-3-900271-48-0, pp. 194. (Hardcover).

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The title of Francis Xavier Clooney's book, *Saint Joseph in South India: Poetry, Mission and Theology in Costanzo Gioseffo Beschi's Tempavani* tells us all that we need to know about his monograph. In this monograph Clooney, a Jesuit priest, discusses *Tempavani* the epic poem in the Tamil language written by the 18th century Jesuit missionary to the Tamil country, Fr. Constanzo Gioseffo Beschi, an Italian, who worked in the Tamil country from 1710 to his death in 1747. Beschi has gained universal fame for his mastery over the Tamil language, being the author of a number of highly acclaimed Tamil texts, including, the epic poem on Saint Joseph, the work under discussion in Clooney's work. Four thousand verses long, the *Tempavani* describes the birth and life of Jesus prior to his public ministry, told from the perspective of Saint Joseph, Jesus Christ's foster father. Rather than plunge into a detailed translation of this epic, what Clooney does in the fifth chapter (of six) of this book is to rather focus on the three chapters from the 27th to the 29th that recount the ministry of Joseph in Egypt, and, which Clooney argues, manifests Joseph as "the natural and moral teacher par excellence" (p17). After all, Clooney clearly indicates in the monograph introduction that he is not interested in "presenting a full analysis of the Tamil grammatical and poetic styles, nor the still necessary full history of the text, but rather an account of Beschi's great plan to make the Christian story grow fruitfully in the soil of South Indian culture" (p. 14). What this book does do, therefore, is to offer a *theological* appreciation of *Tempavani* with the argument that such an appreciation would allow us to perceive the nuances of Beschi's missionary strategies, namely, about how to present the Gospel in ways that would make sense to an audience rooted in a Tamil context.

In keeping with this project, the earlier chapters of the book provide the contextual nest within which the fifth chapter sits—think of it, if you like, as an intellectual matryoshka doll project. The second chapter titled "Some Groundwork for Our Understanding of Beschi's Literary Project" is dedicated to a discussion of the various works that Beschi engaged with. This chapter begins with an analysis of the three chapters (13th-16th) of the *Vetiyarolukkam* (*On the Behaviour of Catechists*), representing the way Clooney believes it allows readers to appreciate "Beschi's overall view of natural virtue and the moral life" (p. 17). In this chapter Clooney also points out that the *Vetiyarolukkam* also references portions of the *Tirukkural* and launches into

an exciting discussion of the classical Tamil text, pointing to how eventually what Beschi did was not so much faithfully *translate* the text as much as *reframe* the *Tirukkural*, to communicate a Christian truth through a reinterpretation of various beliefs and concepts that were dominant in the original text. The third chapter offers an initial introduction to the *Tempavani* offering an outline of the epic, presenting it as a work of a Christian imagination, which introduced Christian theology as a seed into the fertile soil of Tamil literature. What Clooney helpfully points out in this chapter about the *Tempavani*, is that it presents Egypt, the location of the Holy Family's exile, as a stand in for the Tamil country to which Beschi is preaching. The fourth chapter nests the *Tempavani* within a broader context, highlighting some of the works which inspired and influenced the composition. Clooney lists two Tamil epics as a source of this inspiration, namely Kampan's Ramayan from the 13th century, and the Jain epic, Civakachintamani, authored by Tiruttakkatevar, from the 9th century BCE. While the second inspiration is revealed to be the 17th century Spanish mystic María de Ágreda's (1602-1665) *Mystical City of God* (*Mística Ciudad de Dios*), the third source of inspiration for Beschi's *Tempavani* was the author's own Ignatian tradition of the *Spiritual Exercises* where the retreatant is encouraged to enter the scene of the Gospels and experience sentiments of joy, fear, remorse, gratitude. It is only after this elaborate contextualising of the epic that Clooney proceeds to analyse the three chapters of the *Tempavani* in the fifth chapter, followed by a brief sixth chapter where Clooney seeks to link Beschi's strategy of accommodation with the more contemporary Catholic project of inculturation.

Clooney's monograph is a delight to read because it is a true, and masterly, example of interdisciplinary scholarship. The author is both a social scientist as well as a theologian, and the combination of these skills allows us a unique appreciation of the text. At the same time, his treatment of the text also offers us an exciting perspective of what qualitative interdisciplinary work between theology and the social sciences might look like. This would be especially useful for students of Catholicism, whether in the Tamil country, in South Asia, or in the context of global Catholicism, as too often social science engagements are not supported by an adequate, robust, understanding of theology. The most exciting part of this book, however, is Clooney's suggestion that what Beschi was attempting was to present his readers with a book that schooled the native catechists in virtues necessary for Catholic life by building precisely on the virtues already extolled within local society. This makes sense; how else was a Catholic missionary to propagate Catholicism in the absence of a Christian prince who upheld, and physically manifested, a Christian political order? Clooney draws our attention, however, to the fact that Beschi's reference to the *Tirukkural*, focused on just two of the three types of virtues contained within it, notably ignoring to translate the portion on *kamam* or desire. This seems to be clear evidence for how Beschi sought to enter through the Tamilian door, but exit, along with the converted, through the door of European Catholic sensibility. Also interesting is the distinction Clooney draws between Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), and Beschi. While de Nobili is often hailed as the founder of *accommodation*, which is presented as the largely Italian missionaries' strategy to acculturate Catholicism in local forms, Clooney points out that while de Nobili was accommodationist to his Roman, Goan and Jesuit audiences, he was, in fact, contrarily, sharply argumentative with his Tamil audience. Beschi's difference,

Clooney argues, was to stress on an 'affective' method, one which stressed kindness and compassion toward the unconverted native.

Despite its great promise as an interdisciplinary work, and the extremely interesting insights it provides about missionary work and Catholicism in the Tamil country, the book is not without flaws. To begin with, nothing that Clooney himself discusses in the book suggests that either de Nobili or Beschi were anything other than men committed to eventually bringing the people they converted into a clearly Western European form of Catholicism. If Clooney eventually ignores his own data, it is perhaps precisely because of his own location in contemporary theological debates. Clooney appears to want to link early modern accommodation with inculturation, the latter tied to contemporary attempts at fitting Catholicism within the racialised perspective of the nationalist postcolonial order. This theological positioning is not unlinked to an ideological positioning within the social sciences, which is marked by definite methodological nationalism. This kowtowing to methodological nationalism is especially evident in the way in which the region in which, and the people among whom, Beschi worked are framed. Clooney alternatively frames the territory as India—a territory born only in the 19th century via British efforts—South India, or the more acceptable Tamil country. Similarly references to the people have them recognised as Hindus, Indians, rather than simply denizens of the Tamil country who may not even have recognised themselves as Hindu, leave alone Indian. But Clooney also seems committed to reading Hinduism into early modern Tamil country, for example when he writes, "detached action in the world is a core element of Jesuit spirituality, as it would also be a familiar virtue for any Hindu knowing the *Bhagvadgita* and its teaching of karma yoga" (p. 45). Why assume that there was a standard Hinduism, or even Hindus, in a time when equality within native polities was a distant dream? Or when he references "a trope familiar in Hindu religious poetry, even the heaven-dwellers look with envy on their modest home here on earth" (p. 50): what he means is Puranic literature, not Hindu poetry. There are also certain silences in the work. For instance, it is unclear why Clooney assumes Beschi to be the sole author of the Tempavani? Why is Clooney silent about blood sacrifice, that are so much a part of early modern Tamil culture. For example, I thought the book could have spent more time in elaborating this possibility when discussing "This sacrifice comparable to Issac's" (p. 53). Beschi may also have been reaching out to the local Tamil polities, since the notion of blood sacrifice is deeply prevalent in the Tamil worldview. And finally, there is not a whisper of Muslims in the book, and we already know that Muslims were a critical component of early modern, and subsequent, Tamil life—literary and otherwise.

Finally, despite these words of caution, it must be said that Clooney's work, precisely because of its focus on virtues as the route through which we can initiate conversation with those who are culturally different, has a broader significance. Clooney's scholarship draws our attention to the foundations on which we can resume conversations in a time when fundamental universal values seem to be under threat. To put it in Clooney's own words, we would learn; "how to act virtuously in the cultures of today. Beschi's achievement is…a Catholic way of acting in the world, and artfully speaking a beautiful truth in service of a mission of repentance and conversion" (p.136).

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Book Review

Kalyani Devaki Menon. (2022). *Making Place for Muslims in Contemporary India*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. Pp. xiii+196. Price: $ 5.70. ISBN: 9781501760594. PDF

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Making Place for Muslims in Contemporary India is a poignant and brilliant book on Muslim religious minorities in Old Delhi and their efforts at social, historical, and political place-making in contemporary India—an India that is increasingly defined by Hindu nationalist politics. The book's introductory blurb already suggests the various conundrums encompassed in such a place-making enterprises, when saying: "Places do not simply exist. They are made and remade by the acts of individuals and communities at particular historical moments." Exemplary and excellently argued with mastery, *Making Place for Muslims* can be hailed for its applicability as an interpretive model, useful for similar research on the status, treatment, and condition of other postcolonial religious minorities in the Global South—communities produced as minorities based on their religious affiliation.

Based on extensive ethnography with the Muslim residents of the Old (walled) city of Delhi, also known by its Mughal name of *Shahjahanabad*, Menon demonstrates how the precarity of Muslim everyday life in India and the development of their social and religious life in contemporary times is minutely associated with rising Hindu nationalist hostility. Menon's respondents—residents of Old Delhi—many of whom have been in Old Delhi for many decades, not only struggle with their largely-middle class, performative identities that aim at being 'good' Muslims; they also negotiated gender and class exploitation—low-wages for intense and arduous labour within the supply-chain network of a transnational global economy that only increased their vulnerability.

Well-aware of their pejoratively articulated identity as 'Muslim' in postcolonial India, residents of Old Delhi resist assimilation into the Hindu mainstream by tightening the borders of their religious identity ever more. However, even while they do so, they simultaneously also engage and participate in multiple tolerant and transcending spaces that absorb internal differences with other Muslim groups to build an inclusive defence against Hindu nationalist attack—"cultural commons" as Visweswaran argued in 2010. This is nevertheless a complex subject position that is difficult to sustain and negotiate. Menon aptly demonstrates how Old Delhi residents yearn to remake and renew their identity by resetting it within older and more cosmopolitan moulds that hark back to a historical imagination *Shahjahanabad*—a nostalgia and retrotopia that according to Bauman (2017) is a future-less state where an imagined past is the only way to reconstitute an imagined future. Menon's respondents in Old Delhi, unable to look forward to a future that will ever include them, look back at the cosmopolitan past of *Shahjahanabad* instead, set in the Mughal times. It was not the religious segregation between Hindus and Muslims that built individual and community identity back then,

but it was a past, wherein identity was defined by diversity itself generated by being part of the city. This retrotopia has agency, and as Menon writes (p. 4):

> …histories of a city and empire in which religious identity did not determine political belonging, and where cultural traditions of friendship transcend religious boundaries. In so doing, they make place for Muslims by disrupting majoritarian constructions of India as a Hindu place that positions upper-caste Hindus as the normative national subject.

Image 15.1: Men and Women at the Jama Masjid for Shab-e-Barat. Image Source: Kalyani Devaki Menon

Making Place for Muslims is divided into five chapters, and apart from the *Introduction* and *Conclusion*, these five chapters are divided into two parts that are called *Landscapes of Equality* and *Making Place*. While *Landscapes of Equality* consists of two chapters: *A Place for Muslims* and *Gender and Precarity*, the *Making Place* section consists of the last three chapters: *Perfecting the Self*, *Living with Difference*, and *Life after Death*. The first chapter (*A Place for Muslims*) explores how the walled city has increasingly become a place of safety for Muslims. In a scenario that blames all Muslims for being violent, Old Delhi for Muslims is that one historical place that provides residents with a sense of everyday acceptance. This acceptance, however, does not simply take place in according to a default mode; ghettoization is also encouraged as it produces opportunities for better surveillance and control of religious minorities (Appadurai 1996). Describing her understanding of Muslim place-making in Old Delhi, Menon writes (pp. 35):

> I argue that these feelings of insecurity are engendered by a powerful politics of belonging that excludes Muslims from the national imagery, compelling those I worked with to challenge their displacement by crafting a place for themselves in Old Delhi…even as Muslims contest their erasure from the national imagery and assert their presence on the national landscape by making place for themselves in neighbourhoods in Old Delhi, they simultaneously acquiesce to a national cartography that enables their continued marginalization in contemporary India. Indeed, they are both "secure" and "secured" in Old Delhi, since their actions are ineluctably linked to discourses of nation and security that render some places inhospitable to Muslims while "securing" them in others.

This fixing or securing of Muslims in Old Delhi does not, on the other hand, produce its residents as financially self-sufficient. By the very fact that the walled city is a ghetto that stigmatises its residents as Muslim, Old Delhi becomes increasingly depleted of good-quality financial, educational, and care-giving networks, services, amenities, and opportunities like schools, offices, hospitals etc. These facilities have in recent times increasingly moved out of Old Delhi due to the stigma that being Muslim incurs in contemporary India. The second chapter of the book (*Gender and Precarity*) in fact discusses this problem more explicitly, showing how the movement of marginalized Muslim families into Muslim neighbourhoods in Old Delhi, simultaneously compounds their precarity and increases their impoverishment. Traced through stories of women who work in the hand-embroidered brocade-making industry (*zardozi*) that serve local bridal-wear markets, those who work in transnational supply-chain networks as *supari* (betel-nut) cutters, or those engaged in more stigmatized, informal labour based on qualitative exchange, the second chapter of the book outlines how the continuous marginalization of Muslims in postcolonial India forces many into increasing vulnerability contextualized in the absence of labour rights. This informalization has forced women to move into the labour market, who work long hours at labour intensive tasks without much remuneration. Menon calls the situation a "crisis of reproduction" (p. 62) that is increasingly laced with domestic rituals of wish fulfilment (*niyas*) especially among smaller groups of Shias in Old Delhi, who are hindered by an even smaller network. Describing how these cross-cutting vulnerabilities produce the Muslim identity of Old Delhi residents as increasingly intersectional, Menon defines the urgent task at hand as (p. 81):

> We have to examine how their religious identity intersects with other identities—as women, as labourers, as artisans, as migrants, as friends, as neighbours, as creditors, as debtors, as patients, as graduates, as daughters, and as wives—all of which affect their positioning in different ways and shape how they will traverse the social, economic, and political forces operating in contemporary India.

But despite marginalization, Muslim women from Old Delhi are hardly passive victims. The next three chapters of the book contained in the part two of the book (*Making Place*) demonstrate without doubt, how Muslim women respond to their marginalization by both consolidating as well as relaxing the boundaries of their religious identities. In the third chapter (*Perfecting the Self*), Menon explores the emergence of *dawa*

activities in Old Delhi, that she calls the "Muslim Club" (p. 85). Not part of any *maslak*, and identifying mostly with the teachings of Muslim televangelist Zakir Naik, members of the Muslim Club seek an "authentic" Islam, remaining critical of Shias and other Sunnis who follow the Deobandi or Barelvi *maslak*. Insisting on the inculcation of Muslim "foundational texts", women members of the Muslim Club are specially critical of the imbrication of Indian "culture" and "tradition" within Islam that for them, serves to erode away its "authenticity" represented by Prophet Mohammad alone. Constituting a performative identity, the women member of the Muslim Club are acutely aware of the Islamophobia awaiting them in the Hindu and global mainstream, and hence, Menon contextualizes their *dawa* activities—of becoming ideal and modern Muslims in the complexities and tensions of modernity itself that is encompassed by the intersecting vicissitudes of Global Islam and Modernity in India. While the women of the Muslim Club challenge Islamophobia, their piety can also be understood as a form of place making: "an assertion of presence in a country that is increasingly inhospitable to Muslims" (p. 98). Since the fashioning of their self-identity and selfhood is an ongoing process "…that operates in the context of competing hegemonies, conflicting aspirations, and complex sociopolitical forces" (p. 106), their audience also needs "…to situate their words and deeds within the sociopolitical context of their performance" (p. 113).

Menon explores how the emergence of strong religious boundaries among members of the Muslim Club that perform good Muslim-ness is contextualized within Hindu nationalist politics in the everyday, In chapter five (*Life after Death*), Menon describes the unfortunate event of a close respondent's husband's death in Old Delhi that becomes transformed into a site of social and religious contestation, as differences of opinion break out among mourners. Contesting what encompasses an ideal form of mourning among Muslims, Menon writes how "the divergent views expressed about how to appropriately mourn reflect constructions of religious subjectivity, womanhood, and Islam among Old Delhi's Muslims" (p. 138) is a form of community consolidation.

Mourning here reconstructs the individual and community lives of all those who survive death, with the site of mourning constituting a powerful context that re-creates as well as transcends the sectarian differences between mourners. Menon adds here: "mourning practices can bear the traces of the city's cosmopolitan pasts and anxious presents" that "enable alternative forms of subjectification…" (ibid.), that allow women to make bonds with each other within the exclusionary space of Hindu nationalist politics. For "it is amid these historical forces that individuals forge understandings of self and belonging, envision religious identity and practice, and live their everyday lives" (p. 139). In this chapter, Menon makes an important point about the limited scope of "cultural commons" as a universal idea. Living together in intimacy with the 'Other' can threaten modern, exclusive identities, where alternative and temporally-limited communities are as quickly formed, just as they are dissolved, becoming sites of struggle that simultaneously ameliorate the same struggle they serve to create. And this only further demonstrates how "communities, of course, can include and forge connections even as they exclude and articulate disjuncture and difference" (p. 147). Mourning sites hence constitute complex places where the residents of Old Delhi try not only "to be good Muslims, they also aspire to be other things—good parents, good teachers, good workers, good women, good friends, good citizens, good neighbours,

and occasionally, good communists" (p. 155). This transforms mourning rituals into an arena that produces belonging to place, and the making of place.

Though the struggle about difference and boundaries are most poignant when highlighted at instances of personal bereavement, these boundaries and their dissipation is strongly underscored in the performance of Shia mourning in Old Delhi during the Muharram festival as well, that Menon describes in chapter four (*Living with Difference*). Though the history of Shia-Sunni Muharram clashes is well-known for North India, the same mourning processions in Old Delhi are differently coloured, and tolerated by Sunnis as part of their solidarity and inclusivity shown towards other grieving Muslims (cf. Dandekar 2022). While Shias and Sunnis are aware of their mutual sectarian differences, they also live in a common environment of marginalization, exclusionary politics, and violence. It is in this context that Hindu or even Sunni participation within mourning, produces an inclusive community that powerfully, embrace difference. While many of Menon's respondents refused to speak about Shia-Sunni communal tensions, she interprets their refusal as a sign of how Muslim communities internally engender an everyday form of peace-building while living with difference, inside Old Delhi. It is this sense of an intimacy with the Other, and Otherness that is foundational to peaceful coexistence, even if this intimacy is threatening at times. As Menon explains it (pp. 134):

> Ultimately, living with difference is about making place for oneself and one's community in a world shared with others. As they interact with "others" from different religious, sectarian, or class backgrounds, and as they find themselves emotionally or financially involved or dependent on them, individuals construct narratives that transcend difference, even if only momentarily and inconsistently.

Clearly outlining the conundrums faced by religious minorities in a postcolonial world marked by a decline in secularism, *Making Place for Muslims* is a significant book, constituting cutting-edge research for scholars interested in Hindu-Muslim relations in India and South Asia. Written powerfully, the book is an eye-opener. Aptly concluding the book's arguments using Menon's own words (p. 161):

> I have argued in this book that although secularization discourses, Islamophobia, prejudice, and violence have "secured" Muslims in places like Old Delhi, and while economic forces capitalize on the politics of religion, class, caste, gender, and place to make some rich at the expense of others, people continue to live, love, and built community in the face of marginalization, alienation, and dispossession. Some articulate transnational religious communities that defy the singular and insular claims of the nation-state…some highlight boundaries and difference, making themselves visible and lying claim to place in a country in which violent disavowals of Islam and Muslims are increasingly frequent, and valorised. Other narrate religious histories, cultures, identities, and communities that disrupt religious and sectarian boundaries and forge community across bitter divides. And still others engage in rituals of belonging that resist understandings of religious

identity as mutually exclusive, rooting people in place against the tide of Hindu chauvinism and exclusionary understandings of nation and belonging.

As is obvious, *Making Place for Muslims* is also a political enterprise that is critical of Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. It is also an emotional treatise about loving relationships between Hindus and Muslims, and an exercise of empathy for religious minorities in the Global South—in this particular case, with the marginalized Muslim residents of Old Delhi. On the other hand, there are, however, no dissenting voices here that challenge the author's narrative, and the narratives of her respondents. Given the excessive political pressure posed by Hindu nationalist politics, would one not consider the emergence of Muslim opportunistic voices that support Hindu nationalist politics through the general rubric of postcolonial patriotism? How would their narratives complicate the spatialized dichotomy of the Muslim survival mode that produces *Shahjahanabad* as a modern ghetto for minorities in New Delhi? Would supporting Hindu nationalist politics and becoming part of its machinery, out of even the most utilitarian of motivations, not be seen as serving to uplift Muslim poverty and marginalization? Or would such exercising such utilitarian motives harbour and produce greater complexity and even danger for Muslim home-making, place-making, and belonging?

Making Place for Muslims in Contemporary India is a wonderful and compassionately written book that reaches out to its readers with empathy. Recommending it for undergraduates and postgraduates alike, I would further endorse the book to be a great resource for all researchers interested in contemporary India. Written in the simple but yet greatly informative way, *Making Place* constitutes a serious academic and political analysis of our times.

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Book Review

Paul Joshua. (2022). *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches.* Edited by Joel A. Carpenter. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press. Pp. xiv + 249. Price: $ 54.99. ISBN: 978-1-4813-0405-4. (Hardcover.)

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Central to Paul Joshua's study, *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches*, is the notion that Indian Christianity stands on its own ground, a unique formation that blends elements of South Asian culture with the tenets and practices of Christianity. This understanding of Indian Christianity runs counter to what Joshua succinctly describes as the "dominant impression…of Christianity in India…that it is a foreign religion, imposed by European colonizers" (p. 3). Joshua's assertion is meant to be not an abjuration of Christianity's roots outside the South Asian subcontinent, but a call to scholars to engage with Indian Christianity as an *Indian* tradition. Joshua's argument here builds not only on Christianity's historically deep roots in India (extant as early as the beginnings of the Christian era, and invigorated by the arrival of Catholic missionaries in the 16th century, and the entrance into India of European Protestant missionaries as India came under British colonial rule at the end of the 18th century), but also on the many ways in which Indian Christianity has absorbed elements of Indian religiosity in its development. To underscore the "Indianness" of Indian Christianity, Joshua adopts the term "Indian-initiated church" or "IIC," which, as Joshua declares, "is Christianity made in India" (p. 4). (Here, Joshua draws on the now long-established terminology used to describe African-founded Christian churches, "AIC," albeit without engaging the various meanings of the "I" of "AIC"—"initiated"; "indigenous"; "independent"; and "instituted.") Joshua's concern here, however, is not to give a precise meaning to "IIC," but rather to use it to draw our attention to the deep influence of Indian religious and cultural elements in the constitution of the Indian Christian churches. Moreover, as Joshua correctly notes, previous scholarship has tended to ignore this aspect of Indian Christianity, favouring in its stead discussions of theology and conversion. (Whereas this point remains largely true today, it was perhaps more pronounced when Joshua completed this study in 2013, based on research conducted in the early 2000s. [N.B., Joshua passed away in 2016, and the volume here under review was published posthumously under the direction of Joel Carpenter, the editor of Baylor University Press's Studies in World Christianity Series.])

Christianity Remade consists of seven main chapters, each of which explores distinct (and distinctly Indic) movements within the Indian Christian tradition. While acknowledging the long history of Indian Christianity, Joshua's focus here is largely on the communities that trace their origins to the Protestant missionaries whose arrival in India coincided with the late 18th century rise of European colonialism on the subcontinent. In part, Joshua's interest here reflects his own personal history; thus, he notes that he is himself a member of the Indian Brethren church, and that his family was long involved with the ministry of Bakht Singh (1903 - 2000), whose movement is discussed in this volume. More broadly, however, this focus on the Indian Protestant communities also holds a significant place in Joshua's argument that Indian Christianity is misconstrued in India as a "foreign" religion. Thus, as Joshua notes, in "India's collective psyche" (p. 21), Indian Protestant Christianity tends to be conflated with the historical memory of the European colonial presence in India (despite frequent conflicts between the Protestant missionaries and the colonial powers, Protestantism itself stood as a

significant element of colonialism's imposed cultural hegemony in India). This perception, however, masks the reality of the diffuse nature of the European Protestant mission in India, as individual missionaries willingly tailored their ministries to meet the needs of India's diverse population (differentiated as well as stratified through elements of gender, caste, language, locale, and so forth). Whether intended or not, the diffuse nature of these early missions opened a path for the later assimilation of traditional elements of Indian religiosity in the development of Indian Christianity, a pattern that Joshua argues became more pronounced as Indian Christians gradually replaced the European missionaries in leading the various Protestant churches in India. As Joshua's work shows, this can be seen early in the history of Indian Christianity, as evidenced in the life and work of the Indian Christian missionary J. C. Arulappan (1810-67), who attended one of the first Protestant seminaries in India. A decade after beginning his ministry as an assistant to the British missionary A. N. Groves, Arulappan set out on his own, founding an independent, self-governed Indian Christian settlement, "an example of a homegrown Christian community in a predominantly Hindu context" (p. 31). That Arulappan attended to this context in developing a truly *Indian* Christianity is exemplified in his mission activities that included creating unique materials for fostering Christianity among the local population. However, as Joshua points out, rather than viewing Arulappan's work as the beginnings of a "genuinely Indian movement," there has been a tendency to depict it, because it was Christian, as standing apart from its Indian context. For Joshua, however, the movements founded by Arulappan and those that followed him must be seen as no less Indian than they are seen as Christian. This point is reiterated in Joshua's discussion (which follows his discussion of Arulappan) of the figure of Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), who, not unlike Arulappan, founded her own Christian settlement in India, the Mukti Mission. Here, Joshua points out that despite its Christian element, Ramabai's settlement was at its base an *ashram,* a place which drew upon models of Indian religiosity, but to which Ramabai had added the "gospel virtue of loving one's neighbour, particularly the disadvantaged and the vulnerable" (p. 41).

In subsequent chapters, Joshua continues to expose these strains of Indian religiosity within the Indian Christian churches, presenting detailed discussions of the Indian Christian revivalist movement (chapter 2); the Indian Pentecostal Church (chapter 3); the Bakht Singh evangelical movement (chapter 4); the devotionalist Indian Bible Mission in Andhra Pradesh (chapter 5); the Yesu Darbar, a faith healing tradition based in Allahabad (chapter 6); and the New Life Fellowship, a decentralized Christian movement (chapter 7). Along with exposing elements of Indian religiosity within these movement (as, for example engaging with the Christian evangelist Bakht Singh as a *guru* or the Indian Bible Mission as a *bhakti* tradition), Joshua also emphasizes the Indianness of these movements by delving into their relationship with the Indian independence movement. Here, as revealed in Joshua's discussions of the Bakht Singh Assemblies and the Indian Pentecostal Church, the development of Indian Christianity paralleled (as well as often overtly supported) the ideology of an independent India, eschewing foreign control of its missions just as it did foreign governance. In this, despite the fact that Indian Christianity may have had non-Indian origins, on Indian soil, Indian Christianity showed itself to be both politically as well as religiously Indian above all else.

In a similar vein, Joshua argues that even those Indian Christian movements that may have had contemporary parallels outside India, such as the revivalist movements that became prominent worldwide in the early 20th century, were built on elements that were uniquely Indian, or, as Joshua states, "rooted in the soil of India" (p. 58). In supporting his argument for an *Indian* Christianity, Joshua delves deeply into India's rich cultural history, from its casteism (and, in particular, the broad division between Brahmins and Dalits), to the cultural differences engendered by its regional divisions, to the elements of "traditional" Indian religiosity, including (but not limited to) devotion (*bhakti*), the figure of the *guru*; the Indian gods; ritual; and India's

"holy" geography. Here, Joshua's work emphatically distinguishes itself from other related studies (nearly all the movements Joshua discusses have been discussed elsewhere) by exposing the Indian cultural background of these several, varied Indian Christian movements. Here, as Joshua states, rather than maintaining the long-held notion that Christianity as it developed over the centuries in India is in some sense a "foreign" tradition, it is time to acknowledge the essential "Indianness" of Indian Christianity: "an Indocentric taxonomy of Indian churches is long overdue…[and] older models need replacement with fresh ones that are true to contemporary, grounded reality" (p. 195).

In brief, Paul Joshua's study, *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian-Initiated Churches*, is a work of substantial scholarship, standing both as a significant contribution to our understanding of Indian Christianity, and a corrective to the long-held view of this tradition as in some sense non-Indic. Throughout, Joshua presents his arguments with great clarity of thought, narrating them in well-crafted prose and substantiating them with a detailed scholarly apparatus. In exposing the structural elements that reveal the essential *Indianness* of Indian Christianity, Joshua has provided a path forward for scholars in exploring what he shows us to be the rich and varied cultural and religious landscape of Indian Christianity.